

**Show  
and Tell:  
A Chronicle  
of Group  
Material**

Edited by Julie Ault

## Four Corners Books



Democracy Wall panel being installed, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1993.

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<b>Chronicle: 1979-1996</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Case Reopened: Group Material, Julie Ault</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>What Was to be Done?, Tim Rollins</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>An Artwork is a Person, Doug Ashford</b>	<b>220</b>
<b>Tracking AIDS Timeline, Sabrina Locks</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>Behind the Timeline: Collected Histories</b>	<b>238</b>
<b>Exhibition History and Bibliography</b>	<b>257</b>
<b>Acknowledgements and Contributors</b>	<b>266</b>
<b>Reproduction and Photo Credits</b>	<b>268</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>269</b>

# Chronicle: 1979–1996

**September 1979, New York.** Tim Rollins, Marybeth Nelson, Hannah Alderfer, Beth Jaker, and Peter Szypula have all finished their undergraduate degrees at the School of Visual Arts (SVA), where they studied with conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth, whose art, philosophy, and emphasis on collaboration were pivotal for them. They are eager to extend the camaraderie, community, and critical dialogues they created in school. Tim is currently making politically engaged investigative installations, which often include popular music and text, and is at work on a Master of Education degree at New York University (NYU). Marybeth, Hannah, Beth, and Peter are primarily attracted to collective production and are engaged with gender and sexual politics theory. They are not making art individually. At NYU, Tim befriends Patrick Brennan, a painter who has recently transferred to the art education department there. Julie Ault, Yolanda Hawkins, and Tim share an apartment; they all met in art classes at the University of Maine at Augusta in 1973. Julie occasionally makes collages using images drawn from popular magazines, and is interested in collaboration. Yolanda is principally an actress pursuing theater work. Instigated by Tim and Patrick, these friends and friends of friends form a group to discuss and present socially engaged art, other people's as well as their own, and to bring together their aesthetic and sociopolitical aims. DIY culture, feminist discourse, the civil rights movement, Marxist theory, as well as the loose network of collectives, alternative spaces, journals, and adhoc activities in New York City's nonprofit art sector are all formative contexts for the group.



**October 1979.** Marek Pakulski—Julie's cousin, who is also a friend of Tim's—soon joins. Marek, a musician, is the bass player for the Fleshtones. Patrick's friend Michael Udvardy, who he met studying art at Miami Dade College, is also invited to join. Michael is currently making artworks that diagram social relations while continuing his education at Columbia University. The group begins meeting in their various apartments to discuss ideas and plan activities. Each member pays monthly dues of \$30. The name Group Material is agreed on, to invoke collective production and to highlight shared interests in investigating material culture and effecting material change. British artist Conrad Atkinson's current exhibition *Material-Six Works*, which is concerned in part with the politics of labor and unions in Britain, is another reference point for naming the group. Atkinson's work is particularly influential for Tim.

**November 1979.** Group Material discusses acquiring not-for-profit incorporation status in order to be eligible for government funding, and the possibility of getting a storefront headquarters and exhibition / work space. The group designs a logo, plans a manifesto

and sets up a telephone answering service. The members also present their current individual work at meetings. On one such occasion Patrick Brennan projects a slide of a large painting he made of a New Jersey industrial landscape, and stands back to the group facing the projection wearing a leather bomber jacket while Candi Staton's disco hit "Victim" plays on the stereo.

**March 1980.** In addition to theoretical and practical discussions, the group attends panels and starts planning their first shows, to take place once a space is found.

↑ GM members, 1980, clockwise from top left: Szygula, Brennan, Rollins, Ault, Lebron, Nelson, Jaker, Dones, Alderfer, Pakulski

**MEMBERS:**  
Hannah Alderfer, Julie Ault, Patrick Brennan, Yolanda Hawkins, Beth Jaker, Marybeth Nelson, Marek Pakulski, Tim Rollins, Peter Szygula, Michael Udvardy

MINUTES : DECEMBER 11, 1979 Session, Group Material

Attending : Julie Ault, Hannah Alderfer, Jan Marek Pakulski, Beth Jaker, Patrick Brennan, Mary Beth Nelson, Peter Szygula, Timothy Rollins

Absent: Yolanda Hawkins, Michael Udvardy

1. Dues for the month of December:

Dues for the month of December will be paid by mail by all members on December 15, 1979. Mailing address for dues is : Patrick J. Brennan, 229 East 11th Street, N.Y., N.Y. 10003. Patrick will record payments and will issue receipts.

- a. Marek, Tim and Mary Beth make Dec. payments of \$30.00 each at Dec. 11th session.
- b. Patrick announces the opening of GM bank account at the AMALGAMATED BANK on 14th St.

2. Logo Design :

Final deadline for any GM members who wish to propose logo designs will be the next meeting of GM on January 8, 1980.

3. Answering Service:

GM's answering service was established by Julie. The service is METROLINES TELEPHONE ANSWERING SERVICE, located at 164 W. 21st St. N.Y.C. 10011. To leave messages: call 691-7950, Ext. 460. To pick up messages : 691-5800, ask for Ext. 460.

4. GM discusses the publication of a journal or book :

Beth suggests devoting energy to the publication of writing and artistic projects through an inexpensive journal. Plans for the publication can be undertaken while GM waits for the establishment of a permanent headquarters and working space. GM members are encouraged to give this matter thought and to bring specific ideas to the Jan. 8 session.

5. GM discusses Marxist School Symposium and SVA Seminar :

Tim announces his "Problems in Socialism and Fine Art" course to be offered at the New York Marxist School in Feb. 1980. In connection with this work, the N.Y.M.S. is planning a conference on Marxism and Art. GM discusses possibilities for participation in this conference. GM agrees to allow those GM members who are interested in this project to get involved as representatives of GM.

6. GM discusses the development of a source book:

GM talks about compiling a source book of contacts, services, printers, etc., in order to have a handy guide of

2. inexpensive resources that will help promote GM's work and publicity. GM members are asked to bring resources information ( addresses, phone numbers, prices, etc.) to Jan. 8 meeting.
7. GM Manifesto:  
GM decides to write a manifesto in order to publicize the rationale and the aspirations of the collective. Notes for this manifesto should be initiated independently by each member of GM. The manifesto will then be forged from the collection of member's notes. Work on the manifesto will begin at the Jan. 8th session of GM. The history of the manifesto form will be researched by interested members, reporting Jan. 8.
8. Review of Artwork :  
Hannah, Old and recent work of Peter, Julie, Patrick and Tim was reviewed. All GM members are encouraged to propose exhibition plans for new work.
9. Search for Headquarters :  
The date for a search for GM headquarters will be set at the Jan. 8th session.
10. Organization of GM Meetings:  
Patrick proposes to agree upon a more efficient method for organizing GM sessions. GM decides to elect a rotating chairperson for each meeting. Mary Beth is elected for Chair at the Jan. 8th session of GM.
11. Minutes:  
Tim suggests that minutes from GM meetings be recorded then mailed to GM members soon after each session. GM agrees. Minutes are to be mailed beginning with Dec. 11th session.
12. GM Workshop:  
GM decides to split session time , allotting  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the session for the discussion of business and issues, the other  $\frac{1}{2}$  to be used as a workshop for the production of publication plans, logos, source book, etc.
13. Next meeting:  
Next session of GM is scheduled for January 8, 1980 at 132 East 26th St. (2C). at 8:00 p.m.

*Timothy J. Rollins*



↑ GM storefront at 244 East 13th Street, 1980  
→ Following spreads:  
Fiery communiqué to GM from Tim Rollins

**MEMBERS:**  
Hannah Alderfer, Julie Ault, Patrick Brennan, Liliانا Dones, Yolanda Hawkins, Beth Jaker, Marybeth Nelson, Marek Pakulski, Tim Rollins, Peter Szyputa, Michael Udvardy

**June 1980.** Tim consults Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts (VLA) about New York State incorporation procedures and learns that instituting terms for decision-making and responsibility allocation in the group, and producing and preserving a paper trail are prerequisites. Meeting minutes and internal business including proposals, rebuttals and questions should be registered in writing and kept on file. A statement of purpose as well as operational policies and a three-year projected budget need drafting. The group is required to establish committees, select officers and assign duties to each member. Despite not wanting such a formal structure, the group adheres to these procedures on paper in order to get incorporated. In principle the group is committed to a non-hierarchical structure and decisions are made according to collective agreement, often achieved after plenty of animated and fiery debate. VLA lawyer David Glaser agrees to handle Group Material's incorporation process pro bono. Patrick and Michael's friend Lilianna Dones (Lili), formerly a fellow painting student at Miami Dade College, is accepted as a new member. Lili is studying in NYU's art department. Her work involves

gathering information about people's economic and social conditions through questionnaires.

**July 1980.** The group finds and rents an affordable storefront at 244 East 13th Street, on a low-income largely Spanish-speaking block on the Lower East Side. The immediate focus is on the first show and the initial program, fixing up the space, and producing a statement of purpose, announcements and press releases for public distribution. The space needs renovation including a sink, a paint job, electrical work and lighting, false walls for the back, as well as a general clean up of the interior and exterior. Yolanda Hawkins is made forewoman and a renovation schedule is established. Monthly dues are raised to \$45 to meet the responsibility of the storefront's operating costs; any excess funds are to be put into programs and activities. With the prospect of going public getting closer, interpersonal tensions and ideological conflicts escalate. The agenda for the July 22 meeting includes: "open, general discussion of Group Material's purpose with a consideration for current personal and practical tensions operant in the group."

July 22, 1980

Unsolicited Statement  
to GROUP MATERIAL

A PROPOSAL FOR LEARNING TO GET THINGS OFF OUR CHESTS;  
BEHAVIOR, DISCIPLINE AND OUR PROJECT

Timothy Rollins

I'd like to be very honest. I was significantly hurt by last week's meeting; the subsequent depression was exacerbated by what I interpret as some other members' feelings that I personally was responsible for problems in the group, that I should talk to people, that I should do something about the strained relationships that have afflicted this organization with a severe case of hypertension. This is what I have to say, and I think it only fair and proper to address my statements to the Group as a whole:

Not to be overdramatic, but I worry - am sometimes terrified - because of Group Material. The colossal amount of time, energy, talk and money that has already been funneled into this Group by its members would make any serious internal fuck-up the most grave of tragedies. To be blunt, this Group MUST be a success - a success of a kind that the Group as a whole can live with. I see ourselves as heading towards failure and I need to express my opposition to tendencies operating even at this early stage.

#### BEHAVIOR

In the long run my criticisms of the group's internal behavior AS A WHOLE are probably the least important. But this category of problems is certainly the most infuriating, the most painful. I want to address the question of intrigue in the group - the kind of rabid backbiting I detect that produces only a smelly, foaming residue when personal and working relations are combined in disproportionate amounts. I think the "uncomradely" behavior evident in meetings and ( I'm certain ) in private conversation about Group members is pathetic and incredible at this early point, among persons who are supposed to be friends. Here are some of the signifiers in this semiosis of crap : whispering in the ear of another member while someone is making a statement to the Group, a total loss of temper and control culminating in mindless personal insult, obnoxious dry grins to others when suggestions are made, pedestrian little jokes that throw a monkey wrench into the course of an important discussion, the rolling, winking, crossing, clenching of eyes and any other number of exaggerated facial contortions that attempt to produce meaning but only piss people off. When we have reservations about points being made, we must learn to articulate them in the clearest language possible. Resentment that is written all over our faces must be deciphered from its confused, mysterious forms for the sake of the people affected and for the sake of the Group as a working whole.

I think I am resented in the Group, and I offer this self-criticism : I do tend to be impatient, pompous, pedantic, demanding, self-righteous and, most disturbing to me because I can't seem to control it, a tendency to parade my knowledge in the search of argumentative authority. ( Perhaps I'm doing this at this very moment; I'll talk about this later...) But on the other hand I feel that any knowledge or information that I offer is automatically taken as an affront to the Group's intelligence, that academic information is a priori useless or of no interest to the Group. I know that this will be strenuously denied in theory, but is my imagination when I see at least four pairs of eyes roll whenever I make a point of history or aesthetics or political economy ? I am sincere when I say that my comments

( except for those moments when I'm obviously engaged in phrase-mongering ) and my little drawings and my little proposals and my little writings such as this develop out of an enthusiasm for the people and project and potential of this fucking Group. There have been intimations saying that I'm dictatorial ; I won't take this nonsense. Dictatorial behavior occurs when someone denies the proposals and decisions of the Group in the sole interest of advancing his/her subjective whims. But what if no one makes even a weak attempt at a cohesive, concrete, informed and MATERIAL suggestion ( in the form of writing, diagram, or any other sort of presentation that can be scrutinized and analyzed ) but, rather, simply ( very simply ) skims "ideas" from the tops of their heads in a cavalier fashion ??? We all have visions - but what we desperately need are diagrams for practical activities. Generally, our style of work sucks. When someone does work, bringing in a concrete idea, they are rarely supported - instead everyone plays the role of the critic. But even this is theater - at least real critics produce a literature that offers a clear position, no matter how mistaken. You can't imagine the frustration when you work to propose something - research the possibilities- take the time to articulate your suggestion, only to be accused ( usually subliminally ) of intimidating the group, of being an absolutist, of "trying too hard" or - the most crippled insult of all - "talking too much." If only our mouths produced written language - we'd have volumes of important material that could be collected and used by other groups interested in the type of work we're trying to do. " Trying to do." Don't you see how pathetic this is ?

Trust isn't a personalized emotion - it has a function that should be emphasized in this Group. In reality this group possesses few innocents ; it contains neither Wolves nor Lambs . Whether or not we continue in our neurotic, sheepish and bleating confusion is a matter that can only be determined by every member of the Group DURING THE WORK PROCESS OF THE GROUP ITSELF. We have different fields of expertise ( developed or emergent ), levels of proficiency in a multitude of interests and a healthy pluralism whenever it doesn't collapse into a confusion of interests. We should have nothing but enthusiasm for our project because - and your head is really up your ass if you don't realize this - WE HAVE NO OTHER SATISFACTORY OPTION. I refuse to "play down" my activity for the sake of making Group members "feel" like they are participating. DO SOMETHING ! Better we all become a pack of over-talkative dilettantes with arms full of drawings and proposals and mouths full of references than a sanitarium of slouching mumbler with pens and notebooks in one hand and a beer can in the other.

#### DISCIPLINE

Group Material really needs to tighten up, to be more efficient in our work methods and organization, to be more conscientious to priorities if we are not to deteriorate into a messy, arbitrary, indistinctive co-op gallery that dresses indecisiveness in the garb of humility, "down to earth"-ness and a commitment to the casual. When discipline isn't consistently embraced by every member in a group, then self-discipline and self-initiative is unfair and impossible - it virtually feeds the laziness or the sloppiness of other members' responsibilities. Already in Group Material we can see that certain individuals tend to carry the organization, only to be reprimanded for conspiring to build hegemony. All this leads to personal resentments that are hard to undo.

Group members should be highly conscious of their responsibilities. I'm amazed how members approach the reality of this enterprise. The Group should at least provide a world of compensation for the social functions we perform for money: we design for corporations, teach for the state, construct the lofts for people responsible for gentrification, make insipid, useless products for the profit of some asshole somewhere. And yet we wouldn't think of being late for work at the office, work that is almost completely against our self-interest, but when a work session on the Group Material space is scheduled, people saunter in over an hour late or don't show up at all. And we wonder why advanced capitalism has survived with such durability all this time - they know how to organize themselves effectively! THIS IS THE WRONG TIME AND PLACE TO PLAY IN A LOW-KEY. Everyone is treating the Group as if it were some leisure-time activity when particular people (namely Mary Beth and Patrick, without whom I'm sure we would have 1. no space because no one else got off their asses to look 2. no references because most of us have pathetic credit histories 3. no basic utilities) are losing money, losing time at work and, certainly, losing faith in the ability of this group to last five years. FACT: Not one serious suggestion for a 3rd (or 4th or 5th) show has been offered - only the most vague, evasive and practically flippant of "ideas for proposals for shows." Sometimes I wonder if there hasn't been a strain of mononucleosis artfully introduced into the group by the biological warfare department of the CIA. The endless wind-blowing, the "working out" of polemics that common sense should tell us can only be resolved in praxis - all this I suspect gets us quite depressed. Many of the little practical problems I find with the group would be petty complaints if they did not appear to be irrefutable evidence of the Group's collective incompetence. Trivial?... if we can't even call Con Ed, how the fuck are we going to be able to call press and contacts to get people to come to the space, to establish a supportive audience, to promote our work for the benefit of not only ourselves but, and I mean this, for the advancement of art history in America. Our inconclusiveness is becoming maddening; one gets crazed trying to keep 1001 issues and questions "in mind" never knowing when group "opinion" will shift at the whim of one who has changed his/her mind, or who didn't attend the last meeting and didn't bother to call someone to find out what went on.

#### OUR PROJECT

The problem of discipline, like the problem of behavior, is linked to the question that, it seems, everyone in the Group is trying to evade: WHAT IS GROUP MATERIAL GOING TO DO? Only the collective can discuss this, but I want to ask: Are we to be a co-op debating society or a spearhead for a politically and socially informed cultural movement? Of course these are the extremes of possibility, but anyone who sees aiming for the high mark as "impractical" or "overambitious" has been victimized by the old pedagogy of the bourgeoisie that tells every member of the working class: "You can do nothing but work for us!" Artists or would-be artists like us tend to suffer from an irrational inferiority complex when it comes to putting our asses on the line of actual cultural production. Are we Group MATERIAL or not? Really... how insecure... how dare we feel inadequate or hesitant to do work in this age of Judy Chicagos and Times Square Shows??? This is to say nothing of the out-and-out reactionaries that constitute the facade of the American avant-garde! Our work concerns, at an essential level, the politics of aesthetics in a world where politics are increasingly being made aesthetic. We will certainly do more harm than good - by example - if we don't get our shit together in the way of theory and practice. (Can't you

hear it now? "So you are naive and want to make a socially committed art? Look at Group Material, look how far they got...") Discipline is the foundation of any effective activism (if in this world, at least) and the Group needs to work harder on an individual and collective basis. We must DO things, MAKE things - it is through this practice that we will earn a real ability and education instead of merely consuming information we can puff out at someone else's gallery openings.

Julie said a good thing a couple of weeks ago, unfortunately not at a G.M. meeting. She was in her room, preparing her artworks. I don't remember what led to her excellent comment: "I'm just going to do these things and I'm not going to worry about looking like an asshole anymore." At last, purism is defeated! Julie is no hero (or isn't she?!), but this is an example of commitment (to cultural production - to art) and courage. It will probably get her a nice bunch of money in the long run as well. (Just kidding, of course.)

Tim

**August 1980.** Ideas for shows are debated and the exhibitions calendar is planned. There is a lot of discussion about the press kit proposed by Hannah, and over how to represent Group Material and its specific exhibitions. Money is tight. The press kit and inaugural materials are scaled down. Out of financial necessity the group decides new members will be charged a \$500 membership fee for a full vote in Group Material, or \$250 for half a vote.

**September 1980.** Mundy McLaughlin, another former School of Visual Arts student, is accepted as a new member. Mundy's montages combining found images and maps illustrate collectively held assumptions about U.S. politics and consumption. Severe financial problems result in Julie and Patrick scolding members who are not paying up. Michael Lebron, a Cooper Union graduate working with advertising

strategies and public address, attends two meetings and the September 6 photo session of the group but does not become a member of the group. Former SVA student Anne Drillick as well as George Ault (Julie's cousin and a friend of Tim and Yolanda's), currently a computer science graduate student at NYU, join Group Material. Both are attracted to group process rather than object making.

**MEMBERS:**  
Hannah Alderfer, George Ault, Julie Ault, Patrick Brennan, Liliana Dones, Anne Drillick, Yolanda Hawkins, Beth Jaker, Mundy McLaughlin, Marybeth Nelson, Marek Pakulski, Tim Rollins, Peter Szypula, Michael Udvardy



Proposal for the Proposal of Exhibitions.  
Tim Rollins, July 29, 1980

Proposals for exhibition “forms and contents” should be presented to Group Material in this order:

1. Ideas for shows tend to come from the strangest places: in the midst of lunch, two seconds before you are ready to fall asleep on a Thursday night, during a drunken conversation, and so on. Rarely are ideas generated in one individual’s head: the individual’s idea is actually a synthesis of something seen or heard or investigated or thought of socially. But nevertheless an individual is inevitably responsible for giving an idea its voice. Ideas for shows should be *well thought* (as to appropriateness, feasibility, advantages and potential problems, history of the idea, etc., ideas as to concrete execution) by an individual or group and DRAFTED in the form of a loose proposal to be submitted to Group Material.

2. Discussion for show proposals should NEVER be discussed on the same day or meeting that they are delivered. Each member of GM should have a copy of the proposal outline to take home and TO THINK ABOUT, adding suggestions directly to the submitted proposal sheet.

3. At the next meeting, people come back with their complaints, their enthusiasms, their criticisms. Group votes whether to *develop* or *return* the proposal to the individual responsible. If returned, the idea is dropped. If developed, members return their written comments (on the proposal sheet) to the individual who tries to synthesize group opinion into a FORMAL PROPOSAL to be adopted at the next meeting.

4. PROPOSAL is presented at the next meeting and either agreed upon or not agreed upon. While a consensus will always be attempted, if a stalemate occurs impeding decision on adoption of show, then a majority vote must be taken.

5. The individual responsible for proposal becomes the SPONSOR for the exhibition, and creates a committee to do all the work for the actualization of the show, going through appropriate Officers (sec., treas., public relations, press, community liaison, art director, etc.) to ensure a successful and smooth operation.

6. Exhibition is held.

Meeting Minutes (excerpt),  
Tim Rollins, July 29, 1980

Group debates the colors of the wall. Julie proposes one wall red, the other gray. Pat expresses fear of looking like a “regular” art gallery—he is for painting the entire space red or Julie’s “combination proposal.” Yolanda is against a “neutral” gray—is for all red, the combination, or a darker charcoal gray. Lili is for the combination proposal with an emphasis on the red wall and office. Peter wants the entire space gray with the exception of the office space walls which will be red. Marybeth suggests that the context of the exhibition space shouldn’t be over-emphasized and that the color should be comfortable. She wants gray walls with the office red. Hannah agrees with Marybeth, believing that all red would draw out the walls imperfections and would make the space intense and small looking. Beth also wants a gray space with a red office and a red toilet room. Beth suggests that what goes on in the space will contextualize the space and that wall colors are somewhat irrelevant. Tim passes out statement concerning the reasons for painting the gallery red. The group votes on three options: 1. Combo proposal of gray walls, red office. 2. All red. 3. All gray. Option one passes unanimously. Color chips that Tim researched are chosen. Tim is responsible for getting the paint. . . .

Group makes questions for each of us to answer for next meeting about first show:

How do you want GM to be represented in the first show?  
Do you want GM to be represented as a collection of individuals?  
Do you want GM to be represented as a group or collective?  
How do we want to be represented in relation to the community where we are located?  
How do we want to reach a broader audience?  
What do you want to do for the show?  
How do we want GM to relate, include other artists?  
Why include other artists?  
What do we want our relationship to the art world to be?

Notes on first show plans (excerpt),  
August 1980

An attempt should be made to avoid the first show looking like just a bunch of art. I think this could easily happen as the show will have no central theme and the works will not be ultra related to each other.

In my opinion the interest we need can be had through the way in which we treat our space as an exhibition salon. The function of the gallery must be realized in social and historical terms. . . . The interior design of our space and the displaying of art should be of optimal importance and should be determined by intellectualism, careful thought, and not taste, never taste. . . . We should strive to make this event fun. We absolutely must avoid snobbery, stuffiness and rigidity. (Brennan)

I think it is extremely important that our first show clearly demonstrates our belief in a working method that recognizes people organizing to work together in their own interests as the basis of political action—and our commitment to the forming of alliances necessary to do this. Any first show, no matter what its structure, would say, “This is who and what we are, and this is an indication of what you can expect from us. . . . One way to do this would be for GM to assume, at various points throughout the show, a more self-conscious voice of introduction. . . . could for example introduce a history of artists’ groups “as GM”—or GM as an idea whose time has come—or as a certain notion of socialism / feminism, as workers, as a bunch of young artists committed to a comprehensible art (who like to scream at one another), as coming out of a certain class background—as \$45 a month, as teachers, as students, as neighbors, as coming out, as Diana Ross. . . (Nelson)

*Theme*—socio-political information. Supplemental information—as important as the artwork (we must keep in mind that a large percentage of the traffic flowing through the first show will have had very little prior exposure to the content of GM or the artwork involved). 1. Flyers or a booklet containing the following info: A. What is Group Material—who is involved and what do we hope to accomplish. B. Background information on guest artists and GM artists whose work is exhibited. A poster or some other commemorative piece of paper. (Dones)

First show (FS) will determine our initial outreach, make clear who we see as our audience, and to what kind of a public we are committed to. . . . FS appropriate time to express how we see GM relating to community, operating in this particular location. . . . Address community by having all written statements a part of the show in Spanish and English, immediately bridging the language barrier. . . . Each GM member to participate in some way—either individual or group works or statements, some people will do both. That we make art—statements demonstrating where our commitments lie socially and politically—that we invite only individuals operating within political groups to show work. That other art groups engaged in social activism may present works representing their group that have been made under collective name. . . . The purpose of this show would be to establish our alliance / affinity to these artists. . . . to show how firmly based we, as a group of artists, are in an emerging cultural activism, which is occurring on an international scale. This collection of artists / art groups makes a point about the relationship of “individual” to “collective” as a satisfactory personal solution, as a viable political strategy. (Jaker)

The organization of the first show must reflect our understanding of how we function, why we decided to originate, what are our histories, diversities, and similarities, immediate and long range goals. . . . I feel a Blueprint diagram or foundation should be constructed of how this communication is to take place. This also ties in directly to GM as a learning center. . . . The Diagram, Blueprints exhibitional form should reflect the communication process built on struggle. A struggle practical enough to satisfy physical needs and progressive enough to satisfy intellectual and emotional needs. Communication is central to the articulation of social relations between people. (Szypula)



## Inaugural Exhibition

Group Material,  
244 East 13th Street, New York,  
October 4–27, 1980

The inaugural exhibition includes a window installation of montages made by Peter, Marybeth, Hannah, and Beth, an installation by Conrad Atkinson, works by Michael Lebron, Klaus Staeck, and other group members. Lili's piece, *Budgets*, consists of ten papers pinned to a bulletin board. Although they are not identified by name, they reflect the budgets of Group Material members. A calendar of upcoming exhibitions and information about the group is distributed. The night before the show opens, Tim is setting up his piece, which includes stenciling text in red paint on the floor, while a stereo with Martha and the Vandellas' "Dancing In The Street," also a part of his work, is on continuous play. It is unclear if the paint will dry in time and whether or not the show will be ready for the reception. As the Vandellas song plays repeatedly, tensions mount and everyone begins yelling at one another.

↑ Window montages by GM for Inaugural Exhibition



Gerald Marzorati, "Artful Dodger,"  
*The Soho News*, October 15, 1980

"I am for art that is political-erotic-mystical . . . for art that embroils itself with the everyday crap and still comes out on top," Claes Oldenburg declared nearly 20 years ago, around the time he opened the door to his Store (an actual storefront on the Lower East Side) and beckoned the street drop into the post-abstract expressionism art vanguard. Not long after, of course, Oldenburg abandoned the lowly grit of the city block (and that of the plaster sculpture he made and stocked) for the American heartland and the monumental promise it held.

In moving along, Oldenburg was also moving with the flow. If, by the late 60s artists were inclined at all to work within Robert Rauschenberg's famous gap between art and life, they usually concerned themselves with art and life of a very private sort. The street, and all that it gathers, got pulled in.

But now, in neighborhoods where galleries fear to tread, there's fresh pounding on the pavement. In the South Bronx, Stefan Eins and Joe Lewis have staked out and maintained Fashion Moda, a ground floor performance and gallery space that has planted a touch of downtown way uptown and shipped back to Manhattan some provocative notions about what art is and who can make it. Last New Year's Eve, a group of artists associated with Collaborative Projects—a cell-like group of politically conscious artists that has organized a number of shows and events along social themes—seized an abandoned, city-owned storefront on Delancy Street (many of the artists lived or worked in the surrounding blocks) and filled it with crude, manifesto-type artworks condemning the neighborhood's landlords and developers. (The city eventually padlocked *The Real Estate Show*, but has since given the organizers another ramshackle storefront on Rivington Street the artists call ABC No Rio.) And last spring many of the ideas and personalities associated with these various groups and events came together in the much-discussed *Times Square Show*, where, along with everything else, more than a few prominent art-world figures saw for the first time that art was once again infiltrating life.

The latest such move was launched earlier this month in a storefront at 244 East 13 St. between Second and Third Avenues—a "bad" block in the icy parlance of the suddenly resuscitated East Village real estate

industry. Here, in what was formerly an Hispanic social club, an eight-month-old artists collective called Group Material has opened a gallery and committed itself to, in the words of the inaugural statement, "the creation, organization, and promotion of an art dedicated to social communication and political change."

"We're not just going to be a gallery devoted to showing political art," Timothy Rollins explained several hours before the opening of the gallery's first show—a small survey of politically-minded works, most of them by Group Material artists. "We want to set up real social relationships with the people here, working people. It's important for us to become a vital part of the block. A lot of people did it in the 60s, and then they got away from it. Now everybody's more complacent about and satisfied with the whole art-as-commodity idea. We're not."

Like most of the artists, writers, filmmakers and musicians who make up this burgeoning storefront scene, the Group Material members—as Liliana Dones' *Budgets* survey piece in the current show accurately details—are young (under 30), live on the Lower East Side (loftless), and make art that reflects the new wave's penchant for unpolished media and unvarnished messages. And Group Material's politics, like those of Fashion Moda and Colab, stem less from any dogmatic ideology than from the facts of their lives. Fresh from art school (where many of them met), stuck in cramped apartments and dull, if rent-paying, jobs, the Group Material artists are fighting what they see as an urban guerrilla war with the only tools they have.

"We're not just white kids slumming," argues Patrick Brennan, another group member. "We're here because we live here, and our problems are the neighborhood's problems. We pay the rent [\$450 a month] so we can be as political and controversial as we want or have to be."

Among the events on Group Material's calendar are *The Salon of Election '80* (a show of presidential election-based art to take place election night, Nov. 4); the *Gender Show* (an investigation of issues concerning sexuality); and a dance party featuring three decades of "revolutionary" recordings.

In all these activities Group Material members emphasize that they hope to draw on talents and resources outside the group, and draw to the storefront those who might normally pass a gallery by. Says Rollins confidently: "The whole thing, in the end, should be seen as a catalyst."

To which skeptics will no doubt counter, catalyst for what? There are those who maintain that the best of these young artists will, in the near future, crop up in mainstream galleries and museums—that the storefront scene is not so much an alternative as a trailblazing shortcut.

Further, it has been argued that the increased cultural activity among young East Village artists has, if inadvertently, been a catalyst for rising rents and co-op conversions that drive out the very neighborhood people Group Material wants to align with and help.

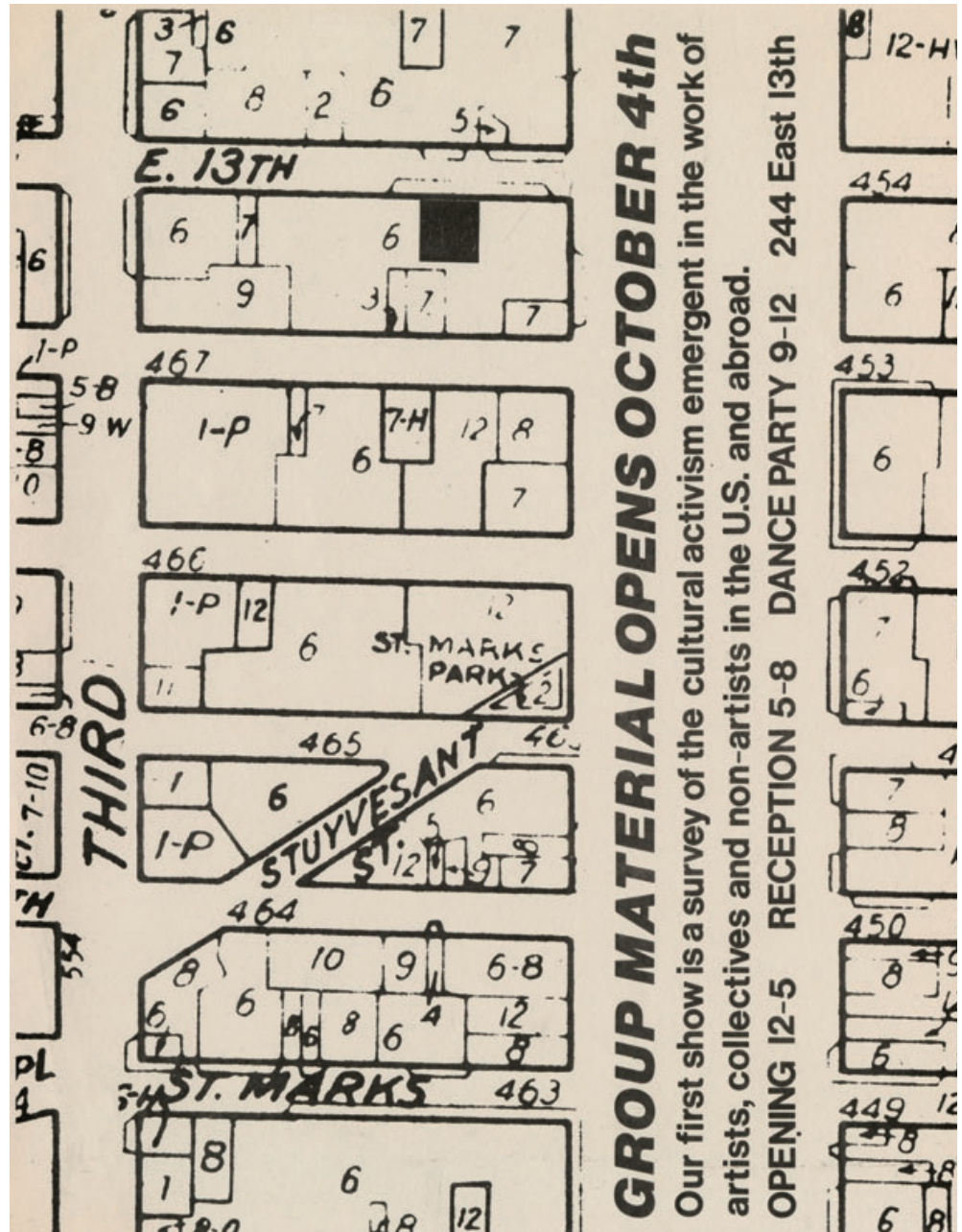
Such assertions have not escaped the Group Material artists. "You always have to deal with contradictions," says Rollins. "Most of us are aware of how gentrification works. But what are we supposed to do? Would it be better if we lived on Columbus Avenue, made art, ignored politics and remained pure? You've got to do something."

Richard Goldstein, "Enter the Anti Space" (excerpt), *The Village Voice*, November 5-11, 1980

Here, in the heart of the up 'n' coming East Village, artists five years younger than the Colab crowd have opened a space that offers advice about lowering your rent—in Spanish. People from the block donated all the furniture; local children wander in, giggling at the walls. At the opening last month, 400 people gobbled fish fritters cooked by the woman upstairs. It was so successful, as art events go, that Group Material has already earned the enmity of New Wave artists far and wide. "Real cute," smirked one. "Well read," snarls another.

The members of Group Material return the compliment. "We don't identify ourselves as New Wave artists," says Beth Jaker. "It seems to be a very reflective art," her colleague Tim Rollins adds, "a camp critique, the middle class making fun of itself. It's like the warning Walter Benjamin gave about the danger of aestheticizing politics. We're less interested in reflecting than projecting out into the community."

↓ Inaugural Exhibition, left to right: works by Patrick Brennan, Margia Kramer, Mundy McLaughlin  
→ Following spread: Detail of handout to visitors distributed during Inaugural Exhibition



# WHO

IS GROUP MATERIAL ? WHO ARE THEIR AUDIENCES ? GROUP MATERIAL IS 5 GRAPHIC DESIGNERS, 2 TEACHERS, A WAITRESS, A CARTOGRAPHER, TWO TEXTILE DESIGNERS, A TELEPHONE OPERATOR, A DANCER, A COMPUTER ANALYST AND AN ELECTRICIAN. GROUP MATERIAL IS ALSO AN INDEPENDENT COLLECTIVE OF YOUNG ARTISTS AND WRITERS WITH A VARIETY OF ARTISTIC AND POLITICAL THEORIES AND PRACTICES. GROUP MATERIAL IS COMMITTED TO THE CREATION, ORGANIZATION AND PROMOTION OF AN ART DEDICATED TO SOCIAL COMMUNICATION AND POLITICAL CHANGE. GROUP MATERIAL SEEKS A NUMBER OF AUDIENCES :

**WORKING PEOPLE** - PEOPLE WHO REALIZE THAT THE FINE ART THEY SEE IN MOST GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS BEARS LITTLE RELEVANCE TO THE EVERYDAY INTERESTS AND STRUGGLES THAT CHARACTERIZE THEIR LIVES

**NON-ART PROFESSIONALS** - HISTORIANS, ANTHROPOLOGISTS, BUSINESSPEOPLE, TEACHERS, SOCIOLOGISTS, JOURNALISTS, ETC. ; PEOPLE WHO WOULD LIKE TO LEARN HOW DIFFICULT SOCIAL ISSUES CAN BE CLEARLY INVESTIGATED AND PRESENTED THROUGH ARTISTIC MEANS

**ARTISTS, STUDENTS, ORGANIZATIONS** - PEOPLE WHOSE WORK IS, DUE TO ITS SEXUAL, ETHNIC, POLITICAL OR COLLOQUIAL NATURE, USUALLY EXCLUDED OR UNDER-REPRESENTED IN THE OFFICIAL WORLDS OF ART AND ACADEMIA

**OUR IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY** - THE PEOPLE OF MANHATTAN'S LOWER EAST SIDE, THE PEOPLE ON THE BLOCK, THE PEOPLE WHO WILL PASS BY OUR STOREFRONT ON THEIR WAY TO SOME EVERYDAY ACTIVITY

# WHAT

IS GROUP MATERIAL'S PROJECT ? IN OUR FIRST YEAR, GROUP MATERIAL WILL EXHIBIT THE ART OF GROUP MEMBERS, COMMUNITY ARTISTS, NON-ARTISTS, FAMOUS ARTISTS. THE SHOWS WILL INITIATE A FORUM FOR A VARIETY OF CONTROVERSIAL THEMES : THE AESTHETICS OF CONSUMPTION, THE 1980 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, THE IMAGERY OF ALIENATION, GENDER, THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FOOD, AUTHORITY AND HIGH FASHION, POLITICAL ART BY CHILDREN OF N.Y. TO NAME SOME EXAMPLES. RELEVANT FILMS, LECTURES, PANELS, LITERATURE, AND PERFORMANCES WILL ACCOMPANY EACH EXHIBITION.

# WHERE

IS GROUP MATERIAL LOCATED AND WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT ? GROUP MATERIAL IS LOCATED AT 244 EAST 13TH ST. BETWEEN SECOND AND THIRD AVENUES IN N.Y.C. OUR LOCATION IS AT ONCE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL. BESIDES OUR ART EXHIBITIONS, GROUP MATERIAL WILL BE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE LIFE OF OUR NEIGHBORHOOD. PART OF G.M.'S WORKING RESPONSIBILITY IS TO THE IMMEDIATE LOCAL PROBLEMS THAT SHAPE THE SPECIAL CHARACTER OF THIS PLACE. HOUSING, EDUCATION, SANITATION, COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, RECREATION : THESE ARE THE CONCRETE AREAS OF PRACTICE THAT GIVE OUR ARTISTIC AND THEORETICAL WORK SUSTENANCE AND MEANING. THAT OUR ADDRESS MIGHT SEEM TO BE AN UNLIKELY SITE FOR AN ART GALLERY MAKES IT ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT THAT WE BEGIN TO RETHINK THE PURPOSE OF ART AND THE ORIENTATION OF ITS INSTITUTIONS. GROUP MATERIAL WANTS TO EXPLODE THE ASSUMPTIONS THAT DICTATE WHAT ART IS, WHO ART IS FOR AND WHAT AN ART EXHIBITION CAN BE.

# WHEN

IS GROUP MATERIAL OPEN ? AN INDEPENDENT ART DEPENDS ON ITS NOT BEING A BUSINESS. SINCE G.M. IS ORIENTED TOWARD PEOPLE WHO MUST WORK, WE ARE OPEN 5 P.M. TO 10 P.M. ON WEEKDAYS, NOON TO 10 P.M. ON SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS. THERE WILL BE SPECIAL HOURS FOR SPECIAL EVENTS.

# WHY

WAS GROUP MATERIAL ORGANIZED ? GROUP MATERIAL WAS FOUNDED AS A CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE TO THE UNSATISFACTORY WAYS IN WHICH ART HAS BEEN CONCEIVED, PRODUCED, DISTRIBUTED AND TAUGHT IN NEW YORK CITY, IN AMERICAN SOCIETY. GROUP MATERIAL IS AN ARTIST-INITIATED PROJECT. WE ARE DESPERATELY TIRED AND CRITICAL OF THE DRAWN-OUT TRADITIONS OF FORMALISM, CONSERVATISM AND PSEUDO AVANT-GARDISM THAT DOMINATE THE OFFICIAL ART WORLD. AS ARTISTS AND WORKERS WE WANT TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OVER OUR WORK. DIRECTING

WORLD. AS ARTISTS AND WORKERS WE WANT TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OVER OUR WORK, DIRECTING OUR ENERGIES TO THE DEMANDS OF SOCIAL CONDITIONS AS OPPOSED TO THE DEMANDS OF THE ART MARKET. WHILE MOST ART INSTITUTIONS SEPARATE ART FROM THE WORLD, NEUTRALIZING ANY ABRASIVE FORMS AND CONTENTS, GROUP MATERIAL ACCENTUATES THE CUTTING EDGE OF ART. WE WANT OUR WORK AND THE WORK OF OTHERS TO TAKE A ROLE IN A BROADER CULTURAL ACTIVISM.

# HOW

DOES GROUP MATERIAL PLAN TO IMPLEMENT ITS WORK ? GROUP MATERIAL RESEARCHES WORK FROM ARTISTS, NON-ARTISTS, THE MEDIA, THE STREETS-FROM ANYONE INTERESTED IN PRESENTING SOCIALLY CRITICAL INFORMATION IN A COMMUNICATIVE AND INFORMAL CONTEXT. WHILE OUR DIRECT APPROACH IS ORIENTED TOWARD PEOPLE NOT WELL ACQUAINTED WITH THE SPECIALIZED LANGUAGES OF FINE ART, WE EXPECT THAT OUR SHOWS WILL BE VERY REFRESHING FOR AN AUDIENCE THAT HAS A LONG-STANDING INTEREST IN QUESTIONS OF ART THEORY AND PRACTICE. IN OUR EXHIBITIONS, GROUP MATERIAL REVEALS THE MULTIPLICITY OF MEANINGS THAT SURROUND ANY VITAL SOCIAL ISSUE SO THAT PEOPLE ARE INTRODUCED TO A SUBJECT, MAKING EVALUATIONS AND FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS ON THEIR OWN.

OUR PROJECT IS CLEAR. WE INVITE EVERYONE TO QUESTION THE ENTIRE CULTURE WE HAVE TAKEN FOR GRANTED.

## C A L E N D A R

1 9 8 0 - 1 9 8 1

OCT. 4 -  
OCT. 27 :

### GROUP MATERIAL OPENS

OUR FIRST SHOW WILL BE A SURVEY OF THE NEW CULTURAL MILITANCY EMERGENT IN THE WORK OF ARTISTS, COLLECTIVES, AND NON-ARTISTS IN THE U.S. AND ABROAD.

OPENING : 12 NOON - 5:30 P.M.

RECEPTION : 5:30 - 8:30 P.M.

DANCE PARTY : 8:30 - 12 MIDNIGHT

NOV. 16 :

AN OPEN CALL TO ALL ARTISTS !!!

GROUP MATERIAL WILL ACCEPT FOR EXHIBITION ANY AND ALL ARTWORKS CONCERNING THE 1980 ELECTIONS. GROUP MATERIAL WILL BEGIN ACCEPTING WORKS ON OCTOBER 11, 1980. ENTRIES WILL BE ACCEPTED UNTIL OUR EXHIBITION SPACE IS EXHAUSTED - FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED.

ELECTION NIGHT OPENING, NOV. 4TH AT 8:00 !  
WATCH THE RETURNS WITH GROUP MATERIAL !!!!

NOV. 21 -  
DEC. 21 :

### A L I E N A T I O N

AN EXHIBITION THAT DESCRIBES AND EXPLAINS THE MODERN BREAK-UP OF REALITY ; OUR SEPARATIONS FROM EACH OTHER, OUR ART, OUR PRODUCTION, OUR NATURE, OUR SELVES.

IN DECEMBER !

### REVOLTING MUSIC !

AN EXHIBITION OF MUSIC IN THE FORM OF A WILD DANCE PARTY!!!!

FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY, GROUP MATERIAL WILL D.J. THE REVOLUTIONARY HITS OF THE PAST THREE DECADES : RECORDS THAT ARE OVERT AND COVERT DEMONSTRATIONS OF CLASS, SEXUAL AND RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS.

PLUS SLIDES &  
FILMS OF WESTERN  
INSURRECTIONS !!

JAN. 9 -  
FEB. 2 :

### THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE



← Budgets by Liliana Dones  
↑ GM and friends on East 13th Street

# The Salon of Election '80

Group Material, New York, November 4-16, 1980

The show, consisting of a wide array of works relevant to topical political situations and the presidential campaign, opens on election night. Group Material invites people to watch the returns and "join us for an evening of ridicule, suspense, fear, and hopelessness." Three televisions are installed, which are tuned into network election coverage and a broadcast of Michael Cimino's film, *The Deer Hunter*, about the effects of the Vietnam war on a group of friends from a small town in Pennsylvania. Former actor Ronald Reagan is elected.

**November 1980.** Marek Pakulski has left the group to focus on his music, leaving the Vice President role vacant, which has to be filled for incorporation requirements. Tim reports on the progress of the *ALIENATION* show and presents the flyer design and ideas for special events. It is suggested that the group participate as a whole in some manner: either in the form of a collective project, or through an evening of performance pieces that concern alienation. The group agrees on the night of performances, but no date is set. Tim also makes a request for historical quotations that could be enlarged as part of the installation and suggests lighting the show with only glaring fluorescents. The group decides to serve coffee in styrofoam cups with ugly plastic stirrers for the opening and no booze. *The People's Choice* is planned with special events such as talent shows and screenings of home movies being considered. A Christmas party is scheduled for the block. There is general discussion about the need to analyze and critique the exhibitions and events, and the poor quality of interaction among group members, particularly around developing shows. These and other group conflicts are articulated.

President Jimmy Carter delivers his concession speech, 1980  
Still from *The Deer Hunter*

#### MEMBERS:

Hannah Alderfer, George Ault, Julie Ault, Patrick Brennan, Lilliana Dones, Anne Drilllick, Yolanda Hawkins, Beth Jaker, Mundy McLaughlin, Marybeth Nelson, Tim Rollins, Peter Szygula, Michael Udvardy



Meeting Minutes (excerpt),  
Tim Rollins, November 11, 1980

Open (epic) discussion:

Patrick: Complains work and responsibility is not being equally divided within group. The group is not functioning as a group, and in effect is working against itself.

Lili: Hostilities are worked out in meeting but remain. Group is polarized. Tim and Patrick are the only ones who hang the shows.

Beth: Agrees with Patrick on matters of workload and admits being guilty of not doing enough. Thinks uneven effort on part of members is a direct result of hostilities within the group.

Peter: Suggests that in the instance of the *ALIENATION* show Tim was in total control

from the beginning and didn't want anyone to contribute anything. Comments that Tim had told him there was no work left to do.

Patrick: Moves that the *ALIENATION* show was only a small aspect of the problem.

Tim: Dislikes insidiousness and hostilities in group. Group members have to discipline themselves.

George: States he has tried his best to do work in the group but had not realized how little time he would have. Wants to learn something in the group. Has considered quitting.

Julie: Members should take responsibility for doing work and not wait until they are told what to do. People are jealous of an idea—therefore don't want to contribute to Tim and Patrick's shows, however the majority of shows are Tim and Patrick's ideas—does this mean that no one is going to help with any show? Talk of members (Beth, Hannah...) is positive but their actions don't reflect this. Members who don't put work in a show are hostile toward those that do—do not talk to them about their work.

Hannah: Suggests that Patrick and Tim are not using the right tone to get her cooperation. Their open hostility makes her less willing to participate in their projects. Wants more theoretical discussions on shows.

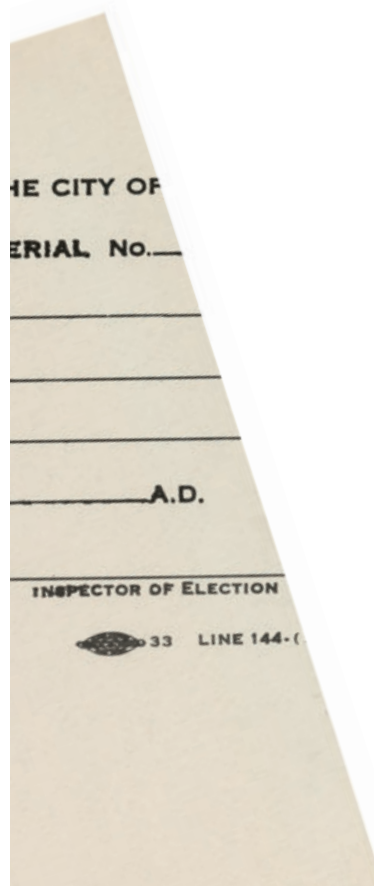
Tim: Initiating projects, and discourses are more important than discussion. (Can't chitchat about "alienation.")

Marybeth: Agrees with Julie's comments. Will try to be more responsible. Finds it impossible to work with Tim and Patrick but tries to work around them (workshops, Halloween party). There may be a jealousy of ideas but there is also a possessiveness of ideas on part of Tim and Patrick—won't let other members join in creative process. The work of members goes unnoticed if not directly witnessed. The relations in the group are not getting better but worse.

Lili: Introduction of the Third World concept—those members are directly involved in feuding. It is selfish of six members to take up time dominating discussion.

Julie: Not selfish of other members because it is a definite problem within the group and it must be worked out. The group is not going to work out until everyone finds a place within the group.

Mundy: We are involved in a business-type organization and should not let personal differences spoil our effectiveness.



The Salon of Election Eighty  
An open call to all artists!  
Group Material will accept for exhibition  
all artworks concerning the theme  
elections.  
November 11, 1980.



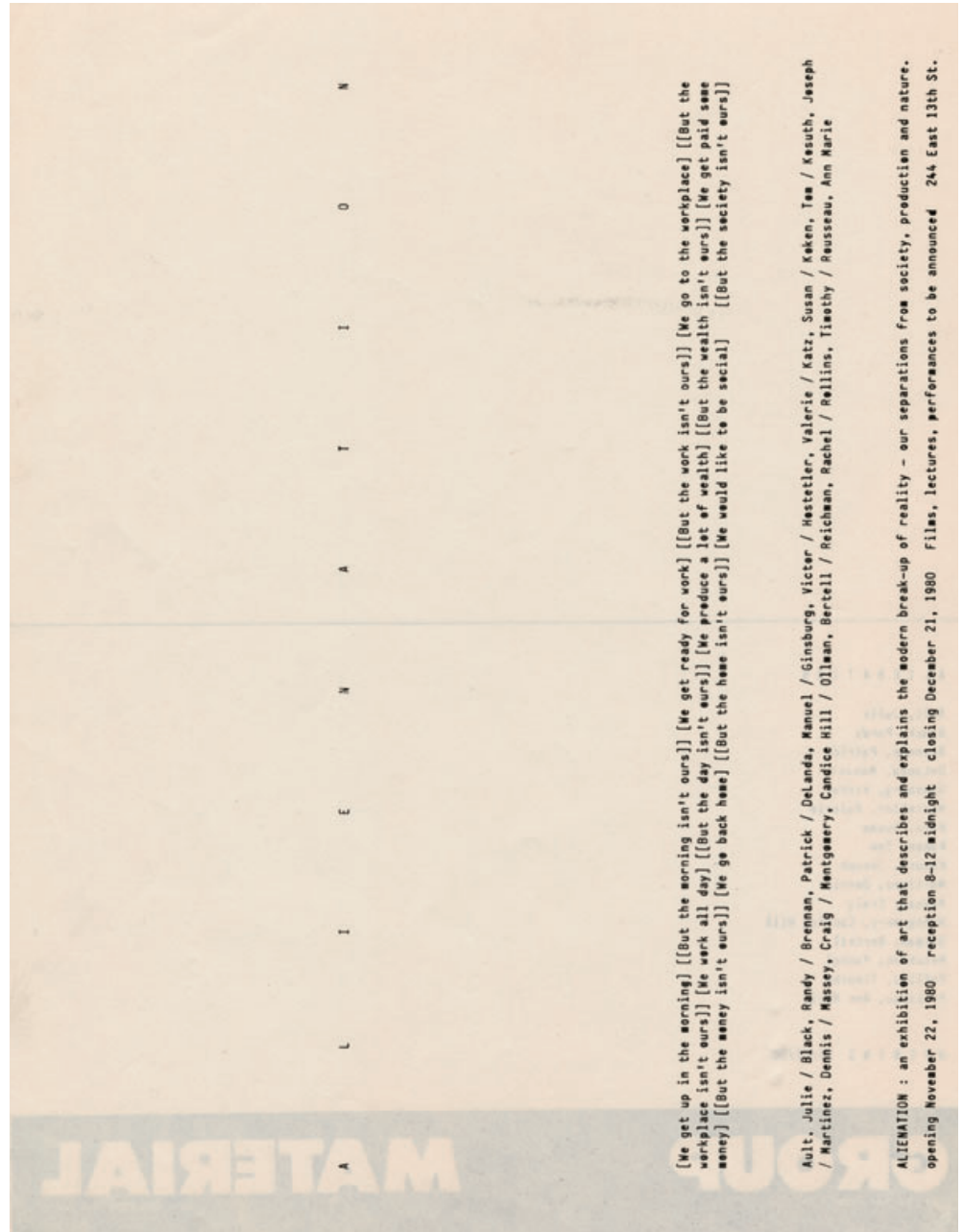
## ALIENATION

Group Material, New York,  
November 22-December 21, 1980

ALIENATION, in part informed by Marxist theory, is: "An exhibition that describes and explains the modern break-up of reality—our separations from society, production and nature." During an evening of live performances, Mundy sings "The Star-Spangled Banner" and recites the Lord's Prayer. Patrick performs *I'm a Victim*, the finished version of the presentation he previously made to the group, for which he stands in front of a painting he made of a Hudson River waterfront location instead of using a projected image.

**December 1980.** Tim submits a proposal to split the group into two completely independent bodies that share only the responsibility of maintaining the space.

↑ ALIENATION, left to right: works by Joseph Kosuth, Tim Rollins, Ann Marie Rousseau, GM (windows)  
→ ALIENATION flyer designed to mimic Ridley Scott's 1979 film, *Alien*



ALIENATION

[[We get up in the morning]] [[But the morning isn't ours]] [[We get ready for work]] [[But the work isn't ours]] [[We go to the workplace]] [[But the workplace isn't ours]] [[We work all day]] [[But the day isn't ours]] [[We produce a lot of wealth]] [[But the wealth isn't ours]] [[We get paid some money]] [[But the money isn't ours]] [[We go back home]] [[But the home isn't ours]] [[We would like to be social]] [[But the society isn't ours]]

Ault, Julie / Black, Randy / Brennan, Patrick / Delanda, Manuel / Ginsburg, Victor / Hestetler, Valerie / Katz, Susan / Keken, Tsa / Kosuth, Joseph / Martinez, Dennis / Massey, Craig / Montgomery, Candice Hill / Ollean, Bertell / Reichman, Rachel / Rollins, Timothy / Rousseau, Ann Marie

ALIENATION : an exhibition of art that describes and explains the modern break-up of reality — our separations from society, production and nature. opening November 22, 1980 reception 8-12 midnight closing December 21, 1980 Filas, lectures, performances to be announced 244 East 13th St.



## The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)

Group Material, New York,  
January 10-February 1, 1981

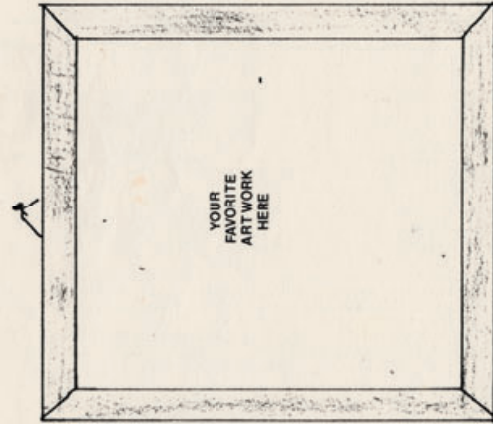
**January 1981.** With the help of neighborhood kids Hector and Celinda, Group Material goes door-to-door visiting residents on the block, inviting participation in the upcoming exhibition. Doors open readily to the kids, who speak Spanish. In some cases people offer something on the spot; one woman takes her wedding photo off the wall and hands it over. Others are skeptical about the use and care of their treasured objects. Momentum builds as people bring in their material and items are installed in the space. Friendly rivalry prevails and soon the walls are full. Lili, who is Cuban, suggests "Arroz con Mango" (which loosely translates as "what a mess") as a subtitle for the show. Invitations to the opening are mailed out using the notoriously slow bulk mailing system in order to keep costs down. The announcements do not get delivered in time for the reception, which is nonetheless a great party with only residents from the block and Group Material members in attendance. "Bingo Night," an event accompanying the show, attracts lots of neighbors and local artists.

**February 1981.** George Ault leaves the group, due to his studying responsibilities at NYU.

↑ PEZ candy dispenser collection exhibited in *The People's Choice*

**MEMBERS:**  
Hannah Alderfer, Julie Ault, Patrick Brennan, Lilliana Dones, Anne Drillick, Yolanda Hawkins, Beth Jaker, Mundy McLaughlin, Marybeth Nelson, Tim Rollins, Peter Szypula, Michael Udvardy

# The People's Choice Art Exhibit.



"... but what is it supposed to mean?"



The answer to this and other similar, often posed questions will be answered by the very people who ask them. The visual content of the show will be almost entirely up to the community, who will be invited to submit the artwork that they have in their homes. It will be for and about their opinions, their ideas and feelings towards art, artwork and the people who make art.



Thomas Lawson, "The People's Choice, Group Material," Artforum, April 1981

Group Material is a loose association of about 12 artists committed to working in the area where aesthetics and politics meet. The group has existed in one form or another for about a year, operating from a storefront on East 13th Street since last July and presenting theme shows in which the idea behind each show is considered more important than any of the pieces in it.

The members of Group Material find the notion of production problematic when they consider the role of art objects. To keep from having that production co-opted (something very few overtly political artists have been able to avoid) they downplay and at times repudiate the object in favor of the context. The group's real work is their use of the storefront as a catalyst. Their ambition, at least at present, is remarkably free of individual careerism and is focused instead on the creation of the conditions necessary for making communication possible.

One could quarrel with their anachronistic denial of the potential that the art object holds but not with their genuine desire to initiate discourse. The problem lies within their well-worn means. But these questions are cavils, evidence merely of factional dispute. What is more important in the case of Group Material is their emphasis on the need for discourse, the break that they are attempting from the self-enclosed systems of recent art.

For *The People's Choice* the group invited the residents on the block to exhibit things they liked and were important to them. Most brought personal mementoes, photographs and gifts, and a few brought objects that indicated the idiosyncratic tastes of real collectors. Nearly everything came with a story, as a whole, the show turned into a narrative of everyday life, a folk tale in which intimacies were shared without shame.

The artwork on display was diverse in both intent and degree of sophistication. There was a mural done by the kids on the block as a part of a weekly project. There were a few amateurish paintings of family, favorite landscapes and pleasing abstract shapes. There were some small clay pieces by someone's grandmother, now dead. The value of these artifacts lay precisely in their sentimentality, a quality that is absent from most artwork that strives to mean something to a general audience.

Most of the paintings were family souvenirs or gifts. The photographs were of babies, first communions, weddings, pictures taken in the army, and in one case, a billboard of superimposed snapshots documenting the history of an entire family. Each picture had its own story, and together they added up to a moving, detailed record of a small community within the city.

Another category was that of the collectors, people who had chosen to exercise a quirky, personal taste in furnishing their homes. There was a collection of small toy animals from above a person's kitchen sink, another of PEZ brand candy dispensers, a three-dimensional picture of a covered bridge and a strange-looking valet chair. The function of all of these is mostly esthetic, yet they still have extra-esthetic narratives that sustain them. The most shocking of these was the Robert Morris poster from 1974, infamous in another context, in which the artist posed in S&M costume. It was presented here with the explanation that it was taken from the apartment of a man who had hanged himself.

Apparently different from the very personal, very local content of the bulk of the show, the sculpture of Jorge Luis Rodriguez seemed at first out of place. But the welded-steel construction, a shiny-surfaced dressing table with a crazed, Cubist-inspired structure, soon began to seem more at home. Not only was the image itself a domestic one, and obviously intended to be seen as such, but it soon became clear that Rodriguez's role on the block was a special one. He is the community's artist, working with the community's own icons and supported by the people he serves.

The artists of Group Material are clearly serious in their commitment to the idea that art can be used as an instrument for social and political change, and to date their interventions have demonstrated a remarkable intelligence. But like all such groups, they will probably suffer from the contradiction that lies at the heart of their existence. No matter what their aspirations are, no matter their abilities, at some point each member of the group will be faced with a terrible, if familiar, choice—between political or esthetic action. Until then, Group Material will probably present some of the most provocative and thoughtful shows to be seen in New York.





[Press release \(excerpt\),](#)  
Group Material, January 1981

*The People's Choice*—an exhibition of favorite art possessions on loan from the people and households of 13th Street between 2nd and 3rd Avenues, and the members of Group Material. A display of the private gone public, of the-not-normally-found-in-an-art-gallery, of personal choice and cultural value on one block in New York City.

↑ Photograph lent for  
*The People's Choice* by  
Junior, the  
superintendent of 244  
East 13th Street

December 22, 1980

Dear Friends and Neighbors of 13th Street :

GROUP MATERIAL is having an exhibition and you are invited !

Group Material is the gallery that opened this October at 244 East 13th Street. We are a group of young people who have been organizing different kinds of events in our storefront. We've had parties, art shows, movies and art classes for the kids who are always rushing in and out.

"Arroz con Mango" is the title of our next exhibition. We would like to show things that might not usually find their way into an art gallery : the things that you personally find beautiful, the objects that you keep for your own pleasure, the objects that have meaning for you, your family and your friends. What could these objects be ? They can be photographs, or your favorite posters. If you collect things, these objects would be good for this exhibition. If you knit, crochet, do needlepoint, or any other craft, these would be good, also. Drawings, paintings, sculpture, furniture or any other art forms created by yourself or others will be included. Choose something you feel will communicate to others. If there is a story about your object, write it down and we will display it along with the thing you have chosen to show.

Imagine that for three weeks there would be a room full of things that describe the people of 13th St. !

If you are interested in exhibiting in this show, please drop by the Group Material gallery anytime between 5 - 10 weekdays, noon - 10 on weekends.

"Arroz con Mango" opens January 9th. We will be putting the show on the walls starting January 5th, so there isn't much time !

PLEASE get in touch with us AS SOON AS POSSIBLE if you would like to contribute to the show.

Thank you,

Liliana, Marybeth, Tim,  
Patrick, Anne, Mundy,  
Peter, Beth, Julie,  
George, Hannah

## IT'S A GENDER SHOW

Group Material is organizing an exhibition and series of events around issues of GENDER.

### WE ARE SEEKING:

- Material which opens up definitions of femininity and masculinity.
- Material which speaks to issues of physical attractiveness, youth, and sexual potency which idealize male and female activity and relations.
- Material which illuminates the relationship between sexuality and our gendered subjectivities.
- Material which comments on the assumption that erotic desire is constructed differently for men and women.
- Material which demonstrates how male and female behaviors are developed and reinforced in the FAMILY.
- Material which confronts sexual models which influence us; representations of gender roles in popular music, advertizing, in culture at large.
- Material which addresses why we organize politically around same-sex sexuality in a society structured by gender divisions.
- Material which documents the emergence of sexual "outlaws" who violate patriarchal rules of conduct.
- Material which exposes the social institutions which strive for sexual conformity, cultural hegemony.
- Material which describes the commonplace ways we can and do manipulate gender boundaries in order to break loose of gender tyranny.
- Material which considers whose class voice speaks the loudest in issues of sexuality and gender.

The Gender show opens at Group Material on February 14, 1981. If you have anything to contribute, please call the phone numbers listed below. We need material for the walls and special events.

### The special events being organized are:

- Two evenings of films, independent films about gender, and sex education films used in the public school system.
- Video presentations
- A panel discussion on Gender, Sexuality, Gay Politics/Feminist Politics.
- An evening of performances.

If you prefer to stop by Group Material, we are located at 244 East 13th Street, between 2nd and 3rd Avenues. We are open every weekday evening from 6-10 P.M., Saturday and Sundays 12-10 P.M.  
For further information call :  
Beth Jaker-866-5352 / Marybeth Nelson-684-0881 / Peter Szygula-8892553 / Hannah Alderfer-964-8184

## *It's A Gender Show!*

It's a collection of artworks, films, video, written material and found information.  
It explores the subjective, social, and political meanings of being male/being female.  
It describes masculinity and femininity as they are socially constructed.  
It opens Saturday, February 14th, 1981, 12 A.M. - 7 P.M. at GROUP MATERIAL, 244 E 13th St., N.Y.C., 10003.  
It invites you.

## It's A Gender Show!

Group Material, New York,  
February 14-March 9, 1981

*It's A Gender Show!* is organized by Group Material members Beth Jaker, Marybeth Nelson, Hannah Alderfer, and Peter Szygula with external curatorial collaboration from an artist friend, Effie Serlis, who also studied at SVA. The exhibition's thematic focus on gender and issues of sexual politics generates a great deal of interest and expectation among artists (as well as criticism). The show develops a strong word of mouth and brings in a substantial audience. (There are no existing photographs of this show.)

Letter to Group Material (excerpt),  
Joy Episalla, Carrie Yamaoka, Michelle Araujo,  
Bill Allen, Bobby Bordo, February 14, 1981

Group Material has misrepresented its own objective of social communication in the curating of the *Gender Show* in the following ways: There was no opportunity for the artists to share their ideas and artwork about gender (in an attempt to end the alienation of the individual artist). Rather, the curators, unbeknownst to the contributing artists, decided to jury the show, and then viewed the work in the privacy of the artists' homes, thus prohibiting any dialogue about the nature of gender. . . .

Group Material has misrepresented its objective of political change in the curating of the *Gender Show* in the following ways:

As in the "official world of art and academia," the artists had no opportunity to "maintain control" over their work. In one case, the curators denied the artist control over his work by accepting it only up on the condition that he make certain changes. Another work was not accepted because it was "too large" . . .

We write this letter because Group Material has been a real alternative to the world of art commodification. Its strength lies in criticism and support in a collective fashion. To continue this discriminating practice reinforces the ways in which artists are alienated and coopted from distribution and exhibition of artwork. . . .







## Consumption: Metaphor, Pastime, Necessity

Group Material, New York,  
March 21-April 20, 1981

This is the first exhibition for which the space is painted entirely red. A Tupperware party is held on April 15. The invitation reads: "Group Material loves Tupperware! Join Louise, a charming Tupperware representative, and Group Material in the consumption of a product well worthy of artistic acclaim!" Much to Louise's surprise, and as a credit to her sales skills, the Lower East Side-based artists and musicians who attend buy a lot of Tupperware.

**April 1981.** Suggestions for next year's exhibitions include: a show about the family; open invitation in collaboration with Lower East Side space ABC No Rio and Fashion Moda in the Bronx; Living in the City; Religion; Arroz con Mango II; Law and Order; War; Habits & Rituals; Media—Can You Top This?; political photomontage artist Klaus Staack; Sports; Television; Apocalypse; the Whitney Biennial; Celebrity Show; Fun Show; and Love and Sex.

↑ The "Everything Must Go!" sign installed at GM's entrance for *Consumption* prompted the landlord to notify the group about its obligation to fulfill its lease agreement.

March 18, 1981

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

On Saturday, March 28 from 2 - 8 p.m., GROUP MATERIAL opens its latest in exhibitions devoted to social themes :

CONSUMPTION:

METAPHOR  
PASTIME  
NECESSITY

AN EXHIBITION ON THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF USE, SQUANDER, ABSORPTION AND DESTRUCTION.

CONSUMPTION as NECESSITY :

**BIOLOGY DICTATES !** We require a minimum amount of food, shelter, clothing, utilities. The quality of life depends on the fair and equal access to these bare necessities. But the basic materials essential to life are owned, operated and distributed by "the Private Sector." "Getting by" is a political struggle.

CONSUMPTION as PASTIME :

**EVERYDAY IS A SALE !** To fabricate needs, to hunt and shop - this is our leisure. Don't preach about the wasted labor, time, environment, mental and physical health. I like the long, glowing aisles and I like to browse to the Ray Conniff Singers and I always want, gripped in a supernatural urge to buy.

CONSUMPTION as METAPHOR :

**IT'S THE MODERN FOOD CHAIN !** To dominate production, the ruling class must promote the endless consumption of goods, services and culture as if it were the consummation of civil society. Masses are ground into markets. The antagonistic individual, nation or class is absorbed, one way or another, by capitalism's coup of everyday life.

**SEE !** Mundy McLaughlin's tragic supermarket photos !  
**WONDER !** as Mierle Laderman Ukeles asks, "Where do we stick the garbage ?"  
**GAZE !** at Anne Pitrone's poster-narrative about the endless wait for upward mobility !  
**MARVEL !** at Julie Ault's universe of middle-class products !  
**TRY !** Cathy Thomson's Atlantic City Tableaux !  
**CRY !** at Barbara Lipp's documents on cosmetic surgery !  
**SIGH !** at a seagull trapped by a Coke can by Christy Rupp !  
**SAMPLE !** Michael Udvardy's construction-paper mural on peer-pressure purchases !  
**BEHOLD !** Timothy Rollins's installation on Nestlé's consumption of the Third World !  
**CONSIDER !** Bill Stephens's collusion of Capitol and Coca-Cola !  
**LAUGH !** at Patrick Brennan's merciless caricatures of culture consumers on the left and right  
**LINGER !** with Lyn Hughes on penetration  
**STUDY !** Juan Sanchez's painting on American imperialism in Puerto Rico !  
**RELAX !** with Mike Glier's drawing of a

2.

As the metaphysics of limitless growth and infinite markets loom out of control, the desire to consume becomes itself all-consuming.

It's power for power's sake as the ultimate act of consumption is in the works !

It's a final clearance sale !

EVERYTHING MUST GO !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

HOURS : 6 to 10 p.m. WEEKDAYS  
Noon to 10 SAT. & SUN.

Press contacts ( after 5:30 p.m. )

PATRICK BRENNAN (212) 260 - 8721

LILIANA DONES (212) 260 - 3757

- senator with advice for a nervous nation !
- SAVOR ! Gregg Smith's painting of visiting chefs from Communist China !
- BUY ! Bill Allen's and Robert Bordo's piece on industrial and artistic production !
- BROWSE ! through Micki McGee's book on "Her Intestinal Bypass" !
- LOOK ! at Mattie Peoples' painting of a lost Black utopia !
- SATISFY ! your suspicions with Greg Sholette's piece on Citibank's destruction of neighborhoods !
- SCREAM ! at a chandelier of blood-eating zombies by Karen Hatch !
- HURRY ! to see Sally LeLong's windows about advertising's imperialism of the Self !
- TEST ! Randolph Black's proposal for High Art !
- TAKE ONE ! of Moira Dryer's prints about America's new Chinese market !
- RUSH ! to see Andrew Nash's nice blue swimming pools !
- USE ! Gary Morgan's xeroxes on starvation, nuclear power and party dresses !

CONSUMPTION:  
METAPHOR  
PASTIME  
NECESSITY

3-28-81  
OPENING 2-8  
RECEPTION 8-10

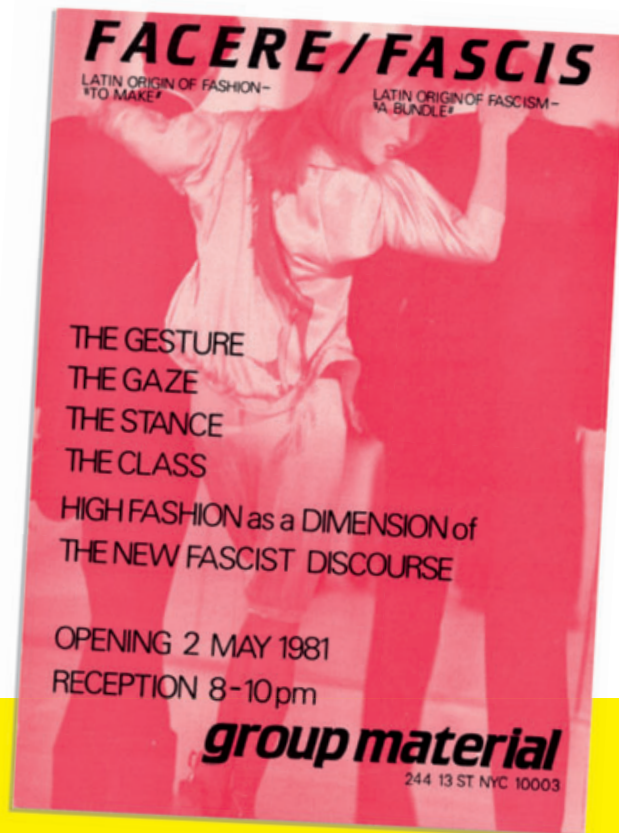
GROUP MATERIAL  
244 E 13ST. NYC



↑ Detail of work by Tim Rollins in Consumption

## Facere / Fascis

Group Material, New York,  
May 2-June 4, 1981



A Dress / Dance / Dazzle event is held at Club 57 in conjunction with the exhibition. Mundy and Julie DJ and people are invited to: "Just wear what you swear by. You'll walk that glorious runway as your fashion selection is announced to an admiring audience. All the dancing afterwards will relieve that spring fever. Group Material puts fashion in your hands . . ."

The announcement card for *Facere / Fascis* is a source of conflict in the group. Hannah and Beth

feel the image is offensive to women. Hannah, who often designs materials for the group, does not want any part in doing this card. Lili, who is also a designer, does, and designs it to look like a magazine cover.



5/12/81

Dear Group Material,

For three months time now I have not been participating fully in Group Material due to other commitments and a growing resignation as to the personal and political thrusts of this group.

My inability to support and participant in the directions in which Group Material is going collide on a few levels.

Briefly stated; sexual politics, issues of sexual difference and preference, and feminism are met within this group with disinterest and hostility which seems irresolvable with continued participation and struggle.

What now seems as a major ambition; rather than a lesser consequence or motive of GM; is a springboard for individual art careers into commercial galleries.

Within these political differences of commitment lies great personal antagonisms. A smaller background drama which emphasizes the seriousness of our disagreements and gives it a cutting edge which interrupted the forgotten projections of GM.

So after a lot of talking with friends and thinking I'm leaving Group Material. Hannah - this is yet not said all that needs to be said....

The Future of Group Material,  
Julie Ault, May 1981

For GM to improve itself we should look to some of our original ambitions.

- 1) "Part of GM's working responsibility is to the immediate local problems that shape the special character of this place. Housing, education, sanitations, community organizing, recreation. These are the concrete areas of practice that give our artistic and theoretical works sustenance and meaning."
- 2) "Rethink the purpose of art and the orientation of its institutions. GM want to explode the assumptions that dictate what art is, who art is for and what an art exhibition can be."
- 3) Broaden our base, communicate with artist groups, etc. outside the U.S., and set up an international network.
- 4) To represent GM as a group in exhibition and projects (outside of 244 East 13th).

The People's Choice was the best show we've had. It was so successful because the show itself was a brilliant idea and it really addressed #2 above. It is also the only show we got intelligent and favorable press (from Artforum). Political Art by Children and Food & Culture both have the possibility to be as

successful. These shows are the most fun and were and will be true GM projects which the whole group works on.

We should concentrate on this type of work as opposed to the theme shows where we choose two or three people to take care of the show and then they go collect work. Not that this format hasn't been good but it is much more problematic in terms of there being a comprehensive, understandable, explanatory show on the walls, "In my opinion" (ha ha ha) the Consumption show is the only one of those that succeeded....

Lastly, if GM is to become the force we want it to become every member must question their interest. The best way to combat the criticism of being a self-interested clique is to cease being a self-interested clique.

**May 1981.** Hannah Alderfer, Beth Jaker and Marybeth Nelson want to work collaboratively on visual projects in feminist communities. Along with Peter Szypula they leave the group due to irreconcilable differences over ideological priorities and personality clashes.

**June 1981.** Yolanda Hawkins has not been participating much or attending meetings for some time and is no longer a functioning member of the group. Group Material is now an incorporated not-for-profit organization, awaiting tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service.

← Letter of resignation to the group by Hannah Alderfer

**MEMBERS:**  
Julie Ault, Patrick Brennan, Lilliana Dones, Mundy McLaughlin, Tim Rollins, Michael Udvardy

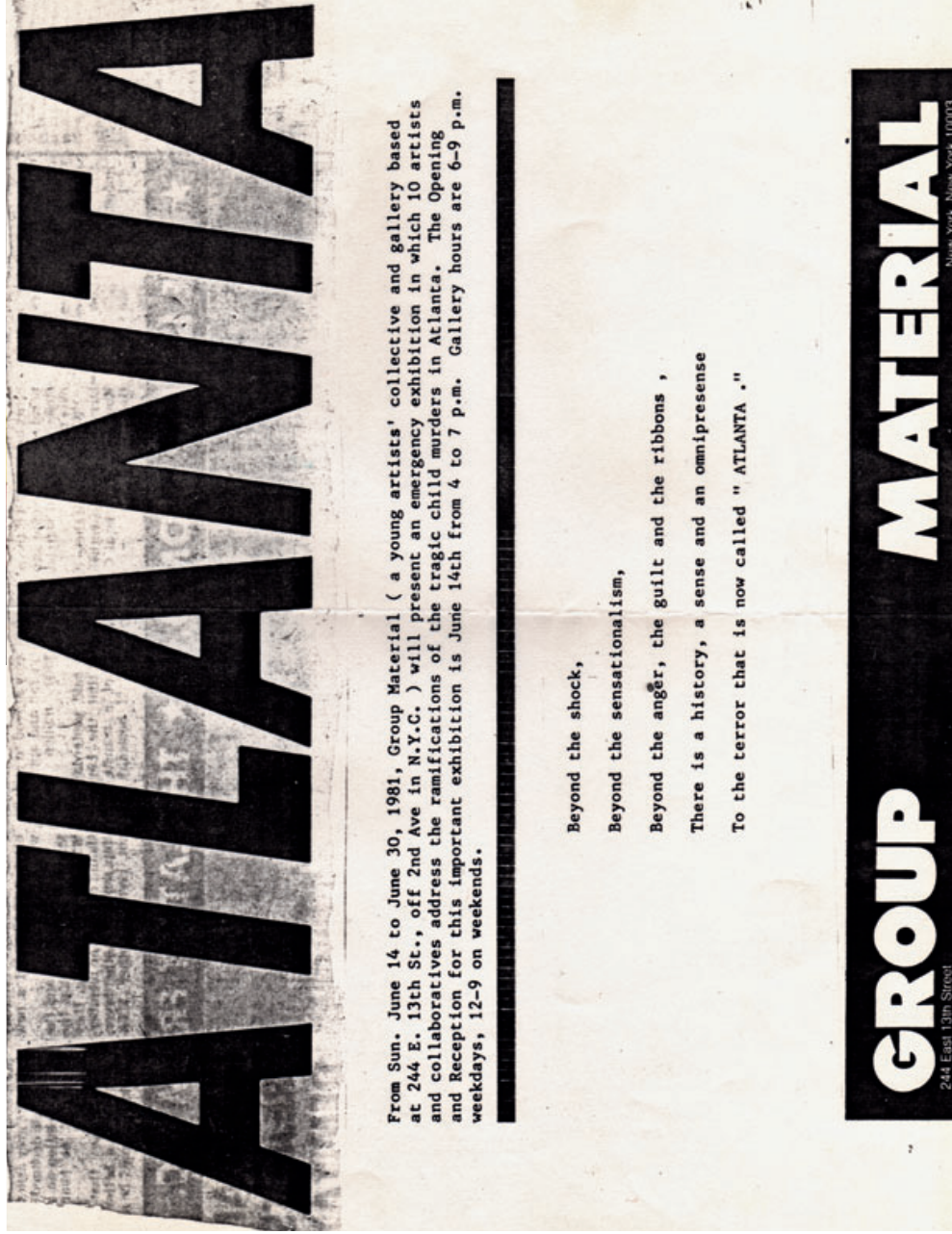


## Atlanta: An Emergency Exhibition

Group Material, New York,  
June 14-30, 1981

Since the summer of 1979 the bodies of twenty-nine black children, adolescents and adults have been found dead in Atlanta, believed to be murdered by one or more serial killers. Atlanta's black communities are terrorized by the killings, which receive a great deal of media attention. Group Material responds to this topical situation, which has been generating responses in art making, with an exhibition presenting "ten artists and collaboratives who address the ramifications of the tragic child murders in Atlanta."

↑ Atlanta, left to right: works by Faith Ringgold, Micki McGee, and Tim Rollins with 35 children from Harlem and the Lower East Side



Present: Ault, Udfarty, Dones, Rolaidns, Hawkins, Burnen, La Plumba, Hawkins.  
Absent: Onassis, Rockefeller, etc.

Agenda:

- 1) Grants (NEA)
- 2) Witchhunts (NO MORE).
- 3) Invitational Show.
- 4) Food.
- 5) Judy Richheimer.

1) Grants (NEA). Tim filled out and sent the application for the NEA grant and the group listens as he reads aloud what he wrote on the application. Patrick goes wild with objections ( a bit to wild in the eyes of most group members, who wonder if perhaps Patrick is having his period) (only kidding Patrick) to the fact that Tim filled out the application without consulting the group. Most members agree that in the future the group should be consulted on such members, and that also all members should take on more responsibilities. We agree to meet twice a week from now on. We agree Group Material, as far as finances goes, is in a panic situation. We agree that just because the girls in Group Material have higher IQs than the boys, that doesn't mean that they are more intelligent.

A bit of research has told Tim that 7-Loaves is nothing but a two bit SHIT OPERATION. This is no doubt the biggest scandal at this weeks meeting. The Cultural Council is on the other hand, a CLASS operation (croissants...) and supply accountants, which are needed to account for the funds we are granted.

\*\*\*\*\*to deal with our financial emergency, dues are \$55 until further notice\*\*\*\*

- 2) Witchhunts (NO MORE). It's on,
- 3) Food. Fuck the food show! Everyone agrees we can't do it. Instead we will have a one night exhibition/benefit/feast. Virtually the same artists on the list for M-5 will be asked to do dishes, which will be eaten all for the good price of \$2.50. Mundy and Julie will start the work on the show - fliers/press release. Everyone will call the artists.
- 4) Invitational Show. Stephan has agreed to participate, but since big Joe Lewis (a powerful man in these parts) is having a show at the actual elite Fashion Moda complex, he suggests we show work in gutted buildings, and outside - he will provide a map/walking tour. (If only one girl from Group Material will tickle his toes while saying obscene things).

5) Judy Richheimer. There is a possibility she will be writing about us for Profile Magazine ( correction Portfolio magazine, or was that Panorama?) and she wants to sit in on one of our meetings. Everyone seems to think this is alright (but why should she want to?)

\*\*\*\*\*

Thursday's Work Meeting

- Filing: Lili.
  - Converting the back room into an office: Lili and Julie. (But everyone should help.)
  - Mailing List: Julie and Mundy. (How to get listed: Yolanda)
  - Grant Letters: Pat, Joe and Mundy.
- \*\*\*\*\*
- next week: more vicious infighting promised!

Meeting Minutes (excerpt),  
Mundy McLaughlin, June 23, 1981

Incorporationville: Everyone is sick of these reports and Mundy must deal with negative vibes as she dishes out the news that if we get tax exempt status within 18 months of becoming incorporated, we are not responsible for taxes. She must deal with yawns and downright looks of disdain while reporting that going under an umbrella will not effect our incorporating procedure. Mundy is very sad when her report is over—she enjoys being in the limelight so. Back of the space: the word from Julie the Jawbreaker (so better behave) is GET YOUR SHIT OUT OF THE BACK BEFORE IT GETS STUFFED UP YO' ASS. Madame Binh Graphics Collective: Wants to do a poetry reading on June 19—group says YEAH WE GO FOR THOSE GIRLS—even if, as Tim points out, they aren't cool. Artists Interested in GM: Hey man we are getting GOOD FEEDBACK from groovy artists like John Fekner, Paulette Nenner, and lots of great people who know where it's at. The word is, and this is a trip man, they actually think we are TOGETHER and all that. Grant Letter(s): Fine, fine, mmmm good. Good letter boys.

Opportunity for the Women of Group Material: One of the boys has been lonely lately at night (betcha can't guess who????) since that lovely tradition known as the Tall Ships is being replaced this year by the more elegant NATO WAR SHIPS on July 4th, there will be a demonstration or two. No More Nice Girls—call Anne Pitrone 477-5799 (who may not be a part of No More Nice Girls, but is organizing this demonstration). So come on you nice girls, Lili, Julie, Mundy—screw it—let that bitch in you come out. Read *The Scum Manifesto!* (Due to the fact that the secretary has become a sincere feminist in the past week, she will leave you with a quotation from that great book of wisdom—*The Scum Manifesto*: "Although completely physical, the male is unfit even for stud service.")

## Eat This Show

Group Material, New York,  
July 11, 1981, 8 p.m.

The final show of Group Material's first season is a one-night exhibition of pieces related to the culture and politics of food, along with edible artworks consumed during the event.

**July 1981.** Patrick Brennan, Liliana Dones, and Michael Udvardy leave the group out of frustration with ongoing conflicts and from a desire to focus on their individual art practices. Patrick announces he is keeping the space to use as a studio. The lease is in his name.

**August 1981.** Group Material is awarded its first NEA grant in the amount of \$5,000 (through an eligible umbrella organization, Heresies). Director Frank Hodsell withholds the funds; allegedly because he suspects the group has communist leanings due to the red walls of its gallery. Eventually the money is released.

**MEMBERS:**  
Julie Ault, Mundy  
McLaughlin, Tim Rollins



# GROUP MATERIAL

Distributed to audience at the UPTOWN/DOWNTOWN exhibition,  
City Gallery, Oct. 1981 by the Lower Manhattan Cultural  
Committee

Because of our location we had in effect limited our audience to East Village passersby and those curious enough to venture out of their own neighborhoods to see art off-Soho. But our most rewarding and warm and fun audience was the people on the block. Because they integrated us immediately into the life of their street, our work, no matter how tedious or unrecognized by media, always had a direct and emergent social meaning.

We hated the association with "alternative spaces" because it was clear to us that most prominent alternative spaces are, in appearance, policy and social function, the children of the dominant commercial galleries in New York. To distinguish ourselves and to raise art exhibition as a political issue, we refused to show artists as singular entities. Instead, we organized artists, non-artists, a very broad range of people, to exhibit around a special social issue. From ALLENATION to ATLANTA to GENDER to a very popular show of artwork from the living rooms of people on our block, Group Material sought to reinvent a dialectical approach to reality through the means of art.

Group Material began as twelve young artists who wanted to develop an independent group that could organize, exhibit and promote an art of innovative form and social change. Starting two years ago, we met and planned in living rooms after work. We saved money collectively. After a year of this, we were theoretically and financially ready to look for a gallery space. This was our dream - to find a place that we could rent, control and operate in any manner we saw fit. This pressing desire for a room of our own was strategic on both the political and psychological fronts. We knew that in order for our project to be taken seriously by a large public, we had to resemble a "real" gallery. Without these four walls of justification, our work would probably not be considered as art. And to be honest, the gallery was to become a security blanket in our own minds as well: a second home, a social center in which our politically provocative work was protected in a friendly neighborhood environment. We finally found such a space in a 600 sq. ft. storefront on a Hispanic block on East 13th St. in New York.

WE LEARNED THE HARD WAY.

Sept. 1981

# CAUTION! ALTERNATIVE SPACE!

2.

Externally, Group Material's first public year was an encouraging success. But internally, problems advanced. The maintenance and operation of the storefront had become a ball-and-chain on the collective. More and more our energies were swallowed by the space, the space, the space. Repairs, new installations, gallery sitting, hysterically paced curating, fundraising and personal disputes cut into our very limited time as a bunch of individuals who had to work full-time jobs during the day or night or both. People got broke, people got tired, people quit. As G.M. closed its first season, we knew we could not continue this course without self-destructing. Everything had to change. The mistake was obvious. Just like the alternative spaces we had set out to criticize, here we were sitting on 13th St., waiting for everyone to rush down and see our shows instead of taking the initiative ourselves of mobilizing into more public areas. We had to cease being a space and become a working group once again.

For this second season, Group Material is a very different organization, with new associates, new tactics. We've learned that the notion of alternative space isn't only politically phony and aesthetically naive - it can also be diabolical. It is impossible to create a radical and innovative art if this work is anchored in one special gallery location. Art can have the most political content and right-on form, but the stuff just hangs there silent unless its means of distribution makes political sense as well. Working out of our new headquarters on E. 26th and Lexington Ave. in N.Y.C., Group Material has planned not only special gallery shows (we haven't totally dispensed with them) but also exhibitions in public areas: streets, city squares, newspapers, mass transit, even churches.

If a more inclusive and democratic vision for art is our project, then we cannot possibly rely on winning validation from bright, white rooms and full-color repros in the art world glossies. To tap and promote the lived aesthetic of a largely "non-art" public - this is our goal, our contradiction, our energy.

GROUP MATERIAL WANTS TO OCCUPY THAT MOST VITAL OF ALTERNATIVE SPACES -  
THAT WALL-LESS EXPANSE THAT BARS ARTISTS AND THEIR WORK  
FROM THE CRUCIAL SOCIAL CONCERNS OF THE AMERICAN WORKING CLASS.

October 1981. Group Material distributes a flyer, "Caution! Alternative Space!" in Downtown Uptown, an exhibition by seventeen lower Manhattan based alternative spaces at the City Gallery in New York. The handout explains the problems that emerged during the group's first year, which led to leaving Thirteenth Street to develop a new practice based around distribution and employing public spaces. In addition to planning projects for city squares, newspapers, and mass transit, the group begins to use Tim and Julie's living room at 132 East 26th Street as a headquarters for meetings and occasional exhibitions, and discusses getting new members. Jock Reynolds conducts a site visit to 26th Street on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in response

to the group's funding application. After a few minutes of pretending to be professional and established, the adhoc character of the set-up is apparent to Reynolds, who proposes a candid conversation over a couple of six-packs. He is supportive and offers good advice.

## Enthusiasm!

Group Material Headquarters,  
132 East 26th Street, New York,  
October 31–November 28, 1981



The group show *Enthusiasm!* announces GM's new headquarters. Tim and Julie paint bold exclamation marks inspired by the graphic design of Alexander Rodchenko on the second floor windows of 132 East 26th Street, and use the motif for the exhibition flyer.

↑ Current GM members  
clockwise from left:  
Julie Ault, Doug Ashford,  
Mundy McLaughlin,  
Tim Rollins

**November 1981.** In the summer Tim met Doug Ashford at the *Coney Island Show*, which they had both participated in. Doug had just graduated from Cooper Union where he studied with Hans Haacke and Martha Rosler. He makes layered drawings that quote from mass culture for both street and gallery settings, and is interested in collaborative social practice. Tim introduces Doug to Mundy and Julie in the fall and in November he is invited to join the group.



## M5

5th Avenue buses, New York,  
December 10, 1981-January 10, 1982

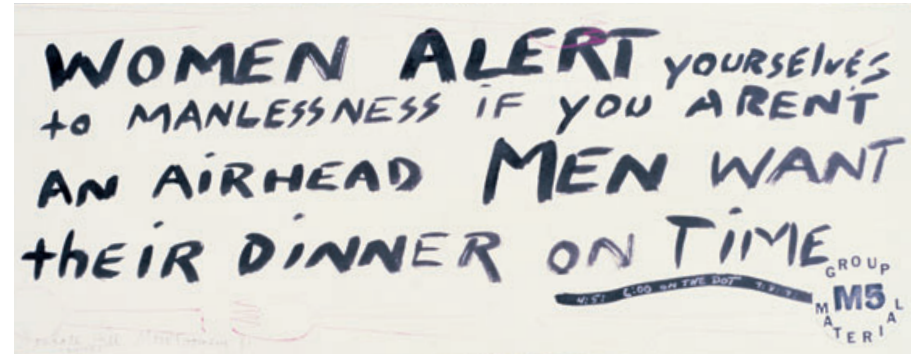
As part of the group's objective to integrate art into everyday spaces, Group Material contracts to fill 100 advertising spaces inside buses on the Fifth Avenue lines—M3, M4, M5, M20—that travel the spine of Manhattan, from Harlem to Soho. The total rental cost is \$600. The work of twenty-nine invited artists is displayed in place of ads for one month. Works range in media from photocopies to paintings.

**March 1982.** GM presents *Works on Newspaper*, a group show of artists working on and with newspapers, in its 26th Street headquarters.

↑ Post Reagan election unattributed advert displayed on taxi cab exterior  
→ M5, top to bottom: works by Candace Hill-Montgomery, Anton Van Dalen, Tom Bassmann

Press Release (excerpt),  
Group Material, December 1981

The collection of artworks speaks to the rider about:  
alienation from their jobs  
the independence of Puerto Rico  
the condition of public schools  
urban fear  
the new face of Uncle Sam  
and much more.





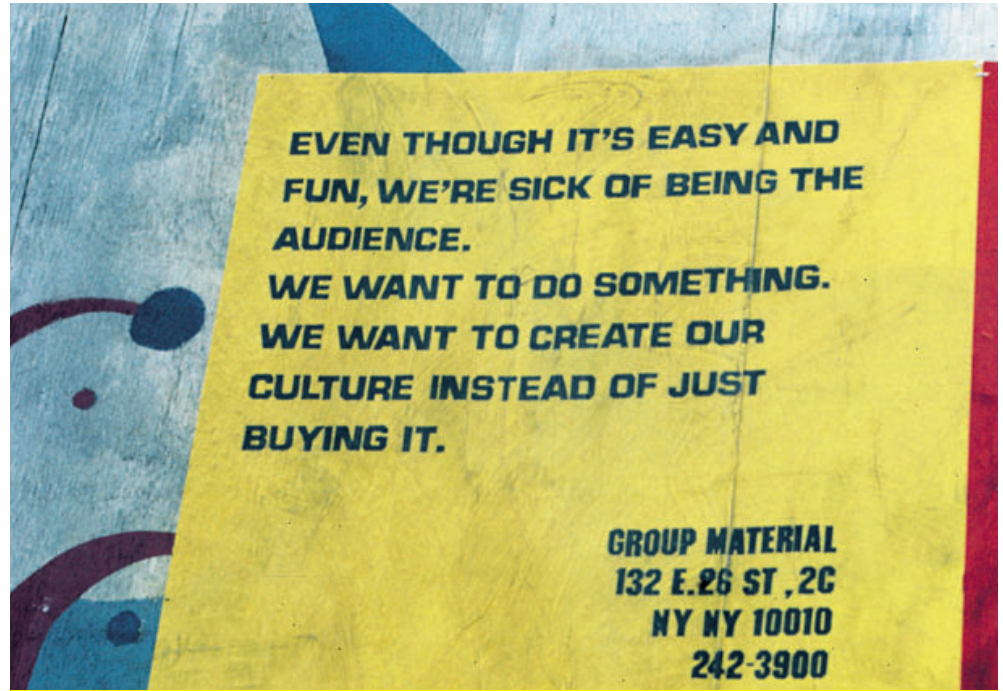
## DA ZI BAOS

Union Square, New York,  
from April 16, 1982

大字報

Big Word Poster

Dazibaos (big character posters) are a popular Chinese debate medium, which Tim learned about when he visited China in 1978. A handwritten poster that opines, informs, or protests is mounted on a public wall. Responses in the form of more dazibaos ensue; a discourse develops. In China "democracy walls" have been a way of publicizing issues and influencing public opinion as well as official policy. For *DA ZI BAOS*, the group elicits and publicly juxtaposes a set of twelve statements in the spirit of the



Chinese dazibaos. With an inexpensive tape recorder in hand, Mundy and Julie question passersby on Union Square about topical social and political issues including U.S. interference in El Salvador, women's reproductive rights, the death penalty, and the importance of labor unions. Six relevant organizations are invited to contribute statements about these issues to be displayed alongside the individuals' interviews. The posters look mechanically printed but are produced by hand for \$200 using projected

Letraset mockups, marker and tempera. The broadsides are illegally adhered with wheat paste to the wall of the defunct S. Klein building, also on Union Square. Tim wears a suit and carries a clipboard to appear official and ward off inquiries during the clandestine late-night installation. The posters remain in place and untouched until they disintegrate from exposure.







↑ GM's DA ZI BAOS, Union Square, New York  
 ↓ Dazibaos readers in Beijing, 1979



NG OF THE  
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SOME-  
D SEE IT.

HOUSEWIFE

**OPEN YOUR EYES**

**HELP PREVENT DRUG ABUSE  
IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD  
CALL TOLL FREE 1-800-522-5353**

**NEW YORK STATE DIVISION OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

**PEOPLE SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIND  
SOME OTHER KICKS, OTHER THINGS  
BESIDES DRUGS. BECAUSE YOU  
TAKE THE DRUG TODAY TO TAKE  
AWAY YOUR WORRIES AND YOU GO  
BACK INTO IT BECAUSE YOUR  
WORRIES ARE STILL THERE.  
THEY SHOULD HAVE SOME OTHER  
KIND OF ACTIVITY, YOU KNOW?**

**UNEMPLOYED**

THESE ARE  
STAND AL  
EVEN TH  
NOW PAI  
ATTITUDE  
TOWARD  
REMAIN

UNIONS BENEFIT SOCIETY - BUT NOT IN MY OFFICE.

OFFICE WORKER

THESE ARE ROUGH TIMES TO STAND ALONE.

EVEN THOUGH PEOPLE ARE NOW PAID FOR WORKING, THE ATTITUDE OF THE MASTERS TOWARDS THE SERVANT REMAINS THE SAME.

HOME HEALTH CARE WORKERS UNION

SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIND OTHER MEANS, OTHER THINGS TO DO TODAY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE AND YOU GO BECAUSE YOUR STILL THERE HAVE SOME OTHER YOU KNOW? ...

"IF THEY KILL ME, I WILL RISE AGAIN IN THE SALVADORIAN PEOPLE, IN THE MASS ORGANIZATIONS."

ARCHBISHOP ROMERO ASSASSINATED BY THE JUNTA 3-24-80

THEY HAVE RISEN UP, AND ASK THE AMERICAN PEOPLE FOR THEIR SOLIDARITY. BECAUSE THEIR STRUGGLE IS OUR STRUGGLE.

COMMITTEE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF EL SALVADOR 19 W. 21 ST. NY, NY 242-1040

I'M NOT TOO FAMILIAR WITH WHAT IS GOING ON NOW IN EL SALVADOR. I'M HEARING SO MANY DIFFERENT STORIES SO I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT'S THE TRUE STORY. WHAT I'M AGAINST IS COMMUNISM. IF IT'S A COMMUNIST THAT IS TRYING TO TAKE OVER I AGREE THE U.S. SHOULD STEP IN. ALOT OF PEOPLE ARE NOT REALIZING WHAT'S HAPPENING. IF YOU TAKE A MAP AND YOU LOOK AT IT, YOU WILL SEE THAT THE COMMUNISTS ARE TRYING TO SURROUND US.

RECEPTIONIST

IN 1983, IF YOU HAVE AN ABORTION YOU COULD BE PROSECUTED FOR MURDER.

MAKING ABORTION ILLEGAL WON'T MAKE IT UNAVAILABLE. JUST UNSAFE.

PLANNED PARENTHOOD

SHE SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO DECIDE.

ACCOUNTING SUPERVISOR

WILL THE BUDGET CUTS CAUSE YOU TO COMMIT A CRIME? MORE CRIME WILL BE COMMITTED AS PEOPLE LOSE THEIR JOBS OR SOCIAL PROGRAMS... AND YOU COULD BE ONE OF THEM. DON'T FOOL YOURSELF.

THE NATIONAL PRISON REFORM ADVISOR BOARD

THIS IS A LAWLESS CITY THERE IS NO DETERRENT TO CRIME. THERE IS A DETERRENT TO KILLING - THE CHAIR. I SPEAK TO SOME OF THE TOUGHEST KIDS AROUND. AS SOON THEY SAY THE CHAIR, "FORGET IT - WE AIN'T KILLING NOBODY."

BUM



## Primer (for Raymond Williams)

Artists Space, New York, May 1982–July 17, 1982

Raymond Williams' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* focuses on the sociology of language through an analysis of how the meanings of important words shift according to changing social contexts, i.e. "community," "individual," "revolution." Group Material jumps off from and modifies Williams' operation, constructing a vocabulary of everyday, outwardly non-ideological words, i.e. "sale," "photo," "vocal," and demonstrates sociopolitical readings of them through artworks and objects.



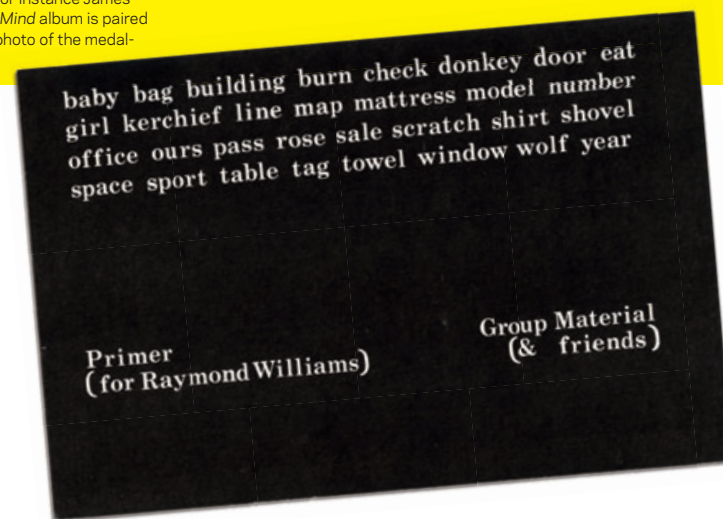
people photo pop record room rose sale shirt

Press Release (excerpt),  
Group Material, May 1982

*Primer* (for Raymond Williams) is a collaborative installation presenting over thirty individual responses to the political and social content of ordinary words such as: building, check, donkey, map, number, sale, space, table, etc. . . . Tim Rollins, a founder of Group Material, states that *Primer* "is dedicated to Raymond Williams, a British cultural critic and historian whose innovative work in the field of art, politics and language (culminating in his book *Keywords* of 1976) serves as an inspiration and example to the theme and method of our project."

This is the first time the group displays pop culture material. GM initially considers installing the "non-art" elements in the hallway leading to the gallery. But after lengthy discussion the consensus is to combine popular culture and contemporary art in the same space. Artifacts and documentary materials are used to demonstrate some of the keywords that structure the exhibition. For instance James Brown's *Revolution of the Mind* album is paired with "record" and a news photo of the medal-

winning sprinters giving the Black Power salute at the 1968 Summer Olympics ceremony is coupled with "sport." The intermingling of influential mass-cultural sources with artworks as a curatorial method creates a lot of excitement within the group.







# i LUCHAR!

GROUP MATERIAL

## Luchar! An Exhibition for the People of Central America

Taller Latinoamericano, New York,  
June 19–July 9, 1982

↑ Title wall of *Luchar!* with photos by Bolívar Arellano of the bodies of Dutch journalists murdered in El Salvador  
↗ Work by Anne Pitrone in *Luchar!*  
→ Following page, *Luchar!*, left to right: works by Bobby G, FDR/ FMLN demonstration flags, anonymous photographs of FMLN guerrillas, Joss Gonzalez

Art and politics intersect in *Luchar!*, an exhibition hosted by the Taller Latinoamericano, a cultural center that provides opportunities for an exchange of ideas and art between and within North and Latin American cultures. *Luchar!* takes place amid a consortium of organizations devoted to political solidarity with self-determination movements in Central and South America which occupy the entire second floor of 19 West 21st Street, and include Casa Nicaragua and Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES). At the reception performers share the stage with political and cultural activists, including Daniel Flores y Ascencio, founder of INALSE (Institute of Arts and Letters of El Salvador in Exile), Lucy R. Lippard, and a representative of the Salvadoran revolutionary organization FDR (Revolutionary Democratic Front / FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front). A work by Anne Pitrone—a life-size piñata that depicts a figure



in the strappado torture position—generates some controversy. Its symbolically powerful presence is disturbingly evocative of lived reality to some staff members of and visitors to the organizations on the same floor.

**October 1982.** A few months after *Luchar!* the group rents a small office space for \$200 a month on the second floor of 19 West 21st Street. The neighboring offices house a variety of social organizations, which stimulates the group's consciousness and discussions about interrelations between art, social practice, and political organizing.





Lucy R. Lippard, "Revolt Issues" (excerpt), *The Village Voice*, July 27, 1982

The call for entries stated, among other things, that "all artwork should either directly or thematically address the relationship between popular movements for self determination in Latin America and United States government policy" and that it would include works not traditionally seen as fine art: multiples, reproducibles, and work by non-artists as well as flags, campaign graphics and propaganda materials."

About 100 Hispanic and North American artists responded. Ashford received a lot of apprehensive phone calls that fell roughly into two categories: art world artists worried that their contributions would be seen as naïve and politically incorrect; and artists working in left organizations worried that their contributions would be seen as too dogmatic and not artful enough. If that split continues, a still more complex set of worries will be justified, though these phone calls are a hopeful sign. . . .



## Revolutionary Fine Arts

Taller Latinoamericano, New York, April 14, 1983, 8 p.m.-12 a.m.

April 1983. In conjunction with announcing GM's new headquarters on 21st Street, a one-night exhibition of works by over thirty politically minded and activist artists, *Revolutionary Fine Arts*, is staged in the communal spaces of the floor. Jock Reynolds writes to GM: "Glad to know Group Material is active and getting a new office together. Please reconsider this year whether you might not wish to reapply to Artists Organizations for support from the Endowment. Linda Shearer and I were really disappointed not to see an application from GM this last year." The group had been resistant to formalizing its procedures and maintaining the accoutrements of legitimacy as required by the NEA, and had not applied. However, having just received IRS tax-exempt status, GM again concocts the semblance of professionalization and a hierarchical salaried staff structure (on paper) in order to be eligible for grants. Privately the group decides to keep minimal overheads, operate on an adhoc basis, and never have salaried positions in order to avoid any conflict of interest.

↑ *Revolutionary Fine Arts*, works visible on left by Tim Rollins and 25 kids from the South Bronx, Tom Lawson



## Subculture

IRT subway trains, New York,  
September 1-30, 1983

*Invitation to Participate* (excerpt),  
Group Material, November 1983

*Subculture* is the natural extension of our successful M5 project. . . . *Subculture* will be an exhibition of art in the place of advertising on New York City subway trains. Group Material has rented 1400 advertising spaces to show the work of 100 artists. The work will be seen on every fourth train on the IRT lines which cover the boroughs of Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. . . . *Subculture* intends to change that vacuous tableau faced by the commuter every day of a world full of hemorrhoid sufferers and opportunities offered by the Albert Merrill School for technical training. While offering real public exposure to artists, this project gives subway riders a chance to view images that carry a little more meaning for them than whether they should "wash with Woolite."

Work for *Subculture* by  
Dennis Adams

*Subculture* is supported with public funds from New York State Council for the Arts (NYSCA), which covers the space rental and publicity costs. Each artist produces their own cards for installation on the trains. The media vary, being hand painted, drawn, collaged, spray-painted and stenciled, silk-screened, photographically printed, and photocopied. Group Material prefers to pay for advertising space, as opposed to seeking in-kind contributions, so as to be treated like any other client. A Mass Transit

Authority (MTA) representative warns that no religious or political messages are allowed. Many of the pieces do in fact have political content and one subverts Christian imagery, but no formal review process takes place. The group delivers the collected subway cards directly to the installation crew, who promise there will be no problem with the material or its content—"we just put 'em up." The sole conflict that develops is over Eric Obrosey's piece, *McMerger*, which envisions the corporate fusion of McDonald's







and Burger King. Obrose's piece comes to the attention of the MTA whose representative advises GM not to submit the piece, as it is potentially offensive to the two companies, which are also subway advertisers. Although not officially rejected, the group suspects Obrose's pieces are simply not installed.

**November 1983.** The group creates a fundraising campaign promising a *Pity Puppy* print to those who contribute at least \$20 to help Group Material continue its activities. Several artists respond; the result is approximately \$250 income. The 14 in. x 11 in. black-and-white print is a reproduction of a painting called *Pity Puppy*, which the group believed was by Margaret Keane. Keane has for years made paintings of children, puppies, and kittens with large pitiful eyes, which are

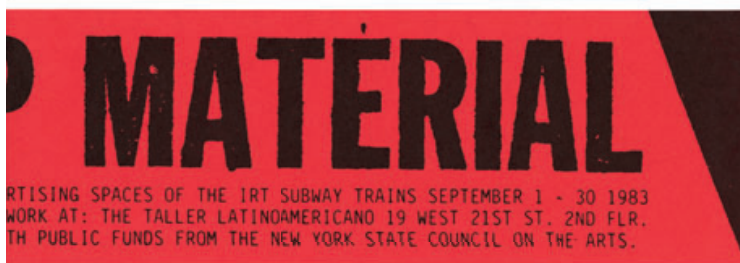


distributed as inexpensive prints and posters. Walter Keane, her husband, claimed credit for the works in the early sixties until she took him to court for a divorce proceeding. Rights to the painting style and artworks were at stake. Margaret painted in front of the judge, and when asked to do likewise, Walter avoided the test, claiming an injury affected his hand. The court sided with Margaret in 1965 and the Keanes divorced. The group was partly attracted to the image by this story of the court proceedings,

but during the production of this book, it is discovered that the image was in fact created by another artist, Gig.

**January 1984.** Group Material mounts a group exhibition titled *A.D., Christian Influence in Contemporary Culture* at Work Gallery, which is actually a storefront studio space shared by artists Tom Bassmann and Louis Laurita, who are frequent participants in GM shows.

✦ *Work for Subculture* by Julie Wachtel  
 ↑ *Work for Subculture* by Brad Melamed



**YOU CAN HELP...**



**GROUP MATERIAL HAS ALWAYS PAID ITS OWN BILLS. But now we need your help. Please send what you can. THANK YOU.**

**DONATORS OF TWENTY DOLLARS OR MORE WILL RECEIVE A SIGNED, LIMITED EDITION PRINT OF "PITY-PUPPY".**

**YOUR DONATIONS ARE TAX-DEDUCTABLE**

**MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE GROUP MATERIAL**

**GROUP**

**MATERIAL**

**W.21 ST., 2ND FL.**

**N.Y.C., N.Y. 1001**



**Timeline:  
A Chronicle of  
U.S. Intervention  
in Central and  
Latin America**

**P.S.1, New York,  
January 22-March 18, 1984**



*Timeline* mixes historical and contemporary artworks, documentary materials, artifacts (some of which Doug procures through associations with Central American artists and intellectuals living in exile), and high-in-demand commodities the U.S. imports from Central America, such as coffee and bananas, which are spread on the floor in one corner of the installation. The centerpiece is a giant red buoy made by Barbara Westermann, William Allen, and Ann Messner for use in a march against

U.S. intervention recently held in Washington, DC. *Timeline* is part of a nationwide campaign called Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America, which produces a considerable program of cultural actions including a network of art exhibitions and benefit events in both commercial galleries and non-profit venues to raise consciousness and money to support popular movements in Latin America. Doug and Julie are closely involved in the planning activities and administration of Artists Call.



[Exhibition Proposal](#) (excerpt),  
Group Material, November 1983

Since 1900, the U.S. has intervened militarily in the affairs of Central and Latin America over thirty times. . . .

For this exhibition, we have designed an installation of many disparate objects, artworks, commodities and historical documents. This myriad of things is collected into a unified purpose: to illustrate the crucial issues of the Central and Latin American U.S. relationship.

Instead of preparing a literal, historical survey of art about Latin and Central American life and politics (an impossibility for many reasons), Group Material proposes to gather together a constellation of artists from different political contexts and times who nevertheless made work about the very same issues that burn with such intensity in Central and Latin America today.

For example, while the work of Diego Rivera, Tina Modotti and Siqueiros have an obvious relevance to the issues we wish

to investigate, John Heartfield's 1933 photomontage (made for a socialist magazine in Berlin representing workers voting for the Nazi Party for fear of their personal safety), is startling in its correlation to the recent election in El Salvador and the "surprising" victory of the ultra-right. . . .

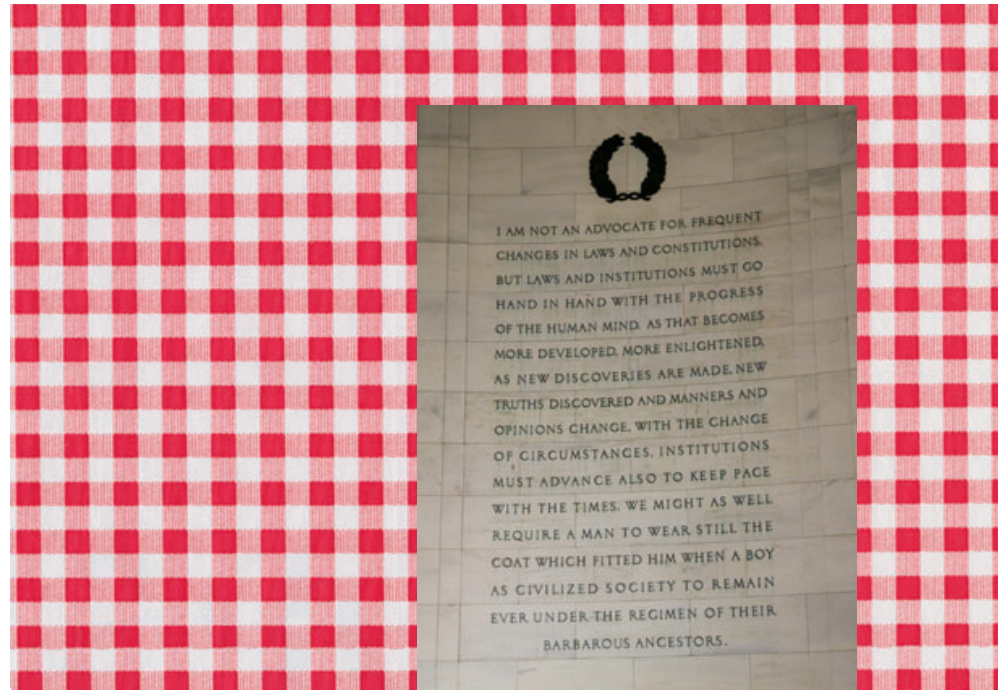
Exhibited with equal status with the artworks, Group Material is curating a collection of commodities (large bags of coffee beans, tobacco leaves, Chiquita bananas from the United Fruit Co., sheets of copper, etc.). We do this because the desire and struggle to acquire these products remains the foundation for much of the oppression that Central and Latin America has suffered historically. . . .





...the ... of ...

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>1868:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Uruguay.                                  | <b>1919:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Honduras.  |
| <b>1868:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Colombia.                                 | <b>1920:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Guatemala.   |
| <b>1873:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Colombia.                                 | <b>1924:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Honduras.  |
| <b>1885:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Panama.                                   | <b>1925:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Honduras.  |
| <b>1888:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Haiti.                                    | <b>1925:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Panama.  |
| <b>1891:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Chile.                                    | <b>1926:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Nicaragua.   |
| <b>1894:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Nicaragua.                                | <b>1928:</b> Banana workers strike in Colombia against United Fruit Co., 1000 killed.                          |
| <b>1895:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Colombia.                                 | <b>1932:</b> 3 U.S. and 2 Canadian warships arrive in El Salvador.   |
| <b>1896:</b> U.S. Marines invade Honduras.                                      | <b>1932:</b> Salvadoran peasants begin mass insurrection; military retaliates massacring 30,000.               |
| <b>1896:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Nicaragua.                                | <b>1932:</b> Panama declares state of seige after 6 are killed in anti-U.S. riots.                             |
| <b>1898:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Nicaragua.                                | <b>1932:</b> John Foster Dulles approves "thorough consideration be given to the elimination of Fidel Castro." |
| <b>1898:</b> Battleship <i>Maine</i> sunk. U.S. initiates Spanish-American War. | <b>1954:</b> CIA overthrows Arbenz government in Guatemala.  |
| <b>1898:</b> U.S. troops invade Puerto Rico to 'liberate' it from Spain.        | <b>1958:</b> Panama declares state of seige after 6 are killed in anti-U.S. riots.                             |
| <b>1899:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Nicaragua.                                | <b>1959:</b> John Foster Dulles approves "thorough consideration be given to the elimination of Fidel Castro." |
| <b>1901:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Colombia.                                 | <b>1961:</b> CIA defeated in Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.   |
| <b>1902:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Colombia.                                 | <b>1962:</b> U.S. naval blockade of Cuba initiated.  |
| <b>1903:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Honduras.                                 | <b>1964:</b> U.S. troops kill student protesters in Panama Canal Zone.   |
| <b>1903:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Dominican Republic.                       | <b>1964:</b> U.S. troops kill student protesters in Panama Canal Zone.   |
| <b>1903:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Panama.                                   | <b>1965:</b> U.S. invades Dominican Republic.  |
| <b>1904:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Dominican Republic.                       | <b>1973:</b> U.S.-sponsored coup in Chile overthrows Popular Unity government; Allende murdered.               |
| <b>1904:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Panama.                                   | <b>1975:</b> 40 students killed at University of El Salvador demonstrating against U.S. intervention.          |
| <b>1907:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Honduras.                                 | <b>1983:</b> U.S. Marines invade Grenada.  |
| <b>1910:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Nicaragua.                                |  |
| <b>1911:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Honduras.                                 |  |
| <b>1912:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Cuba.                                     |  |
| <b>1913:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Mexico.                                   |  |
| <b>1914:</b> U.S. troops intervene in Haiti.                                    |  |
| <b>1915:</b> Marines land in Haiti and occupy it until 1934.                    |  |



## Americana

The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, March 21–June 9, 1985

The group is invited to make a new project for the 1985 Whitney Biennial. *Americana* critically engages the Biennial structure and questions how America represents itself, as well as how the Whitney defines American art through curatorial practice and the politics of inclusion and exclusion. *Americana* is Group Material's model biennial, a *salon des refusés* of what has been significantly absent, excluded by curatorial business-as-usual attitudes, including populist art, works by artists of color, feminist practices, overtly political art, and everyday artifacts. A range of store-bought objects are interspersed with artworks in the display with the intent to dislodge the boundaries between "high" and "low" culture. Several loaves of bread including Wonder Bread, Wonder whole wheat, Pepperidge Farm sprouted wheat, and Arnold Buttermilk are installed in a row in the middle of one wall, and lit with high intensity theatrical spotlights. The lights heat the bread and messages are periodically left at Group Material's answering service requesting "someone come up to the museum and change the bread, it's getting nasty."

↑ Photograph of the Thomas Jefferson memorial, Washington, DC, installed at the entrance of *Americana*



← LeRoy Neiman, *Harry's Bar*, 1984  
 → Martin Wong, *Chinese Laundry*, 1984  
 → Following spread:  
 Two pages from the  
 proposal for *Americana*,  
 1984



## I. INTRODUCTION

How does American culture represent America ?

Americana is an exhibition of contemporary fine art, mass-produced art and decorative objects, and common household products. These different elements of our culture are collected into one dynamic installation. Americana transforms the gallery into an arena of combat between the champions and the critics of the traditional American self-image.

GROUP MATERIAL has organized Americana on FOUR fronts :

1. Fine art that uses or reacts with a specifically American imagery
2. Mass-produced artworks and decorative objects that present distinctively American motifs
3. Commercial products , from soft drinks to major appliances, with media images that feed off of traditional American icons.
4. A "soundtrack" of taped music for the exhibition

These disparate kinds of culture will all be shown together, given visual and conceptual unity by the exhibition design described as follows ...

## II. NOTES ON THE EXHIBITION DESIGN

GROUP MATERIAL organizes exhibitions that bring together many cultural objects in order to investigate a crucial social theme. G.M. accomplishes this mainly through the strategy of precise and innovative exhibition design. Our installations demonstrate how art is dependent on a social context for its meaning. Our shows also bring the supposed neutrality of the traditional exhibition space and practice into serious question.



## EXHIBITION DESIGN, con't.

For Americana, the gallery walls will be covered floor to ceiling in contact wallpaper\*in a wide variety of traditional and contemporary American designs ( from colonial patterns, to facsimile Pennsylvania Dutch tiles, to mod chrome abstract styles, to new "Holly Hobbie" and "Star Wars" motifs.)

All the artwork and objects will be displayed "salon style" , high and low, along the gallery walls in spaces cut out of the wallpaper background.

In a GROUP MATERIAL exhibition, a bag of "Almost Home Cookies" is as important as, say, a piece by Barbara Kruger. Fine art, mass art and commercial products are shown with equal status. What gives Americana its edge is how we place seemingly opposite forms of art, objects and products in combinations that help make their real social interrelations most vivid. For example, how is Eric Fischl's print Year of the Drowned Dog perceived when shown beside a coastal scene by Jamie Wyeth ? How is Richard Prince's Cowboy piece transformed by its placement above a mass-produced popular Western calendar ? And what does an Andrew Wyeth painting turn into when exhibited near a twin-tub washer and dryer combo in "Harvest Gold" tone ?

Americana's lighting will be unusual for an art exhibition. Using theatrical illumination, the show will wear the light of spacious skies, purple mountains' majesty and amber waves of grain.

\*Contact paper is vinyl sheeting with all light adhesive backing. It's inexpensive, easy to install and will not cause damage to gallery walls when removed.







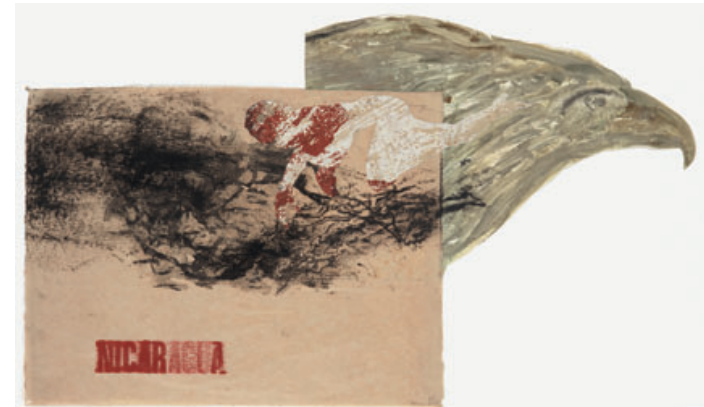
Kim Levin, "The Whitney Laundry" (excerpt),  
The Village Voice, April 9, 1985

What is there to say about a Whitney Biennial in which the most provocative and subversive thing is a LeRoy Neiman hanging on the museum's walls? It's not the picture that's provocative but the perverse fact: the shock of schlock being sanctified, even if it is done tongue-in-cheek. What does it say about the state of our minds—and the state of art—that this is the hideous thrill of the day? Have we finally sunk so low? . . . If Group Material's titillating, weakly rebellious installation lacks the grubby strength of *The Times Square Show* nearly five years ago, it does provide a hook to hang this year's Biennial on: commodity time is here. It's nice that Group Material tried to outwit the Whitney curators with its laundry room, even if it ended up doing the dirty work for them.

Letter to *The Village Voice* (excerpt),  
Group Material, April 16, 1985

Contrary to Kim Levin's assumptions, Group Material wasn't used by the Whitney to any greater extent than its resources and visibility were used by us to present a critical model of what we believe an American museum's biennial should be. . . . Does Levin really believe it takes a clever critic to understand how institutions manipulate the meaning and reception of culture? If you really want a "radical shakeup," why stop at the Biennial? The entire culture industry needs to be overhauled. *Americana* is but one small demonstration toward a program of cultural change. It was not designed for the Whitney, or for art critics, but for the large public which Levin contemptuously reduces to "students, tourists, novices, and art investors."

→ Nancy Spero,  
Nicaragua, 1984-1985





← Tseng Kwong Chi,  
Townsend, Vermont,  
1983  
→ Artist and soundtrack  
list for Americana  
(in progress)

GROUP MATERIAL

AMERICANA-

Artists:

- ✓ John Ahearn walk in
- ✓ Doug Ashford Sat
- ✓ Julie Ault - Sat
- ✓ Alan Belcher ✓
- ✓ Harvey Bletchman - Sat (D)
- ✓ Marshall Collins ✓
- call Henry Darger - Sat (Doug)
- ✓ Jane Dickson - B(D) Sat
- ✓ Sam Doyle ✓
- ✓ Alex - Larry Fink ✓ (T) mort
- ✓ Eric Fischl (T) mort
- ✓ General Electric
- ✓ Leon Golub ✓
- ✓ Edgar Heap of Birds ✓
- ✓ Suzanne Helmuth / Jock Reynolds ✓
- ✓ Candace Hill Montgomery Th (V?)
- ✓ Neil Janney (P)
- ✓ Jerry Kearns ✓
- ✓ Barbara Kruger (C) Th
- ✓ Tweng Kwong Chi from Semaphore (V)
- ✓ Mierle Laderman Ukeles Th or Fri (T)
- ✓ Lady Pink - from Sofa
- ✓ Thomas Lawson ✓
- ✓ Sherrie Levine (T)
- ✓ Peter Max (A?)
- ✓ Alan McCollum ✓
- ✓ Hundy McLaughlin ✓
- ✓ John Miller ✓
- ✓ Peter Nagy ✓ Mr Coffee
- ✓ Joseph Nechvetal Broka (Sat)
- ✓ Leroy Neiman (T)
- ✓ Claes Oldenbergh → Fri
- ✓ Osteriser
- ✓ Saul Ostrow 18th LeQuinones
- ✓ Richard Prince ← stray truck
- ✓ Faith Ringgold ← James Rivera (D)
- ✓ Norman Rockwell ✓
- ✓ Jim Rollins with Public School Students (P)
- ✓ Christy Rupp ✓
- ✓ Juan Sanchez (D) Sat
- ✓ Fritz Schoedler (T?)
- ✓ Laurie Simmon ← Andres Serrano (Fri) T
- ✓ Nancy Spero ✓
- ✓ Joel Sternfeld (T) Fri or Thurs
- ✓ ~~Samba~~ ← Rigoberto Torres Sat (C)
- ✓ Anton Van Dalen ✓
- ✓ Julie Wachtel ✓
- ✓ Andy Warhol Sat (D) Feldman
- ✓ Martin Wong Semaphore truck
- ✓ Jamie Wyeth (P) T

Soundtrack:

- "The Sun Treader", Carl Ruggles
- "The Payback", James Brown
- "You're Gonna Reap What You Sow", Loretta Lynn
- "Mind Your Own Business", Hank Williams
- "Old Folks Gathering", Charles Ives
- "We're Not Going To Take It", Twisted Sister
- "You're Blind", Run D.M.C.
- "I Don't Wanna Play House", Tammy Wynette
- "It's Gonna Rain", O'Neal Brothers
- "The Stripper", David Rose
- "Gotas de Lluvia", El Gran Combo
- "This Land Is Your Land", Woody Guthry
- "Jump Call", Benny Carter
- "The Beverly Hillbillys Theme", Flatt & Scruggs

Letter of invitation to participate (excerpt),  
Group Material, March 1985

Group Material is creating a poster piece to be exhibited at Chapter entitled *Democracy Wall for Cardiff*. . . The piece is composed of ten posters, each 6' x 4' butted together to create a 40 feet long work. The posters alternate between red and green: the green posters carrying statements given by official social organizations in Great Britain, and the red carrying statements given by people interviewed outside Tesco supermarkets and on the street in Cardiff. . .

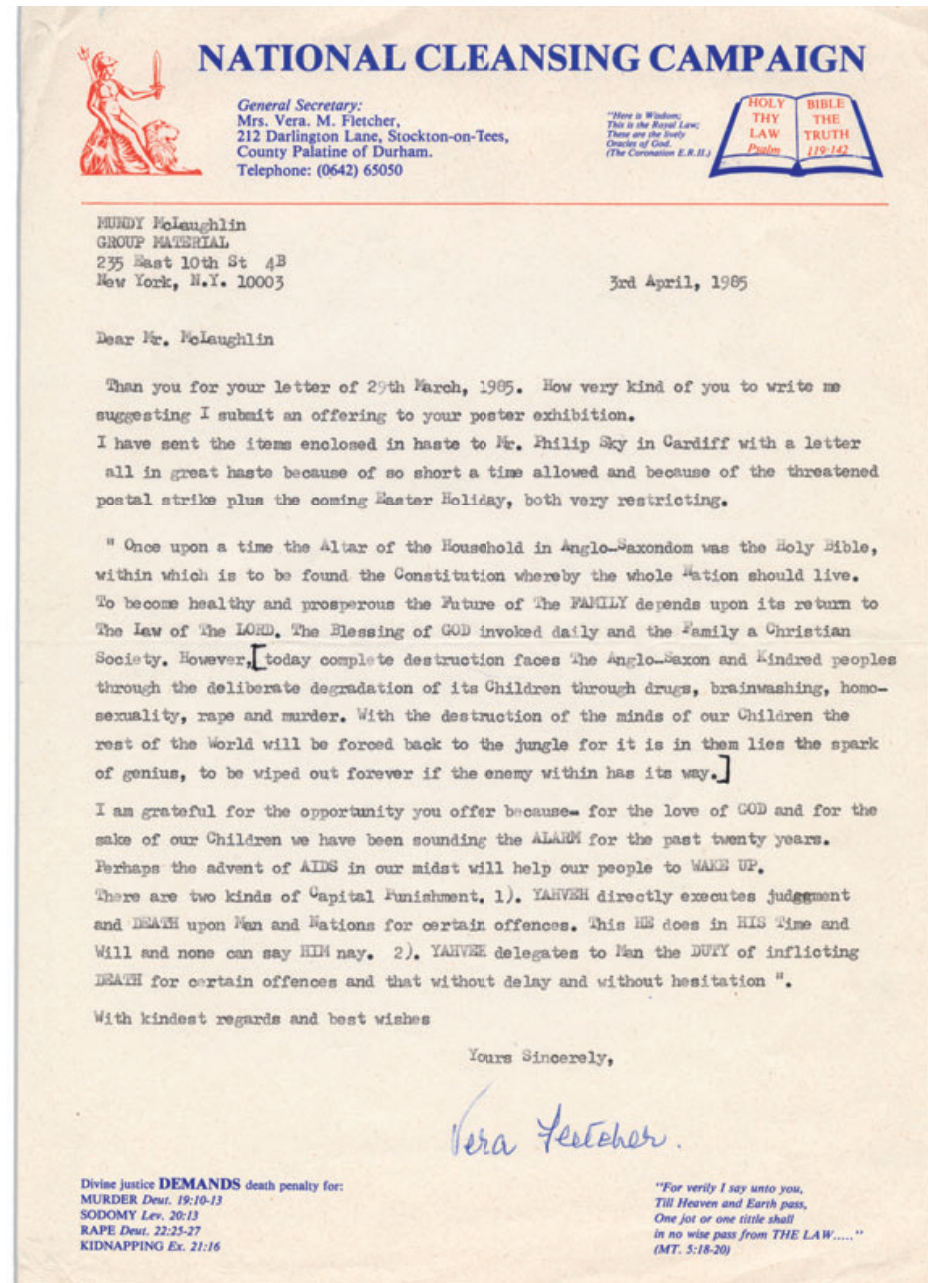
We are contacting organizations with as diverse as possible purposes and functions, in order to create a sort of "landscape" of different social outlooks. We are asking from each organization, of which you are one, a

statement of not more than 50 words pertaining to the "Future of the Family" as it relates to the purposes of your organization. This will be mounted on an individual poster and made part of the entire piece. . .

## Democracy Wall

Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, Wales,  
April 27-May 25, 1985

↓ Democracy Wall  
installed inside Chapter  
Arts Centre  
→ Letter from National  
Cleansing Campaign,  
including statement for  
Democracy Wall poster

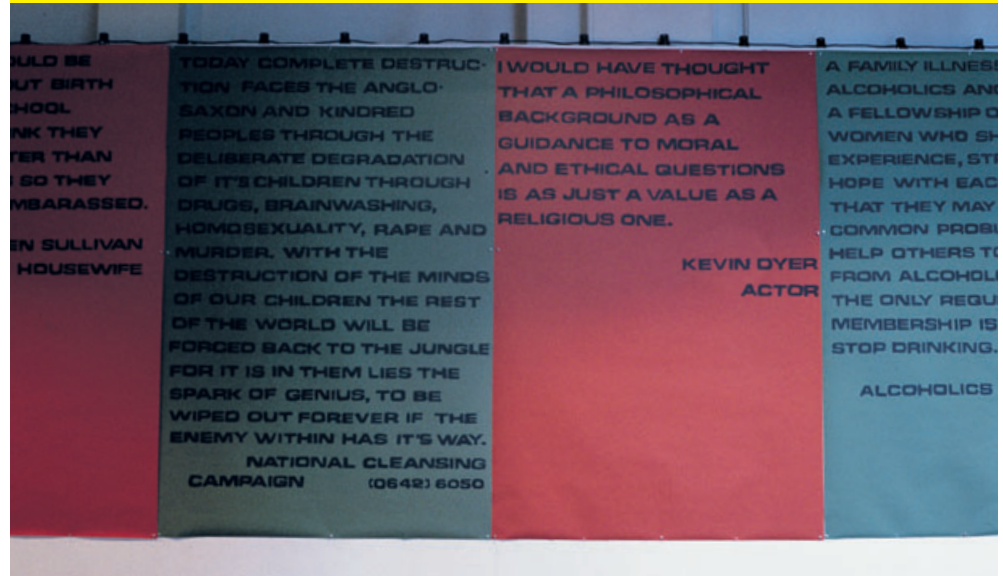




← McLaughlin and Ault making Democracy Wall posters

GM's application of the democracy wall, the form first used by the group in *DA ZI BAOS*, intends to diagram conflicting perspectives rubbing up against one another. *Democracy Wall for Cardiff* is organized around the theme "the future of the family as a social form," presenting statements from street interviews with Cardiff citizens juxtaposed with statements from social agencies. On the day the posters are installed inside Chapter someone destroys the one from the National Front. An explanation by

the curator, Philip Sky, is mounted in its place, stating that the intention of the *Democracy Wall* is: "to present in direct, graphic form, a multiplicity of ideas. Group Material is in no way interested in promoting any line on the Family. *Democracy Wall* is a visual and conceptual survey of popular and official thought on the subject of the Family's future."



VIOLENT THE FAMILY IS THE FOUNDATION  
OULD OF A STABLE SOCIETY.  
ENT MAN. WE MUST BUILD A SANE  
OULD ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
NK LOTS ORDER TO PROVIDE THE  
Y WOULD MATERIAL AND  
WITH A PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ING REQUIREMENTS FOR  
AS HE HEALTHY FAMILY LIFE -  
THE RESTORATION OF FAMILY  
FARMS AND BUSINESSES  
AND AN INCREASE IN  
SPENDING ON HEALTH  
CARE AND EDUCATION.

THE NATIONAL FRONT  
50 PAUSONS RD.  
CROYDON SURREY

IT'S CRUMBLING, THE SOCIETY  
THE OPTIMUM IS A STABLE  
FAMILY BUT I THINK IF YOU  
GET A BREAKDOWN OF  
FAMILIES, CHILDREN DON'T  
HAVE, SAY, A FATHER AND  
THEN YOU GET CRIMINAL  
ACTIVITIES, PERHAPS BAD  
PERFORMANCE AT SCHOOL,  
CHILD DOESN'T GET GOOD  
QUALIFICATIONS,  
HE WON'T GET A GOOD JOB.

SEAN BURY  
UNEMPLOYED TEACHER

"TO MY M  
BOMB IS  
WEAPON  
IS NOT E  
DEFENSE  
IT IS ONLY  
WHICH I  
PETULAN  
COMMIT  
OF DEST  
SANE PE  
WISH TO  
CONSCIE

ALBI

CAMP  
DISARIV



## MASS

various locations,  
May 1985 through  
December 1986

↑ MASS installed at  
The New Museum of  
Contemporary Art, New  
York, 1986  
→ Following spread:  
Hanging instructions  
for MASS

[William Olander, Exhibition Brochure](#)  
(excerpt), (New York: The New Museum, 1986)

The issue of collaboration . . . is extremely complex in relation to Group Material for it is not merely a matter of four artists who collaborate with each other ("Group Material"), but four artists who have collaborated, over the past six years, with literally hundreds of other artists. . . . MASS was conceived by Group Material in response to some current buzzwords often used to describe the contemporary art scene—"hot," "expressionist," "heroic," "violent," "adventurous," and "raw." In opposition to these, Group Material proposed a different spelling of contemporary culture—"MASS." To this end, Group Material invited almost two hundred artists to contribute an image [which had to be 12 inches by 12 inches] of their own: a photograph, a record cover, or an advertisement—to offer literally a signifier which would become the signified "MASS," a twelve-by-forty-foot word which also functions as an image, a concept, a representation, and finally a collaboration . . . . This is a new opportunity to reconsider "MASS" in all of its contemporary significance: mass, as in the masses; mass, as in scientific density; mass, as in mass culture and mass media; mass, as in a religious mass, etc. etc. . . .

[Hanging directions for MASS,](#)  
Doug Ashford, 1985

What you need

- 1) Approx. 300 feet of string
- 2) Nails
- 3) 11 yards of sticky backed velcro (fuzzy side only 3/4" or 1/2" width)

What you do

- 1) Measure out at the floor the placement of letters that fit the space. Ideally there is 2 feet between each letter. This would bring the total amount of wall space needed to 38 feet. Also, try to leave 3 feet space at each end as well. Mark bottom of wall accordingly.
- 2) Hang seven level and tight horizontal strings the entire length of the wall. These should be placed (ideally) so that center string is at average eye level. There must be one foot between each string. MASS is 8 feet high but needs higher wall with space at top and bottom (see diagram).
- 3) Meanwhile, cut velcro into 1/2" by 1/2" or 3/4" squares and attach one piece to each corner (or more where needed) to every panel. Do not peel off sticky backing paper until ready to adhere to wall. Each panel should have both sides of velcro. (MASS should arrive with stiff side of velcro already stuck to back of every panel.)
- 4) With horizontal placement measured onto floor and vertical placement determined by strings you now have a grid to guide sticky works to wall. Peel off paper from back of fuzzy velcro on each panel and press panel to wall. Be sure that panels go up in order! (See diagram). Also be certain that approx 1/4" space is maintained between each square panel. (Panels are slightly smaller than 1 foot by 1 foot).
- 5) Remove string and nails. Panels can be adjusted slightly or easily removed and replaced, because of the velcro.
- 6) Please be sure to pack in crate after the exhibition in order. This makes it easy for the next exhibition.

Questions—call day or night.





## Messages to Washington

Washington Project for the Arts,  
Washington, DC,  
September 1-October 12, 1985

Fifty advertisements are placed in local newspapers around the country inviting people to send visual, taped, or textual "messages to Washington" to make up an exhibit in DC, which the group plans to supplement with popular expressions of political opinion pulled from its archive of photos and artwork. The ads are necessarily small due to budget constraints, many are poorly printed and some are illegible, which explains at least in part the relatively few responses—twenty or so—to the public call. The group fills out the exhibition with artworks as well as items lobbyists distribute to Congress to publicize their issues, for instance an eight foot piece of lumber from a carpenter's union.

↑ *Messages to Washington* with work by **Christy Rupp** in foreground  
→ Following spread: **Drawing of 1984 vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro** by **Steve Jones**, installation by **Dorothy Kohn (Dottie the K)**

# "MESSAGES TO WASHINGTON"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

"Everyone has an opinion"

People's opinions fascinate us. Group Material is tired of hearing people's opinions as watered down by "public opinion polls", distorted by the media and through their letters as interpreted by President Reagan. We have an idea other people feel the same way.

The exhibit "Messages to Washington", to be installed at Washington Project for the Arts in September 1985, is an opportunity for people from all over the country to have their direct opinions join with other people's opinions to form a collective portrait of how Americans really feel about their government and what it is doing.

We are sending an open call out to every state and territory in the Nation for people to

## TELL YOUR GOVERNMENT WHAT YOU THINK

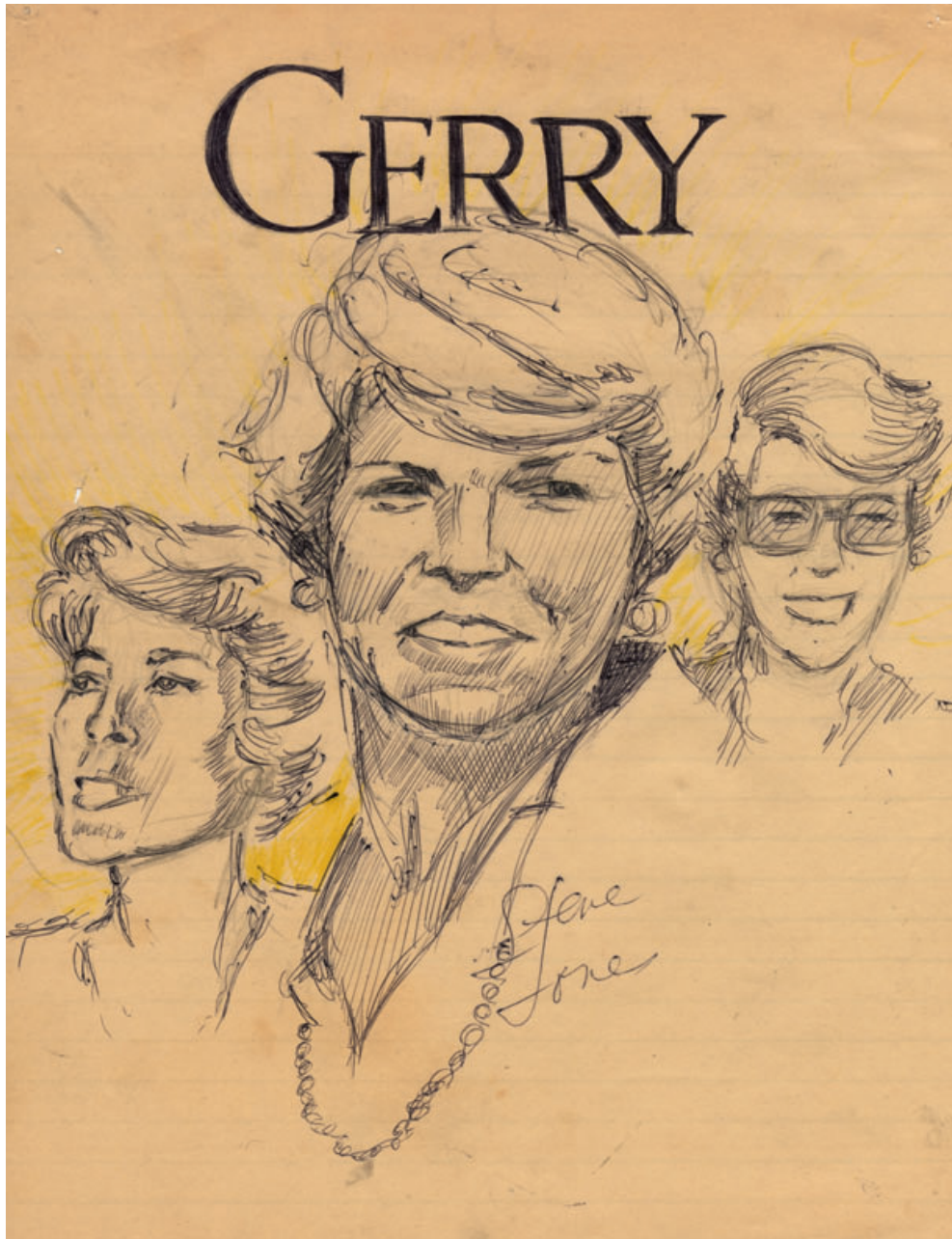
We are asking for visual - paintings, drawings, photographs, objects, (any size), written - letters, poems, etc., and verbal/audio - recorded on standard cassette tape - messages, to be sent to Group Material at 80 8th Avenue, Suite 303, New York, N.Y. 10011 no later than August 15, 1985.

Everything we receive will be installed at Washington Project for the Arts at 400 7th Street N.W., Washington D.C. from September 1 1985 through October 12. It is anticipated that it will be seen by many political representatives and that it will attract important newspaper, T.V. and radio coverage.

Group Material is a non-profit organization founded in 1979 to create exhibitions that are both socially and formally progressive. The group has been active since that time creating exhibits in which the individual parts make up a dialogue examining social, political and cultural subjects.

Our more recent projects include SUBCULTURE, on New York City subway trains, TIMELINE, for "Artist's Call", at PS. 1 in New York, AMERICANA, for the Biennial Exhibition of the Whitney Museum and DEMOCRACY WALL for the Chapter Arts Center in Cardiff, Wales.







**December 1985.** Group Material produces *Alarm Clock*, a single-wall installation, for *The Other America: Art and Labor* at Royal Festival Hall in London. *Alarm Clock* focuses on labor in the U.S. and is realized with input and assistance from British artist, and co-curator of *The Other America*, Margaret Harrison. *Alarm Clock* includes: office flyers, a variety of alarm clocks ("made in China", "made in Yugoslavia," a Westclox "Standard," a Westclox "Big Ben," a "designer" clock), bumper stickers, coffee mugs

with office slogans on them, *The Professional Image* book, office memo post-it pads, a managers door sign, and a Bruce Springsteen *Born in the U.S.A.* poster—all intermingled with artworks. The alarm clocks, hung intermittently at eye level, are all stolen at the opening.

↑ Lobbyists' flyer included in *Messages to Washington*  
 ↓ Advertisement to participate in *Messages to Washington*, published in *The Tribune*, July 11, 1985

Introductory Wall Text (excerpt), *The Alternative Museum and Group Material*, February 1986

The classical conception of democracy mandates that each individual act on the "free exchange" of information surrounding him. The founding fathers thought that eventually this treasure chest of ideas would enable a population to see, judge and then change its condition. Government would act as a mirror—reflecting the individuals' informed judgment. And the citizen, in turn, would feel his identity reflected in the nation state.

Such a neat package somehow went astray. Today the overload of information has fractured any consistent reflection of social life. World views can be flipped like television

channels—seconds of *Dynasty* interchange with seconds of congressional debate—as facts blend with fiction the ideal of informed judgment becomes little more than another commercial.

Any totalitarian grip on alternative views of the world seems redundant—instead pictures and sentences are drained of meaning. . . .

## Liberty & Justice

The Alternative Museum, New York, February 22–March 22, 1986

**February 1986.** The Alternative Museum's director Geno Rodriguez invites Group Material to co-organize *Liberty & Justice*, an exhibition staged to coincide with the Centennial Celebration of the Statue of Liberty. The exhibition includes forty critical artistic interpretations of liberty and justice in the United States. A soundtrack of versions of "The Star-Spangled Banner," "America the Beautiful," and "God Bless America" plays constantly.





## Arts and Leisure

The Kitchen, New York,  
May 24–June 14, 1986

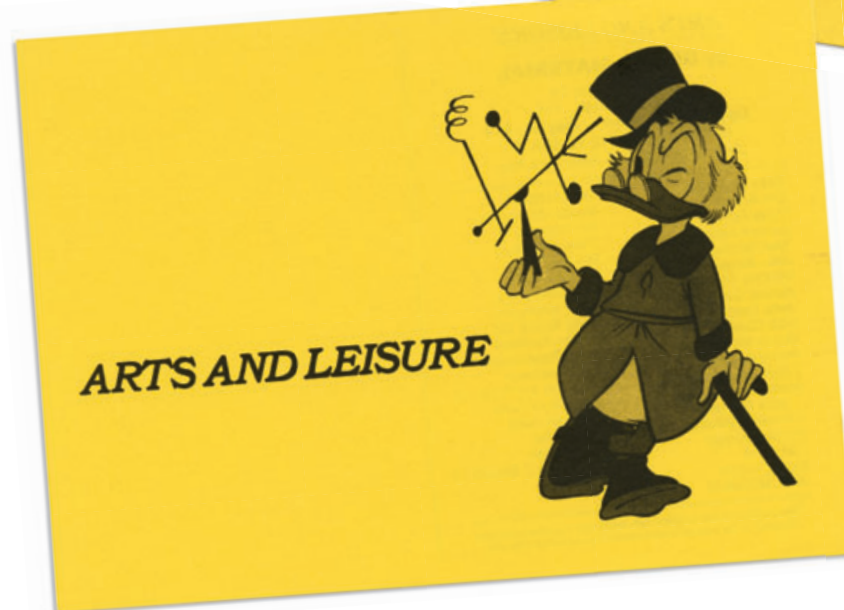
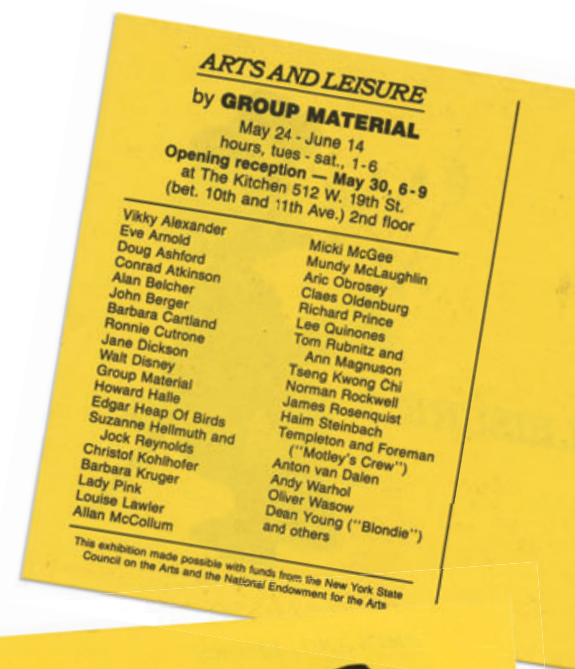
Group Material uses a primary color scheme for the show—one wall blue, one red, and one yellow—an allusion to popular culture and specifically to some clippings and cartoons included in the show. A visitor comments on how much she enjoys the exhibition; not realizing the group's intentions, she adds, "It's just too bad you had to work with those wall colors."

**Summer 1986.** Mundy McLaughlin leaves the group and New York to return to Canada, where she is from, to study law at McGill University in Montreal. She is tired of U.S. politics and fatigued by the collective process, wanting to pursue an individual art practice.

The group had stopped requiring monthly dues a couple years previously, and now regularly receives NEA funding for general operating costs and NYSICA support for special projects. For the most part, hosting institutions finance the respective exhibition and project costs.

[Press Release](#) (excerpt),  
Group Material, May 1986

*Arts and Leisure* presents a critical overview of imagery that takes art history and popular culture as its subject. Combining "fine art" and mass media images, *Arts and Leisure* questions the modern tradition of using art as the subject matter of art, as exemplified by Pop Art's homage to popular culture, Postmodernism's exacting criticism, the nearly hostile mockery of Fine Art by comic strips, and recent socially conscious art. . . . A recent *National Enquirer* article reporting with amazement on modern art prices correlates with a Louise Lawler criticism of the fine art media. Aric Obrosey's "yin / yang Pizza Hut / African Hut" bridges the commercial order of Dagwood spitting on museum art in the popular comic strip. Walt Disney's low view of the fine artist coexists with Conrad Atkinson's belief in the artist as an agent of social change.





## Resistance (Anti-Baudrillard)

White Columns, New York,  
February 6–28, 1987

The group seeks to counter the art world's apparent infatuation with, and use and abuse of French theorist Jean Baudrillard's writings, particularly as they are used to invoke "the end of the political." A roundtable discussion about what is at stake in relation to his theories, art, and politics is held between Judith Barry, Peter Halley, William Olander, Julie Wachtel, Oliver Wasow, and Doug Ashford and Julie Ault for GM. The edited transcript is made into handouts that accompany the show. Dividing the space are three television monitors showing Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville's *Six Fois Deux / Sur Et Sous La Communication*, David Cronenberg's *Scanners*, and a work by Dara Birnbaum. Barbara Kruger participates with a piece called *Why I Am Not Anti-Baudrillard*, which is a quote from the theorist about the relationship between antithesis and thesis. Baudrillard visits New York for a conference at NYU while the show is on, and Josie, who works at White Columns, hands him an invitation, to which he says with dismay, "but this is anti-Baudrillard."

↗ Announcement card for *Resistance* (front) with photograph by Catherine Allport of the funeral of a UDF organizer killed by police, Umlazi, South Africa, 1985

**MEMBERS:**  
Doug Ashford, Julie Ault,  
Tim Rollins

Exhibition Proposal (excerpt),  
Group Material, October 1986

A theoretical jungle surrounds us. Overgrown from inactivity, this jungle harbors real dangers—the dissolution of history, the disfiguration of any alternative actuality, and the attempt to disown practice. Activism is perceived as illusory in an illusory culture.

In this self-imposed confinement art becomes comfortable, criticality becomes style, politics becomes idealism, and ultimately information becomes impossibility.

Group Material refutes this operatively submissive philosophy with this proposed exhibition, *Anti-Baudrillard (Resistance)*.

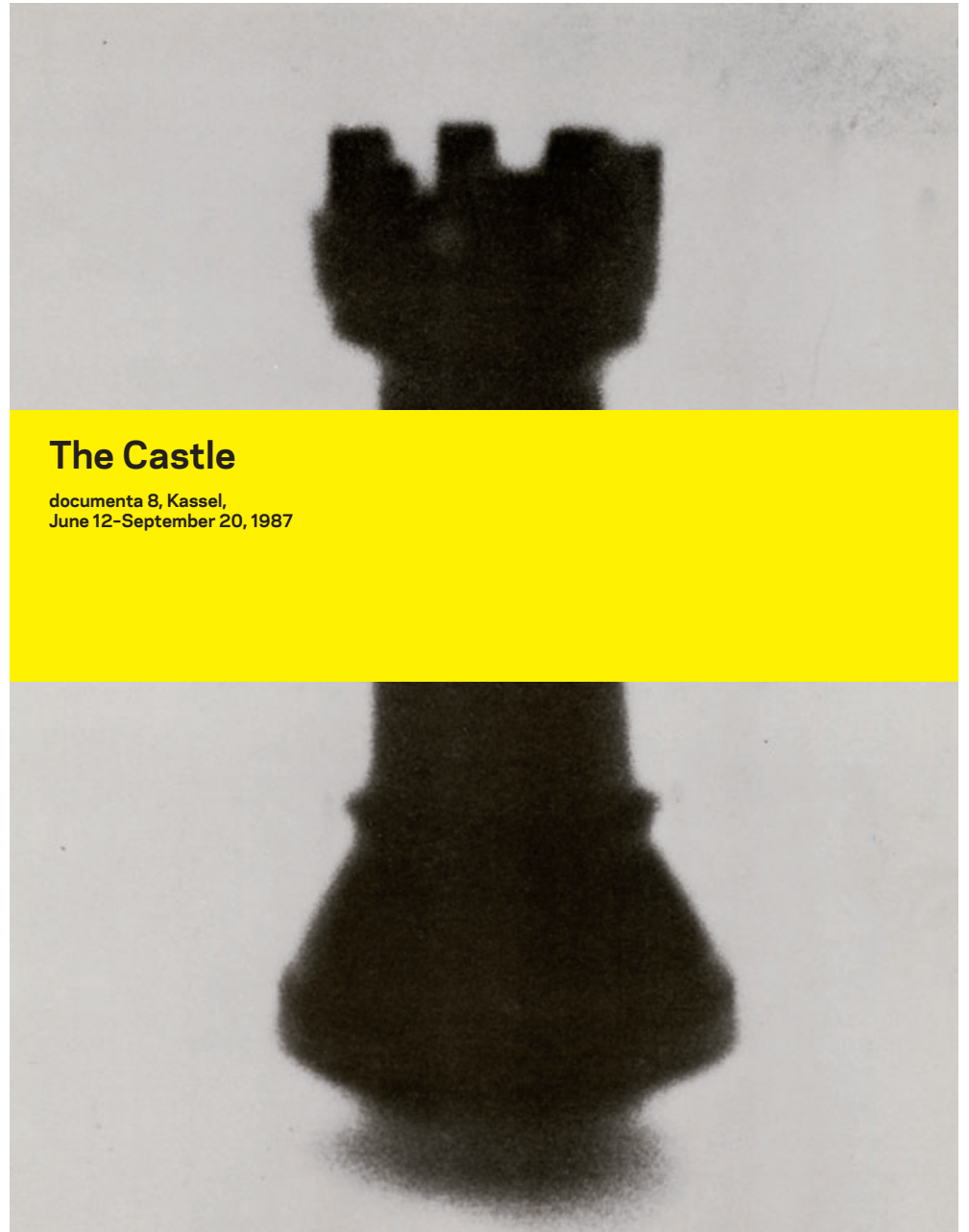
*Anti-Baudrillard (Resistance)* is a collection of art objects and images that depict an undeniable political reality and form a picture of widespread, international resistance. This resistance denies the self-indulgence of leisure-class theory. It is resistance born from necessity and genuine day-to-day existence. . . .





## The Castle

documenta 8, Kassel,  
June 12-September 20, 1987





An enclosed circular room painted a subtle shade of silvery gray and carpeted in royal blue is constructed for *The Castle*. Franz Kafka's book with the same title, about a man who repeatedly tries and fails to gain access to the authorities of the eponymous castle, is a reference point for the exhibition concept. A deleted extract from Kafka's text is reproduced along the bottom and top perimeters of the walls, encircling and captioning the space—metaphorically expressing the perspective of the show. It reads: "The Castle in itself is infinitely more powerful than you are; nevertheless there might still be some doubt whether it will win, but you don't turn that to account; it is as though all your endeavors were aimed at establishing the victory of the Castle beyond any doubt, that is why suddenly in the midst of the fight you begin to be afraid

without any cause, thus increasing your own helplessness." A soundtrack of easy-listening versions of socially relevant and revolutionary songs plays continuously. A collection of American and German store-bought products exemplify "how the consumer marketplace masquerades as an arena of alternatives and creates an illusory freedom of choice: buying power is substituted for political power." Products designed to appeal to notions of hierarchy and status are installed, including Mr. Big napkins, Master Blend coffee, Lord cigarettes, Meister Klasse soup mixes, and Imperial margarine. GM focuses on only small-scale artworks for the show to contradict the competitive bigger-is-better attitude evident in international exhibitions such as documenta.

← Previous page:  
Detail of announcement  
card for *The Castle*  
(front)  
↑ Exterior view of  
*The Castle*  
↗ *The Castle*, left  
to right: works by  
Silvia Kolbowski,  
Tom Lawson (top),  
Master Blend coffee  
(middle),  
Aric Obrosey (bottom),  
Larry Johnson

MEMBERS:  
Doug Ashford, Julie Ault,  
Tim Rollins



Exhibition Proposal (excerpt),  
*Group Material*, September 1986

*The Castle* has a subject, a theme and design that unifies the myriad of objects exhibited. *The Castle* refers to how modern western culture, from the most common household product to the most coveted contemporary artwork seems to address a new will to power, not genuine political power but a desire for the representations of power, the signs of superiority, privilege and dominance. . . . *The Castle* features artists who imitate, mediate, appropriate, and militate against this crisis of contemporary visual culture. . .

The visage of Orwell's Big Brother has been sublimated by the omnipresent surgically altered face of Michael Jackson. The power we seek to impress or usurp, the power we desire yet deny, the power that has penetrated every fiber of our common sense, the power that has made working classes disbelieve in their own everyday existence; this is the subject of our exhibition. . . .



Reader's Guide (excerpt),  
Group Material, June 1987

All artists seek an ideal audience. This audience used to be people—flesh and blood individuals. This is finished. Our art is now made for The Castle.

Unlike the older forms of dominance—the King, the Boss, the Landlord, The Castle is a general, sweeping power we can no longer exactly locate. Despite its lack of specificity, it strikes us with as great a force and brutality as ever before experienced in history. It is the dangerous, amorphous nature of The Castle that makes it the object of our love and attention.

To love The Castle is to make oneself in its image. Artists take on attributes of The Castle. As in the game of chess, we as artists are taller and more privileged than the dispensable pawns. Artists are pawns of a higher rank, bestowed with illusions of freedom. Yet like the rook, we must comply with strict laws of limited movement.

Here is our offering to The Castle—an arrangement of paintings, drawings, sculptures, prints, photographs, pages torn from popular magazines, recorded tapes of music, decorative household objects, things we buy in supermarkets—visual objects that dress in the vestments of power in order to perhaps gain an audience to power, an audience with The Castle.

The Castle, like all castles before it, is very slowly crumbling into history. Others will scour the ground, find the useful debris and use it to build new structures. We look forward to the moment when The Castle weakens, when the artist rejects the role of the rook, retrieving full power of movement. This requires artists who, not waiting their turn, ignore the law of the grid and break the rules of the game.



## Constitution

The Temple University Gallery,  
Philadelphia,  
October 1–November 14, 1987

For Constitution, the walls of the Temple University space are painted a shade of tan from the Federal period of American interior design—the period when the Constitution of the United States was drafted. Group Material paints an enlargement of the preamble and initial section of the 1787 Constitution on the gallery walls to create a visual and symbolic background for the art displayed, which includes works in various media by “fine” artists, so-called outsider and “folk” artists, and a bench designed by Thomas Jefferson. A soundtrack of Mahalia Jackson singing traditional hymns plays during the show.

↑ Constitution, left to right: works by John Ahearn, Andres Serrano, Nancy Spero (top), Sherrie Levine (middle), Daniel Pressley (bottom) → Exhibition handout → Following spread, left to right: works by Guerrilla Art Action Group, Curtis Brown, Edward Curtis (top), Dennis Adams (bottom), David Robbins, Faith Ringgold, Thomas Jefferson (bench)

# CONSTITUTION

DO I CONTRADICT MYSELF?  
VERY WELL THEN I CONTRADICT MYSELF,  
(I AM LARGE, I CONTAIN MULTITUDES.)

— WALT WHITMAN  
FROM “SONG OF MYSELF”  
1855–1881

HOW TO CELEBRATE THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA? BEGIN BY IMAGINING THAT WE PAY TRIBUTE NOT TO A YELLOWED DOCUMENT VACUUM-SEALED UNDER THICK PLATE GLASS IN WASHINGTON, D.C., BUT RATHER TO A LIVING BODY — LIKE A 200-YEAR-OLD PERSON — MIRACULOUSLY VIGOROUS AND WISE, YET OBSTINATE, PERHAPS TOO CONFIDENT OF ITS OWN GOOD INFLUENCE AND PERFECTION, WITH THE AGE-OLD DILEMMA OF PRACTICING WHAT IT PREACHES IN THE EVERYDAY REALITY OF TODAY’S AMERICAN PEOPLE.

MANY WANT TO GIVE THE CONSTITUTION THE KIND OF BIRTHDAY PARTY BEFITTING A GRAND OLD DAD. GROUP MATERIAL ALWAYS LOVES A PARTY, BUT ESPECIALLY A CELEBRATION OF ISSUES, OF QUESTIONS. GROUP MATERIAL TOASTS THE CONSTITUTION BY DEMANDING IT BEAR WITNESS. IN THIS RESPECT, OUR EXHIBITION CONSTITUTION IS A GOOD-SPIRITED TOWN MEETING. THE CHORUS OF FINE ARTWORKS, EVERYDAY OBJECTS, FOLK ART OBJECTS AND FURNITURE ALL ASK OUR GUEST OF HONOR THE SAME QUESTIONS IN MANY DIFFERENT VOICES AND LANGUAGES: WHY DID YOU COME ABOUT AND FOR WHOM? WHAT DID YOU MEAN 200 YEARS AGO AND WHAT DO YOU MEAN TODAY? WHY HAVE YOU SUCCEEDED AND FAILED AT THE SAME TIME? HOW CAN WE PROTECT YOU? HOW CAN YOU PROTECT US?

FOR THIS EXHIBITION AT THE TEMPLE GALLERY IN PHILADELPHIA, GROUP MATERIAL HAS TAKEN THE CONSTITUTION-AS-DOCUMENT, AS A HISTORICAL WRITING, AND ENLARGED THE ORIGINAL CALLIGRAPHY, TRANSFORMING IT FROM AN ARTIFACT INTO A SITE — AN ARENA WHERE WE MAY OBSERVE THE BATTLE BETWEEN PROMISES AND DOUBTS AS MANIFESTED IN THE STREETS OF AMERICA DAILY.

CONTRADICTION — BETWEEN IDEALS AND LIVED REALITY, BETWEEN WEALTH AND POVERTY, BETWEEN DOMINANT CULTURE AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCE — IS THE FUNDAMENTAL HISTORICAL TRADITION OF OUR UNITED STATES. GROUP MATERIAL’S CONSTITUTION IS A CRITICAL TRIBUTE TO THIS NATIONAL CONDITION — THIS PRIMAL AMERICAN DESIRE FOR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM THAT AT ONCE VINDICATES AND THREATENS THE PREMISES OF OUR MOST REVERED HISTORIC DOCUMENT. A CONSTITUTION IS ALSO A WALK. WALKING THROUGH OUR EXHIBITION, YOU ARE WALKING THROUGH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE CONSTITUTION MADE VISIBLE. YOU ADD TO THIS EXHIBITION WITH THE LIVED EXPERIENCE AND ACTIONS OF YOUR DAILY LIVES, TRANSFORMING CONSTITUTION FROM A NOUN TO A VERB, INTO SOCIAL ACTION.

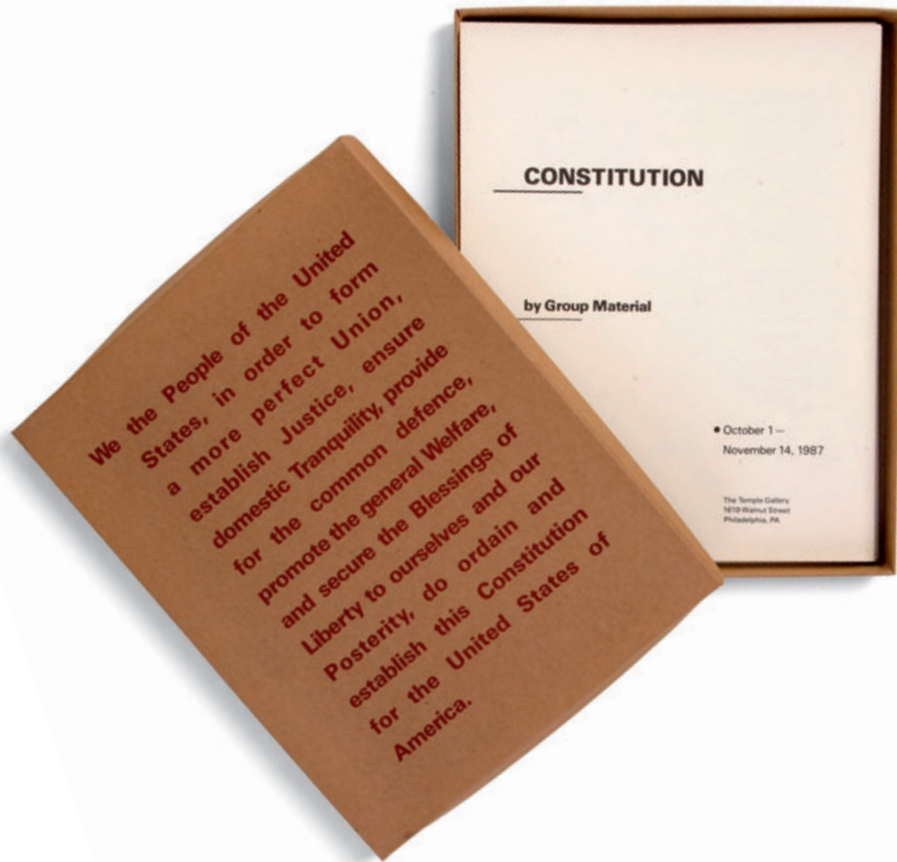
WHAT IS MORE DANGEROUS TO THE FORMING OF A MORE PERFECT UNION THAN THE ILLUSION THAT WE POSSESS SUCH A FLAWLESS STATE ALREADY?

HOW TO CELEBRATE OUR CONSTITUTION? BY SPOILING THE PARTY WITH QUESTIONS.

— GROUP MATERIAL







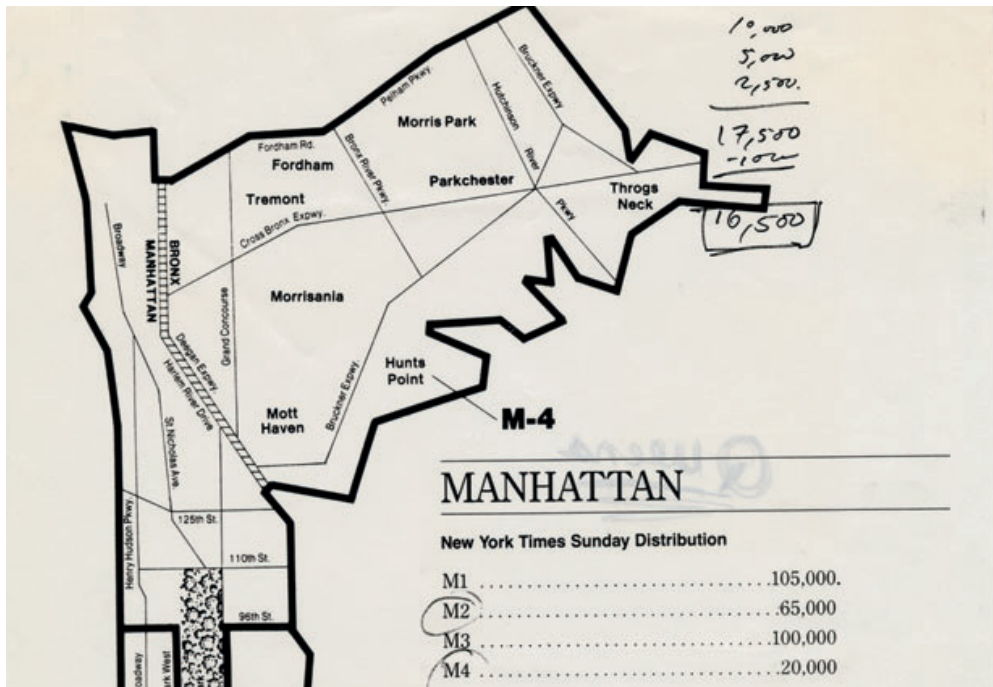
**Fall 1987.** Julie visits Felix Gonzalez-Torres' MFA exhibition at NYU, which includes dateline Photostat pieces and images of crowds reproduced as puzzles, and brings his current work to the attention of the group. Contact is made and affinities between Felix and the group are immediately apparent. Felix had participated in *Subculture* in 1983 after Mundy, enthused from seeing a work of his, had gotten in touch. Felix seems a natural for the group. After getting together a couple times with Doug, Julie, and Tim, he is invited to join.

Tim Rollins leaves the group to exclusively devote himself to his progressively more primary

endeavor, K.O.S. (Kids of Survival), the after school workshop he developed in the South Bronx where junior and high-school kids read books together and collaborate on paintings that communicate their lived experiences in relation to the ideas encountered in the literature. Tim had wanted to stop participating in GM for a while, and as Felix has now joined, he feels confident that his leaving does not jeopardize its continuation.

← Constitution catalog  
 ↑ Constitution, left to right: works by Gretchen Bender, Leon Golub, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Tom Lawson

**MEMBERS:**  
 Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Felix Gonzalez-Torres

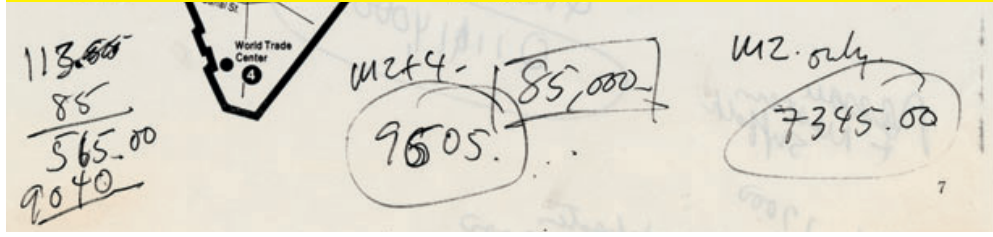


## Inserts

advertising supplement to the Sunday New York Times, May 22, 1988

GM acts as a contractor, commissioning works by ten artists for *Inserts*, booklets to be placed in an edition of a Sunday newspaper. The single page works are conceived for the situation by Mike Glier, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Carrie Mae Weems, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Nancy Spero, Nancy Linn, Hans Haacke, Richard Prince, and Louise Lawler. Originally planned for the *Sunday Daily News*, the project is rejected just prior to realization. A *Daily News* source reports that the approval committee was expecting drawings and paintings, and was taken aback by the amount of text in the art. Additionally, they viewed the tone and subject matter of AIDS, nuclear weaponry, and racism as offensive and inappropriate to their family-oriented readership. The group approaches the *New York Times*, whose director of Advertising Acceptability reviews the content and expresses concern that readers may be confused and upset by the use of the term "pickaninny" in the work by Carrie Mae Weems. He asks if she will reword. Weems refuses and the *Times* agrees to publish the piece intact. *Inserts* has a budget of \$25,000, the majority of which goes for the space and distribution into 85,000 copies of the May 22 Sunday edition. Grants from NYSCA, the Public Art Fund Inc., and Art Matters, Inc. fund the project.

← *New York Times* distribution map for advertisers  
→ Following spreads:  
**Inserts, left to right:**  
Mike Glier, Jenny Holzer, Richard Prince, Louise Lawler





I AM A MAN.  
I ENTER SPACE BECAUSE  
IT EMPTIES ME.  
I CHASE PEOPLE  
AROUND THE HOUSE.  
I SLEEP ON MY BACK  
FOR SIGHTS OF SEX  
THAT MAKES BLOOD.  
I PROTECT WHAT MULTIPLIES  
BUT I AM NOT CERTAIN  
THAT I LOVE MY BOY.  
THERE IS PLEASURE  
IN STOPPING MY FLESH  
WHEN IT DOES WRONG.  
GETTING WHAT I WANT  
MAKES ME SICK.  
WHY I FIGHT IS  
NOT YOUR BUSINESS.  
I LIKE DYING AND I AM SURE  
I CAN DO IT MORE THAN ONCE.  
I NEED PERFECTION BUT  
WHEN I IMPLEMENT IT  
HALF OF EVERYONE DIES.  
I HAVE A LOT OF ACCIDENTS  
AND I THINK THEY ARE FUNNY.  
I EMPLOY PEOPLE TO MAKE  
MY HOURS LIKE DREAMS.  
I LIKE A CIRCLE OF  
BODIES WHOSE HANDS  
DO WHAT THEY SHOULD.  
I WILL KILL YOU FOR  
WHAT YOU MIGHT DO.

FIREMAN PULLING  
DRUNK OUT OF A  
BURNING BED:

"YOU DARNED FOOL,  
THAT'LL TEACH YOU  
TO SMOKE IN BED."

DRUNK: "I WASN'T  
SMOKING IN BED,  
IT WAS ON FIRE  
WHEN I LAID DOWN."



enough.

There are enough nuclear weapons scattered over the globe to kill everyone on earth at least 12 times.  
Ruth Leger Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures, 1986

A poster for the 'Democracy Education' exhibition. At the top, there is a banner with the letters 'K k L l M m N n O o P p Q q R r'. Below the banner is a black and white photograph of a diverse group of children smiling. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# DEMOCRACY

## Education

Exhibition: September 14-October 8  
77 Wooster Street  
New York City  
Tuesday-Saturday 12-6 pm

Town Meeting, September 27  
155 Mercer Street, 8 pm

Dia Art Foundation  
212.431.9232

## Democracy

Four installations and Town Meetings, Dia Art Foundation, 77 Wooster Street, New York, September 15, 1988-January 14, 1989

The group identifies crises in democracy as its subject and develops a format in response to the specifics of Dia's history. Dia is known for supporting the realization of works that extend in perpetuity, for instance *The Lightning Field* by Walter De Maria, and lately for its yearlong exhibitions at 77 Wooster Street. Since its inception Dia operated as a privately financed foundation but has recently undergone restructuring, enabling the organization to receive public funding. The group considers the theme of democracy warrants a continually changing exhibition over the allocated four months. In discussion with curator, Gary Garrels, numerous practical challenges emerge

A poster for the 'Democracy Politics and Election' exhibition. The background is a black and white photograph of a crowd of people, some with their arms raised. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# DEMOCRACY

## Politics and Election

Exhibition: October 15-November 12  
77 Wooster Street  
New York City  
Tuesday-Saturday 12-6 pm

OPENING RECEPTION  
Saturday, October 15, 6-8 PM

Town Meeting, October 18  
Election Viewing, November 8  
155 Mercer Street, 8 pm

Dia Art Foundation  
212.431.9232

and the group opts for breaking the exhibition period into four subthemes and sequential parts, scheduled to mirror the exhibition pace of a commercial gallery. Roundtable discussions between practitioners in each of the fields are intended to inform and educate the group in preparation for the exhibitions and four Town Meetings are planned to coincide with their exhibitions. Artist Martha Rosler is invited by Dia for the second half of the season; she adopts Group Material's structure of sequential exhibitions and town meetings (open forums) for her project *There's No Place Like Home*. Dia names the entire year of programming "Town Meeting."

Each of GM's Dia installations contains a version of an American flag and some form of seating: a regulation school flag and school desks in *Education*, a supersized flag and a La-Z-Boy chair in *Politics and Election*, an "outlaw biker" flag and backyard picnic tables and benches in *Cultural Participation*, and a work by Michael Jenkins called *June 30, 1986* which depicts a flag with the stars cut out, along with folding chairs in *AIDS and Democracy: A Case Study*.

Dia staff are extremely hospitable and permit GM to use their offices and infrastructure not only for planning *Democracy* but for working on other projects as well.

A poster for the 'Democracy Cultural Participation' exhibition. The background is a black and white photograph of a group of people sitting at tables. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# DEMOCRACY

## Cultural Participation

Exhibition: November 19-December 10  
77 Wooster Street

A poster for the 'Democracy AIDS and Democracy: A Case Study' exhibition. The background is a black and white photograph of a building with a flag. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# DEMOCRACY

## AIDS and Democracy: A Case Study

Exhibition: December 17-January 14  
77 Wooster Street  
New York City  
Tuesday-Saturday 12-6 pm

# TOWN MEETING!

## EDUCATION & DEMOCRACY

### ORGANIZED BY GROUP MATERIAL

**Tuesday, September 27, 8 PM**  
 DIA ART FOUNDATION • 155 Mercer St.

## AGENDA

Meeting Chairperson: Tim Rollins, Director, Art and Knowledge Workshop, Bronx

- I. Welcome and introductory remarks by Tim Rollins for Group Material
- II. Brief summary of issues raised during a panel on Education & Democracy organized by Group Material\*
- III. Open to the floor: Discussion on the following questions --
  - A. What are some aspects of the present crisis in education in the U.S.?
  - B. Education for whom? -- Who has the greatest access to organized forms of education? Who is denied access to these same institutions? How is democracy served by current educational policies? Is a Eurocentric curriculum suitable for the increasingly multicultural nature of contemporary American society?
  - C. Education beyond schooling? -- What is the state of forms of

## Democracy: Education

Dia Art Foundation, New York,  
 September 15–October 8, 1988;  
 Town Meeting,  
 September 27, 1988

*Education* presents artworks directly and metaphorically related to education and its institutions alongside collaborative contributions by teacher and student groups. Doug writes a letter of invitation to public school teachers to elicit projects from and with their students for the exhibition, which, with help from Mario Asaro (a former intern with Group Material who is associated with Artists / Teachers Concerned) is distributed via the mailing list of the New York State Teachers Association. Although he is no longer

*Education & Democracy* will be recorded, transcribed and incorporated into a publication organized by Group Material for the Dia Art Foundation.

\*Education & Democracy panel held in May 1988: John Deveaux, Bronx Educational Services; Rodney Harris, Boys & Girls High School, Brooklyn; Catherine Lord, California Institute of the Arts; Tim Rollins; Ira Schor, City University of New York.

This project is supported in part by public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, and the New York State Council on the Arts. Admission is free. For more information call (212)431-9232.

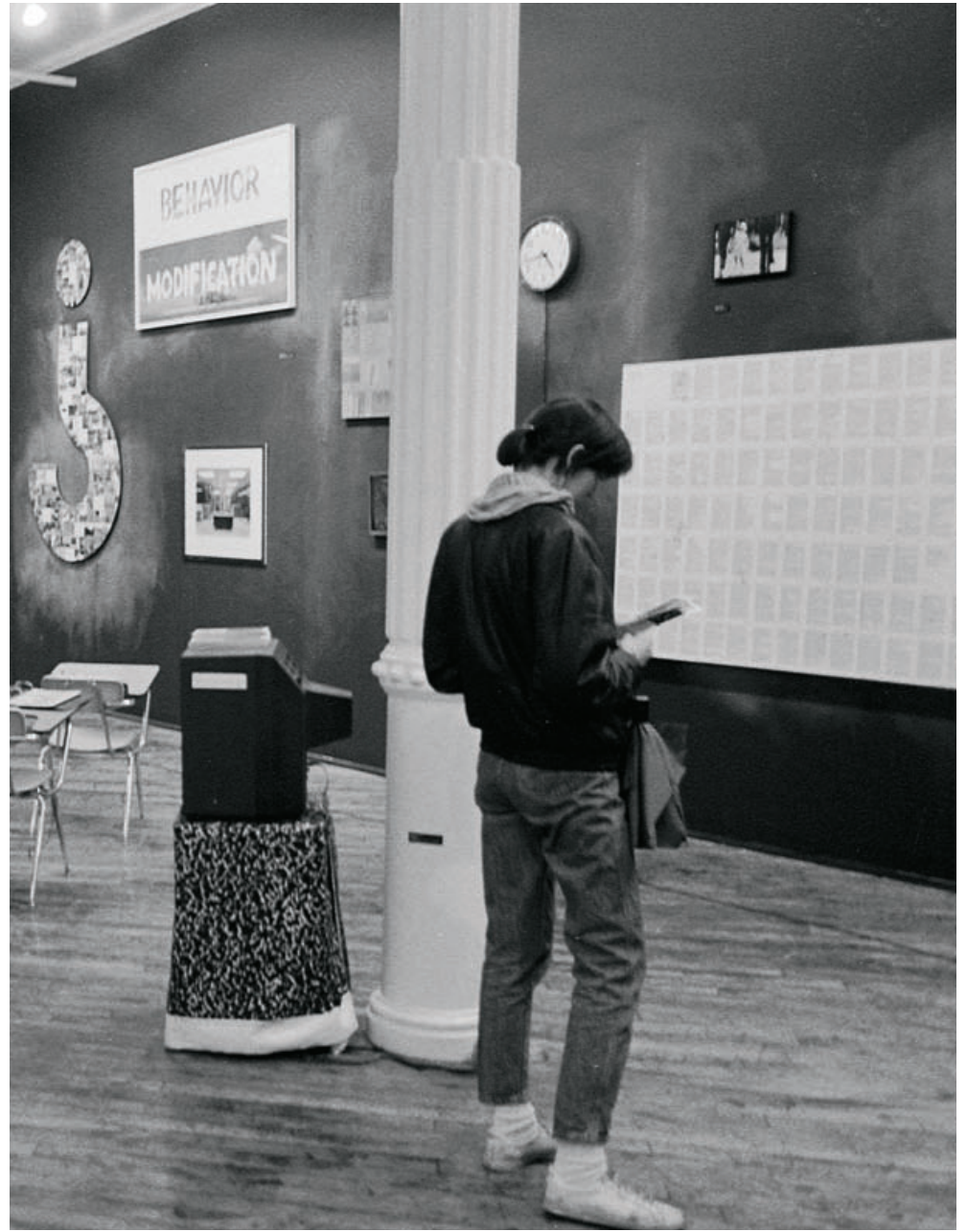
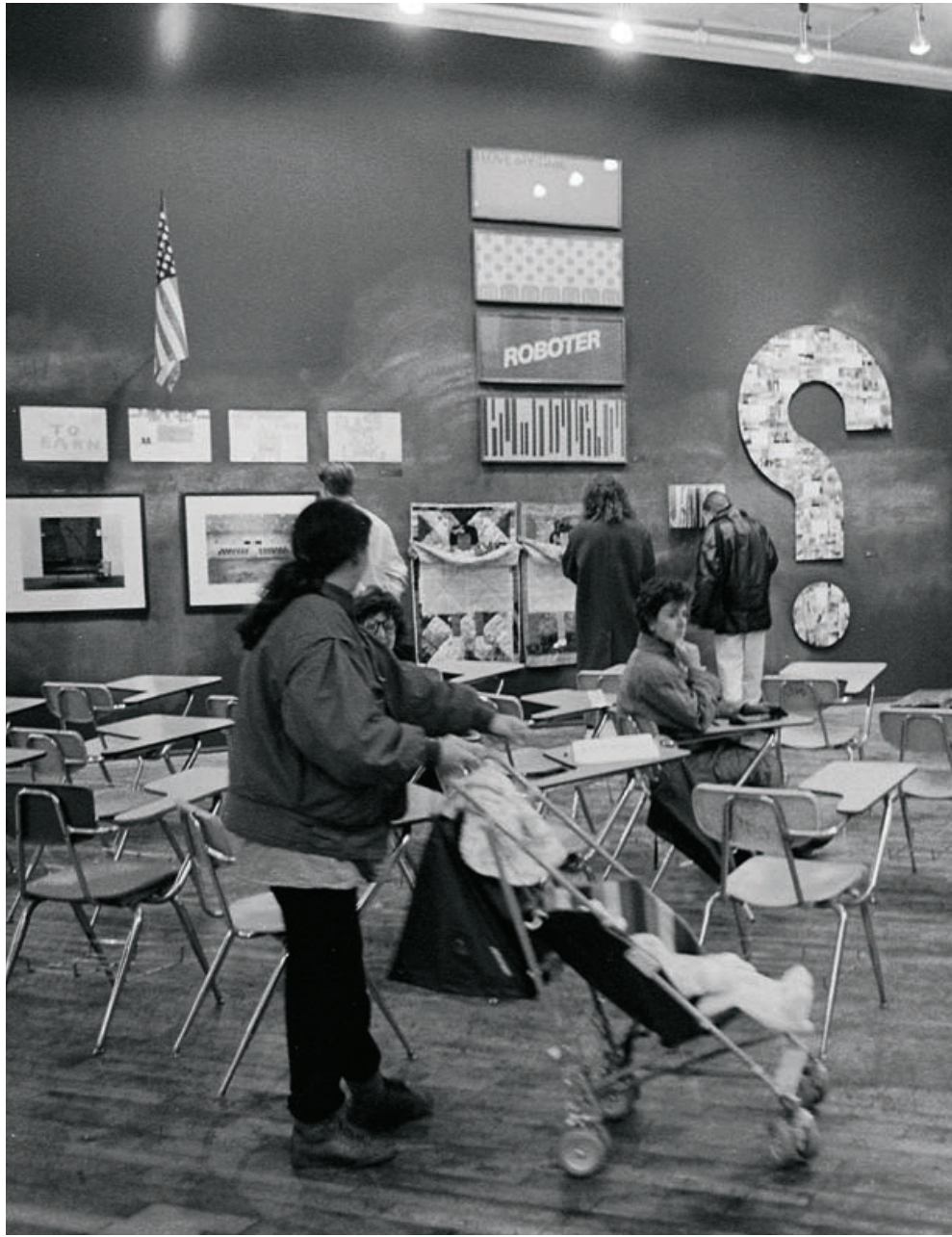


an active group member Tim Rollins is involved in the proposal stage of *Democracy*, and he participates in the roundtable discussion, as well as acting as chairperson of the Town Meeting.

GM paints the walls with blackboard paint, which is a surprise to Peter Halley, whose work in the exhibition uses mainly black paint as well. During the show, a fire breaks out on the floor above and the fire department arrives. In the chaos of attempting to remove the art from

harm's way, two firemen manhandle the most valuable artwork in the show—two chalkboards with ephemeral traces of a performance by Joseph Beuys on them—thereby damaging the work.

↑ *Democracy: Politics and Election* roundtable discussion, left to right: Eva Cockcroft, Judge Bruce Wright, Julie Ault, Felix Gonzalez-Torres







[Press Release](#) (excerpt),  
Group Material, September 1988

Our objective is to focus on the different options and limitations that surround the process of learning. The installation is designed as a classroom, where many voices enter a dialogue. Democracy is in a state of crisis. It must be a process of collaboration and inclusion which needs to be constantly reinvented. . . .



## Democracy: Politics and Election

Dia Art Foundation, New York,  
October 15–November 12;  
Town Meeting,  
October 18, 1988

The presidential race between Michael Dukakis and George H. W. Bush is defined by a new level of negative campaigning and television oriented, art directed spectacle masterminded by Bush's campaign manager, Lee Atwater, with assistance from political consultant Roger Ailes. Symbols seem to stand in for substance, which is registered in the installation by the placement of a television tuned to major network campaign coverage on a podium right at the gallery entrance. Hundreds of red, white, and blue balloons are inflated to cover the ceiling during the reception. Dia's caterers likewise thematize the decorations and drinks with a red, white, and blue motif. The opening atmosphere is of a perversely patriotic party gone wrong.



[Press release \(excerpt\)](#),  
October 1988

The *Politics and Election* exhibition will not simply illustrate political crises and struggles, but will focus specifically on the contemporary nature of political power. We are currently witnessing the complete dismissal of substance and honesty, in which the real crises are overshadowed by the style of presentation. The exact color, dimensions and design of the debate podiums have become more important than the issues being discussed. Through juxtaposition of subtly related objects and images, Group Material invites the audience to read between the lines....

↑ *Democracy: Politics and Election* left to right: works by Bertrand Lavier, Antonio Muntadas and Marshall Reese (monitor), Mike Glier (hanging), Mitchell Syrop (wall), supersize flag and La-Z-Boy chair included by GM

# TOWN MEETING!

## POLITICS & ELECTION

### ORGANIZED BY GROUP MATERIAL

#### Tuesday, October 18, 8 PM

DIA ART FOUNDATION • 155 Mercer St.

## AGENDA

Meeting Co-Chairs: Lucy R. Lippard, writer and activist  
Jerry Kearns, artist

**PAST:** Introduction by Lucy R. Lippard and Jerry Kearns, a recent history of cultural responses to political crises.

**PRESENT:** Open to the floor. Discussion on the following:

- What are the major aspects of the current political crises?
- How are you responding to these crises individually and collectively?
- Are these various methods and strategies successful?

**FUTURE:** Are there events approaching us that will demand cultural action?

- What are the possibilities for action on a local and national level?

Please come prepared to speak on these issues. The Town Meeting on Politics & Election will be recorded, transcribed and incorporated into a publication organized by Group Material for the Dia Art Foundation.

This agenda is based on a panel discussion held in June 1988: Richard Andrews, former Director of Visual Arts, NEA, Washington D.C.; Leon Golub, artist; Esther Parada, artist; Judge Bruce Wright, Justice of the Supreme Court, State of New York.

This project is supported in part by public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, and the New York State Council on the Arts. Admission is free. For more information call the Dia Art Foundation, (212) 431-9232.



## Democracy: Cultural Participation

Dia Art Foundation, New York,  
November 19–December 10;  
Town Meeting,  
November 22, 1988

↑ Store sign omitted  
from *Democracy:  
Cultural Participation*



Group Material installs a cloth sign that reads “Under New Management” over the gallery doorway, which is intended to reference the presidential election, relations between multiculturalism and institutional change, as well as Dia’s transformation from a private to public institution. Dia staff consider this to be in poor taste and want it removed; reluctantly, the group complies. A couple of days before the opening, the group feels something is missing from the exhibition and makes a shopping trip to a supermarket in search of inspiration and material. The snack food aisle contains a plethora of options packaged to suggest ethnic identifications with particular tastes.

The group buys numerous examples to allude to market versions of multiculturalism, e.g. BonTon “Fiesta Mix,” Bachman “Pastapazz,” Bravos “Nacho Cheese” tortilla chips, and installs the packages in a row along two walls of the exhibition. The La-Z-Boy reclining chair from *Politics and Election* is raffled during *Cultural Participation* along with a “name brand color TV” and a “20 lb. self-basting turkey.” Tickets are sold for \$1 by Dia guards who approach visitors asking them if they want to enter a raffle.

→ Following page: Dia guard Camilla Fallon at *Democracy: Cultural Participation* with banners by Mike Kelley behind desk



[Press release \(excerpt\)](#),  
Group Material, November 1988

This installation will construct a site of displacement, symbolic of our mainstream culture which is becoming progressively homogenized. Consumptive freedoms of choice replace more active forms of cultural participation. We have been socialized by what we own, not by what we do and make. The marketplace script tells us how to be a man or a woman, what it means to speak a language, what it means to be an American. This exhibition asks, are we a multicultural society, or just a diverse set of demographic statistics? ...

# TOWN MEETING!

## CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

### ORGANIZED BY GROUP MATERIAL

Tuesday, November 22, 8 pm  
DIA ART FOUNDATION • 155 Mercer St.

## AGENDA

Meeting Chairperson: David Avalos, Artist, San Diego

- I. Welcome and introductory remarks by David Avalos
- II. Open to the floor: Discussion on the following questions --
  - A. What are some aspects of the present crisis of cultural participation?
  - B. Culture for whom? Who is given access and who is denied access to the institutions of representation? In what ways do cultural institutions serve and in what ways do they fail their communities and public?
  - C. How does consumerism affect our participatory power? How do various marketplaces and institutions define communities and dictate sociality?
  - D. What are some non-mainstream, alternative, and/or oppositional practices? What are the problems and solutions presented by these practices?
  - E. What are our options? How can we begin to build cultural democracy?

This agenda is based on a panel discussion held in June 1988: David Avalos, Martha Gever, Lucy Lippard, Randall Morris, Robert Farris Thompson, Deborah Wye.



## Democracy: AIDS and Democracy: A Case Study

Dia Art Foundation, New York,  
December 19, 1988–January 14, 1989;  
Town Meeting, January 10, 1989

Group Material regards this installation as a "juncture in which sorrow, rage, and fear can be used to reinforce our decision to act, to empower ourselves in the struggle for a society in which all individuals will have their most basic needs fulfilled by a responsible, egalitarian, and truly democratic government." The tables that cross the space distribute stacks of flyers from activist and community organizations. Monitors on either end screen videos—a common medium for artists creating work addressing the AIDS crisis. A wall text at the entrance dedicates the entire *Democracy* project to William Olander, friend and Senior Curator at the New Museum, who is very ill. The group installs a makeshift wheelchair ramp for the opening, which Bill attends. It is an emotional evening for the group, also tinged by a measure of antagonism to the memorializing orientation of some art in the show by a number of visitors wanting a more militant exposition.

Ronald Jones: *Untitled* (1986). Its label reads: (International Maritime Code: "Stop and watch for my signals. You are in grave danger." "I am trying to communicate with you. You are in grave danger.")

and watch for my signals. I am disabled—communicate with me." "I am disabled—communicate with me for you are in grave danger too.")

# Safe Combat in the Erogeuous Zone

BY ELIZABETH HESS

**AIDS AND DEMOCRACY: A CASE STUDY.**  
Group Material, Dia Art Foundation, 77 Wooster Street, through January 14.

**G**roup Material's survival over the past decade is an achievement in itself. In 1979, a group of art students formed a collective as an antidote to the extreme alienation artists were feeling toward one another, not to mention toward the rest of the world. Whatever their political beliefs, the members shared the conviction that art was, or could be, a social force. This is still their raison d'être. Over the years, Group Material (Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Felix Gonzalez-Torres) has developed a less anarchistic and more strategic aesthetic, yet it has not lost its ability to surprise us. Taking over Dia with a four-part series about "Democracy" was a most unexpected coup.

Many of the recent exhibitions on AIDS have used photographic documentation to dispel any illusions about the reality of the 79,823 cases on record in the U.S. Photos aptly convey the immediacy of the crisis, but there are obviously other ways for artists to communicate their thoughts on, or experiences with, AIDS. The power of Group Material's fourth and last show lies in the collective's decision to expand the usual approach to the subject through a Conceptual installation.

"AIDS and Democracy" necessarily—if predictably—includes loads of information to counter manipulated or missing facts with more up-to-date data. Hours of continuous videotape play on two monitors, and numerous broadsides, pamphlets, newspaper clippings, and handouts from ACT UP fill a long table in the center of the gallery. But, beyond the fact sheets and the human drama, the show implicitly raises a fascinating question about the impact of AIDS on contempo-

rary art and, in a few cases, on works made prior to the advent of the disease. In another context, many of the 36 pieces might not raise the specter of AIDS, but this installation sets up the work to argue a point of view. The walls are yoked into the activist premise of this show: AIDS is so pervasive and misconstrued that everyone must participate in the fight to stop it. The disjunction between the cool "art" and the hot "propaganda," initially jarring, becomes less and less so as the information gleaned from the software and hard copy begins to color our general vision. The best way to look at this show is to move back and forth between the tapes, the print material, and the objects on the walls.

The point this installation makes is that, in the light of concrete information on AIDS, all works, no matter how tangentially related, take on a particular meaning. AIDS unavoidably changes the picture of art, which is exactly what all major life and death disruptions do. Not so long ago, the vehemence of antiwar sentiment infiltrated the content of many images that didn't initially intend to speak out on Vietnam. Jasper Johns's flag, for example, was temporarily invested with an ironic significance. Many of the more abstract works here, such as Ross Bleckner's fuzzy striped canvas, which is shaped into a protective shield (or perhaps an authoritarian badge), may or may not have been made with AIDS in mind. Either way, Bleckner's piece reads as if it was painted to combat AIDS because it is in this show. The same is the case for a figurative sketch by Mike Glier, of several heads accompanied by a detached, limp arm.

We see Group Material's curatorial eye working, as certain objects shift into context. Michael Jenkins has cut the stars out of a large painting of an American flag, leaving an empty hole in the corner

of his facsimile. The piece comments only generally on governmental failure, but here the desecration of the flag becomes a demand for the right of every citizen to health care. A few works, such as Nancy Burson's *Leukemia Visualization Image*, don't need to make any accommodation to the theme. She juxtaposes a magnified photo of healthy cells with one of diseased ones, ironically revealing the beauty in the beast; to the untrained eye, both the normal and the malignant cells have their own fascination. Several American flags ripple through the air in a small realistic canvas by Brian Bozack, who we learn from a chilling label on the wall, died last year on the 4th of July.

Nothing in the gallery is immune to AIDS: even a painting of an ordinary oak branch by Joe Andoe, which seems entirely unrelated, becomes tragic through association. A few pieces, including A

ART

inally taken in the '60s, what is most frightening about their inclusion here is not what they reveal about the past, but what they imply could happen in the future. The fact that these are pre-AIDS images allows them a critical distance to comment on the issue.

On the brighter side, there's some good sex in this show. It's primarily for educational purposes, but a few of the experts get off by demonstrating what they preach. *Life Guard for Sex*, produced and directed by Richard Morgan, is an attempt to prove that safe sex can be sexy. The tape (only available on request) is filled exclusively with the pleasures of voyeuristic, gay, X-rated antics, complete with genitals waxing and waning. Bodily fluids, however, remain within their rightful owners. True to the spirit and format of the average porn film, there's no story, character development, exterior scenes, or memorable faces.

Most of the videos are traditional documentaries that faithfully chronicle various protests, including the unveiling of the AIDS quilt in Washington, D.C., *Doctors, Lovers, and Women*, directed by Maria Maggenti and Jean Carlomusto, is one of few tapes geared to women, both lesbians and heterosexuals. Last January, when Dr. Robert E. Gould wrote an article in *Cosmopolitan* claiming that heterosexual women could have unrestricted sex even with a partner who tested HIV positive, he never dreamed that the woman's movement would jump on his back with a camera; the doctor is intelligently and aggressively made to look like a dangerous fool, and the controversy makes national news as it cuts a mainstream path through a host of talk shows all the way to *Nightline*. The tape unravels the original facts in the story, and then follows them in a hilarious montage as they get tangled up again in the media. *Cosmo* girls can get AIDS too, just like everybody else.

# It's Called Denial

BY KIM LEVIN

**WITH 42,000 DEAD / ART IS NOT ENOUGH.** The stark white lettering is on a black poster designed by Gran Fury. Issued last month, it's the first of the Kitchen's artist-designed monthly announcements—and within minutes its statistics were out of date (by January 2, U.S. dead numbered 46,334). "I would appreciate your coverage of this piece [the poster] as it allows a new forum for artists, but mostly because I find Gran Fury's message very moving in an arts community (including the Kitchen) where it is all too easy to hide within our work and ignore the horror surrounding us," Patrick Moore, publicity director at the Kitchen, wrote to me. Someone using my desk at the Voice propped a book up against the poster to hide its message.

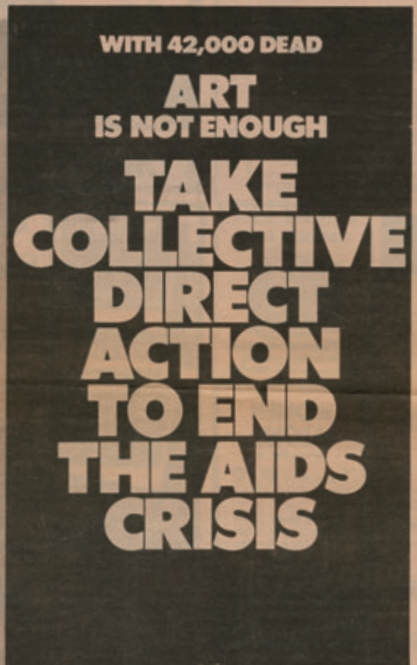
That poster is not in Group Material's

## ART

"AIDS and Democracy: A Case Study" at the Dia Foundation, though the informational fliers and leaflets on the long table that cuts diagonally through the space come from ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power). Gran Fury, an activist artists' collective, is composed of members of ACT UP. On the walls is work by some familiar artists from well-known galleries: Ross Bleckner's striped shield, Louise Lawler's military- and health-budget piece, Barbara Kruger's *Your Face Is Stranger Than Your Fiction*, General Idea's AIDS logo (miniaturized and multiplied as a sheet of stamps). Gran Fury's aesthetic contribution to this show is a small painting that sums up the insufficiencies of distanced, ironic art: R107, it proclaims, appropriating General Idea's appropriation of Robert Indiana's LOVE in order to offer an alternative.

Elizabeth Hess praised Group Material's AIDS show last week in these pages, and while I agree with my colleague that any show on the subject calls needed attention to the crisis, I'm not quite as enthusiastic as she is about the way this particular show couples "hot" messages and "cool" art. I feel the show doesn't go far enough. She called it Conceptual. I'd call it nonconfrontational. The art absorbed some heat from the messages, but it also cooled them down for the sake of a handsome, palatable show.

For an audience already in sympathy with Group Material's premises, the pre-AIDS art images such as Dorothea Lange's 1942 photo of a detainee in a Japanese-American internment camp or Jannis Kounellis's 1975 collage that pins a butterfly onto David's revolutionary Marat—appropriated by the curators to help make a point—are visual reminders, confirmations of principles. But I doubt that anyone not already in tune with the symbolic allusions would get the point. That's a dilemma that socially concerned exhibitions always face: they're preaching to believers. Then there's the sticky ques-



tion of curatorial appropriation, using art in a way that has little to do with the artist's intentions. But that aesthetic dilemma, given the crisis situation, may just be irrelevant.

Group Material has stated its objectives: "This installation will create a juncture in which sorrow, rage, and fear can be used to reinforce our decision to act, to empower ourselves in the struggle for a society in which all individuals will have their most basic needs fulfilled by a responsible, egalitarian, and truly democratic government." Yet in putting together an intellectualized show of tangential art, the group has chosen to exhibit no visual sign of dis-ease. Given the range of Bleckner's elegiac work, the choice of his shield emblemized the show: a formal blocking device, a shield against sorrow, rage, and fear. If Group Material aims to provoke action through art, it should know that Conceptual strategies of dis-

tancing and mediation act as psychic shields. Robert Mapplethorpe's self-portrait with a death's-head walking stick and Kenneth Cole's ad ("This year, because of AIDS, thousands of Americans won't live long enough to fill these shoes") are the show's most directly confrontational visual images. The more conceptualized choices avoid, as metaphors do, directly confronting the horror of reality.

The art world tends to be insular and anesthetized, and denial is endemic in our society, but the anesthetized slant of the cool art in this show leaves something to be desired. The exhibition, thanks to ACT UP, does address the political, social, and legal implications and complications of the health crisis. However, the condition of AIDS-as-illness, the physical and emotional devastation of the syndrome, has not been approached. This show may provoke the correct political

and moral reactions, and it may provide some viewers with the illusion that by looking at an art show on the subject of AIDS they're doing something about it, but it simply doesn't evoke emotion leading to compassionate action. Not that a traditional Group Material installation (condoms pinned to the walls or hospital beds with IV equipment?) would have been appropriate, either. But this exhibition doesn't have the provocative strength of Gran Fury's summer installation at White Columns. And it doesn't begin to have the powerful effect of the NAMES Project quilt. I don't think that anyone who has seen the quilt will ever forget it, while this is just a well-intentioned, politically and aesthetically correct art show. And if the ACT UP material weren't in it, it would have looked like just another group show. The statistics were there but the individuals within them were missing.

The show also raises questions about how Group Material's role, at the end of the '80s, has subtly changed. We still think of Group Material as the free-wheeling social-activist group that took social, political art out of an art context and into vacant buildings, onto the advertising slots of subway cars, and within a Sunday New York Times supplement. In an art context—a Whitney Biennial or Docu-

## ART QUOTE

There is the problem of meeting the needs of an ever more ethnically diversified population without lowering standards, fostering ghettos, encouraging politicization, rip-offs and cultural babbles, and diluting the precious artistic heritage of the West that we in America are especially obligated to preserve and transmit.

—Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "The New President and the Future of American Art," in the first (December 1988) issue of the international edition of *The Journal of Art*

Maybe we should create a Department of Dilution Control. —editor

ments 8—Group Material included what regular curators tend to leave out. Group Material's strength is derived from its abrasive proximity to reality, even when that reality is the politics of an international exhibition. But with this series of four shows at Dia (collectively titled "Democracy"), of which this is the last, I find myself wondering whether the trio of artists who currently make up Group Material have come to function not as gadflies but as traditional curators themselves. I wish the AIDS crisis had provoked them to something more than a well-meaning, commendable theme show. As Moore said to me, "It doesn't matter who the artists are or what they are doing. They have to be doing something other than their art." Art is not enough. ■

## Letters to *The Village Voice*

Of course, art is not enough [Kim Levin, "It's Called Denial: Another Look at Group Material's AIDS Show," January 17]: people dear to us are passing the divide, minds are slowly glowing fainter, hearts are beating their last months, weeks, days. Of course, Kim Levin and Gran Fury are right—these are our own emotions. And yet Levin's article is unfair. Art is never enough in life's realm: Munch's deathbeds are not death, as conversely French impressionist paintings are not the sun on meadows. Elizabeth Hess is equally enraged, I am sure, about the merciless plague, but she looked at the show with the expectations one has for art ("Safe Combat in the Erogenous Zone," January 10).

Art is not direct action. The powerful poster by Gran Fury is not direct action—it merely calls for it. Direct action locates itself in life: in the fight for AIDS patients' rights and dignity, in the fight for an all-out governmental effort to fight the disease, and, let's not forget, in the hospital rooms where some nurses and doctors do what they can—and argue with their more frightened colleagues.

Rudolf Baranik, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Whatever one might think of Kim Levin's rather odd argument against Group Material's AIDS show—which seems to suggest that artists ought to give up art in favor of activism (does that, I wonder, apply to critics as well?)—what really prompted this letter is my question as to whether or not we saw the same show. The space of Group Material's show was diagonally traversed by two tables that, as Ms Levin says, provided a large amount of literature about AIDS, its consequences, and possible personal and collective responses. (This material was assembled by Group Material, not as Levin suggests, by ACT UP.) At each end of the tables, which dominated the space, was a large videotape monitor, playing continuously. Continuously filling the gallery were the sounds of activism—not sorrow, pity, or evocations of the disease—from the 11 videotapes, almost all of them directly about AIDS activism and made by AIDS activists. I found no mention of any video works at all in Ms Levin's review.

In the words of activist and organizer Joe Hill: "Don't mourn, organize!" I doubt that anyone with work in the show would disagree.

Martha Rosler, Brooklyn

← Previous spread: "Safe Combat in the Erogenous Zone," Elizabeth Hess, *The Village Voice*, January 10, 1989  
 ← "It's Called Denial," Kim Levin, *The Village Voice*, January 17, 1989

MEMBERS:  
 Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Karen Rampsbacher

**March 1989.** Karen Rampsbacher, the curatorial assistant at the Dia Art Foundation and a women's health care and AIDS activist, is a vital presence providing feedback and stimulating dialogue during the making of *Democracy*. With the project finished, the group invites her to become a member and work together.

**May 1989.** Group Material is invited to make a poster for the exterior side panels of San Francisco buses for *Art Against AIDS on the*

*Road*, and invites artist and Gran Fury member, John Lindell, to collaborate on the piece. The result is a version of a poster Lindell made previously for Gran Fury, the New York based collective of AIDS activists, that reads "All People with AIDS are Innocent" alongside the caduceus symbol, which represents the medical profession.



## Unisex

The Lesbian and Gay  
Community Center, New York,  
June 1-December 1, 1989

Group Material curates a tape of disco hits of the late 1970s and 80s, the period when AIDS was recognized and came to define the era, for its contribution to *The Center Show*. The tape plays continuously in the restrooms of the Center for the duration.

**Summer 1989.** During the Congressional controversy over NEA funding of exhibitions of Robert Mapplethorpe's and Andres Serrano's works, the Corcoran Gallery in Washington,



DC, which had just cancelled their forthcoming Mapplethorpe show, invites Group Material to make an exhibition on censorship. Director, Christina Orr-Cahall's letter states: "In the last few days I have met with many of the board of trustees to reconfirm our commitment to contemporary art. . . . All have regretted the set of circumstances which have endangered our relationship with the artistic community." The group begins making a proposal for an exhibition titled *Intolerance*, and polls a few artists,

writers, and curators for their views. Responses include, "don't do it, it's too loaded," "no, don't, the show would be serving too many objectives simultaneously and won't serve the issues," "do it but it must clearly transcend context and act against Congress," "agree to do it only if the Corcoran makes a retraction," "anything you do would show complicity with Orr-Cahall's compromises." Ultimately GM declines the invitation.

⌘ *Unisex* cassette tape  
↑ *Home Lobbyist*  
mail-order kit,  
symptomatic of the  
extended "culture war"  
over art funding that  
began in 1989





## Shopping Bag

Kunstverein, Hamburg,  
October 14–November 26, 1989

GM is commissioned to make a publically sited, community-engaged project for D&S *Austellung*. The result is *Shopping Bag*, which has a list of the shopping capitals of the world on one side and the current arms dealing centers on the other, both superimposed on a repeated image of helicopters. The bags are distributed in local shops and department stores in Hamburg for the duration of the exhibition.

↑ People using GM's shopping bag in Hamburg

Group Material, "Exhibition Statement,"  
*Art Papers*, January–February 1990

... less than ever does a simple reproduction of reality express something about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the A.E.G. reveals almost nothing about these institutions ... Therefore something has to be constructed, something artificial, something fabricated.

—Bertolt Brecht

Last summer Group Material went to Hamburg, invited by the Kunstverein to produce a project outside the museum as part of their D&S exhibition. Our five day stay to research sites and make a proposal included the one Saturday of the month that stores are kept open in Germany. We walked through the downtown business district during this unusually frantic crowding of the streets and stores and felt immediately at home.

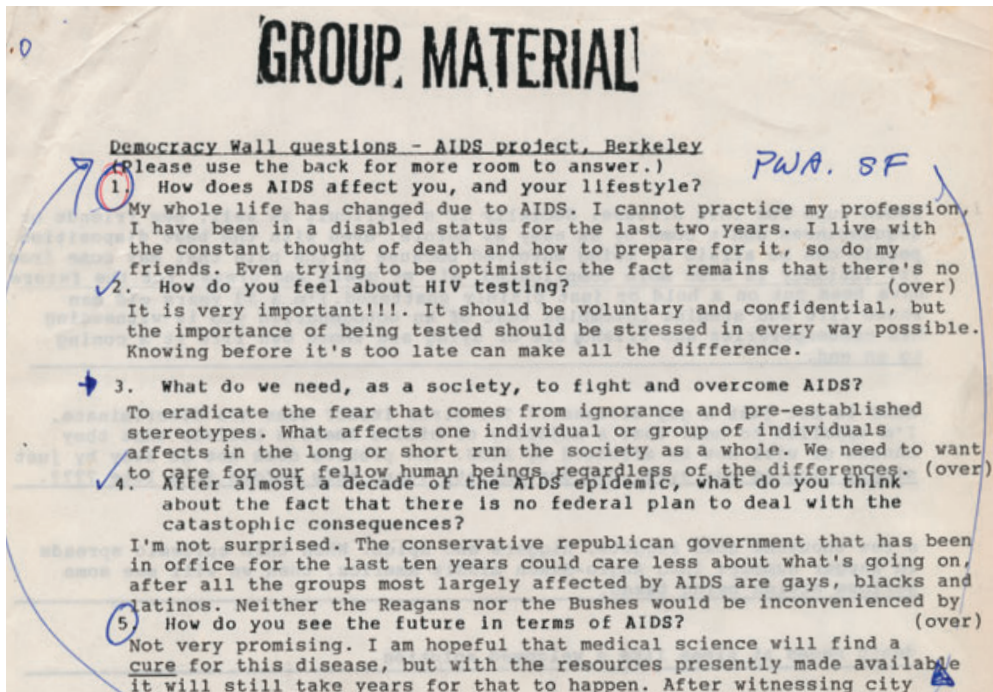
In Germany you can't help but think about war. We talked about the idea of "postwar" alliances and military industries as we stepped in and out of boutiques and stores. The seemingly infinite arcades of Hamburg resemble a sort of urbanized American mall, a concentration of consumer bliss easily traversed by foot. We realized that any legal attempt to divert attention from these glitzy displays toward some sort of artwork about military weaponry would be futile.

In large part, the consumer affluence that we were taking part in was and is a direct result of a history of military and economic domination by strong countries over smaller ones, multinational interests over local concerns, and profits over people. Behind each store counter isn't just a cash register; there is an intricate geography of demographics and battle-plans. The capitals of fashion and armaments neatly coexist.

The proliferating global information order and its expanding communications and media systems has increasingly blurred the definitions of "public" and "private." Our "public" piece, something with a practical function, would be seen in use on the streets of Hamburg as it made its way into the "private" space of the home. The shopping bag replaced the usual ones in a large department store and a variety of smaller shops for the duration of the exhibition.







## AIDS Timeline

University Art Museum,  
University of California  
at Berkeley,  
November 11, 1989-  
January 28, 1990

After seeing *AIDS & Democracy: A Case Study*, Larry Rinder, curator of the Matrix program at Berkeley University Art Museum, invites GM to make a project. Ten years of the AIDS epidemic have passed with severely inadequate public response, and the group decides to map the interlocking conditions that transformed the epidemic into a crisis. It embarks on several months of research into the areas of the medical and scientific industries, governmental policies, media representations and the stigmatization of people with AIDS which influence public opinion and allocation of resources; as well as grassroots and activist responses by affected communities. Berkeley student Richard Meyer assists in the research. With the university audience in mind, an

AIDS situation. This Democracy Wall is part of a larger project by Group Material at U.C. Berkeley, AIDS TIMELINE, which is a social and political history of AIDS in this country since 1979.

Please fill out the questionnaire to the best of your ability and return it to me, Karen Rampsacher, or Catherine Saalfeld tonight. We appreciate your cooperation and look forward to completing the project. Thanks again.  
\*GROUP MATERIAL\*



information-heavy installation is designed. The group intertwines the collected informational layers in a text that chronicles the histories of AIDS in the U.S., with an added focus on the Bay Area. This text runs through the show—demonstrating that actions and events have consequences and interconnections with other actions and events—and structures the arrangement of ephemeral materials and artworks installed around it. Artifacts intended to mark cultural events and situate viewers in particular moments through collective memory are included—for instance a poster for the top-grossing movie for 1980, *The Empire Strikes Back*, which is hung near a photograph of Ronald Reagan's inauguration.

In addition to the timeline installation, GM organizes a Democracy Wall on the exterior facade of the museum, consisting of responses from community members to questions about AIDS, such as “How does AIDS affect you, and your lifestyle?” The placards are produced in blue and gold—the University’s official colors. GM curates a lengthy video program situated in the exhibition, and a shorter sequence of videos, which are installed in the gymnasium on campus. GM also invites the NY-based agitprop collective Gran Fury to insert a piece in an issue of *The Daily Californian* newspaper to coincide with the opening day of the project. [See pages 226-255 for *AIDS Timeline Case Study*]

← Anonymous questionnaire for AIDS Timeline Democracy Wall  
↑ Democracy Wall installed on University Art Museum, Berkeley  
→ Following page: detail of AIDS Timeline with ACT UP T-shirts, text and magazines



**IMPORTANT INFORMATION! GUIDELINES FOR APPLICATION!**

**YOUR MESSAGE HERE**

Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago,  
February 23-March 20, 1990

**PUT  
YOUR MESSAGE  
HERE!**

This project is being supported in part by Art Matters, Inc., Gannett Outdoor of Chicago, and The Lannan Foundation.

# YOUR MESSAGE HERE

## INTRODUCTION

Individuals and groups in Chicago are invited to design billboards in "YOUR MESSAGE HERE", a public project sponsored by Randolph Street Gallery. The deadline for submissions is November 15, 1989.

Anyone can present a design for consideration, including community organizations, social service agencies, writers, visual artists, performing arts groups, advocacy groups, and teachers and their students. Collaborations among individuals or between organizations and individuals are also encouraged. The participation of individuals and groups of diverse cultural backgrounds is central to the project.

There will be about 40 street-level billboards (5' x 11' size), located within various neighborhoods throughout the city, including many in the areas of Pilsen/ Little Village, the near Northwest Side, the West Side, and the South Side. Each design that is accepted for production will be enlarged and posted by a sign company for three months, from January through March 1990.

This project is being organized, in part, because many people are undergoing struggles to preserve their urban neighborhoods on their own terms, both in Chicago and nationally. "YOUR MESSAGE HERE" seeks to recognize the resources and relationships that exist within communities, as well as to foster closer relationships between individuals and their communities, artists and their neighborhoods, local organizations and the people they can serve. This project offers individuals and groups the opportunity to develop public messages that speak to each other and to the surrounding community.

## UPDATE

The following notes are a brief update on what has happened so far with this project.

Community meetings were organized and held during September and October with the assistance of the North Lakeside Cultural Center, The African-American Arts Alliance, The Westside Cultural Arts Council, The Mexican Fine Arts Center, and Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center. These meetings were held to introduce the project and invite participation. Local participants discussed their interests and their concerns about the project; we also discussed how communities may be affected by the presence of the billboards. The meetings were attended by people from diverse backgrounds, including artists, representatives of community organizations, local arts organizations, teachers, advocacy groups, and others.

As a follow-up there was a meeting held at Randolph Street Gallery to bring together people from different areas of the city, and to discuss this project and other community art projects with the artists collective, Group Material, who are helping as project coordinators.

Some of the topics that were discussed at the meetings include the following:

- How commercial billboards look and function in the communities (for example, they often attempt to identify racial and economic stereotypes).
- Subjects that could be addressed in the billboards (for example: Local issues like school reform, recognizing community resources such as neighborhood arts groups, health facilities, etc.; National issues like fair housing, racism and cultural diversity, censorship, etc.; Global issues like the environment, the AIDS epidemic, etc.).
- What the role of Group Material is - they are a New York-based artist collective who are widely recognized for their broad-based and socially insightful group projects. (Group Material is advising and helping Randolph Street Gallery to coordinate "YOUR MESSAGE HERE".)
- How the designs will be selected - see REVIEW section on the next page.
- Financial compensation for participants - see FEES section on next page. (At this time we are not able to pay participants, although we may be able to raise funds to cover this and other costs, including a publication on the project that may serve as a working resource for future efforts.)



A complex organizational process and structure are used to generate *YOUR MESSAGE HERE*, an exhibition of site-specific billboards installed in neighborhoods in Chicago. Randolph Street Gallery (RSG) invites Group Material to co-organize and co-curate. Joanne Vena joins the effort as project coordinator. Gannett Outdoor donates billboard spaces for a three-month period. Planning meetings are held at RSG and at the North Lakeside Cultural Center, The African-American Arts Alliance, The Westside Cultural Arts Coalition, The Mexican Fine Arts Center, and the Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center to set the stage for and elicit proposals for billboards. An open call is made, which says, "Anyone can present a design for consideration,

including community organizations, social service agencies, writers, visual artists, performing arts groups, advocacy groups, and teachers and their students." Representatives from RSG, GM, and five community centers review and select the proposals to be realized. Gannett Outdoor has right of approval and finds some designs problematic, including a piece by No Pasaran Women's Group consisting of an image of women's hands holding cans of spray paint and the text: "Women Unite—Spray at Night" and "Stamp Out Sexist Ads." Kay Rosen's *A GAG ORDER MAKES ME WANT TO THROW UP* is deemed distasteful by Gannett and replaced with her alternative proposal, *BIG TALK*.

↑ Billboard by John Schneider



Project Statement (excerpt),  
Group Material, February 1990

Advertising has an enviable transformative power. As a way of communicating ideology, worldviews, politics, it is both a means and an end. It is able to channel desire in the direction of a specific product or service and create an unfulfillable feeling of lack in the face of material plenty. The real power of advertising is the power of suggestion—the ability to define social agendas (e.g. consumerism), and to form the background within which we imagine ourselves and in turn, live our lives.

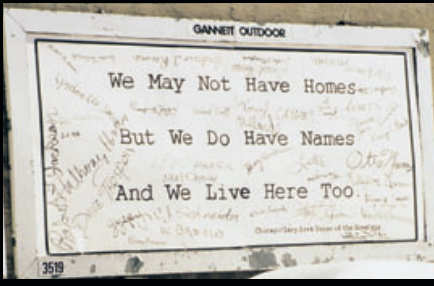
The low-income largely black and Hispanic neighborhoods of Chicago contain an astonishing number of billboards, the overwhelming majority of which advertise . . . liquor and cigarettes. The idea of *YOUR MESSAGE HERE* was to replace as many of the usual ads that we could wish with what people wanted to see on billboards on their streets in their neighborhoods.

This project was designed from the start to be an inclusive process intended to engender excitement, participation, and experience. The process itself was time-consuming and complex. Group Material and Randolph Street Gallery organized a series of community meetings in various Chicago neighborhoods. A call was put out inviting interested people, artists and non-artists, to come talk about issues in their community and how they might be addressed with billboards. We were interested in fostering closer relations among artists and their communities as well as between different groups. . . .

In the face of hundreds upon hundreds of billboard images in the city, *YOUR MESSAGE HERE* might seem modest in scale. But neither the process that produced the project, or the potential effects of such a model of working collaboratively to temporarily claim a bit of public space and attention were modest or insignificant.

↑ Left to right: Julie Ault,  
Joanne Vena, Karen  
Rampacher, Doug  
Ashford  
→ Map of Chicago's  
neighborhoods used  
when planning *YOUR  
MESSAGE HERE*





← Top row, left to right:  
Billboards by Kay Rosen,  
James Liebner and  
Catholic Parishes of  
Pilsen, Martina Lopez

Second row, left to right:  
Vito Greco / Alligator,  
Jaenna Dunning, Mark  
Blottner

Third row, left to right:  
Felicity Rich, Stephen  
Lanthisophon, Mario  
Gonzalez, Jr. and Jesus  
Morales / Inner City 8

Bottom row, left to right:  
Greg Boozell and Sara  
Frederickson & Chicago /  
Gary Union of the  
Homeless, Many Patten,  
SisterSerpents



## Democracy Poll

Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (NGBK), Berlin, June 26-July 5, 1990

↑ Democracy Poll statement displayed on electronic billboard on the Ku'damm, Berlin's main shopping street  
→ Detail of Democracy Poll booklet inserted in *Der Tagesspiegel*

## DEMOCRACY POLL GROUP MATERIAL

Die Menschen immigrieren aus den weniger entwickelten Ländern und den ärmeren Ländern, in denen der Lebensstandard sehr niedrig ist ... nicht nur hierher, die würden überall dort einwandern, wo man sie läßt. Den Menschen ist klar geworden, daß eine konservative Regierung, ich meine Freiheit, Demokratie und Mitte bis rechts, den höchsten Lebensstandard bieten kann. Mehr ist dazu nicht zu sagen. Der Lebensstandard ist natürlich in einem entwickelten Land sehr viel höher, und wenn man die Leute aus den weniger entwickelten Ländern einfach kommen lassen würde, dann gäbe es einen totalen Exodus. Man muß gewisse Kontrollen haben, man kann nicht einfach jeden 'reinlassen, weil dann alle kommen würden. Die Lösung ist, die Dinge zu exportieren, die diesem Land Erfolg gebracht haben. Und das sind: Freiheit, freies Unternehmertum und Privatinitiative. Und mit diesem Modell – und das muß das Modell sein – wird man einen außerordentlichen Aufschwung andernorts haben.

*Democracy Poll* is a multi-sited investigation of recent developments after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Questions posed to individuals and organizations in Germany and New York center on issues relating to the German Republican movement, hopes and fears for the future of Germany, changing attitudes to immigration law among others. Spontaneous interviews in public places are conducted. Sixty of the responses are selected and edited by GM for inclusion in a booklet inserted into an edition

of the daily newspaper, *Der Tagesspiegel*, for broadcast on an electronic billboard on Berlin's major shopping street, Kurfürstendamm, and for display on billboards in several U-Bahn stations.

## Psychologin, Berlin-West





↑ Democracy Poll interview statement installed at U-Bahn station, Berlin

[Letter to NGBK curator Frank Wagner \(excerpt\)](#), Julie Ault

The questions (first draft) we agreed on are as follows:  
 What are your hopes for the future of Germany?  
 What do you think about the current policies on immigration, guest workers, and refugees? How does the opening of the wall affect these matters?  
 What is your definition of freedom?  
 Explain what you think the criteria should be for granting citizenship?  
 What do you think the relationship between NATO and Germany should be?  
 What does nationalism mean to you?  
 What do you see as the reasons for the recent growth of nationalistic feeling?  
 Why do you think that the R.E.P. and other conservative organizations are growing?  
 How is this being affected by the opening of the wall?

I strongly urge you to conduct the interviews yourself as the manner and sensitivity of the interviewer is very important to the success of the project. . . . Just approach everyone indiscriminately and you should end up with a good mix of viewpoints. When Mundy and I did this in the past we dressed "well" and it seemed to help being female so perhaps a female companion would be good. Two people are best so it's not overwhelming but looks somewhat organized as well. The most important aspect of the interviewing process is to lead the person into conversation in a relaxed way, to not cut them off, to not color their response in any way by reacting adversely or otherwise to what they say, and to ad lib, start with a question, if it doesn't work, try another, and be ready to really just ask something off the top of your head to elicit an opinion. That's why it's best if someone who has a vested interest in the project does the interviews.

[Sample interview statements, Democracy Poll](#)  
 Group Material, April 1990

The ego of most West Germans is based on their economic situation and the fact that probably in no other country in the world do simple folk live so well. The idea just occurs to me that the safest way of ensuring that never again a war will be started on German soil is to make sure that the Germans always live a little better than their neighbors, thus they do not seek to assert their own worth in military exploits.

Taxi driver, Germany

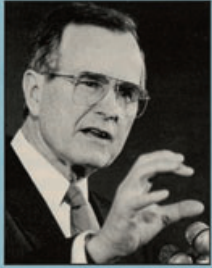
I think there are different reasons why some people in other countries are afraid of Germany. I guess a lot of people are afraid that Germany will get too big. In Europe Germany will play the largest role, it already does almost, and even more after reunification. It's easy to figure out what that means economically. And therefore fears are legitimate, in my opinion.

Camera assistant, Germany

We can't afford to be patriotic anymore because the world has become so small that if you are concentrated and centered on what is happening in our country or any other country you are going to miss the entire bigger picture. I just think that we Americans are realizing that we are not as important as we thought. It was all self-aggrandizement. On an economic level we were considering ourselves number one for a long time. Especially when Reagan pulled us out of the depression by artificially stimulating the economy with billions and billions of dollars that we didn't have. Our trade deficit is enormous and our national deficit is enormous.

College student, U.S.

# The Insurance Industry and AIDS



“Like many of you, Barbara and I have had friends who have died of AIDS.”

“Once disease strikes, we don’t blame those who are suffering... We try to love them and care for them and comfort them. We don’t fire them, we don’t evict them, we don’t cancel their insurance.”

Do you remember these words of President George Bush? They are taken from his first speech addressing the AIDS crisis. Perhaps you heard these words on television or read them in a newspaper. Maybe you were one of the insurance executives in the audience who is a member of the National Leadership Coalition on AIDS (NCLA). If you live in Hartford, the home of many of our country’s most powerful insurance companies, it’s possible you’ve seen this quote on the back of a public bus.

President Bush’s belated message of compassion set an important precedent. It was the first time the White House specifically addressed AIDS as a national issue since the epidemic was reported nearly ten years ago. In his speech, the president promised a cabinet review of health care in the United States, and endorsed the

## AIDS & Insurance

Real Art Ways, Hartford,  
September 1-30, 1990

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a rapidly escalating epidemic thought to be caused by a virus — HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). HIV suppresses peoples’ immune systems, making them vulnerable to a host of diseases, many of which are treatable, often at significant cost. To date there have been 146,746 people diagnosed with AIDS, and an estimated 1.5 million people are infected with HIV. HIV affects people regardless of their age, race, sexual orientation, and economic class.

Our government has conducted widespread educational campaigns to warn the general public of the dangers inherent in driving without a seatbelt and in smoking tobacco. These efforts have undoubtedly saved lives. If the United States government had conducted an intensive educational campaign in 1984, immediately following the discovery that HIV is transmitted through the exchange of blood and semen, many people who are now HIV positive might not have become in-



AIDS & Insurance bus ads are installed on the rear of Hartford buses that travel from the city center to the suburbs. This project is sponsored by Real Art Ways. The posters feature a picture of President Bush and a quotation from his speech to insurance executives at the National Leadership Coalition on AIDS, which reads, “Like many of you, Barbara and I have had friends who have died of AIDS.” “Once disease strikes, we don’t blame those who are suffering . . . We try to love them and care for them and comfort

them. We don’t fire them, we don’t evict them, we don’t cancel their insurance.” Hartford is the insurance capital of the country and home to many corporate headquarters. The group hopes the poster will be understood as an official announcement. Mary Anne Staniszweski writes an essay for a brochure to complement the ad, which is handed out to staff at the entrances of insurance company offices.





## AIDS Timeline (Hartford, 1990)

Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford,  
September 30–November 18, 1990

*AIDS Timeline* is re-configured for the Wadsworth Atheneum Matrix gallery, where it includes information and material from local AIDS-related community organizations as well as works by artists from the Hartford region. GM regards the *Timeline* not as a traveling exhibition, but as a flexible framework that takes into account the specificity of the AIDS crisis in a given geographic parameter, while also reflecting the development of the pandemic on a national scale.

↑ Felix Gonzalez-Torres  
on opening day of *AIDS  
Timeline*, Hartford  
↗ *Democracy: A Project  
by Group Material*  
displayed in bookshop



1990. *Democracy: A Project by Group Material*, (Dia Art Foundation, *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, Number 5, edited by Brian Wallis) is published by Bay Press. There is a book launch at Printed Matter Bookstore at Dia, 77 Wooster Street, which is where the exhibitions took place two years earlier. The book's introduction states: "The final part of *Democracy*, and perhaps the most important, is this book. Through this book we tried to encapsulate many of the ideas that went into

and came out of the *Democracy* project in order to make them available to a far wider public than could attend the events. We organized the publication very much as we organize our exhibitions, bringing together a variety of voices and points of view to address the issues."

## Collaboration

The Allen Memorial Art  
Museum, Oberlin,  
October 26, 1990–January 13, 1991



For *Collaboration*, the group produces a video of interviews with area residents on the subjects that divide and unite the college town of Oberlin, Ohio. Large-scale *papier-maché* rocks, modeled after rocks in the campus landscape, are distributed to public schools and completed by students working with their teachers. The video is screened in the museum and the rocks are shown on the grounds. Felix does not participate in this project because he is teaching this year at CalArts.

**Fall 1990.** At the invitation of Patrick O'Connell, director of Visual AIDS, Group Material publishes fragments of *AIDS Timeline* for DAY WITHOUT ART 1990 in the December issue of eleven publications: *Afterimage*, *Art & Auction*, *Art in America*, *Art New England*, *Artforum*, *Arts*, *Contemporanea*, *High Performance*, *October*, *Parkett*, and *Shift*. James Morrow works with the group to design the layouts for print.

↙ ↑ Video stills,  
*Collaboration*  
→ Following spread:  
detail of *AIDS Timeline*,  
magazine version,  
*Artforum*, December  
1990

Exhibition Statement (excerpt),  
Group Material, October 1990

For Oberlin, we proposed not a finished product, but a process. We wanted to make a situation in which the method of collaboration and the content of any potential project(s) would not be predetermined by Group Material.

On September 6 we came to Oberlin and presented some of our previous projects and talked about our working methods. The first step toward opening the collaboration was to open the floor to an exchange of ideas. Many people spoke at this initial meeting. Their concerns ranged from the destruction of the round house to make way for a McDonald's, and the threat of war in Iraq, to the high cost of tuition at the college. The one problem that was articulated repeatedly—thereby becoming the primary issue at hand—was that of the division between the college and the town and the perceptual and physical barriers that inform the separation of

communities. Economics seemed to play a major role in this discussion and related directly or indirectly to every concern raised that night.

A planning meeting, open to anyone who wanted to participate in the collaboration, was scheduled for September 7. The goal was to determine how to approach the issues of community and economics and, ultimately, to make something that could be shown in the museum and other public places, or distributed in another way. About sixty people came to this meeting. After much discussion, it was agreed that we would divide into smaller groups, which reflected interest in particular forms and methods. . . .



's AIDS TIMELINE is presented as a WITHOUT ART 1990 by Visual AIDS their December issues: Afterimage, Art New England, Artforum, Arts, nce, October, Parkett, and Sbift.

a Company and the Lincoln many issue an "AIDS Profile" m to earmark applications ppendents that engage quire physical exertion." denied insurance.

ives to the Federal Office manding that more money h; and that ARC (AIDS e eligible for the same



er the occasion.

searchers demonstrate that HIV during sexual intercourse.

**SEX**

After hosting two successful AIDS benefits in New York and Los Angeles, Elizabeth Taylor is named National Chairperson of the newly formed National AIDS Research Foundation, later to become AmFAR, American Foundation for AIDS Research.



JAMA, (Journal of the American Medical Association) publishes an editorial by Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of AIDS research at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, explaining the results of two studies done on household contact and AIDS. Rather than recognizing perinatal transmission of HIV, Fauci mistakenly warns of the possible risks of casual contact. The Associated Press runs a "household contact" story over their newswire, beginning a national hysteria which extends to the outfitting of many police officers with rubber gloves.

The New York City Department of Substance Services approaches ADAPT (Association of Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment,) to urge them to formulate an organized response to the growing number of intravenous drug users at risk for HIV infection. ADAPT proposes a pilot project to distribute free, sterile needles to addicts on the streets.

The Centers for Disease Control's original definition of AIDS is revised to become more specific, outlining particular illnesses called "opportunistic infections" that indicate a suppressed immune system related to AIDS.

Francisco AIDS Foundation "Corporate Executive," Mike Glier "Blood," Andres Serrano "Find A Cure" from "Street Graphic Interventions," Diane Neumaier

President Ronald Reagan gives his first public speech on AIDS. He says that the administration is committed to finding a cure and asks Surgeon General C. Everett Koop to prepare a "major report" on AIDS. Congressman Henry Waxman terms Reagan's pronouncement "outrageous," noting that Reagan's budget, made public just days before, includes reductions in spending for AIDS research.



Reagan asks for a \$10 million cut in the Public Health Service's AIDS budget as well as cuts in Medicaid.

**1986**

The Public Health Service adds AIDS to the list of "dangerous contagious diseases" which prohibit entry into the United States. Subsequently, many visitors are detained by immigration.

A National Academy of Science report charges that government response to AIDS has been "dangerously inadequate" and calls for \$2 billion per year for education and research. President Reagan signs legislation that provides only \$410 million for this research.

A single B-2 bomber costs over \$500 million.

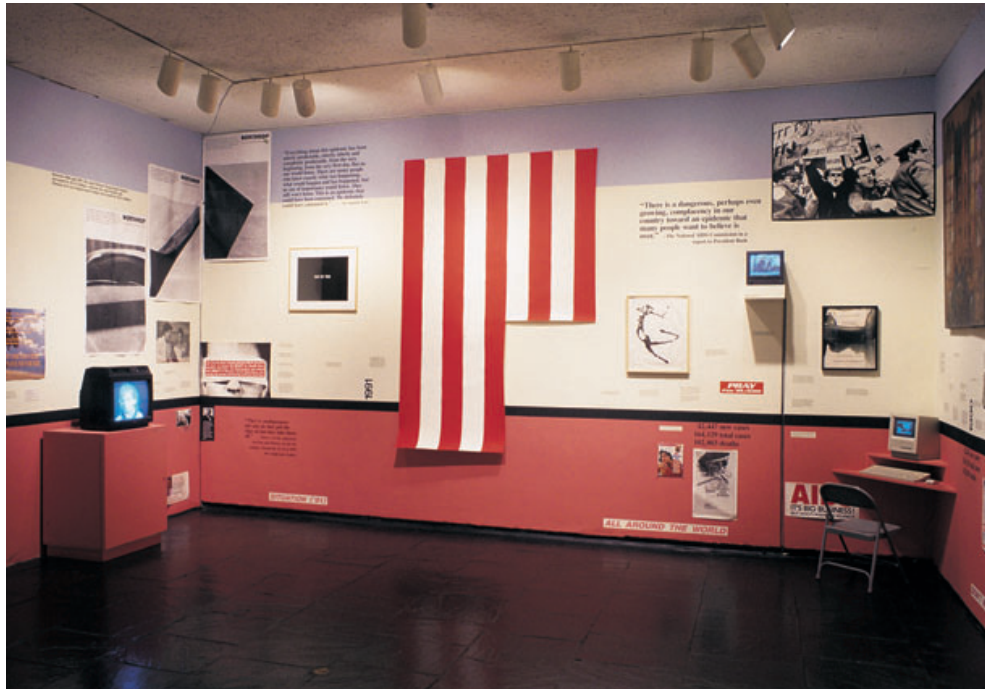
**WHO'S ZOOMIN' WHO**



The Supreme Court, in Bowers can outlaw "sodomy" and other conducted by consenting adult in the dissenting opinion, that h the houses, hearts and minds o lives differently."



June 30, 1986, "Michael Jenkins "Selections From The Disco, Various BPM, 1979-1990," Steven Evans additional photography: Ben Blackwell art direction:



## AIDS Timeline (New York, 1991)

The Whitney Museum of  
American Art, New York,  
April 16–June 23, 1991

*AIDS Timeline* is reconfigured for the 1991 *Whitney Biennial*. During the show's planning conflict surfaces in the group, in part over staging another version of the *Timeline* as opposed to developing a different exhibition strategy and form for addressing the subject matter. Alongside these differences, Felix is suffering from the death of his boyfriend, Ross Laycock, and expresses burnout from working on so many AIDS-related projects consecutively. Julie, Doug, and Karen likewise feel burned out. Nonetheless the group is committed to using the Whitney as a platform for presenting its history of the development of the AIDS crisis. For the third version of *AIDS Timeline* the walls are painted with a tripartite treatment composed of dismal distortions of red, white, and blue—muddy rose, cool grayish white, and a drab light blue. It is notable that Group Material's contribution to the 1985 *Biennial*, *Americana*, did not contain the work of any artist shown in the *Biennial* at large, while several participants in *AIDS Timeline* are represented in the *Biennial* as well. In response to accusations of elitism and bigotry over the years, the Whitney, like

ACT UP, The Advocate, Lutz Bacher, James Baldwin, Gretchen Bender, Nayland Blake, George Bush, The Center, Dick Cheney, Jeanne Dunning, Evan Estern, Steven Evans, Tom of Finland, Fund for a Feminist Majority, Dr. Robert Gallo, Mike Gier, GMHC, Gran Fury, Peter Halley, Whitney Houston, Rock Hudson, Interview Magazine, Michael Jenkins, Peter Jennings, Dr. Stephen Joseph, Ed Koch, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, Dr. Mathilde Krim, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Rudy Lemcke, Life Magazine, Life-styles of the Rich and Famous, T.L. Litt, George Lucas, Robert Mapplethorpe, Marlene McCary, Meryl Meisler and the Drop Ins, Brad Melamed, Harvey Milk, Donald Moffett, The Names Project, Diane Neumaier, Newsweek, Daniel Nicoletta, Oliver North, Northrop, People Magazine, Raymond Pettibon, Planned Parenthood, PWA Coalition, Rambo, Ronald Reagan, Real People, The Rest Stop, Tim Rollins + K.O.S., Kay Rosen, Erika Rothenberg, The Sentinel, Andres Serrano, The Silence=Death Project, Lorna Simpson, Sharon Siskin, Rolf Sjogren, Kevin Smith, Nancy Spero, Ellen Spiro, Jimmy Swaggert, Tasmanian Devil, Elizabeth Taylor, Testing the Limits Collective, Ben Thornberry, Michael Tidmus, Time Magazine, Tylene, Us Magazine, Dionne Warwick, Carrie Mae Weems, Burroughs Wellcome, Wheel of Fortune, Oscar Wilde, Millie Wilson, David Wojnarowicz, Martin Wong.

many institutions, appears to be more inclusive than in the past.

**June 1991.** A hampering degree of tension and discord has been percolating in the group, which largely goes undiscussed except casually, one-on-one. Everyone feels somewhat at a loss about direction and over how to digest larger cultural and political changes of the past few years in relation to collective practice. Also in question is how to simultaneously use, remain true to, and transcend the group's history. Felix seems depleted by the collaborative process and is primarily advancing his individual voice as an artist. Julie feels the group has been on a treadmill too long and has a crisis in faith about the art field as a working context. She goes to college to study political science, with a potential shift from the cultural field to mainstream politics in mind. Doug has been increasingly devoted to teaching and investing his energies in the classroom and pedagogical pursuits. Karen is heavily involved with the women's health care and reproductive rights movement and frequently expresses disinterest

in, and antagonism to, the field of art beyond using it as a site for activism. Somewhat undefined interpersonal conflicts are also present.

Additionally, public cultural funding has been vastly decreased and restricted by Congress since 1989. NEA grant recipients are required to certify in writing their compliance with a "decency clause." GM's 1991 applications to the NEA and NYSCA are denied funding. GM does not apply again.

**November 1991.** Group Material declines to participate in an exhibition that it previously agreed to take part in via a letter: "While we remain supportive of your important project and would like to have been part of it, we've decided to take an official hiatus after much deliberation. In short, we are suffering from burn-out and a run of pessimism and really need a few months with no undertakings in public so we can reinvent our practice and revitalize our work for ourselves and potential audiences."

↑ Announcement card  
(front)  
→ Following spread:  
two pages from Text  
Material's wall text  
document for *AIDS  
Timeline* (New York, 1991)

1989

Medical data reveals that early intervention for HIV positive people can delay the onset of full-blown AIDS. Many AIDS organizations now endorse testing. However, questions are raised about confidentiality and discrimination, as well as the practicality of testing when there are so few plans of treatment available, accessible and affordable.

Introduced by ACT UP, the "parallel track" program allows patients who are intolerant to the prescribed treatment to receive experimental AIDS drug outside of a clinical trial. ddI, only the second drug to slow HIV replication, is made available through parallel track for patients who have severe side effects from AZT.

Art works by Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe spark a controversy in Congress, leading to restrictive legislation forced upon National Endowment for the Arts. The legislation provides that "none of the funds authorized . . . may be used to promote, disseminate or produce materials which in the judgment of the NEA . . . may be considered obscene, including, but not limited to, depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the sexual exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts and which, taken as a whole, do not have serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value."

500,000 people march on Washington in a "March for Women's Lives" in support of safe, legal and accessible abortion.

There were 30 soup kitchens in New York City in 1980, now there are 600.

The United States invades Panama to ouster CIA trained and supported General Manuel Noriega.

The official poverty line for a single person in America is now \$5,469, and for a family of four is \$10,989. A full time salary at minimum wage is \$6,968 a year, and 23.5% of all American children under the age of three live in poverty.

The ruptured tanker Exxon Valdez spills 11 million gallons of crude oil into Alaska's Prince William Sound. This is worst oil spill in U.S. history. Only 8% of the spill is ever cleaned up.

ACT UP demonstrators interrupt trading on the New York Stock Exchange for 4½ minutes. The demonstrators call for traders to sell Burroughs Wellcome stock because the drug company profiteers from the AIDS crisis. Simultaneous protests occur in New York, London, and San Francisco. Shortly thereafter Burroughs Wellcome lowers the price of AZT (the only federally approved drug that slows the replications of HIV) by 20%.

Six American Jesuit priests are murdered in their home in San Salvador by El Salvadorian National Guardsmen. The United States State Department helps to delay any investigation. A witness to the killings is threatened with deportation by U.S. State attorneys in Miami.

The Supreme Court, in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, provides states with new authority to limit a women's right to abortion, but stopped short of reversing its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion.

In response to grassroots activism, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves aerosol Pentamidine for prevention of AIDS related pneumonia (PCP). This is the first time a drug has been approved because of community-based research. Pentamidine increased in cost from \$25 in 1984 to \$200 in 1989, per dose/per month.

The opening session of the Fifth International AIDS Conference in Montreal is taken over by PWAs and AIDS activists calling for more inclusion of People With AIDS in research. ACT UP releases "A National AIDS Treatment Research Agenda" which outlines principles for conducting clinical trials: involving PWAs in trial design, emphasizing drugs for opportunistic infections, creating more flexible protocols,

broadening entry requirements, avoiding use of placebos, and establishing criteria other than death rate for judging whether drugs are effective.

A study sponsored by the insurance industry shows that 37 million people, nearly 18% of the U.S. population, have no medical insurance.

26% of adolescents who were diagnosed with AIDS in 1989 contracted HIV through heterosexual intercourse. AIDS cases among 15 years olds in New York City increased 40% between 1987 and 1989.

David Duke, former leader of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, is elected to the Louisiana State Legislature on the Republican ticket.

Partnership for the Homeless projects there will be up to 30,000 homeless People With AIDS by 1993 in New York City. Yet the city government has a plan to provide only 800 beds for homeless PWAs by 1991. At this time, there are an estimated 8,000-10,000 PWAs living on the streets, with only 74 beds available. Federal funds for low income housing assistance drops from \$27 billion to \$8 billion in 1989.

ACT UP and other AIDS activists descend on the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. This is the beginning of an ongoing protest to pressure the CDC to change the definition of AIDS to be more inclusive, especially to study illnesses that affect women, intravenous drug users, and people of color. By 1991, 65% of HIV infected women die without ever receiving an AIDS diagnosis.

1990

Though many public health officials note that shared needles are a primary source of HIV transmission and therefore advocate for dispersal of clean syringes, the U.S. Senate vote 99 to 0 to ban the use of federal funds for free clean syringes for I.V. Drug users.

The 6th International Conference on AIDS held in San Francisco is boycotted by many AIDS organizations, medical professionals, and others, due to the discriminatory policies of the United States. Immigration and Naturalization Services which bar people with HIV infection from entering the country.

50,000 Haitians demonstrate in New York City to protest a federal Food and Drug Administration restriction barring any Haitians from donating blood in the United States. This restriction feeds the discrimination against "risk groups" rather than dealing with "risk behavior." The restriction is repealed due to community pressure.

AIDS is now the leading cause of death in women between the ages of 25-39 in New York City. According to a survey by the Department of Health, most women know HIV is transmitted in semen and that condom use can prevent transmission. Only 32% actually use condoms. Many women incorrectly believe that the disease affects only homosexuals.

Women with AIDS are disproportionately Black and Latina, together representing 72% of female cases. While Latinas are 8% of the total U.S. Population, they make up 16% of cumulative AIDS cases. AIDS is the leading cause of death among Latinas ages 25-44.

The expected lifespan of black Americans this year is so low that it will statistically lower the overall life expectancy for all Americans. This is the first time that life expectancy has gone down in America since records began to be kept at the turn of the century.

Parents of students in a Brooklyn junior high school petition the school and threaten to keep their children home to protest the presence of Joey DiPaolo, an 11 year old boy who reveals that he is HIV antibody positive.

Deregulated Savings and Loan institutions across the country go out of business leaving \$150 billion of debt to the American taxpayers, later increasing to a \$500 billion debt.

[Project Proposal](#) (excerpt),  
Group Material, May 1991

Recently we have seen a resurgence of the use of the term "obscene" in relation to artistic expression and intellectual discourse. Distorted definitions of obscenity have been used by political special interest groups to propose mechanisms of control over American cultural life. Group Material believes that the discussion that will truly determine the legal, institutional and moral definitions of obscenity must take place in a highly public format.

The advertisements that Group Material produces will be small and succinct, each relating to the next as an ongoing narrative discussing the various aspects of how obscenity is socially defined. In this way, specific works could address specific issues related to social definitions of obscenity. These could include: the construction of gender and sexuality, book banning in educational settings, the imposition of religious ideas, political uses of morality, sex and AIDS education and other issues of dissent . . . The context of the newspaper provides us with important levels of meaning. As a source of information, the paper acts to frame any information it contains with an aura of intimacy.

[Project Statement](#) (excerpt),  
Group Material, December 1991

*Cash Prize* is a series of advertisements in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* that address the ongoing management of information in America. Each advertisement consists of a juxtaposition of a list of simple researched facts and quotes with a photograph borrowed from the entertainment industry. . . . Group Material seeks to represent the economic state of many American families in contrast to the popularly used image of familial bliss. As information, *Cash Prize* describes a social unit under siege from the changing taxation policies and depleting welfare programs of the Reagan-Bush era. As art, it produces a relationship between this political order and the informational order of the newspaper and other media—each dependent on the other for the maintenance of the America we now live in.

## Cash Prize

*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*,  
December 17-20, 1991

The group is invited to make a site-specific work as part of a public art project called *In Public: Seattle 1991*. Group Material visits Seattle for a few days but is uncomfortable with the so-called "parachuting in" method of community engagement. Although it is becoming common practice, GM regards this as a problematic symptom of the institutionalization of socially engaged art practices taking place in the shadow of public cultural funding debates. Back in New York, GM proposes to make a series of print advertisements that address sexuality and representation as they intersect with censorship and social control—a subject of debate in the "culture wars." This idea elicits some trepidation from *In Public* over the meeting of subject matter and newspaper as venue, and the group shifts its focus to the state of the American family, "an entity often used by political forces as a symbol in determining social debate and policy."

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Sat. P-I

"In the days ahead I will propose removing a number of the roadblocks that have slowed our economy and reduced productivity. Steps will be taken aimed at restoring the balance between the various levels of government. Progress will be slow—measured in inches and feet, not miles—but we will progress. It is time to reawaken this industrial giant, to get government back within its means, and to lighten our punitive tax burden. These will be our first priorities, and on these principles, there will be no compromise."

—Ronald Reagan,  
Inaugural Address, 1981

Between 1980 and 1990 the richest fifth of Americans saw their taxes go down by 9.5% while the poorest fifth of Americans saw their taxes rise by 16.1%.

The amount of U.S. children falling into poverty between 1982-1989 increased by 2.1 million. During the same period the amount of U.S. billionaires quadrupled.

# Cash Prize

Group Material/Seattle Arts Commission/521-0329



The top fifth of Americans now earn more than the other four fifths put together. The income of the richest 5% after taxes, increased 50.6% between 1980-1990.

The official poverty line for a single person in America is now \$5,469 annual income and \$10,989 for a family of four. A full time salary at minimum wage is \$6,968 a year, and 23.5% of all American children under the age of three live in poverty.

# Cash Prize

Group Material/Seattle Arts Commission/521-0329



1992. Doug, Julie, and Felix teach a sculpture class at Rhode Island School of Design that combines collaborative teaching and individually-led sessions. Group Material makes a multiple titled *Family Photo* to benefit Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago, which is a laminated publicity photo, also used in *Cash Prize*, from the popular 1980s prime time soap opera, *Dynasty*. The ABC series depicted the ostentatiously wealthy Carrington family, and starred Joan Collins, John Forsythe, and Linda

Evans; *Dynasty* was the pop cultural epitome of the lifestyle-focused, financially inflated eighties.

Karen Ramspacher is no longer actively participating in the group. Felix's involvement is off and on as he devotes his energies to his individual practice.

↑ Promotional photo for *Dynasty*

MEMBERS:  
Doug Ashford, Julie Ault,  
Felix Gonzalez-Torres





## Tomorrow

San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, October 8–December 31, 1993

The Betty Russell Foundation, a program that fosters cooperative projects between the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Visual Arts Department at the University of California, San Diego chooses Group Material for their 1993 residency and project. GM wants to use the project budget to buy a set of films thematized around the ideological formation of “the State,” as an acquisition for the Museum’s permanent collection. The idea is not positively received and the “democracy wall” form is activated instead. The group’s inquiry into the San Diego area focuses on people’s views of the future and their political and social priorities.

➤ Left to right: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Julie Ault, and Doug Ashford visiting the San Diego Museum



Project Statement (excerpt), Group Material, October 1993

In 1982 when we sought people’s opinions on the street in New York City for our *DA ZI BAOS* project many seemed surprised to be approached. Perhaps because it was a novel experience people were largely receptive and spoke with little self-consciousness. Eleven years and three Presidential elections later, people we questioned in San Diego were receptive—possibly for a different reason. Today they expect to be asked what they think. Models of how to give an opinion are everywhere and to some degree internalized in each of us.

Public opinion is a valuable denominator in our current political economy. The strength of an imagined majority or the embarrassment of an ineffectual minority gathered around a position usually no more specific than ‘for’ or ‘against,’ can be wielded with great effect to reproduce support or dissent. . . . Populations are pictured as

percentiles. . . . roaring numbers replace genuine democratic discourse. . . . Nuance and contradiction simply do not correspond with reductive models of sentiment.





## Democracy Wall

Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston,  
October 19, 1993-January 23, 1994



Museum  
of  
Fine Arts  
Boston

95 Huntington Avenue  
Boston  
Massachusetts  
02115  
(617) 267-9300

August 20, 1993

### MEMORANDUM

To: Curators and Department Heads

Fr: Trevor Fairbrother TF

Re: On-site project by artists' collaborative Group Material

For the Department of Contemporary Art's exhibition, *In and Out of Place: Contemporary Art and the American Social Landscape* (October 19, 1993 - January 23, 1994), Group Material will present one of their "Democracy Walls" on the facade of the West Wing entrance. This boldly-colored billboard will comprise a landscape of opinions concerning the role and function of museums in modern life, specifically the Museum of Fine Arts and the Boston community. Three artists from Group Material -- Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres) will be in Boston from August 26 through August 31 conducting brief interviews with staff, visitors, and neighbors in the area. If you and your staff encounter these artists and they ask for a few comments, I hope that you will be willing to help them. I assure you that they are both friendly and responsible, and I am confident that the project they are making will have a strong positive effect for the Museum.

In my absence, Kathi Drummy, Operations Coordinator in the Department of Contemporary Art, will host the artists and be in charge of this phase of the project.

During the initial site visit, the Museum's operations manager responds to Julie's query about the viability of the façade of the new I.M. Pei wing as a site for a piece by Group Material, by saying, "I don't want to be negative, but that's impossible." A "democracy wall" is nonetheless planned for exactly this location, chosen for its symbolic value as the institution's skin, delimiting inside and outside. The resulting piece costs one hundred times more than *DA ZI BAOS* did in 1982, as it cannot be directly attached to the façade and requires special rigging.

Doug and Julie spend several days interviewing MFA staff including curators, educators, and administrators about their perspectives on

the role and state of the museum. They also tape a hundred impromptu interviews with visitors entering the museum and passersby in the vicinity. The resulting *Democracy Wall* engenders controversy. The museum's director leaves the curator a lengthy phone message expressing dissatisfaction with the critical content of the piece, and requests that a disclaimer message be placed nearby, saying in effect, it's only art. The statements are presented as anonymous, but at the opening many of the formerly-friendly staff who were interviewed steer clear of Julie and Doug, who speculate that people have misgivings about their candor. Perhaps the public exposure of the museum as a contested institution is also unsettling to them.





[Project Proposal](#) (excerpt),  
Group Material, May 1993

Except in private conversation and focus-group situations, museum visitors rarely have the opportunity to communicate their motivations for going, expectations, describe their experiences and responses to what they see, or express their affirmations, criticisms and desires for the institution. Group Material will visit the museum and its immediate area to conduct spontaneous interviews along these lines of inquiry. A group of excerpts will then be selected for reproduction and display. The selection does not represent GM's opinions or artificially construct an editorial but seeks to represent a range of articulate responses and ideas. The *Democracy Wall* form is a multi-vocal opinion landscape that mirrors the way individual voices echo, dispute, rub up against one another and ultimately construct a picture of collective experience. . . .



[Maureen Dezell, "Propping Up The Wall,"](#)  
*The Boston Phoenix*, October 29, 1993

Museum of Fine Arts director Alan Shestack has caved in to pressure from a handful of museum trustees and insisted that *Democracy Wall*, the twelve-panel temporary installation now on view above the MFA's West Wing entryway, be accompanied by a label explaining it's a work of art. The museum commissioned Group Material, the New York-based artists' collaborative, to create the 10-by-77 foot installation. . . . The piece includes observations by museum visitors, non-visitors, staff, curators, and a quote from the MFA's official mission statement. "We tried to develop an elaborate critique and appreciation," explains Group Material's Julie Ault. "If you could stand outside the museum and listen, this is what you might hear." Apparently, though, some don't want to listen.

A few museum trustees complained to Shestack about what they perceived as the negative tone of the work. Others said they liked it. Though he approved the Group Material exhibit, Shestack began saying shortly after its installation that he had "problems" with the piece. Shestack, who failed to return repeated phone calls to discuss *Democracy Wall*, told exhibition organizer Trevor Fairbrother. . . . to come up with an explanatory label addressing the trustees' concerns. "I don't mind there being an ID label," says Fairbrother. "But I agree with the artists' notion that if you're given the side of a building, as they were—and that's a brave and generous gesture on the museum's part—you don't put something right next to the piece explaining it's taking a stand on something. Any good art has a point of view."

This is the only major metropolitan museum in the country that doesn't get any city or state support. Initially these Brahmin types didn't want the government to be involved. This was to be their institution. So the museum went along happily for some time not charging for entrance and then the money began to run out. The initial impulse to reach out to a wider audience was an economic one. The building of the West Wing as a kind of a pleasure palace was to attract people — to up the gate. On a higher level there are many in the museum who feel that it is our ethical responsibility as professionals and as keepers of the art to reach out to our physical community and to a wider audience.

Museum Staff

It's close to Roxbury and aesthetically, culturally, and politically it's the farthest point away from a rich white person's house. The museum is irrelevant to Roxbury because Roxbury is a community that has been denied anything that is as a concept. The exterior of the building is like a palate cleanser. And you shouldn't go to a museum with your palate cleansed. You should go with your art and culture on your mind and on your body.

Museum Visitor

People say if you're not reaching 80% of the population you're not valuable. I think the art is here, preserved, and on view, and this justifies the museum enough. There's a tendency to say the museum has to make itself relevant but people have to make art relevant in their lives and it's not only the museum's job to do that. What's probably most draining is the need to entertain and compete for the attention of people used to sitting and watching a half-hour TV show. There's something wrong with a culture when you have to work so hard to have a real experience.

Museum Staff

We've been h  
popular and  
and with it  
that a crowd  
a ballpark.  
for something



**Spring 1994.** Felix is no longer active in GM. Doug and Julie collaboratively teach Photography II at Mason Gross School of the Arts and participate (as Group Material) in *Public Domain*, curated by Jorge Ribalta at the Centre d'Art Santa Monica in Barcelona, with a configuration of GM's published projects titled *Campaign*. In April they create the exhibition design for *Public Interventions*, curated by Eleanor Heartney and Milena Kalinovska at the ICA, Boston, which is a comprehensive look at temporary and permanent public art projects that interact with the economic, political, and social issues.

**May 1994.** While visiting Munich on a site visit to the Kunstverein for planning a project, Doug and Julie meet Thomas Eggerer and Jochen Klein, two painters just finishing their studies who have recently collaborated on texts and a temporary public intervention. Affinities are evident and the four hit it off. Thomas and Jochen are invited to work with Group Material, initially on *Market*, which is scheduled to take place at the Kunstverein München the following year. Thomas has a pending DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst) fellowship in New York; he and Jochen move to New York in the summer.

↑ Left to right: Jochen Klein, Doug Ashford, Thomas Eggerer in shopping mall, New York

**MEMBERS:**  
Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Thomas Eggerer, Jochen Klein



## Market

Kunstverein München, Munich,  
May 6–June 18, 1995





Figuring that Market might be Group Material's final interior exhibition, it is designed to reference early shows by using red walls and is planned to be composed exclusively of mass-produced materials and informational artifacts rather than artworks. Specifically it addresses the ways in which market culture is adopting previously marginalized ideological positions and ideals, including those associated with feminism and civil rights. Curating for this occasion means investigating lines of inquiry in promotional culture and a great deal of shopping. A wallet that Julie bought in the early eighties, with the word Freedom silk-screened on it, is used as the iconic emblem for Market. The group produces a set of give-away promotional items including "quick-slit" letter

openers, bumper stickers, "Keepit Clips," and small shopping bags, all with the Freedom wallet image printed on them in lieu of a company logo. Together with a catalog, these elements form the show's publication. 150 advertising slogans that make no direct mention of a product or brand but poetically appeal to "fundamental" concepts about life and society and suggest abstract yet ideologically toned directives, are collected and made into vinyl type transfers in various sizes and colors installed directly on the walls. This language loosely captions the installed objects and screened videos.

**Fall 1995.** Doug and Julie collaboratively teach the Interdisciplinary Seminar at The Cooper Union School of Art.

↑ Left to right: Thomas Eggerer, Jochen Klein in supermarket, Munich  
 → Collection of materials for Market, awaiting installation  
 → Following page: Video stills, *Cops: Caught in the Act, How to Organize Your Home*, screened in Market



Advertising slogans for Market (excerpt),  
Group Material, May 1995

You've never been this secure.  
Take me away  
It's What's Inside That Counts  
A Business of Caring.  
In Touch With Tomorrow  
Make the Connection.  
The Convenience You Expect.  
Business First, Freedom Second.  
It Just Feels Right.  
For the real world.  
Let's Come Together  
Where do you want to go today?  
The Right Choice  
It's The Right Thing To Do.  
Have It Your Way  
You're in Good Hands.  
Power over tomorrow.  
The Power of Partnership  
Better things for better living.  
Your Edge on the Future  
The Right Decision.  
Find your life in ours.  
We make the things that make a difference.  
Solutions for a small planet.  
We'll help get you there.  
Built to set you free  
The Strength of Experience  
Making the Difference Together  
We're a part of your life.  
There is a difference.  
Nothing Comes Closer to Home.  
Let's talk taste.  
And you thought you knew us.



Group Material, "Project Statement,"  
Three Rivers Arts Festival Program, 1996

The quotations and underlying images running throughout the program guide were compiled by Group Material as our contribution to this year's public art component of the Three Rivers Arts Festival, *Points of Entry: A Community Based Public Art Project*. We have integrated the Festival's schedules and information with a constructed 'dialogue' from interviews conducted spontaneously on the street, during a radio call-in program, and from scheduled discussions in homes and offices. Several excerpts are reproduced from previous writings by architects, critics and designers. All texts are represented anonymously to de-emphasize attributes normally used to categorize identity—such as location of residency or institutional affiliation—and instead highlight actual statements.

The questions we raised with interviewees were largely about their experiences using the city, neighborhoods and public spaces, recent relevant changes, personal and collective histories, functions of urban festivals and the cultural, corporate, and consumer entities that administrate, support and visit such events. The linked fragments can be read as a textual chain that was not

conducted as a dialogue in real time, but should convey a logic of interconnectedness between topics.

As 'community' and 'public' are amorphous terms it is crucial to question the ideological underpinnings and context as well as the character of social constellations at work when they are invoked. Given recent trends toward professionalization of community-based art alongside privatization of public space, we decided to investigate the term 'community' in relation to the festival itself.

Our project is not a sociological or scientific survey, nor is it a random sampling of Pittsburgh residents and there is no pretense of objectivity here. The overarching goal of the project is to introduce unarticulated perspectives and voices into the official festival arena and to construct a picture of 'community' and 'the city' as indeterminate and contested by introducing unexpected observations, critiques, and agendas.

## Program

Three Rivers Arts Festival, Pittsburgh,  
June 7-23, 1996

The group is invited to participate in the Three Rivers Arts Festival, a multileveled official arts festival produced for downtown Pittsburgh. As a response to the problematic context of institutionalizing community-based art practices, Group Material decides to replace the artificiality of an assigned constituency by naming the organizers of the festival themselves as the "target audience," and using the festival's program guide as the form and distribution for GM's contribution. Using a variety of means including street interviews, a radio call-in show, and local newspaper ads the group solicits testimony from Pittsburgh residents about their experiences of the city, including those that are behind-the-scenes, secret, and subcultural. The stories express an alternative mapping of the production of the urban space of Pittsburgh through hidden histories, which Group Material threads through the official program guide for the festival.

### INSIDE THE FESTIVAL

Juried Visual Arts . . . . .	2
Points of Entry . . . . .	3
Public Art . . . . .	5
PPG Place . . . . .	6
Children's Area . . . . .	7
Performing Arts . . . . .	8
Artists Market . . . . .	14
High School Banners . . . . .	14
Acknowledgments . . . . .	15
What's Happening . . . . .	16

# Three Rivers ARTS Festival

TOWN OF PITTSBURGH

JUNE 7-23, 1996  
PITTSBURGH

*Pittsburgh is like a big fort. Geographically it's bound by a highway which goes all around the city. So before you get to Pittsburgh you can't see it. Usually you can see a city five or ten minutes before you arrive—but not here. It's very separating.*

*Once I made drawings of the paths people look through downtown on their lunch hours. I would sketch these little maps to see if there was any important shape or hidden meaning in the routes people took.*

*Part of my experience is that some of my family lived in the city so I grew up half there and half in the suburbs—and there's a big difference between them. In the city you can get away with so much more, there's less cops and so many people just hanging out on the street corners. The ratio of cops to kids is high...they watch you nonstop. The city cops don't care what you do because they got bigger things to deal with. The city represents a lot more freedom, an in-between place where you can get away with things out in the open you wouldn't do in the suburbs.*

*You know the problems in big cities today—how people go out and live in the suburbs and never come back. They come here 9 to 5 but they don't come in on the weekends and this draws them back. Festivals are what every city wants to do so its' citizenry will realize the city is a good place to live and have a good time, not just a place for*



**Fall 1996.** Felix Gonzalez-Torres' death, from AIDS-related causes (on January 9, 1996), has cast a shadow on the group for Julie and Doug, who are already ambivalent about its continuance. Although Thomas and Jochen are still open to working in Group Material, enthusiasm is lacking. Group Material seems to be in a state of dissolution rather than reinvention. Jochen Klein has returned to painting and moves to London, and Thomas Eggerer is also considering painting again, as

well as a move to Cologne. Julie feels it is time to formally bring the group to an end, rather than let Group Material's history be watered down by less compelling work. Doug agrees. Julie and Doug decide they will continue to individually represent the group's histories through live narration and writings, and consider making a book about the group at some future date.

Chronicle guiding text written by Julie Ault with information drawn from the Group Material archive, and the memories of Doug Ashford, Liliانا Dones, Thomas Eggerer, Mundy McLaughlin, Marybeth Nelson, and Tim Rollins.



# Case Reopened: Group Material

Julie Ault

*[The archive] cannot help with what is not actually there, with the dead who are not really present in the whispering galleries, with the past that does not, in fact live in the record office, but is rather, gone (that is its point; this is what the past is for); it cannot help with parchment that does not in fact speak. . . .*

*Moreover, historians read from what is not there: the silences and absences of the documents always speak to us.*  
Carolyn Steedman<sup>1</sup>

## Assembling the archive

In the summer of 2008 I gathered together the physical traces of Group Material from file cabinets, closets, bookshelves, and under the couch in my apartment, and transferred the whole lot to the Downtown Collection at the Fales Library at New York University. There, it would be cohered into a formal archive and joined by the material from other group members, most notably the substantial accumulation of long-term member Doug Ashford.

The group's material traces had been dispersed since 1983 when the collaborative decided it would no longer maintain an exhibition space or headquarters and instead function nomadically, working from members' homes and aided by the temporary infrastructural support of art institutions that invited GM to make projects. Decentralized, members kept their own paper trails, or not. While no single person had the official responsibility of keeping up documentation of GM's process and projects, former member Mundy McLaughlin did so for the most part until 1986, at which point I took over the informal role, as well as the files. Founding member Tim Rollins gave me his files soon after. Others who left did not turn their collected material over to those who continued.

What remains tangible for the archive, thirty years after GM's founding, is a mixture

<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust. The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 81, 151. I am indebted to Fariel Armaly for recommending this excellent inquiry at just the right time.

of several individuals' saving habits stimulated by idiosyncratic, conceptual, and practical factors. Some of what was saved is of ambiguous value and much that should have been kept was not. Things got lost and thrown out early on because as barely solvent young New Yorkers we had space constraints and moved frequently. Other things got lost or discarded due to carelessness and lack of historical consciousness. (I am embarrassed to recall that it wasn't so many years ago when I enthusiastically threw out bundles of files thinking "Those projects are done, I won't be using these anymore." At the time, freeing up storage space in my small apartment seemed more pressing than an abstract notion of history.)

The inception of Group Material's archive can be regarded as a kind of reunion—materially speaking and as an enterprise that engenders coming together. The desire to seek out relevant materials from the group's former members was threefold: to organize the most comprehensive diverse and multivocal information collection about Group Material possible for public use, to regroup the group symbolically through its fragments and traces and, in the process, to reconnect with those members who I was not already in touch with in hopes of gaining new insight into the collaborative's internal relations. Five out of a total of twenty core members have died: Patrick Brennan, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Beth Jaker, Jochen Klein, and Michael Udvardy. The process is ongoing: meeting with Marybeth Nelson, Hannah Alderfer, and Peter Szypula from the original group over twenty-five years later, and freshly experiencing the camaraderie, closeness, and fun that colored the initial collaboration was thrilling, as was rekindling dialogues with Liliana Dones and Karen Ramspacher.

This book was planned to emerge on a parallel track with organizing the archive. The challenge of how to represent GM's collective endeavor, and with what authority, was highlighted. It was vital to inform previous participants about the project and seek their advice, as well as their contributions to the archive.

The plan to transfer Group Material's documentation to a publicly accessible conserving institution had been in the works for a while. Four years ago I met Marvin Taylor, who founded the Downtown Collection in 1993, and was immediately impressed with his focus on documenting New York downtown culture as an arena of directly and tangentially interconnected individuals, collectives, communities, and practices. (The archive encompasses art, literature, music, theater, performance, film, activism, dance, photography, and video). The Downtown Collection meaningfully contextualizes its constituents; Taylor seeks to obtain overlapping and complementary collections. He stresses archives are living entities, and has generated a vibrant collection and a decidedly non-stuffy research site that counters the cliché of the archive as somber crypt. (Taylor further won my vote when he said he regards archives as "false evidence," but more on that later.)

Doug Ashford was likewise enthusiastic. We recognized the Downtown Collection's broad cultural reach as the ideal context for Group Material's ultimate "institutionalization," particularly as Taylor, clearly an activist archiver himself, was excited by the notion of Group Material's collection being cohered and structured by former members, even though the more common course is to simply deposit a relevant collection with its arbitrariness and gaps intact and let people make what they will of it. Discrepancy is inevitable. Some gaps stimulate research, but some are better filled, such as fleshing out the collective's archive with individual members' material. (Normally archives adhere to original provenance as a structuring device, which would

result in continued degrouping in GM's case.) Furthermore, Taylor supported the idea of using the period of processing the material as an archiving laboratory in which some initial research projects could be produced, including the making of this book and a multiform inquiry into GM's exhibition *AIDS Timeline* by Sabrina Locks.

### Activating the archive

Group Material's cultural practice was temporal and the forms employed were primarily ephemeral. When the group ended in 1996, I was intent on preserving its ephemerality, resisting becoming history, and opposed to leaving the responsibility of defining and interpreting our work—at least initially—to a curator or art historian. There was a certain appeal in preserving the ephemeral aspect of the entire project: letting people learn about the work through the fragmentary documentation in circulation, and broadcasting Group Material with live narration that renders the past vividly, including tailoring presentations for specific contexts or audiences. Previously GM favored joint representation but since its ending, Doug and I have opted for narrating the work from individual perspectives publicly, and responding to individual enquiries case-by-case. For thirteen years we have sustained a vital dialogue—at times, a debate—about GM's historical representation as various issues emerged. Intermittently we broached the idea of making a book, waiting for the timing to be right.

It had been clear that a time would come when some of us would want to revisit GM and fashion inquiries and accounts, but that we needed the distance of time to do so properly in part because the emotional dimensions of ending a long-term collaboration clouded our capacity to think analytically and freely about how exactly such a project might be generated, and with what aims, means, and methods. For me, buying time so that we could eventually do justice to the subtleties of Group Material's practice and production was also motivated by the desire for an unencumbered phase to develop my own individual creative interests, voice, and identity.

A great deal of interest in Group Material has been expressed in the years since it ended. Would this continue if the combination of fragmentary access and an amorphous status, which invite projection, were offset by the concrete and intrinsically conservative forms of archive and book?

Because the archive has the capacity to construct relationships between Group Material and present and future, the situation compelled us to consider it anew and to shape the content and context from which research into the collaborative's practice will be made. The key challenge has been to figure out which archiving and history writing structures, practices, and methods would effectively animate and complicate the subject of Group Material without excessively controlling or overdetermining its meanings.

Institutionalizing the archive implies closing down, or "closing the casket," but it simultaneously involves opening up and multiplication through use and interpretation. The archive is a primary source for potentially infinite production of history. The archive relocates agency from Group Material as working entity to others who activate its bodies of information. Institutionalization also entails a reassignment or sharing of authority. The relationship between GM's archive and the Downtown Collection is resonant with previous dynamics between GM projects and hosting institutions, except that this cohabitation will be permanent.

The transfer necessitates imagining future use. Exemplary scenarios need to be

conjured including those beyond our lifespans. Group Material's general approach is free access, for whatever purpose desired, including reproduction rights. However, the thorny question of reconstruction requires further conceptual negotiation. The nature of GM's temporal and context-specific work places limits on remaking art (installations, projects) from the archive, but directives and restrictions nonetheless need to be thought through and articulated. In recent years we have been asked if Group Material exhibitions and projects could be reconstructed. If material ingredients of an exhibition were to be gathered from the archive and other sources, and installed according to photographic documentation of the original manifestation, the result would be a cross between artwork and artifact. There is no replacement for the actual experience of an exhibition, which makes a good argument for the research value of re-creation. However, one has to take into account what is missing. Group Material's exhibitions spoke from and to particular contexts during specific times. Aesthetic practice and social practice merged in the projects, which usually involved layers of collaboration in and beyond the group. The social processes involved in creating a project, which were part of the work, would be absent from any reconstruction. Contexts cannot be replicated. It is impossible to reproduce the climate of circumstance and perception and understanding for events.<sup>2</sup>

Archives and books are paradoxical; they enliven and deaden, expose and suppress. What was previously an open-ended answer to "What is Group Material?" is unlikely to remain that way in the face of such historicizing forms that authorize and to some degree fix definition, even as they seek complexity.

The dangers of becoming history are well signposted, but the need to cohere and disseminate information coupled with the desire to relinquish the responsibility for (and control of) mediation supersedes the risks. That Group Material would have an interest in its own historicization is intrinsic to the group's working paradigm. The investigative and representational methods Group Material utilized as well as its concern with discursive practices are mirrored and enacted in relation to its own history in this project. The challenge of representing one's own (collective and by extension individual) history fundamentally dislodges divisions between the archive and memory as well as between objective and subjective knowledge.

### Unpacking the archive

In the fall of 2008, a temporary workspace was set up at the Downtown Collection within which collecting material, deciding on the archive's conceptual structure, and arranging and inventorying took place. GM's material came out of its various crannies of dormancy to form a fertile ground for research processes to begin. Inspired by the television series *The Wire* and programs about investigating "cold cases," we imagined ourselves detectives making sense of the surrounding evidence, charged with solving the case of Group Material, and for Sabrina, the case of *AIDS Timeline*.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the group's sketchy saving methods, there remains an informative and exciting pool of documents, photography, and artifacts that chart Group Material's process and practice. Included are meeting minutes from the group's first year and a half of activity, internal communiqués, original proposals, announcements, press releases, exhibition statements, press responses, correspondence, project files, installation photography, snapshots, working notes and notebooks, exhibition soundtracks, research and source material, publications and books, and artworks and ephemera that were used in projects. Building the archive continues; some individuals'

<sup>2</sup> Discussions between Helen Molesworth, Doug Ashford, Karen Ramsbacher, and myself raised important issues about reconstruction, as have conversations with Martin Beck, Miwon Kwon, Rasmus Rehling, and Sabrina Locks.

<sup>3</sup> Sabrina Locks initially brought up the analogy of *The Wire*, specifically scenes in the detectives' workrooms where they pinned documents and clues to the walls in order to look for interconnections.

papers have been folded in and some are forthcoming.

After just a few days of sorting through and reading the early papers as well as encountering information long blotted from memory, I was shocked to discover I had unwittingly been telling a fair number of inaccuracies—lies even, while imparting stories about Group Material these past years. I read further, and the divide between recollection and fact expanded. Certain retrieved information was basic while some signaled that Group Material was much more complex and debatable than I had meanwhile fabricated and perpetuated. My initial foray into Group Material's paper, artifact, and image trail transfigured the mental spatialization in which I had short-circuited information and prioritized it through the filters of my impressions.

I can't say I've had no inkling of the essentially loose relationships between memory, history, and accuracy. After all, how could activities spanning seventeen years with a total of twenty core participants across that period be portrayed all-inclusively in memory, in conversation, or with a typical presentational format? I was uneasy with expediency and habitual representation and sometimes was disinclined to speak about Group Material whatsoever, but felt responsible to address the ongoing interest, particularly since there was no comprehensive published source to direct people to.

In retrospect I believe describing Group Material during the years since it ended has been as much about concealment as exposure. (Foucault: "Storytellers continued their narrative late into the night to forestall death and to delay the inevitable moment when everyone must fall silent.")<sup>4</sup> Telling has supplied a positive, active relationship with the past (and forestalled "death" analogous to Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*) but what inevitably became routine narration has also prevented my own deeper reflection into the collaborative's meanings and experiences.

Determining the criteria of what gets included in the formal archive—delimiting what is Group Material and what is not, is more complicated than it initially might appear. Questions of privacy and publicity and inside and outside arise.

Should some (perhaps particularly juicy) information be withheld or destroyed to respect the private machinations of group interaction? How does the individual get demarcated in collaboration? In the archive? Some GM members are intensely invested, some are detached, and others are dead and uninvolved in its history. Such disparity proliferates from the archive. Should personal reflections on Group Material from our notebooks be put into the archive? (Another inequity: some took notes and saved them, others did not.) What about individually culled source material that was clipped or preserved for general interest but with Group Material tangentially in mind? What about material that played an informal role in GM's practice? What about material reflective of former members' work after the group ended, which demonstrates individual incorporation and extensions of GM's principles and methods? There is the question of whether information and documentation (or facsimiles) from individuals and institutions Group Material worked with should be sought out and integrated into its archive. Wouldn't potential understandings of GM and the social relations it engendered be meaningfully elaborated by such inclusions, despite that active pursuit to fill out a collection is generally frowned upon as a threat to the fair play of the "as is" archive and its authenticity.

One could spiral out of control making more and more connections to information and items that would texture and deepen understandings of Group Material, and essentially end up "turning over the iceberg."<sup>5</sup> But conceptually at least, these

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 117.

<sup>5</sup> Rasmus Rehling used this term when we were discussing these issues.

speculations are warranted. Where does the archive end? What defines its frame? The archive can be contracted or expanded depending on how these questions are considered.

### Archive Authority

Although first person narration is avidly consumed, as well as venerated in certain situations (therapy, the courtroom), when history is at stake, first person narration is regarded paradoxically; on the one hand subjective perspective, reliance on memory, and relation to ego render it suspect, only quasi-legitimate. On the other hand, “having been there” invokes empirical authority and authenticity. History is even more complicated when collective subjectivity is involved: all those contradictions, multiple agendas, and conflicting memories! The written record is generally privileged as trustworthy authority.

Because they are repositories of documents or “facts,” archives seem to tell the truth, and they do so with a degree of authority. Archives tell truths, but they also mislead through omission (Taylor’s “false evidence”). Connecting the dots between discrete documents and discovering relations between pieces of information—producing meaning—is at the heart of research. But what is housed within a particular collection is rarely systematic; it is often fragmentary, disconnected from context, and sometimes random. Crucial pieces of information, which might answer questions, suggest particular narratives, or unlock mysteries are not necessarily archived.

In spring and summer of 2007, before moving material to NYU, two interested parties who had minimal knowledge of Group Material tested how and what Group Material’s documentation trail communicates. Rasmus Røhling, an art student at the time at Jutland Art Academy in Århus, Denmark, and Sabrina Locks, a graduate student finishing her studies at Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, respectively reviewed the files and documentation from Group Material’s initial period of activity.<sup>6</sup> Witnessing, and subsequent discussion of their understandings, interpretations, confusions, distortions, assumptions, and questions illuminated and delimited the materials’ capacity to convey Group Material. For instance, Rasmus and Sabrina were shocked by the character of the group’s business-like minutes during its first year until I explained that the volume and manner of documentation happened because we diligently followed set rules for organizational record keeping in order to meet the criteria for incorporation in the state of New York. Later on GM primarily communicated in person and by phone, which accounts for the dwindling traces of internal dialogue. Sabrina and Rasmus were perplexed by two consecutive sets of minutes: one week listed ten group members, the following only six. Inexplicably the record made no note of the heated resignation of four members, which accounted for the discrepancy. It was clear some qualifying narration was essential to portray Group Material with more dimension and accuracy than archival material with its gaps and silences is capable of.

Various authorial modes embody specific expressions of authority, and neither archives, spoken, or written representations are unbiased or comprehensive. Subjective and objective are not secure categories; they are hybrid and permeable. Memories and histories intertwine and actively condition and contextualize any event, throwing contradictions into relief and potentially rendering resolution absurd.

<sup>6</sup> I met Rasmus when I was teaching at Jutland. He asked if I knew of any interesting work he could get involved in as he was planning a lengthy stay in New York; our dialogue about archiving and historicizing GM developed during that visit. Rhea Anastas (who was then teaching at Bard Center for Curatorial Studies) recommended Sabrina do a summer internship with me in 2007, which we extended to working on a project from and for the archive.

### Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material

What can the collective subjective do when given the chance to write its own history, and transform its own material to a public sphere? How do artifacts—whether material or informational—communicate? How can meanings and histories be extracted from and read into cultural artifacts? What kind of suitable communicative forms can be shaped to embody the historicizing processes, gathered knowledge, diverse purpose, and doubts that drive this inquiry? How to make what is missing evident or register absence as a layer of historicizing?

Private and public information intertwine throughout the chronicle, as do anecdotes and facts, snapshots and installation photographs. Selecting documentation and bringing it together to form textual and pictorial layers, determining placement and juxtaposition, and deciding on the content and mode of accompanying narration are all aspects of shaping Group Material’s historical representation here. Chronology is considered a somewhat open structure, within which readers and users of the book are invited to make meaning of and cross-reference the imbedded information and material ingredients.

Group Material’s actions are presented here as reference points in a larger cultural discourse, and contextual conditions are suggested by use of a variety of means. Group Material authored documents, reprinted in their original form and scale, compose one layer of information in the chronicle. The methods, contents, and visual character of these documents are valued as “original language.” They vividly convey GM’s motivations—what we perceived we were doing at the time, and demonstrate the group’s shifting rhetorical strategies, as well as the cultural vocabulary of particular moments.

The guiding text that filters throughout the chronicle imparting otherwise inaccessible circumstances, facts, and anecdotes is written in a depersonalized present-tense mode. This method of telling intends to situate readers in the times of events, as well as suggest collective subjectivity, distinct from a retrospective individual perspective. Several topics are carried through, such as the continuities and discontinuities of GM’s composition, and how Group Material structured itself and financed its work. Private workings, conflicts and contradictions endemic to group process are likewise articulated. (Certain complex circumstances within the group—such as resignations or departures—are expressed vaguely although “the silences and absences of the documents always speak to us.”)

Configuration and reconfiguration are additionally registered in the chronology as listings of current members. Group Material was a succession of social bodies, transforming whenever someone left or joined. The collaborative was modified by the gain or disappearance of specific interests and methods and new dynamics emerged, which had consequences in practice.

Another layer of the chronicle consists of excerpted texts, which are unified by typographic design treatment. These excerpts are diverse in nature; many are written by GM. Intermittently they open out to take account of other voices—including journalists, project participants, and audience members. The extracts range in function from installation instructions to critical reviews.

Revisionist and interpretive tendencies have been restrained in this initial look at Group Material in favor of creating a useful documentary foundation that, akin to one of the group’s installations, invites a multiplicity of interpretation. *Show and Tell* offers

a distilled representation of the group's strata of process and production, and of the findings from Group Material looking at itself. It is a source for hard data, impression, and historical atmosphere. GM's collaborative spirit as well as its methods and principles are articulated through past projects and enacted in the making of the book. *Show and Tell* is also an introduction to the archive, an invitation to visit and look further. The organization of the archive and the response to that process through this book provide a platform and base interpretation to use, negotiate, and take issue with. Additionally, this final "Group Material project" forms a case study in archiving, historical inquiry, and history writing, shaped from the questions and problems enmeshed in the investigation.

Group Material should not be reduced to memory or record, but can most constructively be articulated and elaborated by the dynamics between multiple bodies of information. Somewhere between the representation of lived experience of events and their contexts, and the non-judgmental multiplicity of the archive, historical representation gets complex and exciting. The history of history is fraught with what Derrida calls "an incessant tension between the archive and archaeology." He continues "They will always be close the one to the other, resembling each other, hardly discernible in their co-implication, and yet radically incompatible, heterogeneous . . ." Perhaps imprint and memory are not mutually hostile, and the conflict between archive and memory is overestimated. What if we understand History and Memory as inseparable, accept their apparent coproductive roles, and refuse to regard this as a predicament.

Group Material's archive and publication projects are fueled by the recognition that the past and its contexts are irretrievable. The knotty undertakings of archiving and history writing have been taken up with resuscitating and mediating in mind, and without illusion that the result be entirely accurate. History is a dynamic of vested inquiry, process, and representation. This book, which is part of the process, mixes and honors multiple ways of knowing, showing, and telling.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*, translated by Eric Prenowitz, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 92.

I am grateful for dialogues with Doug Ashford, Martin Beck, Matthew Buckingham, Sabrina Locks, Sarat Maharaj, Rasmus Rahling, and Marvin Taylor, which have variously influenced my thinking as reflected in this essay.

## What Was to be Done?

Tim Rollins

It was 1978 and we had no choice. We had to do something. We wanted to make a scene. A brilliant desperation was in the air for we young artists who wanted—needed—to be politically engaged but lacked any venues for new and true artistic inquiry, experimentation, demonstration, and change.

Group Material had some powerful foreshadows: Russian Constructivism, Dada and Surrealism, the Arts and Crafts movements in England and later the United States, the Shakers, and other utopian communities. But when I go back and wonder how Group Material came to be, I have to acknowledge the incongruous influence of two very, very different artists—the British activist Conrad Atkinson and the gay neo-expressionist painter Jedd Garet.

My revelation moment occurred when I encountered a special issue of the British art publication *Studio International*, edited by Richard Cork. The title of the issue was "Art for Whom?". It presented and explored a survey of socially engaged, community based arts projects throughout the UK at the moment (and to my mind the only true avant garde movement around). In those pages I was introduced to the art of Conrad Atkinson and Margaret Harrison. What excited and inspired me about Atkinson's and Harrison's projects was the direct engagement with specific individuals and communities to develop and produce artwork that was both visually and politically vital. This was work that actually transformed the situation that was the impetus for the work. Unlike so much "political art" then (and now, sadly), this was not art about politics, about the People as an abstraction. This was work made in concert with communities in crisis with a direct intention to change things to positive effect. This was art as dialogue, not representation and reportage (descriptive, removed, and safe).

Many of the first members of Group Material were my classmates at the School of Visual Arts (SVA) from 1975 to 1977. We were deeply involved in Joseph Kosuth's reading and discussion seminar in art and cultural politics. Jedd Garet was also a classmate of ours and while I don't remember if he was in Kosuth's seminar class, I'm

certain he was in the studio class we all took with the painter Jennifer Bartlett. While Jedd would be quietly making his things in the corner of the studio (this was a required studio class lasting several hours) our gang would be forever arguing with Jennifer about the purpose, meaning, and nature of art. We weren't making objects. We were making dialogue. We sincerely considered the collective conversation as our work and it drove Jennifer crazy. (This was way before "Situational Aesthetics.") We were probably tendentious, a little obnoxious, but I recall a great energy, an irreverence and humor in the talks and we all learned a lot. Even Jennifer had a begrudging respect for what we were attempting to do.

Anyway, we had all just graduated from SVA without the prospects of anything. Jedd Garett, on the other hand, got a large exhibition at the fabulous Robert Miller Gallery straight out of school. Jedd was making these very punky, neo-surrealist paintings that were very popular with lots of folk at the time and championed by critics like Robert Pincus-Witten and Robert Rosenblum. While our gang's ideas of what could be and Jedd's were light-years away, Jedd was still a good friend and so we all went to his wildly successful opening at the gallery. After, we retreated to a bar downtown and then it started. Everyone was complaining and hand wringing. "No one is ever going to want to be involved in our kind of work . . . there is no place for political art in this city . . . oh, what to do, what to do?!!!"

That's when it hit me. We needed our own place.

Born and raised in the hills of central rural Maine, American pragmatism is built into my DNA. Back home, if you need to build a barn, you don't get a committee together to do a study of the history and practice of barn building over the past three centuries and don't need to go into barn-building theory (e.g. The Barn and "the Other"). You build a damn barn. We needed a barn, not a space but a place, a laboratory of our own. We could operate outside the commercial and increasingly not-alternative spaces of the mainstream art scene in order to make our own ways in our own contexts. This is what we wanted and needed to do. Exhibitions as inquiries. And we wanted to do this in a physical space occupied not just by objects, artists and the art-involved audience but a hub of social relations. We wanted to get away from the slumming, abject, funky, raggedy-looking feel of so many of the artist-run galleries at the time without reverting to the expensive-looking Soho white cube paradigm. We wanted to develop social action with style—our style. We wanted to be independent, self-reliant. We wanted to be communitarian (not Communist), not only community-based but also community-engaged, connecting what happens inside the exhibition space / headquarters with social life on the street and neighborhood just outside the doors.

As students many of us were involved in an organization called Artists Meeting for Cultural Change. It was like a town meeting that met at the Paula Cooper Gallery in Soho one Sunday night a month. Participants included Kosuth and Sarah Charlesworth and folk like Lucy Lippard, Leon Golub and Nancy Spero, and many others, including, ironically some seriously troubled sociopaths. We were the youngest of the constant debaters. While the experience of those meetings was a unique education, our gang was eventually turned off and disappointed by the relentlessly negative and combative spirit of the enterprise. The old New Left were conjuring up a culture of impossibility, so unlike the spirit of the civil rights movement that I witnessed and experienced as a young kid.

I remember that in our early conversations about the plans for the Group Material project, we all began to realize that no social system and consciousness is hermetic and airtight. Things like these are more porous than we first believe. Under enough outside pressure, things can spring leaks. There were hopeful models of work that excited us: the feminist Heresies Collective, *The Times Square Show* and *The Real Estate Show*, Jenny Holzer's first Truism posters plastered all over downtown, Mike Glier's *White Male Power* show at Annina Nosei's space in Soho, what Keith Haring was doing with his drawings in the ad spaces in the New York City subways, and the whole riotous community-building neighborhood club scene we visited almost every night (Max's Kansas City, Club 57, The Pyramid, Mudd Club, Danceteria, Tier Three, the UFO club, CBGB, Crisco Disco) that induced fresh possibilities for the making and experiencing of new modes and ways of making art.

Could we do this? Could we flow into an organic democracy that would produce works of art and anthologies of social and cultural concerns? Could we create an arena that renegotiates the physical, psychological and class-bound barriers between art and so-called non-art? Could we relearn our thinking and practice to be less reactive and more proactive in coming up with innovative solutions to some very real limitations and problems in very real communities in some very real lives? Often, when the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of his definition of transformative Love, he would describe this as the kind of Love that would go to any non-violent means necessary to create "the Beloved Community." Could we do this?

# An Artwork is a Person

Doug Ashford

*The impossible demand to start the revolution everywhere at once is replaced by the statement that communication is possible only at the moment when everyone changes places: when the individual loses herself or himself in the effort of showing an image to someone else.*  
Colin MacCabe, "On Godard," 1980<sup>4</sup>

## **"Join us!", Protesters to onlookers at the March on the Pentagon, October 17, 1967**

The dismantling of the progressive economic and cultural changes of the 1960s began in earnest in the 1980s, and Group Material's overall project was imagined in this period of attempted historical erasure. To design our work we looked to the many layers of human activity that pre-dated this right-wing onslaught by twenty years: the attempted re-invention of American life through civil organization and social rebellion. This book comes at a time of concentrated reflection on the complex political contours of art in the 1980s; fifty years after the world-changing disturbances of Berkeley, Newark, Prague, Nanterre, Watts, Alabama, and Stonewall. Today's ascendant culture of war and its accompanying economic collapse bring home many of the state designed public fictions initiated in the 1980s. That the majority must still live precariously and in deprivation suggests that the darkest fantasies of governmental and corporate coercion were actually quite gnostic: an improbable world of passive spectators forced to endorse a reality imposed on them by executive power. The publication of this book in 2010 is then doubly reflective—representing the work of a group of artists in the 1980s that modeled the revolutionary counter-culture of twenty years before.

Most of the members of Group Material were children during the rise of the civil rights, women's liberation, free love, gay power, and anti-war movements of the 1960s. Even if we were too young to directly witness the physical mobilizations that rejected state totality and corporate greed, the concomitant changes in ethos, fantasy, and feelings were tacitly imbedded in our practice. Group Material understood

that connected to the liberation movements against colonialism, patriarchy, and capital were artist-led oppositions to the accepted hierarchies between institutions, audiences and artists themselves. The process of re-imagining ourselves through the rebellious inventing of art objects was, in many ways, a continuation of a larger political momentum.

In this way 60s activism and 80s interpretive enactments were more than the socioeconomic conditions for Group Material's work: they were the foundations of its aesthetic action. Activist politics presented a moment of collective refusal, but in that refusal came an identification with others, known and unknown. The desire for political change produces conjecture on a number of fronts, and conjecture necessitates affinity with others. Modeling a future by banding together amidst the interests of strangers is a legacy shared by the political imperatives of social organizing and the methodological sensibilities of artists. Although art and politics may still be routinely sequestered in the academy, these two find great sympathy with each other in the actual effective function of people's work to change their circumstances. Artists cannot produce unless connected with others: with those behind the creative acts coming before them or with newly apparent audiences that surround them, real and imagined. This social knowledge invested in creative work is therefore based on a projected kind of empathy—a sense of the ethical coming from imagination and hope. Such feelings are deeply connected to the inevitability of ethical affinity formed in oppositional social agency; its acts of protest and organization are a genesis. That is why during an artistic offering, justice and beauty seem to come from the same dream.

For many of the actual participants, however, memories of the movements of the 1960s are marked by its practical failures: the inability of majorities to recognize the potential liberation those revolutionary movements and their counter-cultures could provide. The tragedies of missed opportunities, internal sexism, police infiltrations, capitulations, and betrayals complete an almost unbearable chronicle. But the activism of the 60s also bring a possible philosophical reflection to thinking about the subjective effects of non-governmental organization, a reflection that is encircled by aesthetics. An oppositional movement makes groupings where the desires of others overtake our sense of singular and individual autonomy, a process amplified by protesting actions. If organized acts of civil disobedience put people's bodies on the line, then any sense of the continuation of the self is literally and corporeally opened up to the proximity of strangers. Anyone involved in public acts of political resistance has had such an experience—the look toward another, previously unrecognizable, but made familiar, even loved, in the battle with gigantic repressive authority. The face of the anonymous becomes empathically known. This "new face" producing a fresh affinity found under the duress and risk of social unrest, is an experience of the difference between humans at its most profound: an implicit understanding that however far away liberation may seem, we can still recognize its contours in the work we do together. In times of rebellion, an encounter with the desires of another person allows for the recognition of a radically different future self.

## **"We are also part of the audience", Group Material**

Carl Oglesby of Students for a Democratic Society, writing after the October '67 anti-war mobilization at the Pentagon, tried to come to terms with the shift this massive demonstration mandated: from peaceful protest to direct confrontation and

<sup>4</sup> Colin MacCabe, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 153.

resistance. "If I am correct in assuming that men resist danger and want freedom from all servitudes, then it follows that rebellion does not take place until it is compulsory. The rebel is someone who is no longer free to choose even his own docile servitude." If the political revolutionary is a figure of tactical refusal then Group Material's refutations were multiple and situation-specific. We said "no" to the false neutrality of the museum that forbade the social context of relations between our imaginations, "no" to the reduction of other public domains to corporatist management and blind consumption. We said "no" to the sequestering of art as outside the purview of audiences and artists; we said "no" to the disappearance of subaltern cultures under imperialism, and we said "no" to the supposed inevitable death of our friends to AIDS. Our set of refusals were shared with each other and with the many other individuals and groupings responding to social inequity at that time. We recognized that the politics of any group is made real in collecting seemingly unrelated refusals, showing how group action can generate new life into an individual—say anti-war sentiment coming to the teacher from the loss of her students to the draft, or the collection of a painter's work by an embassy in a CIA-overturned republic. Any singular moment of individual self-conception, of assumptions of the "ethical and reasonable" can be inspired and rethought through the demands of collective rebellion and its resonance. When an individual is moved outside of their normal setting by the effects of movements for social change, their political function changes; their consciousness changes. And likewise, when a participant's political sense in the world is transformed they are in turn, displaced from their accepted senses.

Similarly, the exhibitions and public projects Group Material produced were a displacement of the art object onto unexpected fields of experiences. By organizing art installations based on political urgency, inquiry, and contradiction, the reasonable expectations for art were upset. Abstract paintings occupied space defined by popular insurgency, children's drawings sat alongside electoral advertisements next to paintings of heads of state, Dr. Seuss books were placed near Joseph Beuys blackboards, institutional critique was overtaken by "easy-listening" versions of revolutionary 60s ballads, and so on. Such an inflection, of the meaning of the one onto the connotations of the many, began with dislocating the historical notion of the supposedly autonomous art object onto a politically activated theme. But in addition, the juxtaposition of artworks with everyday market commodities and publicity design evoked the possibility of revelation in the undoing of what already exists. A revolution can even transform the advertisements in the daily paper, the food in the kitchen cabinet, and the tools of the workplace. In a related way, Group Material's transformation of presidential statements into bus adverts, snapshots into billboards, subway cars into a gallery spaces, and then the museum gallery itself into a town meeting, were all the refusals of established frameworks for the organization of art, refusals of the limited imaginings of what artists and viewers could be.

As Group Material's work matured, it became increasingly clear that in order to oppose the oblivion of the present, a form had to be invented through the visualization of democratic process. How else could an authentic response to the imposed disaster of contemporary life be constructed? As artists we knew that the street and the symposia as forms of response were often beautiful—that collectively diverse declarations of justice have all the qualities of improvisation, comparison, proportion, absence, suggestion, and substitution. In many ways the practices that Group Material developed were un-theorized, suggested by the exigencies of the

constituent matters of life over death: be they the formation of Central American independence movements facing American sponsored genocide or the activist response to official indifference to the AIDS epidemic. Our forms of exhibition and public practice reflected the need to invent a dynamic situation, a designed moment of reflection that could include discussion and present dissent. If such an apparatus of artistic presentation emerges from the framework of political assembly—the installation of art can begin to look and perhaps even act, like a *forum*. In calling the exhibition a *forum* we were excavating all its meanings: roundtable, caucus, public assembly, parliament, open framework, anarchic exchange, and more. Making the artwork comparable to the apparatus of democracy did have an actual political effect; it acted as a ground for meetings, associations, transformations of artistic context and real probabilities for the constituents of those represented by and attending to the work. Especially important here in the collected presentation of this book is Group Material's proposal of democracy as a genesis of aesthetic invention, our presentation of the social relations that can be realized by a group of people in an empty room. Group Material's methodology of cultural displacement was anchored in a strong yet abstract image of the process of political work. This abstract image of democracy as a void means that public assembly is visually positioned as a struggle that never ends. It is the template of *forum* that rejects puerile liberal pluralism and replaces it with a radical abstraction—the assignment of discussion's contingency into an imaginable shape that is always irregular and fluctuating.

Art presented as a changeable social shape, as dialogue, presents a context where not just images but political will itself can be personified—a collection of positions and volitions of different people. Encountering this art is equivalent to the experience of viewing a landscape painting where we take the artist's body position, looking across this or that valley toward this or that town square. It becomes unconsciously clear in an experience of a work of art, even in the renaissance convention of occupying the eyeballs of another, that we are in an encounter with someone unknown. Such a formal and physical presence is difficult to discuss rationally because the sense of the point of view of another person is so much more than the strict diagramming of corporeal perspective, the agreement or disagreement with a position. But what can be understood easily is the simple fact that we accept a multitude of artworks as a form of divergent, even oppositional presentations of others' opinions and ideas.

Occupying the sight of a person previously unknown is often a shock. Sometimes even felt like an apparition, it is strangely both erotic and historical, evoking the effect of a long line of encounters that verge on mystical exegesis. Given the ideological hailing of modern institutional life (the way in which we become subjects to institutions outside of any conscious contract), the degree to which artworks can present undiscovered organizations of ourselves is even more surprising. But for Group Material our displaced groupings of visual culture were concrete figurations suggesting that when art insists on new narrations of the self, however mysterious, a political process happens in public. A process, for Group Material, that was designed to be a complex dialogue: with others through affiliation and love, and through others in the political act of showing the unknown, the repressed and yet to be seen. This process created art turned toward ideas of what could be desired rather than existing manifestations of a perceived world, and proposed that art's abstract matrix can figure real techniques of social liberation. To defend the notion of artwork as an



encounter with a person and then to display this encounter in the context of new politics was Group Material's contradictory innovation, the design of a place where the self expands by rupturing in relationship to others.

### "Why sometimes do images begin to tremble?"; Chris Marker<sup>2</sup>

In rereading the documents now collected in our archive, it becomes clear to me that the kind of work produced by Group Material simply had to be made—it happened, like the social activism it followed, out of desperation. Group Material thought then, and it was not unusual to have such ideas, that one could create meaning outside of the privatizing influence of corporate culture by re-organizing the actual experience of culture independently. The art projects we developed resembled the forms of the political vanguard by reflecting the modern notion that individuals have a right to bind themselves together to produce a context that might retain work and happiness. It is against the 1980s emergence of a right wing culture of physical control and spectacularized consistency that this generation of artworks and collective action need to be rethought: the false stability of religious fundamentalism, the mediagenic degradation of culture into profit, the relentless never-returning value of our labor, a historical amnesia that disintegrates capacities to read or even to speak to each other directly. These are the vicissitudes of 80s economic and political regression and they still weigh upon us, attempting to re-form us into an anti-culture of mutual repression. A repression no longer exclusive to the barrel of a gun—a repression designed through images.

Group Material saw that politics happens at the site of representation itself, not just where information is transferred, but rather at the place we recognize ourselves; where we have the sense that we are ourselves, feel a stability that is hailed and recognized by others. A radical representational moment may be collective but it also suggests that we can give ourselves over to a new vision through feeling, an experience linked to contemplation and epiphany. In this way no public description of another, in frame or in detail can be presented as neutral. So when Group Material asked, "How is culture made and who is it for?" we were asking for something greater than simply a larger piece of the art world's real estate. We were asking that the relationships change between those who depict the world and those who consume it, and demonstrating that the context for this change would question more than just the museum: a contestation of all contexts for public life. In making exhibitions and public projects that sought to transform the instrumentality of representational politics, invoking questions about democracy itself, Group Material presented a belief that art directly builds who we are—it engenders us. This was an insistence that the representations found in art give rise to our sense of self and in the end encompass us as subjects. Accordingly we believed that the existing management of art, and of culture in general through the market, enforces a complex system of limiting notions of what makes "us" us or "me" me, what normalizes and enacts the contours of fixed identity. The definitions of gender, race and power were, and still are, dependent on a visual system—images that make possible the recognition or misrecognition of ourselves, between ourselves.

The museum—like the city and the government that makes us in them—is always already in ruins. The anxiety of the proximity to power that art, and art's management implies, is therefore always part of art's production. The historical dynamism of the museum carries within it all the battles fought over the public domain since its

<sup>2</sup> Chris Marker, *Le Fond de l'air est rouge (A Grin Without a Cat)*, 1988.

modern inception. For Group Material the market-dominated context for culture in the 80s and its consolidation in the museum were presented to artists unfairly, as universalizing opportunities steeped in false neutrality. The white walls that Group Material re-painted red critically reacted to institutions, critically insisting that they, not artists or audiences, were the producers of meaning. The prevailing notions of aesthetic pluralism at that time, the promotional leveling of all artistic forms onto consumption, the blandly humanist notions of equivalence in scholarship and public record—all partook in the deeply ideological construction of democracy as a kind of blanketing agreement, a blind consensus. If it is true that capitalism is the most creative form of production the earth has ever known, its reservoir of manufactured agreement strangely needed formal and physical protection.

And it still does. The threat felt by the status quo from art is a real threat. The moment of social unrest of the 60s, like the collectively designed exhibition, shows that you are closer to the ideas of others than you think. This is perhaps why the experience of an art that can concurrently untangle, remake, and re-tangle the ideas we have of ourselves is not easy to produce. The struggle to communicate even amongst those invested in a common project seems at times insurmountable. Manifest in this chronicle is the fact that Group Material created work in struggle with itself, with members often in debate and contention, producing artwork that manifested conflict. As part of the audience it is only logical our disagreement with the world would inspire dissent among ourselves. That the work is still here represents the strength, its true protest, the working together of ideas and desires that are in friction. If there is an emotional equivalency to the idea of creative dissensus, it can be found in the resolute presentation of dialogue in Group Material's process and installations. One of the most compelling memories of the work we did in forming the exhibition was the argument. There is not a single artistic product we made that did not come from discussion, opposition, and disagreement. Today, after many artists and many decades of aesthetic experimentation, dissensus can finally be proffered as the basis for imagining social and aesthetic action—it is an emotional invention of great beauty.

Group Material's self-assignment was to locate the dissensual feelings associated with activism, its emotional reverberations and actual evocations, into a realizable model or design. It meant we had to try to invent visual solutions that would be able to question themselves. By insisting that the presentation of art could approach the experience of dialogue and dissent we showed that when art addresses us as subjects in conversation, we can experience art as an array of personified encounters. We created a site where multiple and conflicting forms and histories cross over and through one another, mutating into paradoxical and unexpected notions of how we could define ourselves as humans. When artworks are engendered as persons in dialogue, the experience of art can make a rebellion.

This essay would not have been possible without the careful attention of Alyse Yang. I am also indebted to the work of Gregg Bordowitz, Hito Steyerl, David Joselit, and Devin Fore, which inhabited my thoughts during the writing period, and to the writing of William Olander, who first broached the idea of an engendering art. My deepest thanks on this project go to Julie Ault: the entire history preserved in this book would not be imaginable without her.



Group Material  
*AIDS Timeline*

MATRIX Berkeley 132  
University Art Museum  
University of California at Berkeley  
November 11, 1989–January 28, 1990

The following chronology is an attempt to trace the development of the AIDS crisis in the United States and contextualize its development socially and politically. Like any representation of history, this project is subjective in that it includes certain information and excludes other information. The juxtaposition of facts in *AIDS Timeline* reveals how government, medical and media inaction compounded the crisis and how the communities most affected by AIDS have worked to diminish it.

1979

Pope John Paul II visits the United States and reaffirms traditional Roman Catholic teaching.

“Real People” a television program on NBC, is the network’s newest hit. A hybrid between news and talk-shows, it examines the “strange and unpredictable, the heroic and fallible in human nature.” The show traces the believe-it-or-not escapades of seemingly ordinary Americans.

98% of all American homes contain a television set, 60% of which are color.

The Institute for the Protection of Lesbian and Gay Youth, later known as The Hetrick Martin Institute is founded in New York City.

Dan White kills San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and openly gay City Supervisor Harvey Milk. White, a former politician and City Supervisor, is convicted only of the reduced charge of manslaughter. His defense claims that due to the over-eating of Twinkies he suffered “diminished mental capacity.” Mass demonstrations, the “White Night Riots,” erupt in the streets of San Francisco after the verdict is announced.

An estimated 120,000 people participate in the first March on Washington for lesbian and Gay Rights.

The U.S. supported Shah of Iran is deposed. The Ayatollah Khomeini takes over.

1980

This year’s top grossing film is “The Empire Strikes Back” directed by George Lucas. It is a science fiction story of the adventures of a fatherless son as he masters ‘the force’ needed to defeat an evil empire.

Dr. Mathilde Krim, a research biologist, begins noticing immunologically unusual patients. The following year Dr. Krim is one of the many people who first report the new diseases. She will later become a founder of AmFAR, the American Foundation for AIDS Research.

Ronald Reagan is elected the 40th president of the United States of America. This is described by many as a “landslide” even though Reagan wins only 27% of the registered vote. Three American Maryknoll nuns are found raped and shot to death in a shallow grave in El Salvador. American military support for the ruling oligarchy is temporarily suspended—only to be reinstated shortly thereafter.

## Tracking AIDS Timeline

Sabrina Locks

An exhibition can function, however provisionally, intentionally or not, as a prescriptive presentation of history, or, as in the case of *AIDS Timeline*, as a call to amend its course.

Begun in 1989 as an exhibition for the Berkeley Art Museum MATRIX Gallery, *AIDS Timeline* is a shape-shifter, re-versioned for the Wadsworth Atheneum, the 1991 *Whitney Biennial*, and for print in eleven arts publications.<sup>1</sup> In 2009 I approach the *Timeline* from its future, through the not yet processed archive of Group Material. In boxes, poster tubes, folios, recollections, and documentation, *AIDS Timeline* is out of order and in fragments. The medium and the artwork no longer exist in concert. The archive, like the exhibition, is a partial history, though it provides nothing so linear as a timeline on which to traverse its terrain.

“The *AIDS Timeline* will recontextualize within a historical framework, AIDS as an epidemic that because of social and political conditions in which it appeared became a crisis.” This was written in a fax sent to research assistant Richard Meyer at the University of California, Berkeley in September, 1989 (from a copy in the archive). In note form, Group Material lists several objectives of *AIDS Timeline*, including: “Represent the development of grassroots organizations engaged in community education, self-empowerment, treatment research and access.”

In the exhibition, the timeline appeared as a black vinyl band running along the gallery wall, marking each year of the decade, with a chronology of AIDS-related time-data, developments and statistics (compiled by Group Material) interspersed around it, along with artifacts, artworks, and other media. A wide spectrum of culture is filtered through a history of AIDS, from 1979 to 1989, manifesting as a crisis in American public response. Countering those in power—from dominant media, government, and medical institutions—voices of activism and ground-level movements organized

All quoted statements by Group Material members—Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Karen Ranspacher—are drawn from an interview conducted by Maria Porges during the installation of *AIDS Timeline* at the Berkeley Art Museum in November 1989, and published in *Shift*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1990, pp. 20–23.

<sup>1</sup> In collaboration with Visual AIDS for Day Without Art, December 1, 1990, Group Material adapted *AIDS Timeline* for the December 1990 issues of: *Afterimage*, *Art in America*, *Art & Auction*, *Art New England*, *Arts Magazine*, *Artforum*, *Contemporanea*, *High Performance*, *October*, *Parkett*, and *Shift*. Each contained a spread for one year in the *Timeline*, and its re-presentation in print was tailored for the specific formats of each publication.

in response to AIDS emerge in increasing number along the timeline.

*We did so much research—we've been working on it for months and months, and once we got here and compiled it, all the information . . . we actually had to cut just tons of stuff.*  
Karen Ramspacher

Much of the cut stuff now sits with the uncut stuff. In the archive, *AIDS Timeline* is embedded in the remnants of its process. Its material sources and traces form a seemingly massive field of potential clues that lead me in to and out of the archive, toward the people who inhabit its histories.

*There's no such thing as just looking. The looking is always invested with a historical text that every person brings in, and what we are really offering are glimpses by which to connect that person with history.*  
Felix Gonzalez-Torres

I realized at a very early stage, amid aggregating traces of *AIDS Timeline*, that the work would require of me certain sleuth-like tendencies. I was trying to locate a position for myself in relation to the material without assuming a set role (art historian, critic, groupie—though I might have been each of those at one time or another along the way). If there was any notion of objectivity at the onset of my investigation, it—along with the idea that I could find out what *AIDS Timeline* really was or really meant on the record and in cultural memory—had to be suspended, or thrown away altogether. In the archive, elements may point to an (imagined) whole, but there is no direct route to get there. There are limits to what can be known, derived, deduced as ascertainable “facts” of *AIDS Timeline*—inaccuracies in documentation, in official and unofficial checklists, internal records; each contain varying degrees of missing information or straight-up misinformation as to the *Timeline*'s specifics, its sources and citations, and the relations of material in the exhibition. Eventually, I understood *AIDS Timeline* as involving a set of histories entered through art: a particular cultural response to AIDS containing within it a wide range of other responses.

*We wanted to start with 1979, to start with the past and go up to the future . . . the architecture of the space is perfect because the ceiling is lower at the beginning where there's less information than at '83 it starts to really grow. '84 the ceiling gets even higher. The room is designed for a timeline, an AIDS Timeline.*  
Julie Ault

Mounted to the wall at the beginning of *AIDS Timeline*, in 1979, is *Untitled (Future Shock)* (1989)—a work by artist Nayland Blake. It contains five different color paperback editions of Alvin Toffler's 1970 book *Future Shock* (in red, yellow, orange, green and blue) encased in plexiglass. “Too much change in too short a period of time” is Toffler's most concise definition of the condition of ‘future shock’. In a conversation from 1973 with artist John McHale, Toffler says:

*One of the functions of the artist to say, “Look, there are other ways of dealing with a situation!” That's what the artist's ‘novel juxtapositions’ do. And history is another pool of information, as you call it—previous field tests, laboratory experiments. . . . If you regard history in this sense . . . then the historian and the artist and the science-fiction imaginer and the popular interpreter—at least many of them—are working at the same business . . . In effect, they are saying to the decision-maker, in business, in politics, or in private life, “You don't need to be what you are. You can act or live differently?”*

As the *Timeline* progresses, statistics tracking the reported number of AIDS diagnoses and related deaths in the U.S. are printed on red and white cardboard placards about the size of an index card. (For 1983: 2,972 new cases; 4,450 total cases; 3,991 deaths to date. For 1985: 5,953 new cases; 10,403 total cases; 8,961 deaths to date.) In the archive there's a stack of twelve placards rubber-banded together in a brown envelope containing also: a pair of yellow rubber gloves; a bottle of Tylenol; a stars and stripes U.S.A. necktie; and a 1980 presidential campaign button with an image of Ronald Reagan that says “Let's Make America Great Again.”

The rubber gloves are a throw-back to AIDS “household contact” hysteria, spawned by Dr. Anthony Fauci in 1985 (then head of AIDS research at the National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases) who mistakenly suggested the risk of HIV transmission through casual contact. Ten years later (I'm twelve at the time), I visit my sister whose partner is HIV-positive, and my mother tells me worriedly to try not using the bathroom, don't touch the toothbrushes, avoid the kitchen. Misconceptions feeding fear and paranoia are not easily dispelled, despite proof of their falsehood.

Below the timeline band, there's a piece of paper pinned to the wall with the first CDC Case Definition of AIDS for 1981–1985:

*For the limited purposes of epidemiological surveillance, CDC defines a case of the Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) as an illness characterized by:*

1. A reliably diagnosed disease<sup>a</sup> that is at least moderately indicative of an underlying cellular immune deficiency, and 2. No known underlying cause of cellular immunodeficiency nor any other cause of reduced resistance reported to be associated with the disease.

<sup>a</sup> *These diseases include cryptosporidiosis; Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia; toxoplasmosis pneumonia or central nervous system infection; candidiasis causing esophagitis; cryptococcosis causing central nervous system or disseminated infection; disseminated atypical mycobacterial infection; cytomegalovirus causing pulmonary, gastrointestinal, or central nervous system infection; mucocutaneous herpes simplex virus infection with ulcers persisting more than a month or pulmonary, gastrointestinal, or disseminated infection; progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy; Kaposi's sarcoma; lymphoma limited to the brain.*

<sup>a</sup> “The Future and Functions of Art: A Conversation Between Alvin Toffler and John McHale,” originally published in *ARTnews* 72(2), February 1973. Reprinted in *LEONARDO*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1987, pp. 391-395]

The Denver Principles (1983)  
Statement of the PWA (People with AIDS) Self-Empowerment Movement

We condemn attempts to label us as 'victims,' a term which implies defeat, and we are only occasionally 'patients,' a term which implies passivity, helplessness, and dependence upon the care of others. We are 'People With AIDS.'

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL PEOPLE

1. Support us in our struggle against those who would fire us from our jobs, evict us from our homes, refuse to touch us or separate us from our loved ones, our community or our peers, since available evidence does not support the view that AIDS can be spread by casual, social contact.
2. Not scapegoat people with AIDS, blame us for the epidemic or generalize about our lifestyles.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH AIDS

1. Form caucuses to choose their own representatives, to deal with the media, to choose their own agenda and to plan their own strategies.
2. Be involved at every level of decision-making and specifically serve on the boards of directors of provider organizations.
3. Be included in all AIDS forums with equal credibility as other participants, to share their own experiences and knowledge.
4. Substitute low-risk sexual behaviors for those which could endanger themselves or their partners; we feel people with AIDS have an ethical responsibility to inform their potential sexual partners of their health status.

RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH AIDS

1. To as full and satisfying sexual and emotional lives as anyone else.
2. To quality medical treatment and quality social service provision without discrimination of any form including sexual orientation, gender, diagnosis, economic status or race.
3. To full explanations of all medical procedures and risks, to choose or refuse their treatment modalities, to refuse to participate in research without jeopardizing their treatment and to make informed decisions about their lives.
4. To privacy, to confidentiality of medical records, to human respect and to choose who their significant others are.
5. To die--and to LIVE--in dignity.

*Ultimately an indictment. Any analysis of AIDS has to be an indictment of the government.*  
Julie Ault

*What we're about is trying to be more specific in presenting how different kinds of representation have different purposes. A cultural model is also a political model.*  
Doug Ashford

Group Material strategically employs the terminologies of politics, the law, and other governing bodies for the purposes of their art, wielding "artistic license" to bring those bodies visibly and critically in the ring of cultural practice. *AIDS Timeline* presents a trajectory—of facts, figures, artifacts, and events—testifying to the purposeful (and by 1989 on the *Timeline*, irrefutable) inadequacy of the government's response to AIDS. Undermining the appearance of a linear progression over time, the *Timeline* also points to a failing holy modern marriage of scientific progress and political rationale as means for action or inaction (regarding matters of public health, the environment, technology)—and affirming against its fatalism in light of these failures, the right and the possibility to live with AIDS.

At the end of *AIDS Timeline*, in 1989, a work by Michael Jenkins, *June 30, 1986* (1989), looms large over the MATRIX Gallery. Red and white stripes, hand-painted acrylic on paper (nine by six feet), *June 30, 1986* has the impression and proportions of an American flag—hung vertically and upside down, but missing its stars and containing only nine stripes instead of thirteen. The title, *June 30, 1986*, is the date of a U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Bowers v. Hardwick*, which upheld a Georgia sodomy law criminalizing oral and anal sex between consenting adults in private. Denied a grand jury hearing after being charged with committing "that act" (as Justice White writes in the opinion of the Court) in the bedroom of his own home with another adult male, Michael Hardwick brought suit against Attorney General Bowers on the unconstitutionality of sodomy statutes which target gay men with the imminent threat of criminal charges and the invasion of privacy and property. Reflected in the nine stripes of *June 30, 1986* are the seats of the U.S. Supreme Court Justices and the five-to-four decision of the Bowers case: five red stripes of the majority (Chief Justice Warren E. Burger; Justices Byron White; Lewis F. Powell, Jr.; William H. Rehnquist; and Sandra Day O'Connor), and four white stripes of the dissenting (Justices Harry Blackmun; William J. Brennan; Thurgood Marshall; John Paul Stevens). The absence of the canton points to the inefficacy, or the absence, of governmental structures designed to enforce the constitutional rights of individuals, and the presiding power of nine people over state and federal jurisdiction.

In a draft of a press release faxed from the Whitney Museum to Group Material, which used the terms "artist's collective," someone had neatly circled the word "collective" and wrote above it "collaborative" instead. Collaborative has not yet been adopted as a noun by most. Collective, on the other hand, as a noun, suggests a position of unity among individuals, as a group. Collaborating, a verb, is a way of working, towards something, implying a means of agency. Collaborative suggests process, not entity.

Group Material's work was collaboratively produced and the social processes involved in its making are equally a part of its subject(s) and content(s). In this sense, the people of *AIDS Timeline*—the participating artists, collaborating organizations, research assistants, curators, journalists, and those who took part in engaging its public—are included in the history of *AIDS Timeline*, as an integral part of the work. Exhibitions produce ephemeral collections of experiences, voices, and histories from the culture and moment of their making.

The following collection of interview segments are drawn from much longer conversations that took place in the spring and summer of 2009. They form a new contribution to Group Material's archive, and reflect my desire to make history speak.

My deepest gratitude to Julie Ault for her trust and steadfast commitment to open and critical dialogue in the development of this project. I am grateful to all who took the time to participate in the interviews and reflect on their experiences of *AIDS Timeline*, and to Kristen Lubben for her editorial support in the process. A special thank you to: Doug Ashford for his enthusiasm; Michael Brenson for invaluable conversation; Mia Locks for consistent insight and feedback; and to my parents, Gene and Sueyun, for their incredible patience and support in my endeavors.

Bob Baldock 1609 Spruce Street Berkeley, Ca. 94709

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Director  
University Art Museum  
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1 December 1989

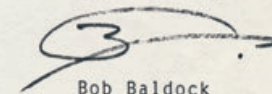
Dear (with apologies for not knowing the proper name)  
Director:

A simple note here to simply thank you for having the AIDS Timeline exhibition. It is startling to see this exhibition in the context of a museum that has for far too long appeared to be either indifferent to - or hostile to - contemporary social and political realities.

This exhibition is a great step toward Andre Malraux's idea of the truly creative, truly indispensable institution, the Museum Without Walls.

With very substantial gratitude,

Yours truly,



Bob Baldock

cc  
Larry  
Schubert  
12.8.89



# Behind the Timeline: Collected Histories

**Mike Glier**  
(participating artist: *White Male Power*, 1981,  
photo-litho prints)

In New York when AIDS was starting to erupt, I was sexually active with a variety of partners at a very bad time, and I was scared to death. It first started with guys reporting this immune deficiency, and there was no name to it. And I knew someone who died very early on, John Bernd, who had his own dance company. I was a waiter at the Spring Street bar and a waiter friend died, also very early on, and didn't know what it was, didn't know how it was communicated. And there was no test for it. So there was a lot of denial at first. Then fear. Then all that really nasty stuff, you know, "the gay disease," and making people feel guilty for their lifestyles and for their sexuality through this disease. There were these really complicated emotions—guilt being one of them—and trying to fight not to feel guilty.

When the Group Material thing came along it was such a healthy response. First of all, it was their typical way of looking at things somewhat dispassionately, organizing it in a sweep, and with a lot of different people and perspectives. *AIDS Timeline* had no guilt in it. And I think it was important in the art world to make AIDS a subject that you can just talk about and deal with rationally. Like all of their installations, I found it kind of bracing, and optimistic; like science is optimistic, and not full of gushy emotions.

Group Material was self-consciously taking Conceptualism forward into the political arena to address the issues of the day. In a way, they were working with the idea that Duchamp set up, where selection, just selecting the object, is a creative act. They'd pull stuff up that, isolated, might've been just this piece of crap, but they would contextualize it in such a way that this piece of crap suddenly was like— [laughs]. Group Material opened work up. It all became richer for the combinations that they created. I also think they unleashed a Pandora's box of evil: lots of people putting together work in ways that ended up feeling irresponsible.

I think it's from their heart and soul, because what they believe is that everybody has something to offer and so they could contextualize the work in such a way that you could see that. And it's a political position about a challenge to hierarchies. They were serious but they always had a great sense of humor, and at the end of the day, they had Dadaist spirit in them, so that they would set forth a thesis, and then often in the same show, they'd undercut their thesis in some way. And that was smart.

**Richard Meyer**  
(art history graduate student, *University of California, Berkeley*, 1989; intern for *AIDS Timeline*)

I was a second year graduate student, really excited to be working with contemporary artists. Group Material—Julie, Doug, Felix, Karen—were all incredibly welcoming. Which for me, as a student and as someone who had never worked on an exhibition before, was very inspiring. They took seriously engaging with AIDS in the Bay Area. Although there was a lot of anger and there was this total activist spirit behind the show, I felt that mostly what they wanted to do was get people thinking and talking about AIDS. I was also a member of ACT UP, which was very inspiring, and I always felt a bit like, Oh, you know, there's not that much room for dissent. With Group Material, which was a much smaller group, one could talk things through and debate the ways that the issues, or the crisis, might be represented in the show, and how it would be historicized on the *Timeline*.

I started as the intern, but from the beginning, because they had a pretty non-hierarchical working method, I felt like I was a participant. Sometimes it was more between the four of them and I was just an observer, but I also felt that they took my ideas really seriously. Their working method was a bit like mine; it was a process that unfolded in the moment. Leading up to the opening, it felt like we were cramming for final exams, not that different from how I deal with writing deadlines, or a semester, which is that there's research, but there's also a lot of casting about and fantasies of all the different forms it might take. It was really down to the wire. We all did different kinds of research, AIDS research, visual research. Then all this stuff was just hauled in to the space.

One of the things that was really useful to see—I don't think this is why they're called Group Material—but it really was a materialist process. At the time, I was worried: Is it going to look good? For some reason I was into the aesthetics. So I was like, is it just going to look like we ran around and got stuff from here and there and then threw it up on the wall?

Because I was trained as an art historian, the other thing I was interested in and concerned about was the moments where the art had a different notion of history than the *Timeline*. The art wasn't always keyed to the moment it was made. These aren't ideas I necessarily articulated at the time, but I wondered: What is your theory of history? On the one hand, the *Timeline* was functioning at the very specific level. There was medical information, scientific information, and activist and popular imagery, and all of that was keyed to the moment, whereas the art floated free. The way I see it now is that it's this really complicated notion of a visual and lived history where images don't have fixed representation. I think it's actually much more interesting as a project because it isn't exclusively documentary.

There was this whole question of: How are we going to do a timeline when we're not strictly interested in a documentary history? I think in retrospect, that it's instructive to have used what could seem like such a fundamental pedagogical device as a timeline, and to actually say, That's what the work is going to be: an exploded timeline, a sort of re-imagining. And it was important that the line was open. One of the things I was fixated on was that it [*AIDS Timeline*] was opening in 1989 and that it was going to go through to 1990, the next decade. That this idea of open-ended history would be embodied.

**Nayland Blake**  
(participating artist: *Future Shock*, 1989, books,  
plexiglass)

The thing about San Francisco at that point was that the art world and the gay world were utterly separate. Art was for the society people. The place I was working at, New Langton Arts, was this installation-based, artist-run nonprofit. I was trying to let people on the East Coast know that there's a bunch of queer artists in San Francisco—you know, the gay capital—and they're also dealing with all this stuff. The caché of Group Material being from New York brought the high end San Francisco art scene. I remember there being a lot of interest on the part of local artists. But some of that was double edged. Like: Oh, why aren't I in it?

Seeing *Future Shock* embedded in *AIDS Timeline*—in another artwork—was great. One of the things I always felt people didn't necessarily get about my work was the quality of overlapping narratives and stories. The artist who always meant a lot to me is Kathy Acker. And that intertextual quality is so amazing in her writing. So for me, it was great to see *Future Shock* functioning in that way. With *Future Shock*—for me as the maker of it—I mean, was I thinking about AIDS at that time? Yes. All the time. And none of the time. Because you were walking around thinking of it. In San Francisco, Gene, the guy who hired me at my first job died, David Cannon Dashiell was dying, people around you were dying. It was like you would see people, then you'd see them again and ... it was at the time when people would go really quickly. So you were always thinking about it; but I was not sitting down and going, I'm going to make a piece about AIDS.

A movie that's always been fascinating to me is John Carpenter's remake of *The Thing*. When you look at it today, you can't help but think it's an AIDS movie. A bunch of guys are isolated out in the arctic. They find this spaceship. They open it up, and there's an organism inside that invades the bloodstream and takes people over and mimics them. It's very gory and very paranoid. And there's only men. And then you look at the release date and it's '82. There was no way they could have explicitly made an AIDS movie at that date. So to me, it shows that the descriptive language for AIDS was already in place before the virus became well known. And that language was previously the language for describing homosexuality. Homosexuality used to be described as this thing that was mysteriously passed in the blood, that had a latency period, where you didn't know when it was going to pop up, and that it caused a kind of inevitable decay. All of that terminology around how AIDS was described as a system—to me, it's an adaptation. That language was chosen, in part, because people were already using it to describe homosexuals.

If you think about the 80s to the early 90s as the era of postmodernism, the hallmark of postmodernism is that meaning is made through the juxtaposition of fragments, as opposed to unified grand statements. And the juxtaposition of those fragments is good news, I think, for queer people because they never stood to gain from the previous state of the kind of grandeur of modernism. They were disenfranchised from that.

I think for Group Material, juxtaposition was not cynical: there was a real belief in social change. I don't think it was wild-eyed optimism that they thought that everything was going to be peaches and cream, but they genuinely felt there was a value in working this way that wasn't simply about recycling the same ideas of the art world.







**Stevan Evans**  
 (participating artist: *Selections from the Disco, Various BPM, 1979-1989, 1989, vinyl* text and wall panel)

I think Group Material helped to inform a whole generation of artists' practice because they were able to get people to dialogue about their projects very early on. That was really incredibly important. And that relates to ACT UP—the slogan was Silence Equals Death. A motivation for the *AIDS & Democracy*, 1988 show and the *AIDS Timeline* exhibitions was to establish this discourse about what was going on and not to hide it.

*AIDS Timeline* is Group Material's most directed show. In terms of the work, some of it I liked, some of it I didn't. But I thought it told a great, encompassing story. As a gay man who was also an artist, whose generation was living through that, and who was a member of ACT UP, I felt it was important for us to document and make our own history. That was likewise an impetus for Group Material and it was a valid history in that it was through their lens.

In 1988, Bill Arning organized a show at White Columns where I made a piece with late 80s disco songs as a kind of concrete poetry. It was called *Late Eighties Play List*. And Group Material collectively responded to that piece and wanted to include a similar work in *AIDS Timeline*. I grew up listening to disco, and that music was very much a part of the fabric in New York at the time. I'd done hours and hours of research looking at *Billboard* magazine from the 70s up to the present for all the dance and disco song titles and all the hits. So I offered this idea, and through conversation we decided that I would supply a song for every year of the timeline, and each song would correspond to the year where it would appear. The song titles are meant to insinuate themselves and, like the music, be a part of the whole.

There was a sense of community with the exhibitions, but it was also Group Material pursuing their curatorial vision; they were artists acting curatorially. There was a little bit of mystery about how they organized a show. How they decided upon their subject, how they decided upon what would be included. I always kind of pictured them sitting in a dark apartment, arguing with each other over what it would be for hours and hours on end.

**Tom Kalin**  
 (participating artist: *1968-1988, 1988, photo and text on adhesive paper, and They Are Lost to Vision Altogether, 1989, video; with Gran Fury, Untitled, in The Daily Californian newspaper, November, 10, 1989*)

I had done graduate studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and then I moved to New York in the summer of 1987 for the Whitney Independent Study Program. People in the New York art world were organizing and working collectively because there was a strong antagonist, Ronald Reagan. There was the Mudd Club and Danceteria and the Pyramid Club and other social vehicles that were super important. And people were horny. So that animated the art world and animated a lot of social things. There was a cultural world that required people's presence and interaction. And punk rock had happened. Punk was profoundly important in terms of demonstrating to people that you could do it, basically. So a lot of those things were in the soil, what little soil there was in the East Village.

I knew of Group Material as an art student, and I met Julie sometime within a year of coming to NY. Of everyone in Group Material I knew Felix the most. And you know, we were in the two communitarian organizations. So there was a particular sort of familiarity that often extended to other collectives. Most of us in Gran Fury understood how Group Material worked. They were thinking curatorially and archivally, and they were thinking in an omniscient and edited way. We were in the trenches. Gran Fury was about distilling things down to its kind of root, gut—you know, the language of the locker room, almost. Blunt, really direct, and street, and being engaged and simplifying. And that was our strength. I think that Group Material was engaged in a much more delicate, connected project, in terms of tools and techniques.

In both Gran Fury and Group Material, there was an instinct to list and catalog, in an unreflected way; to let the "facts" stand for themselves; to chart, to show the progression, without having to make a case, really; that was seen as a kind of just laying things out in a line and comparing them. And then letting the narrative that tied them together, the assumptions underneath it, emerge to the surface. That was around in ACT UP—the listing of how many deaths, like a chant, constantly. So there's something about that in the *Timeline* that was both very particular to Group Material's practice, because of the precision and the innovativeness, with all these things emerging, and a faceted portrait of time as this fluid thing. High and low culture and the flotsam and jetsam were all there, but the other stuff was there. That was very much part of their practice, but was also in the air. Group Material had the foresight to sort of wield that as a deeper form that could both connect all those things, make associations between things, and start to create, propose a narrative.

They were doing this thing that was about making a timeline, but there was a consciousness around the fact that the social gathering was part of the work. That social sculpture aspect was present in Group Material's work.

And again, you cannot underestimate the personal loathings and lusts that animated the moment, that made it memorable, and were subtext to everything. I mean, we were fighting for all these ideological things we believe in, but we also had a total crush on that person and wanted to be thought of well as we were dragged away at a protest or whatever, you know? So that was energizing but also doubly devastating when it got shattered or fractured.



**Robert Buck (formerly Robert Beck)**  
(participating artist: *Safer Sex Preview Booth*, 1989,  
mixed-media; with DIVA-TV, *Target City Hall*, 1989, video)

One channel in *Safer Sex Preview Booth* was for GMHC [Gay Men's Health Crisis] safe sex videotapes. One was for gay men, one was for lesbians and then there was one channel that was just guys and then girls jerking off. So it was even safer sex. The booth was designed for one person, probably four feet across by six feet deep by nine feet high, orange Formica. And there was a question, How can this be exhibited? How can it be contextualized? It was the height of the culture wars, so the museum was reorienting itself to serve two masters, as it were.

Just looking at images of *AIDS Timeline* is a reminder that it was such a lively time in terms of art making. It was like you were part of a wider constellation. Whatever you might be doing was not exclusive, not individuated, and was communicative in ways outside of just art making. And that the *Timeline* was there so that works that were being done could punctuate or could be included in it, was also why there was that feeling of some larger inclusion; that something was being recorded—recorded as it happened, and recorded for the community of makers.

With the *Timeline*, the radicality of making something that was so demonized as AIDS equivalent to a history was profound. It really was an alternative to mainstream television and the press, because it was like: we'll give you that, but we'll also give you X, Y, and Z. There was text, expository material, and voices from the mainstream and from inside, and so it was, in a very radical way: you the viewer decide. We're going to give you this information, and you synthesize it and you parse it.

One of the many things, for me, that made this project so interesting was that it was virtually alive. I mean, the *Timeline* could ostensibly continue, and now what it would have to include is itself. The other part of that would be to see what ACT UP and an exhibition like *AIDS Timeline* achieved fifteen years later. The question hovering would be, Well, who does define history and what does that look like from a historical vantage?

**Larry Rinder**  
(curator, *MATRIX Gallery, Berkeley Art Museum, 1989*)

There couldn't have been a more important subject to explore at that moment in Bay Area culture and society. AIDS was decimating the community and there was no end in sight. Finding a cure meant not only overcoming homophobia (and racism), but also taking on huge federal bureaucracies and gigantic drug companies. What Group Material showed, in part, was that there was room for many kinds of responses, from leaflets to Ross Bleckner's elegiac paintings.

I was quite familiar with Group Material's work, which I had seen in the mid-1980s when I was living in New York. I liked their approach because it took aspects of the current critical-intellectual currents and applied them to curatorial practice. Among the key issues at that time were considering how, or if, one could create work that stood outside of, or resisted, the mainstream power structures of patriarchy and capitalism. Their work used some fairly well-honed strategies to do this, including collaboration, radical juxtaposition, and ongoing dialogue. I found their combination of fine art and popular culture to be invigorating and I also respected the thematic foci of their projects, all of which seemed quite timely. While quite a bit of the art and exhibitions being made at that time took a removed, ironic stance (which often bordered on decadent, in my opinion, however "political" the implicit or explicit subject of the work may have been), Group Material's practice staked a claim for productive engagement. I found that to be encouraging and optimistic. The only road bump I can recall during the process of putting together *AIDS Timeline* involved my decision to go to the Director of the museum, Jackie Baas, to inform her that Robert Beck's video booth would include hardcore porn. Her response was that we needed to watch every minute of it. Which we did, for about six hours, in the museum's small screening room. When it was over, she turned to me and said, "Well, I don't see anything objectionable in that, do you?" And that was the end of it.

I did not play a "curatorial" role within the project. That is, I was not involved in the selection or placement of particular works. As I recall, I functioned basically as a producer, overseeing the budget and providing assistance in obtaining information, locating art works and other materials, and working as a liaison with other museum departments. There are many ways to be a curator.

**Sharon Siskin**  
(Artist-in-Residence, *Rest Stop Support Center, San Francisco and The Center for AIDS Services, Oakland*;  
Coordinator, *Positive Art Life Masks project*)

One day we were doing an art project at Rest Stop, which was a second-story flat that had been rented by a group of folks who were HIV positive and their friends, for people to come to just hang out and talk about drug therapies, or any kind of information that they wanted to share with each other—and Larry Rinder came in with Julie and Felix and Doug. I remember the Group Material people being really amazed by the look of Rest Stop. They kept saying, "Oh, this is so humane. It seems so not institutional." Anyway, they just talked to me for a while and talked to the artists and told us about *AIDS Timeline*, and we were pretty excited. They saw some of the projects we were doing, which were basically body casts—masks and other body part castings—related to the tradition of death masks, but we were calling them life masks. There was something really poignant about making these, because a lot of people didn't have places to live or they were going in and out of hospitals, and they left the masks at Rest Stop. We hung them on the wall. It was a way of keeping a record of people who came through the doors.

I loved the *AIDS Timeline* context for the masks—the mix of activism and education and contemporary media views and other artists' work. All of us with Positive Art were really excited to be involved. Also, I think *AIDS Timeline* and all the other things we were doing to get the work out in public was about AIDS education and AIDS activism—and that when you make the object, you put the object out in a public place in order to create a dialogue.

But I don't know if there's ever a really good understanding of community-based art, except from people who actually do it or actually research it. I remember reading Glen Helfand's review of *AIDS Timeline* in *Artweek* magazine, and having a reaction to his description of our work as not serious enough to review. I didn't want to show the review to anybody I worked with at Positive Art. I thought it was demeaning. So I wrote a letter in response: "I have to take issue with the term art therapy being used to describe the group of masks made by artists at Rest Stop and the Center and the sculpture by Barry Frederick, which are part of the *Timeline*. Rest Stop and the Center are both support service organizations for people living with AIDS or HIV. Many of those people are working artists. I am a California Arts Council artist-in-residence running a visual arts program for those two organizations. . . Artists who are living with AIDS have many of the same motives for making art as, quote, 'healthy' artists do. The fact that a person has AIDS does not turn the process of their art making into art therapy, nor does it make their artwork any less viable or less serious."

By the time the show ended up at the 1991 *Whitney Biennial*, a couple of artists who were originally from back east were so thrilled, and one of them who was healthy enough, Leonard Moore, took a train across the country and went to the opening. He was in total heaven. He was a longtime working artist in his mid-fifties or maybe close to sixty at the time. He had always had a day job as a janitor in a school, and it was his life-long dream to be in the *Whitney Biennial*, even if it was just one little mask.

When the masks went to New York it meant shipping all of them, and we didn't have any funding. And then I realized that it didn't have to be me doing all this and it was just all being taken care of by the museum. That was a pretty interesting part of the process—having local art movers come and treat the work as delicate, wonderful objects, wrapping it all up and building this really heavy-duty crate and them taking care of everything. Then having it come back to us in that way

and being able to un-package it. I think that sort of respect and honoring of the objects made everybody take themselves more seriously, as makers of objects, whether they were artists or not; and understand that their work was powerful and seen by lots of people.

I was able to go to the Whitney show because Larry invited me to be on a panel with Felix, Chuck Close, and Mary Kelly during the *Biennial*. And Felix told me something that really moved me. When Group Material was installing the work, he looked at the mask by Paul McKay, which had a lot of text on it on the outside. There was also text on the inside for whoever was going to install or handle it, which said something like, "One day, you will be holding this mask and I will be dead." And Felix said when he picked up that mask and read that, he just broke down and started crying. So I was able to go back and tell Paul that his work really moved Felix. And not long after that, Paul died. That's one of the masks that I didn't see again because Paul was one of the lucky ones who had a loving family, and his mom wanted to keep anything he had made. All his stuff adorned her home, and probably still does.



**John Lindell**  
 (participating artist, with Gran Fury: *All People With AIDS Are Innocent*, 1988; *Untitled*, in *The Daily Californian* newspaper, November, 10, 1989)

The *Art Against AIDS On The Road* project in 1988 [advertisements on the exterior of San Francisco buses] was the first time I was introduced to the idea of collaborating with Group Material. Group Material had remembered a project that Gran Fury did for "Nine Days of Activism." We did posters, eleven by fourteen inches, that were Xeroxed, and each of us kind of headed up a day. And that's when I made *All People With AIDS Are Innocent*, using the caduceus symbol. So Group Material asked if I'd be involved with them to remake the image as a bus poster. Gran Fury's position was that if anybody wants to take what we do, go right ahead. The bus poster was later shown in *AIDS Timeline*.

Because of the gay community being affected by AIDS, there were a lot of professional people involved, who were feeling disenfranchised for the first time. They had skills that they could bring to it in a way that was profitable to the movement. The moment was so alive with possibility for making change, but a lot of that seemed to fade by the early nineties. I want to say '93 was a critical moment. Neither ACT UP or Gran Fury could respond to the change in the playing field, which with Reagan and Bush, had been really very easy.

Group Material worked under the name of artists, but to me they were actually working as art historians and curators, and were unique in developing sort of a hybrid art/curatorial practice. And that was great to see because they could present information in a way that could wake people up or could stimulate some kind of debate. And certainly, I think the art world then was more about seeing information than it is now. Maybe they are a little bit didactic. Or a lot didactic. But that's kind of great. And there's a place for that.

**Glen Helfand**  
 (art critic, "Brave New Material" *San Francisco Weekly*, November 22, 1989, and "AIDS Reality Enters Art," *Artweek*, November 30, 1989)

Intersections of art and activism were blossoming as of the mid-1980s (projects like Border Arts Workshop, ACT UP, Gran Fury, Tim Rollins + K.O.S., etc.), many of them having a presence in the Bay Area. So a project like the *AIDS Timeline*, perhaps being a bit more didactic than other projects, wasn't difficult to approach as a critic (though I would term some of what I was doing as arts journalism—giving the project more public exposure).

The *AIDS Timeline* project stems from a critical position. I recall the controversy around Nicholas Nixon's photographs (which could perhaps be extended to other depictions like the film *Philadelphia*) and the whole idea of "victim art" that came to a head in the 1993 *Whitney Biennial* (which contained projects like Glenn Ligon's *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book*). I suppose what I find interesting is the internal critique—that the *Timeline* was as self-critical (or critical of the art context) as of the culture at large. From a current perspective it seems so quaintly partisan, but as noted, the issues were extremely powerful.

In hindsight, the idea that the project was created by a very invested party seems like the more important means of "critical proofing." At least from certain critical angles, that Felix was HIV positive and was a known member of the collective clearly shifts the ways in which the work could be seen. This issue has grown more complex in subsequent decades as artists have come to use science, technology, and various forms of information in their work. When should the artist be "trusted"?



**Andrea Miller-Keller**  
(curator, MATRIX Program, Wadsworth Atheneum,  
Hartford, Connecticut, 1990)

The program I ran was a small space on the first floor, meant to allow the museum to have a facility where you could do something on a short lead time. The shows were low budget, so you could get away with doing things that would get more scrutiny if I came to the museum with a grandiose plan. There was a kind of permission within that area, but not that anything goes. I talked to the director about *AIDS Timeline* and needed him to sign on. The Mapplethorpe show was right before it. And I remember I went to Patrick and described the project. And he shook his head and said, "We're not going to do two AIDS shows in a row." And I said, "I didn't think the Mapplethorpe was an AIDS show." [laughs] I was floored. But he came around.

Hartford was the insurance capital of the world at that point. And, I think it's fair to say that the status of the gay community is different twenty years later than at that time. It may be hard for you to imagine the discrimination and the secrecy that existed. Just to situate *AIDS Timeline* in a traditional art museum—it was a big deal to have that here.

What interested me most was Group Material's curatorial practice. I mean, that the exhibition was a work of art. Curatorial practice as a work of art.

**Edd Russo**  
(exhibition designer, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford,  
Connecticut, 1990)

I was one of the museum's exhibition designers at the time. So a lot of time was spent with Group Material figuring out how things were going to fit in. And generating labels, all the texts, photo blowups—you name it. Picking the paint colors, all that stuff.

The artists had a huge hand in placing things, which was good. Because if we had to do it on our own, we probably would've pulled our hair out because there were so many elements to it. Having them there was actually a relief. I wouldn't say that I was frustrated—but it was challenging and kind of exciting because up until it was completely done we really didn't have a sense of what the show would look like. Even though it was one room—it happened several times with MATRIX shows that people would say, "Well, it's only one room. Why is it taking so long?" And it's like, there's 200 things in there, you know? [laughter] It's still 200 things to hang up on the wall. And you have to do it with care and do it right—it's like a major exhibition. There was so much in it, so many different things, that I think people came back to visit on more than one occasion.

People I knew who were not art fans necessarily, or big museum-goers, were talking about it and coming. Because it was such a current thing and everybody knew somebody that was affected. So I think people in the community were kind of revved up that it was happening here, because we didn't usually get that kind of thing. I think it had a huge impact on the local community. And that was gratifying.

**Patrick O'Connell**  
(director, Visual AIDS, 1990)

Because of my history with the National Association of Artists' Organizations, I was one of the founders of the National Campaign for Freedom of Expression and was involved in the Finley versus the NEA lawsuit that went all the way up to the Supreme Court. Around the same time, Susan [Wyatt at Artists Space] gets Nan [Goldin] to do an exhibition to coincide with the first Day Without Art, in 1989, *Witnesses Against Our Vanishing*. The NEA wants to yank the money. And then it just spiraled: there was the incident with the Corcoran canceling their Mapplethorpe show, there was Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ*.

Basically you weren't allowed to be queer. The NEA tried to slap a decency clause on our contract at Artists Space—you can't show this, this, and this, and they starting listing these things, which of course was what we were showing. But for seven years, the government kept losing at every level, because the NEA charter specifically, as written, stated, "no content restrictions." By the time the Supreme Court ruled against us, without reading the letter of the law, they had gutted the NEA and there were no longer grants for individual artists.

We didn't know exactly what form the project would take at first, but we knew we wanted to work with the art publications to do a project for Day Without Art. So we first approached people like Betsy Baker at *Art in America* and Knight Landesman at *Artforum*. It's tricky to get the editors of nine to twelve art publications to agree to do something jointly. And I bet you it was Tom Sokolowski who cast around and thought, Well, hey, wait a second. You know, maybe we could do this with Group Material. Everyone agreed. The editors and publishers of the art publications agreed, which really, in retrospect, was more anticipated worry than difficulty. They wanted to do something. They were not out of touch with what was going on, and they had personal concerns and understood how to use their machinery to address it.

The print version of *AIDS Timeline*, published in 1990, documents the arc of a pandemic and government indifference; the emerging corporate greed; the public ignorance, some of it willful, some of it not; and does it in a way that invites the viewer into the experience and leads them through, and trusts them to understand what was happening. Our projects at Visual AIDS were not about finger pointing. The success of something like the Ribbon Project was that it's an extension of an open hand inviting a broader participation in the public discourse and the dialogue. And you can't just do that, you have to do these in-your-face demands, also. And something like the *Timeline* successfully straddles both strategies. It makes public the personal, and invites more people into that experience. It stands and succeeds as an artwork and not just of-the-moment polemic.

Group Material worked very closely with my partner at the time, Jimmy [Morrow]—or Jimmy worked very closely with them—refashioning, retooling, reediting the *Timeline* to create it in magazine format. You know, it's like, Why would this part work? And if you make something that works across a room, large, it's not necessarily going to work as effectively small, in print, as you go from publication to publication. And one would think you could come back from those meetings with like a headache. But no. He just kept getting more and more excited over it. And was like, "Oh, yes. I've been dubbed a member of Group Material. We. We. We." Well, you see, there's the brilliance; the willingness to share "we."

I'm an artist/art-worker interrupted. AIDS happened to us, and we had no choice but to stop and take note. We could not

ignore it in our professional or personal lives. If you choose to take your practice and rethink it because you have no choice, to create something that's important but will not individually benefit you—and that all of us were willing to stop the rest of our lives to do these things? That's amazing.

Interviews conducted May–July 2009.



This fragment of Group Material's AIDS TIMELINE is presented as a collaborative project for DAY WITHOUT ART 1990 by Visual AIDS and the following publications in their December issues: *Afterimage*, *Art & Auction*, *Art in America*, *Art New England*, *Artforum*, *Arts*, *Contemporanea*, *High Performance*, *October*, *Parkett*, and *Shift*.

ACT UP demonstrators interrupt trading on the New York Stock Exchange for 4½ minutes. The demonstrators call for traders to sell Burroughs Wellcome stock because the drug company profiteers from the AIDS crisis. Simultaneous protests occur in New York, London and San Francisco. Shortly thereafter Burroughs Wellcome lowers the price of AZT (the only federally approved drug that slows the replication of HIV) by 20%.

Mitglieder der Vereinigung ACT UP unterbrechen während viereinhalb Minuten den Handel an der New Yorker Börse. Die Demonstranten fordern die Wertpapierhändler auf, die Aktien von Burroughs Wellcome zu verkaufen, da dieses Pharmaunternehmen mit der AIDS-Krise Wuchergeschäfte betreibt. Gleichzeitig kommt es auch in New York, London und San Francisco zu Protesten. Kurz danach senkt Burroughs Wellcome den Preis für AZT um 20% (das einzige staatlich anerkannte Arzneimittel, das die Ausbreitung des HIV-Virus verlangsamt).

The Centers for Disease Control reports over 100,000 Americans have developed AIDS; almost 60,000 have died. The Public Health Service estimates 1 to 1.5 million Americans are HIV infected.

Die Centers for Disease Control berichten, dass die Zahl der unter Amerikanern aufgetretenen AIDS-Fälle bereits bei über 100 000 liegt; beinahe 60 000 Personen sind an AIDS gestorben. Der staatliche Gesundheitsdienst schätzt, dass zwischen 1 und 1,5 Millionen Amerikaner HIV-infiziert sind.

1990



Dieser Auszug aus Group Material's AIDS Timeline wird als Gemeinschaftsprojekt für DAY WITHOUT ART (Tag ohne Kunst) 1990 von Visual AIDS und den folgenden Publikationen in ihren Dezember-Ausgaben abgedruckt: *Afterimage*, *Art & Auction*, *Art in America*, *Art New England*, *Artforum*, *Arts*, *Contemporanea*, *High Performance*, *October*, *Parkett* und *Shift*.

"Optimistically, AIDS will push this country into getting universal health insurance." Dr. Stephen Joseph, New York City Commissioner of Health.

«Optimistisch betrachtet, wird AIDS unser Land dazu bringen, eine Krankenversicherung für alle einzuführen», sagt Dr. Stephen Joseph, City Commissioner of Health in New York.

This year the Office of Management and Budget plans to zero out funding for 63 federal and state AIDS prevention programs. President Bush wants to eliminate home health services and AIDS drug reimbursement programs.

Das Office of Management and Budget sieht in diesem Jahr vor, 63 gesamt- und einzelstaatliche AIDS-Präventivprogramme nicht mehr zu finanzieren. Präsident Bush will die medizinische Betreuung zu Hause und die Programme für eine Rückvergütung für AIDS-Medikamente abschaffen.



South Carolina passes a law requiring the reporting of HIV+ people. The number of HIV test requests has dropped 40% since this state has implemented the law requiring disclosure and contact tracing.

South Carolina verabschiedet ein Gesetz, nach dem HIV-positive Personen gemeldet werden müssen. Seit dieser Staat ein Gesetz erlassen hat, das die Entschlüsselung und Umgebungsuntersuchung vorschreibt, wurden 40% weniger HIV-Tests durchgeführt.

The House Defense Appropriations Committee now estimates that the cost of a single B-2 bomber has increased from \$500 million to an estimated \$890 million.

Nach Schätzung des House Defense Appropriation Committee haben sich die Kosten eines einzigen B-2-Bombers nun von 500 Millionen US-Dollar auf voraussichtlich 890 Millionen Dollar erhöht.

Fetal tissue research, thought to be effective in reconstructing the immune system, is banned in the U.S. due to controversy over obtaining fetal tissue from abortions.

Die Forschung an fötalem Gewebe, der man in bezug auf die Wiederherstellung des Immunsystems Bedeutung beimisst, wird in den USA aufgrund der Kontroverse um die Gewinnung von fötalem Gewebe aus Abtreibungen verboten.

The Names Project Quilt is displayed in Washington, DC on the weekend of October 6th. This is the last time it will be seen in its entirety due to its massive scale. The quilt weighs 13 tons, and is made up of 10,900 panels—each one measuring 6' x 3' and representing 6 American AIDS deaths. President Bush does not attend.

Die Names Project Quilt wird am Wochenende vom 6. Oktober in Washington entfaltet. Wegen ihrer gewaltigen Größe ist dies das letzte Mal, dass die Decke ganz zu sehen sein wird. Sie wiegt 13 Tonnen und besteht aus 10 900 Stofffeldern, von denen jedes ca. 1,5 x 0,75 m misst und sechs amerikanische AIDS-Tote darstellt. Präsident Bush wird nicht anwesend sein.

The 6th International Conference on AIDS is boycotted by many AIDS organizations, medical professionals and others, due to the discrimination of the United States immigration policy which bars people with HIV infection from entering the country.

Viele AIDS-Organisationen, Ärzte usw. boykottieren die 6. Internationale AIDS-Konferenz aufgrund der diskriminierenden Einwanderungspolitik der Vereinigten Staaten, die HIV-infizierten Personen die Einreise ins Land untersagt.

Masks: Members of the Rest Stop Support Center, San Francisco Photography: Ben Blackwell Art Direction: James Morrow



# Exhibition History

Researched and prepared by  
Elizabeth Zechella.

## **Inaugural Exhibition October 4-27, 1980**

**Group Material,**  
**244 E. 13th Street, New York**  
Conrad Atkinson, George Ault, Julie Ault, Patrick Brennan, Liliana Dones, Yolanda Hawkins, Margia Kramer, Michael Lebron, Mundy McLaughlin, Tim Rollins, Klaus Staeck, and anonymous works collected from the streets of the Lower East Side.

## **The Salon of Election '80 November 4-11, 1980**

**Group Material,**  
**244 E. 13th Street, New York**  
Respondents to an open call (names unavailable).

## **ALIENATION**

**November 22-December 21, 1980**

**Group Material,**  
**244 E. 13th Street, New York**  
Julie Ault, Randolph Black, Patrick Brennan, Manuel DeLanda, Victor Ginzburg, Candace Hill-Montgomery, Valerie Hostetler, Susan Katz, Tom Koken, Joseph Kosuth, Dennis Martinez, Craig Massey, Bertell Ollman, Rachel Reichman, Tim Rollins, Ann Marie Rousseau, Michael Udvardy.

Film program: *Harmful or Fatal if Swallowed* and *Ismism*, Manuel DeLanda; *Hurricane David*, Victor Ginzburg; *A Child's Introduction to the Wonders of Space and In the Twilight*, Rachel Reichman; *Frankenstein*, James Whale.

## **The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)**

**January 10-February 1, 1981**

**Group Material,**  
**244 E. 13th Street, New York**  
Residents of East 13th Street between 2nd and 3rd Avenues (names unavailable).

## **It's A Gender Show!**

**February 14-March 9, 1981**

**Group Material,**  
**244 E. 13th Street, New York**  
Julie Ault, Paul Best, Dara Birnbaum, Ronnie Carson, Helen DeMichiel, Carol Friedman, Vanalyne Green, Esther Grillo, Michael Harwood, Karen Hatch, Jenny Holzer, Lyn Hughes, Glenda Hydler, Daniel Josephs, Kay Kenny, Suzanne Kessler, Dave King, Jim Krell, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine, Frank Majore, Micki McGee, Wendy McKenna, Mundy McLaughlin, Peter Nadin, Adrian Piper, Tony Ramos, Shelly Silver, Laurie Simmons, Jean-Claude Vasseux, Julie Wachtel, Glenda Wharton, and others.

Video program: *Incontinence*, Manuel DeLanda; *Cool Hands, Warm Heart* and *Scar Tissue*, Su Friedrich; *Obscenity*, David Lee; *Argument*, Andrew Tyndall and Anthony McCall; sex education films.

## **Revoltin' Music**

**March 7, 1981**

**The Machinists' Union Hall,  
7 E. 15th Street, New York**

Abba, The Beatles, The Bee Gees, Chuck Berry, Booker T and the MG's, David Bowie, Brother to Brother, The Brothers Johnson,

Chuck Brown and the Soul Searchers, James Brown, Ruth Brown, Johnny Cash, Ray Charles, Chic, The Clash, Merry Clayton, Sam Cooke, Alice Cooper, The Crystals, Miles Davis, Desmond Decker, Fats Domino, Bob Dylan, Marianne Faithfull, Aretha Franklin, The Bobby Fuller Four, Marvin Gaye, Gonzales, Dobie Gray, Al Green, Jimi Hendrix, The Impressions, The Isley Brothers, The Jacksons, Etta James, David Johansen, Dr. John, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Kool and the Gang, Patti Labelle, The Last Poets, John Lennon, Little Richard, Carrie Lucas, Loretta Lynn, Bob Marley and the Wailers, Martha and the Vandellas, Mighty Sparrow, Stephanie Mills, The Monkees, Jackie Moore, Tony Morgan, New York Dolls, Yoko Ono, Parliament, Wilson Pickett, The Pointer Sisters, Elvis Presley, Bonnie Raitt, Ramones, Otis Redding, Martha Reeves, The Richie Family, Jeannie C. Riley, The Rolling Stones, Rose Royce, Roxy Music, Mitch Ryder, The Selector, The Sex Pistols, Shirley and Co., Sister Janet, Sly and the Family Stone, Bill Sommers, The Staple Singers, Stargard, Edwin Starr, Steppenwolf, Barrett Strong, The Sugarhill Gang, Donna Summer, The Supremes, Sweet T., Talking Heads, Temptations, Joe Tex, Toots and the Maytals, Joe Turner, Johnny Guitar Watson, Stevie Wonder, The Village People, Voices of East Harlem, Betty Wright, X-Ray Spex, The Young Rascals.

## **Consumption: Metaphor, Pastime, Necessity**

**March 21-April 20, 1981**

**Group Material,**  
**244 E. 13th Street, New York**  
Bill Allen, Julie Ault, Randolph Black, Robert Bordo, Patrick Brennan, Moira Dryer, Mike Glier, Karen Hatch, Lyn Hughes, Sally LeLong, Barbara Lipp, Micki McGee, Mundy McLaughlin, Gary Morgan, Andrew Nash, Mattie Peoples, Anne Pitrone, Tim Rollins, Christy Rupp, Juan Sanchez, Greg Sholette, Gregg Smith, Bill Stephens, Cathy Thomson, Michael Udvardy, Mierle Laderman Ukeles.

## **Facere / Fascis**

**May 2-June 4, 1981**

**Group Material,**  
**244 E. 13th Street, New York**  
Julie Ault, Stephen Blos, Patrick Brennan, Mary Cooper, Liliana Dones, Linda Herritt, Linda Hughes, Katie Kay, Mundy McLaughlin, April Palmieri, Linda Pit, Jonathon Quinn, Joel Resnicoff, Tim Rollins, Andres Serrano, Sody Sisco, Gregg Smith, Michael Udvardy, Chris Zeller, Kristine Zounek.

## **Atlanta: An Emergency Exhibition**

**June 14-30, 1981**

**Group Material,**  
**244 E. 13th Street, New York**  
Jules Allen, Candace Hill-Montgomery, Jerry Kearns, Madame Birth Graphics Collective, Micki McGee, Mundy McLaughlin, Mattie Peoples, Howardina Pindell, Faith Ringgold, Tim Rollins with thirty-five children from Harlem and the Lower East Side.

### **Eat This Show**

**July 11, 1981**

#### **Group Material,**

**244 E. 13th Street, New York**  
Lower East Side artists, residents, and Group Material members (names unavailable).

### **Enthusiasm!**

**October 31–November 28, 1981**

#### **Group Material Headquarters,**

**132 E. 26th Street, New York**

Julie Ault, John Fekner, Don Leicht, Yolanda Hawkins, Candace Hill-Montgomery, Dorothy Kohn (Dottie the K), Mundy McLaughlin, Paulette Nenner, Brian Mdr O'Boaighil, Anne Pitrone, Tim Rollins, Juan Sanchez, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Anton van Dalen.

### **M5**

**December 10, 1981–January 10, 1982**

#### **Interior bus advertisements**

##### **Fifth Avenue bus lines, New York**

Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Thomas Bassmann, Michael Bidlo, Kim DePole, Louis Forgione, Angela Fremont, Vanalyne Green, Yolanda Hawkins, Candace Hill-Montgomery, Jenny Holzer, Don Leicht, Louis Laurita, Silvia Kolbowski, Marjory Mailman, Mundy McLaughlin, Tom Mellins, Paulette Nenner, Herbert Perr, Juan Sanchez, Greg Sholette, Shelly Silver, Tony Silvestrini, Luis Stand, Michael Transue, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Julie Wachtel, Irving Wexler, Anton van Dalen, Rhonda Zwilling.

### **DAZI BAOS**

**Installed on April 16, 1982**

#### **Former S. Klein building,**

**14th Street and Park Avenue South,**

**Union Square, New York**

Accounting supervisor, bum, CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador), Group Material, Home Health Care Workers Union, housewife, National Prison Reform Board, New York State Division of Substance Abuse, office worker, Planned Parenthood, receptionist, unemployed.

### **Works on Newspaper**

**March 25–May 1, 1982**

#### **Group Material Headquarters,**

**132 E. 26th Street, New York**

Doug Ashford, Candace Hill-Montgomery, Brian Goldfarb, Anne Pitrone, Tim Rollins, Christy Rupp, Seth Tobocman.

### **Primer (for Raymond Williams)**

**May 29–July 17, 1982**

#### **Artists Space,**

**105 Hudson Street, New York**

##### **Commissioning curator: Valerie Smith**

Mario Asaro, Doug Ashford, Conrad Atkinson, Julie Ault, photograph of Che Guevara taken after his death, Adalberto Badillo, James Brown album covers, Dawn of the Dead movie poster, El Lissitzky reproduction, FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) scarfs, Futura 2000, Jean-Luc Godard film still, Yolanda Hawkins, Margaret Harrison, Sharon Hunt, Dorothy Kohn (Dottie the K), magazine interview with Chaka Kahn, Micki McGee, Mundy

McLaughlin, Joseph Nechvatal, Paulette Nenner, Brian Mdr O'Boaighil, Tim Rollins and six children from the South Bronx, Dr. Seuss book, Solidarity t-shirt, 1968 Summer Olympics news photo, and others.

### **Luchar: An Exhibition for the People of Central America**

**June 19–July 9, 1982**

#### **Taller Latinoamericano/**

**The Latin American Workshop, Inc.,**

**19 W. 21st Street, New York**

Jon Agee, Bolivar Arellano, Mario Asaro, Doug Ashford, Conrad Atkinson, Julie Ault, Dorgenes Balestar, Tom Bassmann, Angelo Bellfatto, Maggie Block, Josely Carvalho, Casa Nicaragua, The Clash, Eva Cockcroft, Sue Coe, Raphael Colon Morales, CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador), Daniel Flores y Ascencio, Future 2000, Bobby G. Victoria Garcia, Mike Glier, Leon Golub, Joss Gonzalez, Keith Kearns, Janet Koenig, Louis Laurita, Tom Lawson, Lucy R. Lippard, Mark Lutwak, Vilma Maldonado, José Manco, Micki McGee, Mundy McLaughlin, Susan Meiselas, Camillo Minero, Jorge Morales, Nicaragua Libre, Nicaraguan Ministry of Culture, OSPAAAL (Organization of Solidarity of the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America), Hernand Osorio, Catalina Parra, Herb Perr and Irving Wexler, Tim Rollins, Martha Rosler, Christy Rupp, Juan Sanchez, Nancy Spero, Klaus Staeck, Mercedes Tejada, Maria Theresza Alves, Anton van Dalen, and others.

### **Revolutionary Fine Arts**

**April 14, 1982**

#### **Taller Latinoamericano,**

**19 W. 21st Street, New York**

Bolivar Arellano, Doug Ashford, Conrad Atkinson, Julie Ault, Casa Nicaragua, CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador), Rev. Howard Finster, Mike Glier, Candace Hill-Montgomery, Jerry Kearns, Thomas Lawson, Nancy Linn, Micki McGee, Mundy McLaughlin, Anne Pitrone, Tony Rickaby, RAM (Redistribute America Movement), Tim Rollins and twenty-five kids from the South Bronx, Tony Silvestrini, Klaus Staeck, Anton van Dalen, Julie Wachtel, and others.

### **Subculture**

**September 1–30, 1983**

#### **Interior advertisements, IRT subway**

**trains, New York. Concurrent exhibition**

**held at Taller Latinoamericano,**

**19 W. 21st Street, New York**

Vito Acconci, Dennis Adams, William Allen, Michael Anderson, Ida Applebroog, Mario Asaro, Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Thomas Bassmann, Olivia Beens, Joseph Beuys, Chris Bratton, Andrea Callard, John Calvelli, Carlo Cesta, Chris Chevins, Chico, Day Gleeson and Dennis Thomas, Amanda Church, Ellen Cooper, Merrie Dee, Ian DeGruchy, Jimmy DeSana, Johana Drucker and Stephen Rodefer, Brigitte Elgler, Sean Elwood, Andrea Evans, John Fekner and Don Leicht, Sean Flynn, Mathew Geller,

Arne Gilbert, Marsha Ginsberg and Dorothy Low, Brian Goldfarb and Garrett Kelleberg, Felix Gonzalez, Vanalyne Green, Mimi Gross, Ruth Guardine, Marina Gutierrez, Marianne Gunther, Richard Hackel, Richard Hambleton, Yolanda Hawkins, Suzanne Hellmuth and Jack Reynolds, Lyn Hughes, Malachi Jackson, Bob Jones, Christof Kohlhofer, Dorothy Kohn, Komar and Melamid, Barbara Kruger, Sarafina Landgrebe, Rae Langsten and Herb Perr, Louis Laurita, Tom Lawson, Marjory Mailman, Dona Ann McAdams, Patrick McGraw, Maureen McKeon, Mundy McLaughlin, Brad Melamed, Peter Melville, Ann Messner, Beverly Naidus, Joseph Nechvatal, Bill Neiderkorn, Lisa Neighbour, Vera Nemec, Paulette Nenner, Aric Obrosoy, Saul Ostrow, Carol Parkinson, Cara Perlmán, Cheryl Petyerka, Brian Piersol, Jim Raglione, Harvey Redding, Roy Rogers and Tim Rollins, Erika Rothenberg, Score, Juan Sanchez, Andres Serrano, Greg Sholette, Dena Shottenkirk, Shelly Silver, Tony Silvestrini, Teri Slotkin, Kiki Smith, Paul Smith, Seton Smith, Luis Stand, Anita Steckel, Stephano, Haim Steinbach, Mindy Stevenson, Seth Tobocman, Michael Transue, Penny Umbrico, Julius Valiunas, Robin Van Arsdol, Julie Wachtel, Tom Warren, John Weber, David Wells, Barbara Westermann, Roberta Williams.

### **Timeline: A Chronicle of U.S. Intervention in Central and Latin America**

**January 22–March 18, 1984**

#### **For Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America**

**at P.S.1, New York**

##### **Commissioning curator: Alanna Heiss**

Bill Allen, Ida Applebroog, Bolivar Arellano, *New York Times* advertisement by Artists Call, Doug Ashford, Conrad Atkinson, Julie Ault, Adalberto Badillo, Tom Bassmann, Robert Berlind, Chiquita bananas, CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador), Casa Nicaragua, Sue Coe, copper sheeting, cotton, news photo of Roberto D'Aubuisson, Honore Daumier, Öyvind Fahlström, FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) scarf, FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) banner, Arne Gilbert, Mike Glier, Felix Gonzalez, Michael John Gonzalez, ground coffee, John Heartfield, Candace Hill-Montgomery, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Louis Laurita, Mundy McLaughlin, Susan Meiselas, Ann Messner, Tina Modotti, Paulette Nenner, newspaper articles, Richard Prince, Faith Ringgold, Diego Rivera, Tim Rollins, silkscreen prints of Archbishop Oscar Romero, Martha Rosler, Warren Ser, Andres Serrano, Tony Silvestrini, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Nancy Spero, Klaus Staeck, Haim Steinbach, tobacco leaves, Anton van Dalen, Julie Wachtel, David Wells, Barbara Westermann.

Soundtrack: Hans Werner Henze, Victor Jara, Frederic Rzewski.

### **A.D.: Christian Influence in Contemporary Culture**

**January 11–February 8, 1985**

**Work, 345 E. 12th Street, New York**

William Allen, Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Michael Byron, Stefano Castronovo, Ronnie Cutrone, Sam Doyle, Buckminster Fuller, Rev. Howard Finster, Juliann Krobott, Louis Laurita, Mundy McLaughlin, Nancy Linn, Ellen Quinn, Tim Rollins and José Carlos, Andres Serrano, Nancy Spero, Klaus Staek, Michael Tracy, Anton van Dalen, Sister Gertrude White, and others.

### **Americana**

**March 21–June 9, 1985**

#### **1985 Whitney Biennial,**

**lobby gallery, Whitney Museum**

##### **of American Art, New York**

##### **Commissioning curator: Lisa Phillips**

John Ahearn, All laundry detergent, Almost Home cookies, American custard mix, Americana landscape paintings made in Mexico, Arnold bread, Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Alan Belcher, Harvey Blechman, Bold laundry detergent, Chear laundry detergent, Marshall Collins, Contact wall paper, Henry Darger, Dash laundry detergent, Jane Dickson, Sam Doyle, eagle-themed clock, Fab laundry detergent, Larry Fink, Rev. Howard Finster, Eric Fischl, General Electric can openers, Mike Glier, Leon Golub, Edgar Heap of Birds, Suzanne Hellmuth and Jock Reynolds, Candace Hill-Montgomery, photo of Thomas Jefferson memorial, Neil Jenney, Jerry Kearns, Kellogg's Cereal Variety Pack, Kleenex tissues, Barbara Kruger, Tseng Kwong-Chi, Lady Pink, Tom Lawson, Sherrie Levine, Peter Max, Maytag washer and dryer, Allan McCollum, Mundy McLaughlin, John Miller, Mr. Coffee coffee machine, Peter Nagy, Joseph Nechvatal, Leroy Neiman, New Freedom feminine napkins, Claes Oldenburg and Coosje Van Bruggen, Osterizer blender, Saul Ostrow, Pepperidge Farm bread, Richard Price, Lee Quinones, Faith Ringgold, James Rivera, Norman Rockwell plates, Tim Rollins + K.O.S., Christy Rupp, Juan Sanchez, Fritz Scholder, Andres Serrano, Laurie Simmons, Nancy Spero, Stay Free feminine napkins, Joel Sternfeld, Tide laundry detergent, Rigoberto Torres, Total cereal, TV Guide, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Anton van Dalen, Julie Wachtel, Andy Warhol, Woman's Day, Wonder Bread, Martin Wong, 35mm slide of Andrew Wyeth painting, Jamie Wyeth, Zenith console television set.

Soundtrack: "Lilacs," Carl Ruggles; "Mind Your Own Business," Hank Williams; "Gotas de Lluvia," El Gran Combo; "The Stripper," David Rose; "You're Blind," Run DMC; "The Ballad of Jed Clampett," Flatt & Scruggs; "The Payback," James Brown; "Old Folks Gathering," Charles Yvett; "I Don't Wanna Play House," Tammy Wynette; "Jump Call," Benny Carter; "We're Not Going To Take It," Twisted Sister; "It's Gonna Rain," O'Neal Brothers; "The Devil Gets His Dues," Loretta Lynn; "This Land Is Your Land," Woody Guthrie.

### **Democracy Wall**

**April 27–May 25, 1985**

#### **Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, Wales**

##### **Commissioning curator: Philip Sky**

Family Planning Association, Ellen Sullivan, housewife, National Cleansing Campaign, Kevin Dyer, actor; Alcoholics Anonymous;

Janet Taylor, civil servant; The National Front; Sean Bury, unemployed teacher; Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; Robert Turner, retired post office engineer.

### **MASS**

**1985: Hallwalls, Buffalo, NY, May 10–June 8;**

**Spaces, Cleveland, OH, July 5–26**

**1986: Aljira Arts, Newark, NJ, February 14–**

**March 15; Project gallery, The New Museum**

**of Contemporary Art, New York, April**

**12–June 12; Los Angeles Contemporary**

**Exhibitions (LACE), August 1–31; Artspace,**

**Sydney, Australia, October 1–18; Visual**

**Arts Building, University of Texas at Dallas,**

**November 24–December 12**

**1990: The Decade Show, The Studio**

**Museum in Harlem, New York, May 18–**

**August 19**

Safiya Abdulah, Dennis Adams, Alice Albert, Bill Allen, Ida Applebroog, Mario Asaro, Doug Ashford, Conrad Atkinson, Julie Ault, Todd Lindsteen Ayong, Tom Bassmann, Alan Belcher, Angelo Bellfatto, Ellen Berkenblit, Randy Black, Harvey Blechman, Jennifer Bolande, Barbara Broughel, Peter Burgess, Michael Byron, Josely Carvalho, Carlo Cesta, Keith Christenson, Amanda Church, Eva Cockcroft, Marshall Collins, Michael Coulter, Judith Croce, Greg Davidek, Vincent Desiderio, Jessica Diamond, Jane Dickson, Gary Dodson, Anne Doran, Eric Drooker, Richard Dunn, Elders Share the Arts, Barbara Ess, Andrea Evans, Sean Flynn, Matthew Geller, Arne Gilbert, Marsha Ginsberg, Mike Glier, Leon Golub, Joss Gonzalez, Felix Gonzalez, Penelope Goodfriend, Robert Gordian, Grace Grape-Pillard, Vanalyne Green, Howard Halle, Yolanda Hawkins, Edgar Heap of Birds, Suzanne Hellmuth and Jock Reynolds, Candace Hill, Jenny Holzer, Peter Hopkins, Becky Howland, Shedrack Jones, Anne Katz, Jerry Kearns, Janet Koenig, Tom Koken, Brabara Kruger, Charles Lahti, Rae Langston and Herb Perr, Louis Laurita, Greg Lawrence, Tom Lawson, Don Leicht, Daniel Levine, Richard Limber, Barbara Lipp, Patrice Lorenze, Majory Mailman, Master Alomar, Dona Ann McAdams, Allan McCollum, Micki McGee, Mundy McLaughlin, Betsy McLindon, Brad Melamed, Ann Messner, Susan Morgan, Lillian Mulero, Peter Nagy, Joe Nechvatal, Lisa Neighbour, William Niederkorn, Aric Obrosoy, Peter Oertwig, Mike Osterhaut, Saul Ostrow, Franc Palaia, April Palmieri, A. M. Paterson, R. Polumbo, Houston Powell, Ellen Quinn, RAM (Redistribute America Movement), Bill Radawec, Keith Rambert, David Robbins, Roy Rogers, Tim Rollins Ukeles, Tammy Wynette; "Jump Call," Benny Carter; "We're Not Going To Take It," Twisted Sister; "It's Gonna Rain," O'Neal Brothers; "The Devil Gets His Dues," Loretta Lynn; "This Land Is Your Land," Woody Guthrie.

### **Messages to Washington**

**September 1–October 12, 1985**

#### **Washington Project for the Arts,**

**Washington, DC**

##### **Commissioning curator: Jock Reynolds**

Items sent from people around the country in response to newspaper advertisements placed by Group Material (names unavailable); artifacts selected by Group Material; Mike Glier; Edgar Heap of Birds; Steve Jones; Dorothy Kohn (Dottie the K); Christy Rupp.

### **Alarm Clock**

**November 7–December 19, 1985**

#### **The Other America,**

**Royal Festival Hall, London**

##### **Commissioning curator: Margaret Harrison**

Alarm clocks made in Yugoslavia and China, Doug Ashford, Rudolf Barank, *The Professional Image* by Susan Baxter, bumper sticker, coffee mug, Mike Glier, Leon Golub, Margaret Harrison, Candace Hill-Montgomery, Jenny Holzer, Sherrie Levine, Fred Londier, manager door sign, office flyers, office memo Post-it pads, Tim Rollins and John Mendoza, Christy Rupp, Nancy Spero, Bruce Springsteen "Born in the USA" poster, May Stevens, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Anton van Dalen, Westclox alarm clocks made in America.

### **Liberty & Justice**

**February 22–March 22, 1986**

#### **Alternative Museum,**

**17 White Street, New York**

##### **Organized with the Alternative Museum**

##### **Commissioning curator: Geno Rodriguez**

Dennis Adams, Ida Applebroog, Doug Ashford, Sonia Balassanian, Jennifer Bolande, Chris Bratton, Rene Castro, T. F. Chen, Mel Edwards, Mike Glier, Don Harvey, Susan Harlow, Edgar Heap of Birds, Suzanne Hellmuth and Jock Reynolds, Chris Hurstis, Carol Jacobsen, Jerry Kearns, Maurice Lara, Louis Laurita, Mundy McLaughlin, Brad Melamed, John Moore, Eleni Mylonos, Ken Nevadomi, Saul Ostrow, Adrian Piper, Krzysztof Pruszkowski, Lee Quinones, Faith Ringgold, Tim Rollins + K.O.S., Connie Samara, Joe Sances, Andres Serrano, Nancy Spero, Anne Turyn, Anton van Dalen, Charles Walker, Andy Warhol.

Soundtrack: "The Star-Spangled Banner," Duke Ellington; "America the Beautiful," The Boston Pops; "God Bless America," Kate Smith; "America," Prince and the New Power Generation; "America the Beautiful," Statler Brothers; "America the Beautiful," Leontyne Price; "The Star-Spangled Banner," University of Michigan Band; "God Bless America," Mormon Tabernacle Choir; "The Star-Spangled Banner," The Philadelphia Orchestra; "America the Beautiful," Charlie Rich; "God Bless America," Robert Shaw Chorale and the RCA Symphony Orchestra; "America the Beautiful," Concord Jazz All Stars; "The Star-Spangled Banner," Mormon Tabernacle Choir; "America the Beautiful," Liberate; "The Star-Spangled Banner," Vienna State Opera Orchestra; "God Bless America Again," Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty; "The Star-Spangled Banner,"

Concert Arts Symphonic Band; "America the Beautiful," Robert Shaw Choral and the RCA Symphony Orchestra; "The Star-Spangled Banner," Jimi Hendrix; "God Bless America," Leontyne Price.

**Arts and Leisure**  
**May 24-June 14, 1986**  
**The Kitchen,**

**519 W. 19th Street, New York**  
Vikky Alexander, Eve Arnold, Doug Ashford, Conrad Atkinson, Alan Belcher, John Berger, Barbara Cartland, Ronnie Cutrone, Jane Dickson, Jiri Georg Dokoupil, Mike Glier, Group Material, Howard Halle, Edgar Heap of Birds, Suzanne Hellmuth and Jack Reynolds, Christof Kohlhofer, Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Kruger, Justen Ladda, Lady Pink, Louise Lawler, Allan McCollum, Allan McCollum/Louise Lawler, Micki McGee, Mundy McLaughlin, *The National Enquirer*, Aric Obrosey, Claes Oldenburg, JoJohn Plunkett, Richard Prince, Lee Quinones, Tom Runitz and Ann Magnuson, Tseng Kwong Chi, Norman Rockwell, James Rosenquist, Kenny Scharf, Haim Steinbach, Bob Templeton and Tom Foreman, Anton van Dalen, Walt Disney Studios, Andy Warhol, Oliver Wasow, Dean Young, and others.

**Resistance (Anti-Baudrillard),**

**February 6-28, 1987**

**White Columns,**  
**325 Spring Street, New York**  
**Commissioning curator: Bill Arning**  
**Roundtable discussion: January 25, 1987, Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Judith Barry, Peter Halley, William Olander, Julie Wachtel, Oliver Wasow.**

AFL-CIO poster, Catherine Allport, Conrad Atkinson, Bruce Barber, Gretchen Bender, Joseph Beuys, Dara Birnbaum, David Cronenberg, Honoré Daumier, Peter Dunn, Andrea Evans, FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) artifacts, Madge Gill, Mike Glier, Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, Leon Golub, George Grosz, guerrilla mask, Hans Haacke, Edgar Heap of Birds, John Hearfield, Janet Henry, Jenny Holzer, Impact Visuals, Oskar Kokosha, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Lorraine Leeson, Susan Meiselas, Brad Melamed, Gerhard Merz, Michael Nedjar, Odilon Redon, Nancy Spero, Carol Squiers, photos and graphics from SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization), toy M16 rifle, Gastón Ugalde, Carrie Mae Weems, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Martin Wong, and others.

**The Castle**  
**June 12-September 20, 1987**  
**documenta 8, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany**

**Commissioning curator: Edward Fry**  
Vikky Alexander, All laundry detergent, Doug Ashford, Conrad Atkinson, Julie Ault, Alan Belcher, Gretchen Bender, Brut 33 deodorant stick, bumper stickers, Peter Burgess, Clegg and Guttmann, coffee mug, Combat roach control system, desktop slogans, Mark Dion, Gary Dodson, Nancy Dwyer, Daniel Faust, Forever Krystle cologne, Day Gleeson and Dennis Thomas,

Leon Golub, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Peter Halley, Edgar Heap of Birds, Jenny Holzer, Imperial margarine, Alfredo Jarr, Larry Johnson, Ronald Jones, Steven Kasher, Jerry Kearns, King Vitamin cereal, Silvia Kolbowski, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Tom Lawson, Daniel Levine, Lord cigaretttes, Master Blend coffee, Allan McCollum, Meister Klasse soup mixes, Brad Melamed, Mr. Big napkins, Peter Nagy, Northern toilet tissue, Aric Obrosey, Claes Oldenburg, Porcelana fade cream, Jeffrey Pittu, Tim Rollins + K.O.S., Martha Rosler, Andres Serrano, Lorna Simpson, Nancy Spero, Starn Twins, Haim Steinbach, Oliver Wasow, Carrie Mae Weems, Chris Williams, Martin Wong.

Soundtrack: Easy listening versions of revolutionary songs.

**Constitution**  
**October 1-November 14, 1987**

**The Temple Gallery, Temple University, Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia**  
**Commissioning curator: Julie Courtney**  
Vito Acconci, Dennis Adams, AFL-CIO poster, John Ahearn, Doug Ashford, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Gretchen Bender, Curtis Brown, Walter Clemmons, Luis Cruz Azaceta, Edward Curtis, Sam Doyle, Rev. Howard Finster, Mike Glier, Leon Golub, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Guerrilla Art Action Group, Philip Guston, Peter Halley, Jenny Holzer, Thomas Jefferson, Barbara Kruger, Tom Lawson, Sherrie Levine, Claes Oldenburg, Tom Otterness, Daniel Pressley, Robert Rauschenberg, Faith Ringgold, James Rivera, David Robbins, Tim Rollins + K.O.S., Jack Savitsky, Andres Serrano, Nancy Spero, Orlando Valentin, James Van Der Zee, Robert Venturi, Martin Wong.

Soundtrack: Mahalia Jackson singing traditional hymns.

**Inserts**  
**May 22, 1988**

**Advertising supplement to the Sunday New York Times**  
Mike Glier, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Hans Haacke, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Nancy Linn, Richard Prince, Nancy Spero, Carrie Mae Weems.

**Democracy**  
**September 1988-January 1989**

**Dia Art Foundation,**  
**77 Wooster Street, New York**  
**Commissioning Curator: Gary Garrels**

**Democracy: Education**  
**Roundtable discussion: May 21, 1988,**

**John Deveaux, Rodney Harris, Catherine Lord, Tim Rollins, Ira Shor, Group Material.**  
**Exhibition: September 15-October 8, 1988**  
**Town Meeting: September 27, 1988,**  
**Chairperson: Tim Rollins**  
John Ahearn; American flag (classroom regulation size); Angel Amarat with Rachel Romero; Mario Asaro with the students of class 7-333 from Enrico Fermi Junior High School III; Doug Ashford with the students of class F201 including Dwayne Baker, Kisha Currence, Jamal Jonas, Monty Hooker, Anne-Marie Petithomme, and Bobby Pugh;

Jo Babcock; Rudolf Baranik; Joseph Beuys; Sam Blinkley with students from Small World Day Care including Arnold Acosta, Jr., Sean Aiwais, Philip Antonelli, Bobby, Lorraine Conigliaro, Melissa Maciorowski, Nicole, Christopher Ortega, Jessica Rodriguez, Yvonne T., and Tito; Nancy Burson; Lance Carlson; classroom wall clock; Lynne Cohen; Eric Drooker; Educational Video Center; Barbara Ess; Öyvind Fahlström; Rev. Howard Finster; Peter Halley; Lewis Hine; Jenny Holzer; Builder Levy and Offsite Education Services at the Puerto Rican Council; Dean McNeil; Meryl Meisler and the Drop Ins; Gerhard Merz; Michael (Hospital Audiences), Ed Morales with Tom McGlynn, Diana Caballero, and Elaine Ruiz from the Committee for a Multilingual New York and Victory Arts; J. B. Murray; New Muse Summer Program with Onnie Miller; Nike advertisement; Tom Otterness; Luciano Perna; Adrian Piper; Keith Rambert with the students of class F201 at Boys and Girls High School including Agnes George, Wendy Waddell, Jail House Productions, Emmanuel Tyrell, and Leon Vereen; Maria Reyes; Faith Ringgold; Rise and Shine Productions (highlights from the Poetry Video Learning Project); Tim Rollins + K.O.S.; Rachel Romero and Third Street Men's Shelter and Hospital Audiences; school desks; Dr. Seus's book; Lorna Simpson; Carolien Stikker; Mitchell Syrop; Jon Tower; Robert Venturi; Douglas Walker; Andy Warhol; Gary Wilson

**Democracy: Politics and Election**  
**Roundtable discussion: June 4, 1988,**

**Richard Andrews, Leon Golub, Esther Parada, Judge Bruce Wright, Group Material.**  
**Exhibition: October 15-November 12, 1988**  
**Town Meeting: October 18, 1988,**  
**Chairperson: Lucy R. Lippard**  
American flag (oversize), John Armleder, Arnon Ben-David, Curtis Brown, Luis Carnitzner, Lynne Cohen, Robbie Conal, Gregory Davidek, Sam Doyle, Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler, Rev. Howard Finster, Judy Fiskin, Mike Glier, Leon Golub, Hans Haacke, Bessie Harvey, Ronald Jones, Kenneth Cole advertisement, Margia Kramer, La-Z-Boy chair, Bertrand Lavier, John Lindell, Kim Lutes, Christian Marclay, Dona Ann McAdams, Dean McNeil, Brad Melamed, Tony Mendoza, Kirsten Mosher, Antonio Muntadas and Marshall Resse, David Nyzio, Aric Obrosey, Norman Rockwell, Michael Rosario with Rachel Romero, Erika Rothenberg, Christy Rupp, Wolfgang Staehle, Jana Sterbak, Carolien Stikker, Mitchell Syrop, television set, Martin Wong, Wayne Zebzda.

**Democracy: Cultural Participation**  
**Roundtable discussion: June 11, 1988, David Avalos, Martha Gever, Lucy R. Lippard, Randall Morris, Robert Farris Thompson, Deborah Wye, Group Material.**  
**Exhibition: November 19-December 10, 1988**  
**Town Meeting: November 22, 1988,**  
**Chairperson: David Avalos**  
Bachman Crunchy Jax; Bachman Jax; Bachman Pastapapazz; BonTon fiesta

mix; Bravos nacho cheese tortilla chips; Charles cheese twists; Cheetos puffed balls; Chiffes plantain chips; Cottage Fries; Crunchy Cheetos; Jane Dickson; Doritos tortilla chips; Dutch Style pretzels; Eagle Hawaiian kettle potato chips; Eagle Idaho russet potato chips; Marybeth Edelson; Rev. Howard Finster; Jeff Gates; generic brand potato chips; Arnold Ginsberg; Glade air freshener; Granddaddy's tortilla chips; Bessie Harvey; Carmen Herrera; Jenny Holzer; Larry Johnson; Mike Kelley; Barbara Kruger; Lay's Italian Cheese potato chips; Lay's potato chips; Ken Lum; magazines; Kirsten Mosher; Munchos potato chips; New York Deli potato chips; Aric Obrosey; "outlaw biker" American flag; picnic tables and benches; Richard Prince; Peter Reiss; Alexander Remas; Rolets pork rinds; Rolled Gold pretzel rods; George Romero; Erika Rothenberg; Ruffles potato chips; Fran Cutrell Rutosky; Victor Schrager; Cindy Sherman; Haim Steinbach; Symbol magazine; Mitchell Syrop; Richard Thatcher; Urban Center for Photography (Detroit) with installations by James Dozier, Bob McKeown, Julio Peraza, Keith Piaseczny, Bob Sanders, and others; Douglas Walker; Judith Weisman; Wise butter popcorn; Wise onion rings; Wise potato chips.

**Democracy: AIDS and Democracy: A Case Study**  
**Roundtable discussion: June 18, 1988,**

**Michael Callen, Jan Zita Grover, Maria Maggenti, Group Material.**  
**Exhibition: December 19, 1988-January 14, 1989**  
**Town Meeting: January 10, 1989,**  
**Chairperson: Maria Maggenti**  
ACT UP flyers, Joe Andoe, Gretchen Bender, Ross Bleckner, Terese Bramlette, Ellen Brooks, Brian Buczak, Nancy Burson, Andrea Evans, Steven Evans, flyers, General Idea, Mike Glier, Gran Fury, Michael Jenkins, Ronald Jones, Tom Kalin, Jannis Kounellis, Barbara Kruger, Dorothea Lange, Kate Lawrence, John Lindell, Nancy Linn, T. L. Litt, Robert Maplethorpe, Tom McKitterick, Gerhard Merz, Donald Moffett, Diane Neumaier, Tim Rollins + K.O.S., Andres Serrano, Nancy Spero, Ben Thornberry, Martha Townsend, Nancy Burson, Lola Flash, James Van Der Zee, WHAM! (Women's Health Action Mobilization) flyers, Martin Wong.

Video program: *Work Your Body*, Gregg Bordowitz and Jean Carlomusto; *Prostitutes, Risk and AIDS*, Jean Carlomusto and Alexandra Juhasz; *Doctors, Liars and Women*, Jean Carlomusto and Maria Maggenti; *AIDS: Angry Initiatives/Defiant Strategies*, John Greyson; *Life Guard*; *Showdown in Atlanta*, Ira Manhoff; 1987 *National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights*, Nick Papatonis; Simon Watney Says "No" to Clause 29, Papper Tiger Collective; *ACT UP at the FDA*, Ellen Spiro; *Testing the Limits, Testing the Limits Collective*; *The Names Project*, David Thompson.

**AIDS & Democracy aka Elegy**  
**December 16, 1988-**

**February 13, 1989**  
**Vol/bild, AIDS, RealismusStudio, Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK), Berlin**  
**Commissioning curator: Frank Wagner**  
Joe Andoe, Terese Bramlette, Andrea Evans, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Michael Jenkins, Ronald Jones, Brad Melamed, Dorothea Lange, Nancy Linn, Tim Rollins + K.O.S., May Sarton quotation, Andres Serrano, Martha Townsend.

**Unisex**  
**June 1-December 1, 1989**  
**The Center Show, The Lesbian and Gay Community Center,**  
**208 W. 13th Street, New York**  
**Commissioning curator: Rick Barnett**  
A Taste of Honey, The Bee Gees, Alicia Bridges, Charlotte Church, Sheila B. Devotion, Yvonne Fair, First Choice, Thelma Houston, Grace Jones, The Jones Girls, Esther Phillips, Sylvia Robinson, Diana Ross, Candi Staton, Donna Summer, T-Connection, THP Orchestra, Two Tons O' Fun, Barry White, John Paul Young, Karen Young.

**Shopping Bag**  
**October 14-November 26, 1989**  
**Shopping bags distributed in local shops and department stores**  
**D&S Ausstellung, Kunstverein, Hamburg, Germany**  
**Commissioning curator: Frank Barth**  
**Project coordinator: Ute Meta Bauer**

**AIDS Timeline**  
**November 11, 1989-January 28, 1990**  
**Matrix Gallery, University Art Museum, University of California at Berkeley**  
**Commissioning curator: Larry Rinder**  
**Research assistant: Richard Meyer**  
ACT UP photo and posters; *The Advocate* newspaper; "AIDS Profiteer" stickers; *An Early Frost* publicity photo; *And The Band Played On* by Randy Shilts; B2 bomber poster; *Batman* movie poster; Robert Beck; Nayland Blake; Terese Bramlette; *California* magazines; CDC case definition photostat; Climax poppers advertisement; condom case; Michael Flanagan and DAIR (Documentation of AIDS Issues and Research Archives); *The Empire Strikes Back* movie poster; Steven Evans; Tom of Finland; Dr. Robert Gallo photo; Mike Glier; GMHC (Gay Men's Health Crisis) Safer Sex Comic; Gloria Vanderbilt jeans magazine tear sheet; Gran Fury; Group Material and John Lindell; Hans Haacke; Keith Haring; Rock Hudson film still; Michael Jenkins; Tom Kalin; Surgeon General C. Everett Koop photo; Dr. Mathilde Krim photo; Dorothea Lange; Latino AIDS Project booklet; Louise Lawler; Rudy Lemcke; Life magazine; Brad Melamed; men's tie; Ann Meredith; Duane Michals; Donald Moffet; *Mother Jones* magazine; *The Names Project* poster; Diane Neumaier; *New York Native* article; *New York Times* article; *Newsweek* magazines; Daniel Nicoletta; "No on 64" bumper sticker; Oliver North photo; Northrop advertisements; Patient's Bill of Rights; *People* magazine; public service posters; PWA Coalition newsletter; Rambo publicity

photo; Ronald and Nancy Reagan photo; Reagan/Bush '84 campaign button; Reagan '80 campaign button and inauguration photo; *Real People* publicity photos; Tim Rollins + K.O.S.; Kay Rosen; Erika Rothenberg; rubber gloves; safer sex posters; *Scientific American* magazine; *The Sentinel* newspaper; Andres Serrano; Silence=Death t-shirt; Silencio=Muerte t-shirt; Lorna Simpson; Sharon Siskin and Positive Art members from Rest Stop Support Center, San Francisco and The Center for AIDS Services, Oakland, including Eddie Booker, Steve Brown, Richard C., Steve Curd, Tom Devine, Paul Gronberg, Barry Frederick, Paul Freitas, Ken Huff, J.J., Eric Lewald, Richard McMullen, Ben Medina, Gary Strandner, Max Proudfoot, Steve Rene, Paul Steindal, David Taylor, Lou Troga, Andy Woodward, Teresa Yee, Jeff, Jim, Kat, Oscar, and Terry; Nancy Spero; *Sudafed: Surviving and Thriving With AIDS* by the PWA Coalition; Jimmy Swaggart photo; Mitchell Syrop; Elizabeth Taylor film still; "That's What Friends Are For" 45 rpm record; *Time* magazine; Michael Tidmus; Tyleneol; "Understanding AIDS" brochure; U.S. News and World Report magazine; U.S. soldiers photo; US magazine; "Unique pneumonia" article; David Wojnarowicz; World AIDS Conference poster; and others.

Video program, Matrix Gallery: *Se Met Ko*, Patricia Benoit; *He Left Me His Strength*, DCTV; *Target City Hall*, DIVA TV; *The Helms Amendment*, Jean Carlomusto; *Doctors, Liars and Women*, Jean Carlomusto and Maria Maggenti; *The World is Sick* (sic), John Greyson; *Snob Job*, Barbara Hammer; *We Are Not Republicans*, Bob Huff; *Transformer AIDS*; *Bob Kinney* and *Paper Tiger TV* Southwest; *Ojos Que No Ven*, Latino AIDS Project; *Golden Gate Bridge Blockade*, Arl Spencer Nadel; *Bleach, Teach, Outreach*, Ray Navarro and Catherine Saalfeld; *Keep Your Laws Off Our Bodies*, Catherine Saalfeld and Zoe Leonard; *DiAna's Hair Ego: AIDS Info Up Front*, Ellen Spiro; *Song from an Angel*, David Weissman, and others.

Video program, Berkeley University Recreational Sports Facility: *Life/Information/Protection*, Yannick Durand and Brooklyn AIDS Taskforce; "Out" Tokes, John C. Goss; *We're Desperate, Get Used to It*, Bob Huff; *They Are Lost to Vision Altogether*, Tom Kalin; *Testing the Limits*, *New York City (Part 2)*, Testing the Limits Collective; and others.

**Your Message Here**  
**February 23-March 30, 1990**  
**Billboard project**  
**Collaboration with Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago**  
**Commissioning curator: Peter Taub**  
**Project coordinator: Joanne Vena**  
Cathy Sharley, 32nd Ward Fare Share IPO; ACT UP/Chicago; Anna Stonum, ADAFT of Chicago; Jo Aerne, Sally Alatalo; Aligator/ Vito Greco; Margaret and José Guerrero, Artists Against Homelessness, Julian Akins, Artists of Color United; Chuck Bell; Mark Blotner; James Lieber; Catholic Parishes of Pilsen; Jim Taylor, Community Film Workshop; Arlene Crawford, Rose Blouin,

and Judy Massey; John Pitman Weber; December 4th Committee; Susan Duffy; Jeanne Dunning; El Hogar del Niño (J. Alex Gallindo); Jeanne Martirelli; Emerson House/Amnesty Class; Espi Eph; Debbie Gould; Hispanic AIDS Network with Betsy Scheld, Columbus School; Marcus Jefferson and Kiela Smith; Mario Gonzalez, Jr., and Jesus Morales, Inner City 8; Norma Johnson; Stephen Laphisophon; Martina Lopez; Story Mann; Louisa Hamacheck, Maxworks Co-op Neighborhood Capital Budget Group; Jackie Leavey with Simon Grennan, Neighborhood Capital Budget Group; Mark Nelson; Mary Patten; Kathy Pilat; Felicity Rich; Kay Rosen, Paula Phipps, Jane Addams Resource Corp.; John Schneider; Sister Serpents, Greg Boozell and Sara Frederickson, Chicago/ Gary Union of the Homeless; Barry Bruner and Catherine Cjandig; Whitney Young High School Art Club; Sam Gomez and Kharl Walker, Youth Guidance/Roberto Clemente.

#### Democracy Poll

June 26-July 5, 1990

Insert in *Der Tagesspiegel*, U-Bahn station billboards, and an electronic billboard

RealismusStudio, Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK), Berlin

Commissioning curator: Frank Wagner

Content consultant: Monika Idehen

Interviews with sixty people including a banker, business man, cabdriver, construction worker, carpenter, factory manager, financial consultant, homemaker, lawyer, psychologist, retired pilot, salesgirl, seamstress, secretary, students, teacher, waiter, welfare recipient, and others.

#### AIDS & Insurance

September 1-30, 1990

Exterior bus advertisement

Sponsored by Real Art Ways, Hartford, CT

Commissioning curators: Leslie Tonkonow,

Anne Pasternak

"The Insurance Industry and AIDS" brochure by Mary Anne Staniszewski, published by Real Art Ways.

#### AIDS Timeline

September 30-November 18, 1990

Matrix Gallery, Wadsworth Atheneum,

Hartford, CT

Commissioning curator: Andrea Miller-

Keller

ACT UP photo and posters; *The Advocate* newspaper; "AIDS Profiteer" stickers; *An Early Frost* publicity photo; *And The Band Played On* by Randy Shilts; B2 bomber poster; *Batman* movie poster; Nayland Blake; Terese Bramlette; *California* magazines; Lei Chou; CDC case definition photostat; Climax poppers advertisement; condom case; Michael Flanagan and DAIR (Documentation of AIDS Issues and Research Archives); Philip-Lorca diCorcia; *The Empire Strikes Back* movie poster; Steven Evans; Robert Flack; Peg Forauer; Dr. Robert Gallo photo; Mike Glier; GMHC (Gay Men's Health Crisis) Safer Sex Comix; Gloria Vanderbilt jeans magazine tear sheet; Gran Fury; Hans Haacke; Keith Haring; Rock Hudson film still; Michael Jenkins; Mary Kenealy;

Surgeon General C. Everett Koop photo; Dr. Mathilde Krim photo; Dorothea Lange; Latino AIDS Project booklet; Louise Lawler; Rudy Lemcke; Hillary Leone; *Life* magazine; Robert Mapplethorpe; Alynne Martelle; Chris Martin; Brad Melamed; men's tie; Ann Meredith; Duane Michals; Donald Moffet; *Mother Jones* magazine; The Names Project poster; Diane Neumaier; *New York Native* article; *New York Times* article; *Newsweek* magazines; Daniel Nicoletta; "No on 64" bumper sticker; Oliver North photo; Northrop advertisements; "Our Church Has AIDS" watch; Patient's Bill of Rights; People magazine; public service posters; PWA Coalition newsletter; *Rambo* publicity photo; Ronald and Nancy Reagan photo; Reagan/ Bush '84 campaign button; Reagan '80 campaign button and inauguration photo; *Real People* publicity photos; Maria Reyes; Hunter Reynolds; Tim Rollins + K.O.S.; Kay Rosen; Erika Rothenberg; rubber gloves; safer sex posters; *Scientific American* magazine; *The Sentinel* newspaper; Andres Serrano; Silence=Death t-shirt; Silencio=Muerte t-shirt; Lorna Simpson; Sharon Siskin and Positive Art members from Rest Stop Support Center and The Center for AIDS Services including Eddie Booker, Steve Brown, Richard C., Steve Curd, Tom Devine, Paul Gronberg, Barry Frederick, Paul Freitas, Ken Huff, J.J., Eric Lewald, Richard McMullen, Ben Medina, Gary Ostrander, Max Proudfoot, Steve Rene, Paul Steindal, David Taylor, Lou Tropa, Andy Woodward, Teresa Yee, Jeff, Jim, Kat, Oscar, and Terry; Kiki Smith; Nancy Spero; Sudafed; *Surviving and Thriving With AIDS* by the PWA Coalition; Jimmy Swaggert photo; Mitchell Syrop; Elizabeth Taylor film still; "That's What Friends Are For" 45 rpm record; *Time* magazine; Michael Tidmus; Tyleneo; "Understanding AIDS" brochure; *U.S. News and World Report* magazine; U.S. soldiers photo; US magazine; "Unique pneumonia" article; Andy Warhol; David Wojnarowicz; Martin Wong; World AIDS Conference poster; and others.

Video program: *Se Met Ko*, Patricia Benoit; *Mildred Pearson: When You Love a Person and Life/Information/Protection*, Yannick Durand, Brooklyn AIDS Taskforce; *Like a Prayer*, DIVA-TV; *AIDS is About Secrets*, HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies; *We Are Not Republicans*, Bob Huff; *They Are Lost to Vision Altogether*, Tom Kalin; *Ojas Que No Ven*, Latino AIDS Project; *Bleach*, *Teach*, *Outreach*, Ray Navarro and Catherine Saalfeld; *Keep Your Laws Off Our Bodies*, Catherine Saalfeld and Zoe Leonard; *DiAna's Hair Ego*; *AIDS Info Up Front*, Ellen Spiro, and others.

#### Collaboration aka Economics:

Oberlin Project

October 26, 1990-January 13, 1991

Social Studies: 4+4 Young Americans,

The Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin

College, Oberlin, Ohio

Commissioning curator: Elizabeth

A. Brown

Alexander Aptekar, Norman Cohen, Ron Copperman, Miriam Feinstein, David

Goldstein, Jeff Gross, Hamann, Shirley Hartman, Rose Jackson, Sue Jones, Peter Kalb, Deanna Lee, Joel Mendelson, Nicole Newman, Natly Reed, Rebecca Rosen, Joshua Sarantitis, Diana Schlesinger, Terri Weissman, Carolyn White, Beth Wolfe.

#### AIDS Timeline (New York City 1991)

April 19-June 23, 1991

1991 Whitney Biennial,

lobby gallery, The Whitney Museum

of American Art, New York

Commissioning curator: Lisa Phillips

ACT UP buttons, photos, and posters; ADAPT brochure; *The Advocate* newspaper; "AIDS Profiteer" stickers; *An Early Frost* publicity photo; *And The Band Played On* by Randy Shilts; B2 bomber poster; Lutz Bacher; *Batman* movie poster; Gretchen Bender; Nayland Blake; *California* magazines; CDC case definition photostat; Dick Cheney photostat; Climax poppers advertisement; condom case; Jeanne Dunning; *The Empire Strikes Back* movie poster; Evan Estern; Steven Evans; Fund for a Feminist Majority material; Dr. Robert Gallo photo; Mike Glier; Gloria Vanderbilt jeans magazine tear sheet; GMHC (Gay Men's Health Crisis) Safer Sex Comix; Gran Fury; *Gulf War* poster; *Gulf War* souvenir stuffed Tasmanian Devil; Hans Haacke; Peter Halley; Keith Haring; Whitney Houston "Star Spangled Banner" video; Rock Hudson film still; Michael Jenkins; Dr. Stephen Joseph photo; Surgeon General C. Everett Koop photo; Dr. Mathilde Krim photo; Barbara Kruger; Latino AIDS Project booklet; Louise Lawler; Rudy Lemcke; *Life* magazine; *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* video; T. L. Litt; Robert Mapplethorpe; Marlene McCarty; Meryl Meisler and the Drop Ins; Brad Melamed; men's tie; Donald Moffet; *Mother Jones* magazine; The Names Project poster; Diane Neumaier; *New York Native* article; *New York Times* article; *Newsweek* magazines; Daniel Nicoletta; "No on 64" bumper sticker; Noriega/Bush '88 bumper sticker; Oliver North photo; Northrop advertisements; "Our Church Has AIDS" watch; Patient's Bill of Rights; People magazine; Raymond Pettibon; Planned Parenthood brochure; public service poster with homophobic graffiti; public service posters; PWA Coalition newsletter; *Rambo* publicity photo; Ronald and Nancy Reagan photo; Reagan/Bush '84 campaign button; Reagan '80 campaign button and inauguration photo; *Real People* publicity photos; Tim Rollins + K.O.S.; Kay Rosen; Erika Rothenberg; rubber gloves; safer sex posters; *Scientific American* magazine; *The Sentinel* newspaper; Andres Serrano; Sharon Siskin and Positive Art members from Rest Stop Support Center and The Center for AIDS Services, including Eddie Booker, Steve Curd, Jorge Dreke, Wilma Dresner, Barry Frederick, Phil Jauchen, Steve Harkins, Lee Harris, Maire Hough, Ken Huff, Paul McKay, Leonard Moore, David Taylor, and others; Silence=Death t-shirt; Silencio=Muerte t-shirt; Lorna Simpson; Rolf Sjorgen; Kevin Smith; Nancy Spero; Ellen Spiro; "Stop the Church" flyer and

demonstration photo; Sudafed; *Surviving and Thriving With AIDS* by the PWA Coalition; Jimmy Swaggert photo; Elizabeth Taylor film still; Testing the Limits Collective; "That's What Friends Are For" 45 rpm record; Ben Thornberry; Michael Tidmus; *Time* magazine; Tom of Finland; Tyleneo; *U.S. News and World Report* magazine; U.S. soldiers photo; "Understanding AIDS" brochure; "Unique Pneumonia" article; *US* magazine; vinyl-type quotations from James Baldwin, Oscar Wilde, Dr. Mathilde Krim, George Bush, and others; Carrie Mae Weems; *Wheel of Fortune* publicity photo; Millie Wilson; David Wojnarowicz; Martin Wong; World AIDS Conference poster.

#### Cash Prize

December 17-20, 1991

Advertisements in the Seattle

Post-Intelligencer

In Public: Seattle 1991,

The Seattle Arts Commission,

Seattle, Washington

Commissioning curator: Diane Shamash

#### Tomorrow

October 8-December 31, 1993

Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego,

La Jolla, CA

Commissioning curator: Hugh Davies

Artist; jewelry salesperson, legal administrator, photographer, radio personality, retired doctor, sailor, student, teacher, technician, unemployed, waiter.

#### Democracy Wall

October 19, 1993-January 23, 1994

In And Out Of Place, Museum of

Fine Arts, Boston

Commissioning curators: Trevor

Fairbrother, Kathryn Potts

Five museum staff, MFA mission statement, four museum visitors, two passers-by.

#### Market

May 6-June 18, 1995

Kunstverein München, Munich

Commissioning curator: Helmut Draxler

Acid rain test, Advertising Age advertisements, "AIDS: It's Big Business" poster, All laundry detergent, American Express advertisement, American flag shopping bag, Ariel laundry detergent, Aunt Jemima pancake mixes, Batman mask, Best of Cops video, Betty Crocker cake mixes, Bold laundry detergent, Bounty candy bar, Brawny paper towels, Carefree feminine napkins, Cheer laundry detergent, Chevrolet advertisement, child leech, Bill Clinton Rolling Stone cover, Coca Cola advertisements, Dark and Lovely hair color, Dash laundry detergent, Deutschlandler sausages, Dickmann's cakes, DKNY advertisements, dollhouse furniture, Dunkin' Donuts advertisement, Era laundry detergent, FBI recruitment advertisement, flashing rotary emergency light, Freedom wallet, Gain laundry detergent, gay parent booklet, generic food products and laundry detergent, Glade room fresheners, "Grand Opening" banners, Hamburger Helper, home pregnancy test kit, Homestyle Hamburger

Helper, *How To Organize Your Home* video, Huggies diaper packages, Hungry Man TV dinner, imitation security camera, *Inspire Your Lifestyle* video, Ivory soap, Kente cloth shopping bag, Kraft Foods advertisement, magazine tear sheets, magazines, men's faux ponytail, men's ties, motorist alert HELP sign, The Names Project postcard, natural coffee filters, "Negro Kisses," Nestlé "Sweet Success" snack bars, New Freedom feminine napkins, *New York Times* articles, Nike advertisement, Northern napkins, Northrop Grumman advertisement, "Ocean Voyage" and "Echoes of Nature" environmental cassettes, coffee mug, Post-it pads, pink triangle key chain, planetarium kit, Political Commercial Archive video, Possession cologne, posters, rainbow flag and postcard, red ribbon pin, refrigerator magnets, Saab advertisement, Seventh Generation Kleenex, skin whitening and fade cream, Slimfast snack bars, solar system model, Surf laundry detergent, Tide laundry detergent, Topkuss cakes, Tuna Helper, U.S. Army recruitment brochure, *Under Fire: An American Story* by Oliver North, bumper stickers, Vietnam calendar, vinyl-type advertising slogans, Wheaties cereal, world map.

#### Program

June 7-23, 1996

Three Rivers Arts Festival, Pittsburgh, PA

Commissioning curator: Jeanne Pearlman

Thirty-eight anonymous interviews.

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Books, articles, and reviews are listed chronologically. Articles which do not refer to the relevant Group Material project in the title have this information at the end of each entry.

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*Show and Tell* is dedicated to all those who participated in Group Material's seventeen year project, and to the memory of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who frequently referred to the group as "the best kept secret in the art world," and badly wanted us to someday make a book.

Julie Ault

## Contributors

**Julie Ault** is an artist and author who independently and collaboratively organizes exhibitions, publications, and diversiform projects. Her recent projects include collaborating with Danh Vo on the publication *Where the Lions Are* (Kunsthalle Basel, 2009), and with Martin Beck on *Installation*, Vienna Secession, 2006. Ault is the editor of *Felix Gonzalez-Torres* (steidl/dangin, 2006), and *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), and is the author of *Come Alive! The Spirited Art of Sister Corita* (Four Corners Books, 2006). She has taught extensively, including at Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard, Critical Studies, Malmö Art Academy, Ecole supérieure des beaux-arts, Geneva; and UCLA. In 1979 Ault co-founded Group Material; she was a member of the collaborative until it disbanded in 1996.

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**Tim Rollins** is an artist, educator, community activist, and writer. A co-founder of Group Material in 1979, soon after he and a team of his junior high school students from a public school in the South Bronx founded an after school studio, The Art and Knowledge Workshop. The Workshop serves as headquarters for the group K.O.S. ("Kids of Survival") creating paintings, prints, and sculpture inspired by classics of world literature and music. The collaborative artworks of Tim Rollins + K.O.S. are now in the permanent collections of over 90 museums worldwide and the collective have had over 100 solo exhibitions in over 25 years of working together. Rollins is currently a senior year professor of fine art at the School of Visual Arts in New York. He lives and works in the South Bronx and Chelsea neighborhoods in New York City.

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At **Nick Bell Design** we spend most of our time helping people interpret and engage with the content they find in museums. Ours is a curatorial method of editorial design we learned designing *Eye* magazine (the international review of graphic design) that we now apply to spaces and places: cultural attractions mostly. These days we don't design many books – who can afford to? However, every so often a publisher will tempt us with a testing subject we can't resist. Just as it was with Sister Corita, so it is with Group Material. Thank you Julie and Four Corners Books for helping to maintain our interest and expertise in book design.

Nick Bell

**Four Corners Books** is an independent publisher based in London, specializing in books by artists and books about art. Publishers Elinor Jansz and Richard Embray work closely with artists and writers, tailoring each book to the individual needs of the project. Other titles include: *Come Alive! The Spirited Art of Sister Corita* by Julie Ault, *About the Relative Size of Things in the Universe* by Martin Beck, and *The Jet Age Compendium: Paolozzi At Ambient* by David Brittain. The Four Corners Familiars series invites artists to respond to classic novels and short stories to produce new illustrated editions. The Familiars published so far include *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Dracula*, *Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor*, *NAU SEA SEA SICK*, and *A Stick of Green Candy*.

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## Index

Major GM projects are indicated in bold, as are the page numbers for their main entries. Page numbers of images are indicated in italics.

ABC No Rio 19, 42  
Acker, Kathy 239  
ACT UP 162, 239, 244, 246, 249  
A.D., *Christian Influence in Contemporary Culture* (1985) 81  
Adams, Dennis 78, 128  
African-American Arts Alliance, Chicago 165  
*Afterimage* (magazine) 179  
Ahearn, John 126  
AIDS 133, 152-155, 156, 160-162, 174-175, 176, 179, 180-181, 182-185, 222, 223, 226-255

*AIDS & Democracy* see *Democracy*

**AIDS & Insurance** (1990) **174-175**

**AIDS Timeline** (1989-1990, 1991) **160-162, 176, 179, 180-181, 182-185, 212, 226-255**

Ailes, Roger 145

*Alarm Clock* (1985) 114

**ALIENATION** (1980) 26, 27, **28-29**

Alderfer, Hannah 7, 8, 27, 47, 48, 49, 210

*Alien* (film) 28

Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin 178

Allen, William 37, 44, 84, 86-87

Allport, Catherine 119

Alternative Museum, New York 115

"America the Beautiful" (song) 115

**Americana** (1985) **91-99**

Araujo, Michelle 37

Arellano, Bolivar 74

Arning, Bill 244

*Art & Auction* (magazine) 179

*Art Against AIDS on the Road* 155, 249

*Art in America* (magazine) 179, 253

*Art Matters* 133

*Art New England* (magazine) 179

*Artforum* (magazine) 32, 49, 179, 180-181, 253

Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America 84

Artists Meeting for Cultural Change 218

Artists Space, New York 70, 253

Artists / Teachers Concerned 140

*Arts* (magazine) 179

*Arts and Crafts* movement 217

**Arts and Leisure** (1986) **116-117**

*Artweek* (magazine) 247

Ascensio, Daniel Flores y 74

Ashford, Doug 59, 59, 84, 107, 118, 131, 140, 166, 182, 183, 191, 193, 198, 198, 200, 206, 206, 209, 211, 220-225, 233, 239

Asaro, Mario 140

Atkinson, Conrad 8, 18, 117, 217

**Atlanta: An Emergency Exhibition** (1981) **50-51**

Atwater, Lee 145

Ault, George 15, 27, 30

Ault, Julie 7, 8, 27, 30, 43, 47, 49, 52, 59, 59, 63, 84, 118, 131, 141, 166, 182, 183, 191, 193, 195, 198, 200, 206, 206, 209-216, 230, 233, 239, 244

Baas, Jackie 246

Baker, Betsy 253

Baranik, Rudolf 155

Barry, Judith 118

Bartlett, Jennifer 217, 218

Bassmann, Tom 61, 81

Baudrillard, Jean 118

Beck, Robert see Buck, Robert

Bender, Gretchen 131

Benjamin, Walter 20

Berkeley Art Museum

see University Art Museum, Berkeley

Bernd, John 238

Betty Russell Foundation 190

Beuys, Joseph 141, 222

*Billboard* (magazine) 244

"Bingo Night" (event) 30

Black, Randolph 44

Black Power salute 71

Blake, Nayland 230, 239

Bleckner, Ross 246

Blottner, Mark 169

Border Arts Workshop 249

Bordo, Robert 37

Boozell, Greg 168

*Boston Phoenix, The* (newspaper) 195

Bowers v. Hardwick 233

Brecht, Bertolt 159

Brennan, Patrick 7, 8, 8, 17, 19, 20, 27, 43, 52, 54, 210

*I'm a Victim* 28

Brown, Curtis 128

Brown, James 71

Buck, Robert 246

*Safer Sex Preview Booth* 246

*Target City Hall* 246

Bush, George H. W. 145, 174-175, 249

Carter, Jimmy 26

Casa Nicaragua 74

**Cash Prize** (1991) **186-189**

**Castle, The** (1987) **121-125**

Catholic Parishes of Pilsen 168

"Caution! Alternative Space" flyer 56-57

CBGB 219

Center for AIDS Service, The 247

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 231

Centre d'Art Santa Monica 198

Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff 100, 103

Charlesworth, Sarah 218

Chicago / Gary Union of the Homeless 168

Cimino, Michael 26

City Gallery, New York 57

Close, Chuck 247

Club 57 47, 219

Cockcroft, Eva 141

**Collaboration** (1990-1991) **178-179**

Collaborative Projects (Colab) 19, 20

Columbia University 8

Committee in Solidarity with the People of

El Salvador (CISPES) 74

Conceptualism 238

*Coney Island Show* 59

**Constitution** (1987) **126-131**

Constructivism 217

**Consumption: Metaphor, Pastime,**

**Necessity** (1981) **42-45**

*Contemporaneo* (magazine) 179

Cooper Union School of Art 15, 59, 200

Cops: *Caught in the Act* (video) 202

Corcoran Gallery, Washington, DC 156, 253

Cork, Richard 217

Crisco Disco 219

Cronenberg, David 118

*Cultural Participation* see *Democracy*

Curtis, Edward 128

D&S *Austellung* 158, 159

**DA ZI BAOS** (1982) **62-69, 102, 191, 193**

Dada 217, 238

*Daily Californian* (newspaper) 244, 249

Danceteria 219, 244

"Dancing in the Street" (song) 18

Dashiell, David Cannon 239

*Day Without Art* 179, 253

De Maria, Walter 138

*Deer Hunter, The* (film) 26, 26

**Democracy** (1988-89) **138-155, 177**

**AIDS and Democracy** 139, **152-155, 160, 244**

**Cultural Participation** 139, **148-151**

**Education** 139, **140-144**

**Politics and Election** 139, **145-147, 149** publication 177, 177

**Democracy Poll** (1990) **170-173**

**Democracy Wall** (1985) **100-105**

**Democracy Wall** (1994) 3, **192-197**

Dezell, Maureen 195

Dia Art Foundation 138-139, 140, 145, 148, 149, 152, 155, 177

Disney, Walt 117

DIVA-TV 246

documento 8 121

Dones, Liliانا 8, 11, 17, 27, 30, 47, 54, 210

*Budgets* 18, 19, 24

Downtown Uptown 57

Drillick, Anne 15, 38

Dryer, Moira 44

Duchamp, Marcel 238

Dukakis, Michael 145

Dunning, Jeanne 168

*Dynasty* (TV series) 115, 187, 189, 189

**Eat This Show** (1981) 52, **54-55**

*Education* see *Democracy*

Egger, Thomas 198, 198, 200, 206

Eins, Stefan 19

*Empire Strikes Back, The* (film) 161

**Enthusiasm!** (1981) **58-59**

Episalla, Joy 37

Evans, Steven 244

*Late Eighties Play List* 244

*Selections from the Disco, Various BPM, 1979-1989* 244

**Facere / Fascis** (1981) **46-47**

Fairbrother, Trevor 195

Fales Library Downtown Collection 209,

210, 211, 212

Fallon, Camilla 150

*Family Photo* (1991) 189

Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front

(FMLN) 74, 76

Fashion Moda 19, 52

Fauci, Dr. Anthony 231

Fekner, John 54

Ferraro, Geraldine 112

*Finley v. NEA* 253

Fleshtones, the 8

Foucault, Michel 213

Frederick, Barry 247

Frederickson, Sara 168

Frente Democrático Revolucionario (FDR)

74, 76

*Future Shock* 230

G, Bobby 76

Gannett Outdoor 165

Garet, Jedd 217, 218

Garrels, Gary 138

Glaser, David 11  
Glier, Mike 43, 133, 134, 146, 219, 238  
  *White Mole Power* 219, 238  
"God Bless America" (song) 115  
Godard, Jean-Luc 118  
Goldin, Nan 253  
Goldstein, Richard 20  
Golub, Leon 131, 218  
Gonzalez, Joss 76  
Gonzalez, Jr., Mario 169  
Gonzalez-Torres, Felix 131, 131, 133, 141, 176,  
  179, 182, 183, 189, 191, 198, 206, 210,  
  230, 239, 244, 247, 249  
Gran Fury 155, 161, 244, 249  
Greco, Vito 168  
Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG) 128

Haacke, Hans 59, 133  
Halley, Peter 118, 141  
Haring, Keith 219  
Harrison, Margaret 114, 217  
Hatch, Karen 44  
Hawkins, Yolanda 7, 11, 49  
Heartfield, John 85  
Heartney, Eleanor 198  
Hellfand, Glen 247, 249  
Heresies Collective 54, 219  
Hess, Elizabeth 153  
*High Performance* (magazine) 179  
Hill-Montgomery, Candace 61  
Hodsell, Frank 54  
Holzer, Jenny 133, 135, 218  
*How to Organize Your Home* (video) 202  
Hughes, Lynn 43

Imperial margarine 122  
*In Public: Seattle* 1991 186  
**Inaugural Exhibition** (1980) **18-25**  
**Inserts** (1988) **132-137**  
Institute of Arts and Letters of El Salvador in  
  Exile (INALSE) 74  
Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Boston  
  198  
*Intolerance* (exhibition idea) 157  
**It's A Gender Show!** (1981) 19, **36-37**

Jackson, Mahalia 127  
Jackson, Michael 123  
Jaker, Beth 7, 8, 17, 20, 27, 37, 47, 49, 210  
Jefferson Memorial 91  
Jefferson, Thomas 127, 129  
Jenkins, Michael 139, 233  
  *June 30, 1986* 139, 233  
Johnson, Larry 123  
Jones, Steve 112

Kafka, Franz 122  
Kalin, Tom 244  
  1968-1988 244  
  *They Are Lost to Vision Altogether* 244  
Kalinovska, Milena 198  
Keane, Margaret and Walter 80-81  
Kelly, Mary 247  
Kelley, Mike 150  
*Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and  
  Society* 71, 72

Kids Of Survival (K.O.S.) 131, 249  
King Jr., Martin Luther 219  
Kitchen, The, New York 116  
Klein, Jochen 198, 198, 200, 206, 210  
Kohn, Dorothy (Dottie the K) 110, 113  
Kolbowski, Silvia 123  
Kosuth, Joseph 7, 28, 217, 218

Kramer, Margia 20  
Kruger, Barbara 118, 133  
Kunstverein, Hamburg 158  
Kunstverein München, Munich 198-199

La-Z-boy 139, 146, 149  
Landesman, Knight 253  
Laphisophon, Stephen 168  
Laurita, Louis 81  
Lavier, Bertrand 146  
Lawler, Louise 117, 133, 137  
Lawson, Thomas 32, 77, 123, 131  
Laycock, Ross 182  
Lebron, Michael 8, 13  
LeLong, Sally 44  
Lesbian and Gay Community Center,  
  New York 156

Levin, Kim 96, 154  
Levine, Sherrie 126  
Lewis, Joe 19

**Liberty & Justice** (1986) **115**  
Liebner, James 168  
Ligon, Glenn 249  
  *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* 249  
Lindell, John 249  
  *All People With AIDS Are Innocent* 249  
Linn, Nancy 133  
Lipp, Barbara 43  
Lippard, Lucy R 74, 76, 218  
Locks, Sabrina 211, 214, 229-253  
Lopez, Martina 169  
Lord cigarettes 122  
Lord's Prayer 28  
**Luchar! An Exhibition for the People of  
  Central America** (1982) **74-76**

**M5** (1981-82) **60-61**  
MacCabe, Colin 220  
McGee, Micki 50  
McGill University 116  
McHale, John 230  
McKay, Paul 247  
McLaughlin, Mundy 15, 20, 27, 43, 47, 52,  
  54, 59, 63, 102, 116, 131, 209  
Machinists' Union Hall, New York 38  
Madame Binh Graphics Collective 54  
Mapplethorpe, Robert 156-157, 252, 253  
**Market** (1995) 198, **199-203**  
Martha and the Vandellas 18  
Marzorati, Gerald 19-20  
Mason Gross School of the Arts 198  
**MASS** (1985-86) **106-109**  
Mass Transit Authority 79-80  
Master Blend coffee 122, 123  
*Material-Six Works* 8  
MATRIX Program  
  see University Art Museum, Berkeley  
Max's Kansas City 219  
Meister Klasse soup 122  
Melamed, Brad 81

**Messages to Washington** (1985) **110-114**  
Messner, Ann 84, 86-87  
Mexican Fine Arts Center, The, Chicago 165  
Meyer, Richard 160, 229, 239  
Miami Dade College 8, 11  
Miéville, Anne-Marie 118  
Miller-Keller, Andrea 252  
Mr. Big napkins 122  
Modotti, Tina 85  
Moore, Leonard 247  
Morales, Jesus 168  
Morgan, Gary 44  
Morris, Robert 32

Morrow, James 179, 253  
Mudd Club 219, 244  
Muntadas, Antonio 146  
Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston 192-195

Nash, Andrew 44  
National Association of Artists'  
  Organizations 253  
National Campaign for Freedom of  
  Expression 253

National Cleansing Campaign 101  
National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) 54,  
  57, 77, 116, 156, 183, 253  
*National Enquirer* 117  
National Front 103, 104  
National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious  
  Diseases 231

Neiman, LeRoy 92  
Nelson, Marybeth 7, 8, 37, 49, 210  
Nenner, Paulette 54  
Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst  
  (INGBK), Berlin 170, 173  
New Museum, New York 106, 152  
New York State Council For The Arts  
  (NYSICA) 79, 116, 133, 183  
New York State Teachers Association 140  
Ninn, Nancy 133  
New York University 7, 11, 15, 30, 118, 131  
Nixon, Nicholas 249  
No Pasaran Women's Group 165  
North Lakeside Cultural Center, Chicago 165  
Nosei, Annina 219

O'Connell, Patrick 179, 253  
Obrosey, Aric 79-80, 117, 123  
October (magazine) 179  
Oglesby, Carl 221  
Olander, William 107, 118, 152  
Oldenburg, Claes 19  
*One Thousand and One Nights* 213  
Orr-Cahall, Christina 156  
*Other America: Art and Labor, The* 114

P.S.1., Long Island City 83  
Pakulski, Marek 8, 8, 26  
Parkett (magazine) 179  
Patten, Mary 168  
Paula Cooper Gallery 218

Pei, I. M. 193  
**People's Choice, The** (1981) 26, **30-35**  
People With AIDS 232  
Peoples, Matti 44  
PEZ candy 30, 32  
*Philadelphia* (film) 249  
Pincus-Witten, Robert 218  
Pitrone, Anne 54, 74-75, 75  
*Pity Puppy* 80-81, 82  
*Points of Entry* 204  
Positive Art 247  
Pressley, Daniel 126  
**Primer (for Raymond Williams)** (1982)  
  **70-73**  
Prince, Richard 133, 136  
Printed Matter (bookstore) 177  
*Professional Image, The* 114  
**Program** (1996) **204-205**  
Public Art Fund 133  
Public Domain 198  
Public Interventions 198  
Pyramid Club 219, 244

Ramspacher, Karen 155, 166, 182, 183, 189,  
  210, 230, 239

Randolph Street Gallery 163, 165, 189  
Rauschenberg, Robert 19  
Reagan, Ronald 26, 161, 173, 232, 244, 249  
Real Art Ways, Hartford 174-175  
*Real Estate Show, The* 19, 219  
Reese, Marshall 146

**Resistance (Anti-Baudrillard)** (1987)  
  **118-120**

Rest Stop Support Center 247  
**Revolting Music** (1981) **38-41**  
*Revolution of the Mind* (album) 71  
**Revolutionary Fine Arts** (1983) **77**  
Reynolds, Jock 57, 77  
Rhode Island School of Design (RSDI) 189  
Ribalta, Jorge 198  
Ribbon Project 253  
Rich, Felicity 168  
Richheimer, Judy 53  
Rinder, Larry 160, 246, 247  
Ringgold, Faith 50, 129  
Rivera, Diego 85  
Robert Miller Gallery, New York 218  
Robbins, David 129  
Rodchenko, Alexander 59  
Rodriguez, Geno 115  
Rodriguez, Jorge Luis 32  
Rohling, Rasmus 214  
Rollins, Tim 7, 12-15, 16, 19, 20, 27, 28, 43,  
  45, 50, 52, 57, 59, 62, 71, 77, 131, 141,  
  209, 217-219, 249  
Rosen, Kay 165, 168  
Rosenblum, Robert 218  
Rosler, Martha 59, 139, 155  
  *There's No Place Like Home* 139  
Rousseau, Ann Marie 28  
Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center, Chicago 165  
Rupp, Christy 110  
Russo, Edd 252

**Salon Of Election '80, The** (1980) 19, **26-27**  
San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art 190  
Sanchez, Juan 43  
Scanners (film) 118  
Schneider, John 165  
School of Visual Arts (SVA) 7, 15, 37, 217  
Scott, Ridley 28  
*Scum Manifesto, The* 54  
*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (newspaper) 186  
Serlis, Effie 37  
Serrano, Andres 126, 156, 253  
  *Piss Christ* 253  
Seuss, Dr. 222  
Shakers 217  
Shearer, Linda 77  
Shestack, Alan 195  
*Shift* (magazine) 179  
Sholette, Greg 44  
**Shopping Bag** (1989) **158-159**  
Siqueiros 85  
Siskin, Sharon 247  
Sister Serpents 169  
*Six Fois Deux / Sur Et Sous La  
  Communication* (film) 118  
Sky, Philip 103  
Smith, Greg 44  
Soho News 19  
Sokolowski, Tom 253  
Spero, Nancy 97, 126, 133, 218  
Springsteen, Bruce 114  
Staeck, Klaus 18, 42  
Staniszewski, Mary Anne 175  
"Star-Spangled Banner, The" (song) 28, 115  
Staton, Candi 8

Steedman, Carolyn 209  
Stephens, Bill 43  
Students for a Democratic Society 221  
*Studio International* 217  
**Subculture** (1983) **78-81**, 131  
*Sunday Daily News* 133  
Syrop, Mitchell 146  
Szygula, Peter 7, 8, 17, 37, 49, 210

*Der Tagesspiegel* (newspaper) 171  
Taller Latinoamericano, New York 74, 77  
Taylor, Marvin 210, 211  
Temple University Gallery, Philadelphia 126  
*Thing, The* (film) 239  
Thomson, Cathy 43  
Three Rivers Arts Festival, Pittsburgh 204  
Tier Three 219  
**Timeline: A Chronicle of U.S. Intervention  
  in Central and Latin America** (1984)  
  **83-90**  
*Times Square Show, The* 219  
Toffer, Alvin 230-231  
**Tomorrow** (1993) **190-191**  
Tseng, Kwong Chi 98  
Tupperware 42

Udvardy, Michael 8, 43, 54, 210  
UFO Club 219  
Ukeles, Mierle Laderman 43  
**Unisex** (1989) **156**  
United Fruit Co. 85  
University Art Museum, Berkeley 160, 229,  
  246  
University of Maine 7  
*Untitled (Future Shock)* 230, 239

Van Dalen, Anton 61  
Vena, Joanne 165, 166  
"Victim" (song) 8  
*Village Voice, The* 20, 76  
Visual AIDS 253  
Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts (VLA) 11

Wachtel, Julie 80, 118  
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford 176, 229,  
  252  
Wagner, Frank 173  
Wallis, Brian 177  
Washington Project for the Arts, Washington,  
  DC 110  
Wasow, Oliver 118  
Weems, Carrie Mae 133  
Westside Cultural Arts Coalition, The,  
  Chicago 165  
Westermann, Barbara 84, 86-87  
White Columns, New York 118, 244  
*Whitney Biennial* 42, 91, 182, 229, 247, 249  
Williams, Raymond 70, 71  
Wong, Martin 93  
Work Gallery 81  
*Works On Newspaper* (1981) 60  
Wright, Judge Bruce 141

**YOUR MESSAGE HERE** (1990) **163-169**