



Group Material, *Timeline: A Chronicle of US Intervention in Central and Latin America*, 1984. 'For Artists Call Against US Intervention in Central America', P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York. Photograph: Dorothy Zeidman. Courtesy the artists and Four Corners Books

the authority of linear historiography, it remains recognisable as a timeline nonetheless. By combining this form with strategies of abstraction (the lack of explanatory texts and the loose cognitively challenging connections between dates and objects) and multiplicity (the profusion of objects and narrative voices), *Timeline* exhorts its viewers (as well as its makers) to act as historians themselves. Refusing postmodernism's pessimism towards historical labour and representation, the work insists on the necessity of both tasks, not just for artistic practice but also as modes of spectatorship.⁵²

History is only part of *Timeline's* lesson, however, for its centre of gravity is an object of political agency, a massive bright red sculpture that had been brandished a few weeks before the exhibition opened at a public protest in the nation's capital. Created by Bill Allen, Ann Messner and Barbara Westermann, the sculpture takes the form of a giant maritime navigation buoy. At the demonstration, its bell

rang a repeated toll of warning, marking time not metronomically but according to the jostling movements of protestors holding it aloft by the beams at its base. In *Timeline*, though silenced and stilled by the exhibition context, the buoy's earlier life was referenced in a photograph documenting the Washington demonstration, prominently mounted on the crimson timeline as the very final image of 1984, the installation's culminating moment, when history slips into the present. The chromatic bond between the sculpture and Group Material's timeline establishes a connection between historical analysis and public dissent in the present tense. The red at the centre also marks time along the walls, underscoring collective protest as a force as constant as the chronicle of oppression itself. In turn, the lessons of history that unfold along the walls ultimately converge at the focal point of collective action, interpellating *Timeline's* viewers not only as historians but also as potential activists.

52 See B.H.D. Buchloh, 'A Note on Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977*', *op. cit.* M. Godfrey's 'The Artist as Historian', *op. cit.* makes the case that history, relatively absent from Anglo-American post-War art, has recently become a primary concern in artistic practice. Notable examples relevant for Group Material's work include: Rosler's installation *Fascination with the (game of the) exploding (historical) hollow leg* (1985); Richter's series *October 18, 1977* (1988); Mary Kelly's *Mea Culpa* (1999); and, more recently, Chto delat?'s timeline projects (2008–10) and the 'Potosí Principle' exhibition at the Museo Nacional Centro de Reina Sofía in Madrid and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, curated by Alice Creischer, Max Jorge Hinderer and Andreas Siekmann. My current project undertakes a more thoroughgoing comparison with works such as these.