

SOCIAL AESTHETICS

New York, September 14, 1989—Early this morning five members of ACT UP, an AIDS activist group, entered the New York Stock Exchange under cover of dark suits, crimson ties, and fake Bear, Stearns & Co. identification cards. They went up to the balcony and, just before the 9:30 a.m. opening bell, disrupted the start of trading for nearly five minutes by blasting horns and throwing a flurry of hundred-dollar bills to the trading room floor. This was not simply a belated tribute to the memory of Abbie Hoffman, who twenty years ago caused a near riot at the same location by tossing money to the bulls, the bears, and the pigs. ACT UP's C-notes, unlike Hoffman's dollars, were fake and were inscribed on the verso, "PEOPLE ARE DYING WHILE YOU PLAY BUSINESS." After chaining themselves to the balustrade, today's demonstrators also unfurled a banner from the balcony; it read "SELL WELCOME."

At high noon, several hours after these demonstrators were carted off to police headquarters, several hundred other AIDS activists took to the intersection of Wall and Broad Streets. They formed a continuous circle of men and women more than two blocks long. Before the bolted doors of the Stock Exchange, and in the face of hundreds of cops, they raised a deafening clamor, blaring horns, drumming on cow bells, whistling, and raising their voices with chants to alert those who daily trade in the shares of Wellcome P.L.C. that they are profiting from blood money.

Wellcome P.L.C. is the British parent of the American company Burroughs Wellcome, which still charges ruinous sums for the drug Azidothymidine (AZT). Today it costs roughly \$8,000 annually for a person with AIDS to slow the replication of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in his or her system by taking this drug. Of all drugs requiring daily dosage, AZT is the most expensive in history. This is true even though AZT was actually discovered as a possible anti-cancer agent in 1964 by Jerome Horwitz, a scientist at the federally funded Michigan Cancer Foundation, and despite the fact that the National Cancer Institute supplied Burroughs Wellcome with the raw ingredient required to make the first supplies of AZT. While Burroughs Wellcome has spent about \$80 million to develop

Four members of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) arrested by deputies at the Burroughs Wellcome Co. offices in Research Triangle Park, Durham, North Carolina, 1989.

this drug—a modest sum by industry standards—an analyst with the British investment bank of Barclays Dezoete Wedd, Inc., in New York has estimated that the company's before-tax profit in 1989 was \$100 million (on gross sales of \$220 million to some 45,000 people with AIDS).

Recently scientists released data supporting the idea that AZT would benefit those who are infected with HIV, but who do not yet have AIDS. As a consequence, the FDA is on the verge of recommending that AZT be taken by the hundreds of thousands of people who fit that description in this country alone. As the ACT UP fact sheet accompanying today's demonstration asserted, "Wall Street is betting on AZT being the next drug to reach one billion dollars in annual sales." Over the past three weeks the price of stock in Wellcome P.L.C. has increased by over 40 percent.

Neither Wall Streeters nor Burroughs Wellcome are unfamiliar with ACT UP. Wall Street was the site of the AIDS activists' very first demonstration. On March 24, 1987, scores of protesters sat down in the middle of Wall Street while others distributed literature on AIDS and on how governmental indifference toward AIDS and corporate greed had turned the epidemic into a full-fledged health emergency. Two years later, on the morning of April 25, 1989, four members of ACT UP (two of whom were also arrested in today's action inside the Stock Exchange) donned business suits and briefcases and slipped by security personnel at Burroughs Wellcome's headquarters at Research Triangle Park outside Durham, North Carolina. Having equipped their briefcases with drills, bolts, a small TV, and enough food and drink to get by for three days, they sealed themselves inside a third-floor office in the company's South building. Then they telephoned local newsmen and national wire services to inform them—and the company—of their presence and their demands: that Burroughs Wellcome lower the price of AZT by 25 percent and that the company provide the drug to a federal program that distributes it to those who can't afford to buy it. Burroughs Wellcome promptly announced their intention to lower the price of AZT by 25 percent while claiming, no doubt disingenuously, that they had intended to do so anyway.

Among those Americans whose lives depend upon AZT and who were once solvent, many have since been forced into penury. This has not happened because a disability forced them to give up their jobs or because they had no medical insurance; but simply because their relative solvency (in New York, an after-tax annual income above \$5,508) made them ineligible for Medicaid coverage and gave them no choice but to "choose" financial ruin. For these people—whose insurance coverage is inadequate or nonexistent, and who are not yet sufficiently destitute to qualify for Medicaid—the federal government begrudgingly instituted an AIDS drug reimbursement program as part of its Supplemental Appropriations Act for fiscal 1988. The



number of people enrolled in this program so far has averaged between seven and eight thousand. Funding for the program initially included \$10 million that actually were redirected from elsewhere in the federal AIDS budget and \$5 million from the always beneficent Burroughs Wellcome. Last March, when the funds were depleted, the federal government kicked in an additional \$5 million. Now the time has come to renew this fund. Evidently fearing congressional opposition this time around, Senator Edward Kennedy has proposed that the program be restructured so that the federal government would henceforth disburse grants requiring matching state funds. Some states, no doubt, will be less than forthcoming with their halves, thus creating the preconditions for an exodus that will add an additional burden to states that already have a disproportionately high incidence of HIV infection.

New York, September 18, 1989—In a press release filled with obfuscation, self-justification, and feigned magnanimity, Burroughs Wellcome announced today that it would cut the price of AZT by 20 percent. On National Public Radio, a spokesperson for the company claimed that pressure from the international AIDS activists community had nothing whatsoever to do with their decision.

The AIDS epidemic has struck gay men, African-Americans, Hispanics, and the poor disproportionately. As a result, one's view of this health care emergency is forced to dilate and encompass racial, sexual, and economic privilege, issues from which the AIDS crisis is, after all, inseparable. Perhaps only the matter of reproductive rights shares with the AIDS crisis this capacity to prompt so multifaceted and broad-based a reflection on American social conditions today. Of all the developed nations in the West, only South Africa and the United States have no system of national health care. The costs of medical assistance in this country are notorious; the overcrowded public health facilities are inhumane, even lethal. These conditions of health care in America attest to the failure of our democracy to live up to its most basic principle: that it be government for the people, by the people.

"AIDS and Democracy: A Case Study," an exhibition organized by the artists' collective Group Material for the Dia Art Foundation in 1989, presupposed the capacity of the AIDS crisis to serve as a litmus test for democratic processes in the U.S. today. The failure of those processes to represent the interests of all Americans was symbolized in the rendering of the American flag that presided over the installation at Dia's Wooster Street space. Michael Jenkins's *June 30, 1986* resembles an inverted Old Glory, one that consists, however, entirely of stripes. The date used in the title of this work, and the use of nine rather than thirteen stripes in this flag, suggests Jenkins's concern with the nine Supreme Court justices who ruled (5-4) on June 30, 1986, that police had the right to invade a man's privacy in his home and jail him under a state antisodomy law. Where the blue field of white stars that symbolize the states of the union should be, Jenkins simply cut into his "flag." With the piece pinned to the wall—stripes down, the rectangular void at lower right—this flag seemed frozen in the midst of a continuous fall, as if the negative weight of those absent stars were just dragging it down.

"AIDS and Democracy" contained a considerable amount of educational and agitational printed matter. This was the result of Group Material's engagement with AIDS activists throughout the process of conceiving and organizing their installation. This material, most of which was contributed by ACT UP (New York), was piled neatly in roughly forty stacks on a very long table that bisected the room diagonally. At the opposite ends of these tables, large TV monitors faced clusters of folding chairs. These monitors showed a continuous program of eleven videotapes comprising a cross-section of the rapidly growing library of works in video by AIDS activists, video artists, and filmmakers. Produced over the past four or five years, these activist videos counter the repressive and ineffective educational material put out by federal, state, and city agencies, and refute the chronic misrepresentation by the mass media of AIDS, its modes of transmission, and the people who have it.

In this installation these videos and the graphics that constitute the ephemera of direct political activism (i.e., Gran Fury's posters, *READ MY LIPS* and *ALL PEOPLE WITH AIDS ARE INNOCENT*) were juxtaposed with works of "high" art. In many cases these art works could be understood to bear upon the AIDS crisis only within this context. For instance, Jannis Kounellis's untitled work (1975) consisted simply of an engraving of Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Marat* with a (real) black butterfly fixed to its surface. Andres Serrano's *Winged Victory, a Nike of Samothrace* photographed in piss, presided over the interior as the most luminous lament on display. Under more neutral circumstances it would have revitalized spiritual imagery that has been debased by organized religion by confronting the spectator with his or her anxiety about the body. Louise Lawler's *Them*, which targets the paucity of government spending on health research relative to defense spending in the U.S. and Europe, seemed tailor-made for the installation, but is a work that dates from 1986. Meanwhile, Don Moffett's illuminated box, *1988*, expressed a popular sentiment among visitors to the installation with its photograph of Reagan's departure, captioned in pink script, "So Long, Farewell, Auf Wiedersehen, Goodbye."

These heterogeneous juxtapositions took place in the midst of what had become a polarized situation among some artists and AIDS activists. By late 1988 this became evident in a contentious debate about what, if anything short of collective direct political action, constitutes a significant cultural response to the AIDS crisis.⁴ In retrospect, "AIDS and Democracy" was more valuable as an opportunity to investigate the terms of this conflict than as an attempt to reconcile the two sides of the argument. By providing a forum in which fairly poetic individual art works shared space with a broad range of educational and political artifacts, the installation gave visitors a chance to decide for themselves what significance, if any, each work might have in dealing with this political, social, and personal crisis. It clarified, moreover, that in a situation where the lines are so clearly drawn between those who want to stop the dying and others who continue to exploit it to further a conservative political agenda, the Enemy is not to be found among those who created these works of art.

Finally, there were emotional reasons for joining together art that reflects on death and loss, that questions institutional authority, and that militates for political change. This deep emotional purpose was stated upfront in a statement that Group Material displayed near the entrance. This statement, which outlined the rationale behind this installation in terms of the motivation for AIDS activism itself, dedicated "Democracy" in its entirety to Bill Olander, who, though gravely ill at the time, attended the opening. No less moving, however, were the little touches: the presence of a ramp that the artists procured for placement outside the door to the gallery to guarantee smooth entry for all visitors, including those using wheelchairs.

The title "Social Aesthetics" is not mine. My friend Bill Olander coined it back in 1982 as the title of his essay in the catalogue for "Art and Social Change," an exhibition he organized for the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College. Bill was supposed to have written the essay that I am now writing, but on March 18, 1989, he died of AIDS. I borrow his title for two reasons: first, to emphasize the loss that I and the members of Group Material feel in his absence; and second, because the concept of a socially based aesthetic corresponds with the terms of a "cultural activism" that can encompass both the radical militancy of ACT UP and other activists and the work of artists who, like Group Material, use the symbolic sphere of culture to effect social and political change.

It is now almost a decade since the twelve original members of Group Material decided to reject the conventional options open to them as artists just out of school, to work outside the art marketplace, and to adopt a collective identity. Intent on developing an art that could deal critically with cultural, political, and social issues, Group Material decided to use collaborative methods and to engage, whenever possible, with other community-based and activist groups. This allowed them to extend their encounter with political and social issues well beyond the traditional limits of aesthetic form and content.

During the 1980s, the term "cultural activist" has been applied—sometimes generously, sometimes exclusively—to a variety of cultural practices that criticize mainstream culture and the institutions that regulate it, often embodying the cultural expressions of nonmainstream communities. A conjunction of theoretical, cultural, and historical circumstances made this reclassification of oppositional culture into cultural activism possible. On a theoretical level, this shift was in part a result of debates about the Marxist theory of ideology which took place in France in the late 1960s. The political theorist Louis Althusser was central to this critical reformulation.

In his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Althusser reiterated the traditional Marxist understanding that the ruling ideology, which is manifest in cultural production, facilitates the perpetuation of existing dispositions of power and privilege in society. But departing from more parochial Marxists, Althusser insisted that the dominant ideology is not simply a passive, "superstructural" reflection of social relations determined by the economic "base" of material production; rather, he emphasized, ideology and the social relations of production are joined together by a complex, reciprocal action of mutual determination. What is more, Althusser envisioned the cultural sites of ideological production and reproduction as zones of symbolic contestation, not only emblematic of, but crucial to, class struggle. Oppositional or critical cultural practices, he argued, have the power to destabilize and hinder the reproductive powers of the dominant ideology. Al-



Barbara Kruger, poster for the March for Women's Lives (march for reproductive freedom) in Washington, D.C., April 9, 1989.

thusser's acknowledgment that cultural practices can possess critical powers, and that these are of direct consequence to class struggle, provided the theoretical precondition for conferring "activist" status onto cultural production.²

Since Althusser's day, issues of race and sexual difference have been recognized by many (though not, alas, by all) on the left to be as important as class is in any social transformation that is worthy of the term "revolutionary." The anticolonial uprisings in North Africa, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere from the 1950s on, and the rise of a massive American civil rights movement during the 1960s expanded the basis for a critique of Euro-American culture to include institutionalized racism that colonizes, distorts, and in other ways renders invisible people of color and their forms of cultural expression. From the mid to late sixties, the rise of the feminist movement, and, from the end of the sixties, the struggle for lesbian and gay rights forcefully added the issue of sexual difference to the critique of Western "humanist" culture. Thus critiques arising out of these struggles that centered on the issues of race and gender, as well as class, led to the multifaceted assault on modernist culture that emerged during the 1960s. No great synthesis between these issues ever emerged, nor is it likely that anything more synthetic than a coalition is theoretically practicable. To this day, women, gays, and lesbians have to argue for the political status of their struggle, which many men on the left continue to dismiss as mere "personal" matters, which detract from what they insist is the only truly revolutionary concern—class struggle.

Intent upon the creation, organization and promotion of an art dedicated to social communication and political change, Group Material has used a variety of strategies to explore issues that bear directly or indirectly upon class, race, and gender, and their interface with culture. When the collective inquires, as it often does, "How is culture made, and who is it for?" it presumes the ideological inscription of oppressive social relations within the dominant culture. Group Material proceeds from the assumption that conventional definitions of culture can and should be exposed as conservative instruments of social reproduction. The idealist view of history and aesthetics, which has determined the organizational and discursive practices of museum culture since its formation, highlights the transhistorical over the concretely historical, the eternal over the contingent, and the apolitical over the political in whatever museums put on display. In this way the aestheticism of the museum corresponds with the interests of the ruling elite that supports these institutions while they, in turn, legitimate the power of that elite.

Most of Group Material's projects can be understood as attempts to endow the question, "How is culture made, and who is it for?" with a seduc-

tive physical dimension that prompts the spectator to interrogate the relation between the dominant culture and specific social and political issues. At the same time, Group Material's collaborative, heterodox method results in situations that afford glimpses of a very different "culture," one that privileges pluralism and social justice over the maintenance of canonical laws and social privilege.

Most often their projects result in installations, as the ones they initiated in their storefront space at 244 East 13th Street in September 1980. From the start this collective used the art of exhibition as a form of montage, one that recalls the historical avant-gardist tradition. If their art evokes the spirit of Berlin Dada, however, it is not so much individual works by John Heartfield, Hannah Höch, and Raoul Hausmann that it summons, as the kaleidoscopic installation of the 1920 International Dada Fair in Berlin. In the manner of montage, Group Material's installations create a friction between elements—a productive, discursive friction that sparks improbable insights into a given theme. Yet unlike the 1920 Dada Fair, Group Material's installations always proceed from the choice of a socially significant theme to the selection of cultural artifacts that will, ideally, illuminate that theme and provoke debate.

Thus, in December 1980, Group Material analyzed "alienation" from a Marxist perspective, with an installation of works that helped not only to "express" this ubiquitous malaise but to reveal its dependence upon capitalist social relations. As the announcement for *Alienation* put it:

[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 society isn't ours]

In addition to the art installation, Group Material also staged an "Alienation Film Festival," which included premieres of works by local independent filmmakers, and a screening of James Whale's 1931 classic, *Frankenstein*. As part of the project they invited Bertell Ollman, a professor of politics at New York University and author of a book on alienation, to speak before an audience at the Group Material storefront about alienation and its significance in advanced capitalist societies.

Staging this film festival, and inviting a teacher to speak at their space suggest the special role that social interaction has played within Group Material's collaborative method. Whereas modern artists have an especially high regard for works of art that seem to be the organic embodiment of their interactive material processes, Group Material engages in interactive cultural

processes in order to effect social communication in the hopes of facilitating social and political change. Thus, when Group Material decided to rent their storefront space, they intended their gallery to become part of the social fabric of the existing neighborhood. This was evident not only in the film screenings, parties, and discussions that they held there from time to time, but in the strong populist element that their installations possessed. The most striking manifestation of this populist impulse—and of the desire to identify with their neighbors and their concerns—was the exhibition “The People’s Choice” (later renamed “Arroz con Mango”).

The first part of “Arroz con Mango” consisted of a letter that Group Material distributed among their “friends and neighbors of 13th Street.” Dated December 22, 1980, the letter began, “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.” After breaking the ice they came right to the point. They were interested in showing “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.” The resulting installation included religious imagery, dolls in fancy dresses, family photos, amateur paintings, and clay bowls; it featured a knitted bag from Guatemala, a collection of PEZ candy dispensers, a Rembrandt reproduction, and a poster of Robert Morris, oiled up and posing with chains as a crypto-fascist, S&M dreamboat. Notwithstanding its anarchic potential, everything was exhibited with that deference to order and clarity that are the *ne plus ultra* of aesthetic display—and of the much more heterodox displays of Group Material as well.

At best, the populist impulse reveals a determination to open the domain of “culture” to forms of expression that belong to culturally and economically marginalized groups. It can also effect transformations of the cultural site in a somewhat different sense. Group Material created art for spaces that, in an era of wholesale privatization, are in few ways worthy of the designation “public.” In projects like “DA ZI BAOS” (March 1982) and “Subculture” (September 1983) Group Material attempted to restore the public dimension to such spaces by temporarily transforming the terms of the discourse that usually takes place there.

“DA ZI BAOS” consisted of alternating red and yellow monochromatic posters that were illegally wheatpasted to the facade of the defunct S. Klein’s department store on Union Square. The posters featured statements solicited by Group Material from people in the area around Union Square—a public space whose ethnic and economic diversity and rich history of political struggle were being threatened with eradication at the time by aggressive private



Group Material, *DA ZI BAOS*, 1982. Union Square, New York City.

“development.” Group Material also collected statements from six political and service organizations. CISPEP (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador) contributed the following: “If they kill me I will rise again in the Salvadoran people, in the mass organizations.”—Archbishop Romero, assassinated by the junta 3/24/80. “They have risen up and asked the American people for their solidarity because their struggle is our struggle.”

“Subculture” consisted of sometimes trenchant, often amusing, artist-designed posters which Group Material commissioned to provide temporary relief from the advertising one commonly encounters in the ad space above the windows of New York subway cars. The artist Vanalyne Green, who was then working as a secretary, contributed a poster showing grimy coffee cups photographed from above, to which she added the following narrative caption: “Sometimes when he asks me to bring him a cup of coffee I do so. But I pour the coffee in a dirty cup that has a ring of dried coffee around the inside of the cup. And I smile as I hand it to him.”

The members of Group Material dealt with the issue of American racism when, in June 1981 they staged “Atlanta: An Emergency Exhibition.” This show explored the social ramifications of the murder in Atlanta of twenty-eight black children over a period of two years. The collective intended, in the words of the press release, to go “beyond the shock, beyond the sensationalism, beyond the anger, the guilt and the ribbons,” to find the

"history" and the "sense" behind the killings.³ Among the powerful works that were lent to this show were those by Faith Ringgold, Candace Hill-Montgomery, Jerry Kearns, and the Madame Binh Graphics Collective. That part of Group Material's process that entails interaction with communities of interest was especially strong in this instance. Fifty local schoolchildren who were enrolled in a program called "Arts and Education: Learning to Read through the Arts," in which Tim Rollins (then a member of Group Material) taught, created paintings in response to the question, "Who's Killing the Kids?" Those paintings, which in many cases went beyond the crime to consider its social context, were a focal point of the installation.

In 1984 Group Material installed "Timeline: A Chronicle of U.S. Intervention in Central and Latin America" at P.S.1 in Queens. Three years after they abandoned their attempt to interact with a specific working-class community by giving up their storefront space on East 13th Street, they still interacted with groups, such as those who were militating against U.S. interference in Central and Latin America.⁴ "Timeline" was their contribution to "Artists Call," a community-wide artists' response to American intervention in El Salvador and Nicaragua. CISPES provided Group Material with a list of American interventions, which the artists translated into characteristically striking pictorial and sculptural terms. Among these, a pile of ground coffee, a bunch of bananas, and copper plates suggested the nature of American "interests" in the region. One year later, Group Material joined with the art community again, but in an altogether different sense. They were invited to participate in the Whitney Biennial. The immediate result was *Americana*, a radically eclectic blend of appliances, commercial designs, art, and other forms of decor. Isolated from the rest of the Biennial in the Whitney's ground floor gallery, it commented wryly on the strictly retail biennial survey of American art by offering a self-contained alternative to it. The long-term result of the Whitney invitation was that, as the decade proceeded, Group Material, like so many other activist-artists, became part of the international contemporary art circuit, for which they were asked to devise works in situations that are as far removed from the realm of community-based and grass-roots political activism as the concept of "arts and leisure" suggests. Such a transformation of the institutional circumstances that frame their project threatened to trivialize and neutralize it.

In this sense, the Dia Art Foundation—once better known for its commitment to the abstract and spiritual in art—presented Group Material with a considerable challenge when it invited the collective to organize an ambitious project. How could the collective—then consisting of Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres—maintain the edge to their cultural critique? How could they preserve the emancipatory intent and meaningful community interaction that had typified their original project while moving

at the behest of a rich cultural foundation to the very heart of Soho, the torpid and trendy shopping district in lower Manhattan? How, under these conditions, could they ensure that their characteristic engagement with groups involved in potentially life-and-death struggles would not degenerate into a form of cultural colonization and exploitation? How, indeed.

Group Material responded to this challenge by relying upon collaborative processes as they had all along. First they selected the theme of democracy in America and divided it into smaller topics from which this unwieldy object of investigation might be interrogated. For reasons that have as much if not more to do with the artists' lived experience as they do with expertise and study, the collective decided upon the following four topics: "Education and Democracy," "Politics and Election," "Cultural Participation," and "AIDS and Democracy: A Case Study."

The first manifestations of "Democracy" were the roundtable discussions, in which Group Material invited people from pertinent communities of interest to gather at Dia for an informal discussion; one roundtable discussion was held for each of the four subtopics. These were opportunities for the collective to reach out to representatives of particular interest groups, while engaging them as participants in and coproducers of Group Material's cultural process. As the transcripts from the roundtable discussions reveal, the artists listened far more than they spoke. This is entirely consistent with their ongoing desire to learn about the central issues of, say, the public school system from those who are engaged in the day-to-day struggles of trying to educate.⁵ In this way the artists came away from the discussions with insights into how best to proceed with the job of organizing the second manifestation of "Democracy," the installations.

The roundtable discussions also helped Group Material to map out the third part of "Democracy," the town meetings. Like the roundtable discussions, one town meeting was scheduled to coincide with each of the four installations. As befits the designation, these meetings were open fora for public discussion. Envisioning the town meetings from the beginning as indispensable parts of "Democracy," Group Material ensured that the installations would not be taken for the whole of their project, and that their project, moreover, would not be construed as an extended diagnostic session during which three participants in an artists' collective take the national pulse in four ways and find it erratic. As it turns out, however, there was never any great danger that the installations, even taken on their own, would have led to this conclusion.



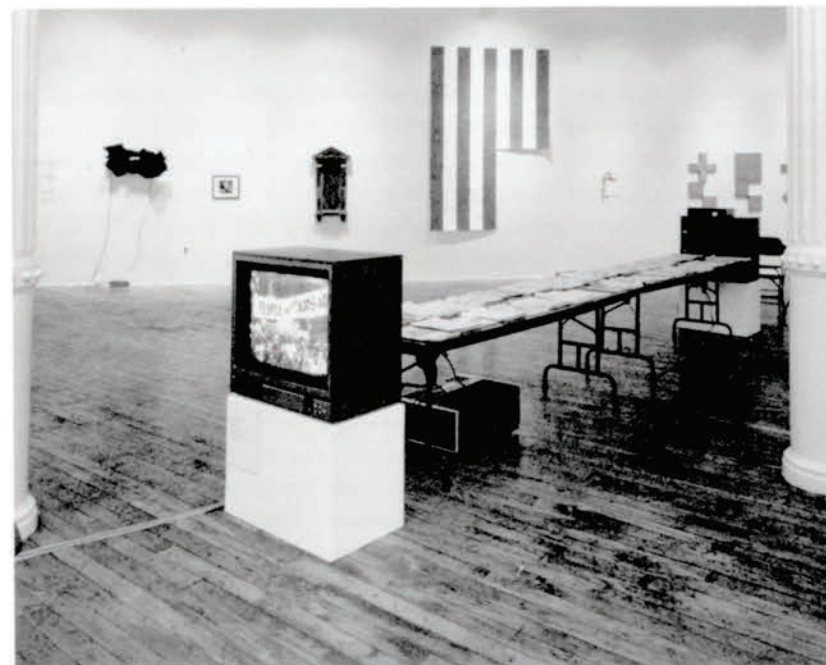
Group Material installation at the Dia Art Foundation, New York, *Education and Democracy*, September 14–October 8, 1988.



Group Material installation at the Dia Art Foundation, New York, *Cultural Participation*, November 19–December 10, 1988.



Group Material installation at the Dia Art Foundation, New York, *Politics and Election*, October 15–November 12, 1988.



Group Material installation at the Dia Art Foundation, New York, *AIDS & Democracy: A Case Study*, December 17, 1988–January 14, 1989.

Public education in America today—especially in our inner cities—is best known for gross inequities in the quality of education, for functionally illiterate high school graduates, for truancy, for wholesale physical deterioration of schools, for the violence in and around schools, and for its Byzantine administrative structures. Under these conditions it seems certain that a considerable proportion of tomorrow's electorate—like today's—will be ill-equipped to protect what democratic freedoms it has. The press release for "Education and Democracy," the first installment of Group Material's "Democracy," contained the following quotation from Thomas Jefferson:

In every government on earth is some trace of human weakness, some germ of corruption and degeneracy, which cunning will discover, and wickedness insensibly open, cultivate and improve. Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves therefore are its only safe depositories. And to render even them safe, their minds must be improved to a certain degree. This indeed is not all that is necessary, though it be essentially necessary. An amendment of our constitution must here come in aid of the public education. The influence over government must be shared among all the people.

To take Jefferson at his word is to conclude that democracy in America is in jeopardy, and has been for some time. Of course, education alone cannot be held accountable for the fact that so few Americans are moved to participate in the electoral process. But neither the consensus that American public education today is in crisis, nor the fact that only 20 percent of those eligible to vote in this country did so in the last election can prevent the talking heads of the mass media from taking every opportunity to brag about our flawless system of government. Who, for example, can forget the spectacle of Dan Rather, beaming from among the youthful throngs in Tiananmen Square last June, as if the song the demonstrators were singing were "America the Beautiful" and not "The Internationale"?

Despite their decidedly critical viewpoint, Group Material managed to avoid the pitfall of assuming the smug posture of condemnation and superiority that has proven irresistible to many on the embattled left. The installation of "Education and Democracy" was a case in point. The room contained four rows of classroom chairs arranged on a bias, as if in perpetual salute to the American flag that hung from the wall nearby. The walls were painted black, with the title of the show written directly on the wall in a well-rounded chalk script. Other samples of writing in chalk—and erasure—added to the scholastic decor. This pedagogical theater avoided didacticism in part through the playfulness of the installation, and in part through the inclusion of largely ambiguous artworks by Peter Halley, Mitchell Syrop, John Ahearn, Lorna Simpson, and Andy Warhol, among

others. Mixing school and art-gallery props removed the possibility that the installation would be dominated either by argument or irony. This cut both ways: the thematic context and the presence of numerous objects that are not conventionally classified as art imposed decidedly unorthodox readings on the "Art." At the same time, many of the objects that were conceived and executed by students and teachers conveyed their message in bold and expressive forms. Take, for example, *Question Mark(s)* by Meryl Meisler and the Drop Ins of Roland Hays Intermediary School. This collaborative work framed the southwest corner of the space with two giant question marks: one backwards, the other upside-down. The surfaces of the question marks consisted of a continuous layer of photographic testimony, produced by the students, that literally underscored in red the school's ongoing physical deterioration. This collaboration between students and teachers—only one among many collaborations in the show—confirmed the presence within the school system of innovative teaching methods, methods that go well beyond the limits of colorful children's drawings.

"Education and Democracy" also provided a historical framework, pointing to some of the social conditions that spurred the progressive movement in American teaching that flourished from the 1930s until the Cold War. Three Lewis Hine photographs in the show documented the living conditions for uneducated working-class children during the second decade of this century. By no coincidence, this was precisely the historical moment when John Dewey outlined the basis for modern American progressive education in the book he titled, significantly, *Democracy and Education* (1916). The social conditions substantiated by Hine's photographs were among those that lent urgency to Dewey's project. In Group Material's installation, these photographs were placed near four small paintings by students in Keith Rambert's class at Brooklyn's Boys and Girls High School. The point of these paintings was clear from the words inscribed across their surfaces: "School gives a sense of direction. (Study! Study!)," "Class is long," and "LEARN TO EARN." The juxtaposition of Hine's photographs and Rambert's small paintings brought to mind one underlying, yet fundamental and recurring aspect of the discourse on education: the degree to which public education is governed by a productive imperative that will dominate people's lives long after they graduate school.

Thomas Jefferson understood—as did many Enlightenment thinkers—that any public instruction that hoped to protect democracy would have to balance practical training with other forms of edification and stimulation. Nearly a century later John Dewey sought to recast this more or less "organic" concept of education. Regarding democracy as a "mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience," Dewey argued that the more numerous and socially diverse the citizens of a nation are, the more worthy

of the name “democracy” that nation becomes. Democracy, for Dewey, was a dynamic social process that could, indeed must, be advanced by continuously “breaking down . . . those barriers of class, race, and national territory which [keep] men from perceiving the full import of their activity.”⁶

During the second half of the nineteenth century—that is, between Jefferson and Dewey—popular education really emerged in the industrialized nations of the West. From the start, it was the site of a discursive conflict. To one side were those for whom education simply meant the preparation of an entire class of people for efficient and docile labor. On the other side were reformers, who saw education as a means of helping people to rise from the class into which they were born, and as a means of combating the increasing atomization of individual life in an era of massive industrialization. Latter-day pragmatist that he was, Dewey claimed to reject the “organic” Rousseauian (or Jeffersonian) model and set out to redefine instrumental logic more radically than had previous reformers. Henceforth, he hoped, the meaning of “efficiency” would no longer be divorced from broader social and personal considerations.

*When social efficiency as measured by product or output is urged as an ideal in a would-be democratic society, it means that the depreciatory estimate of the masses characteristic of an aristocratic community is accepted and carried over. But if democracy has a moral and ideal meaning, it is that a social return be demanded from all and that opportunity for development of distinctive capacities be afforded all. The separation of the two aims in education is fatal to democracy; the adoption of the narrower meaning of efficiency deprives it of its essential justification.*⁷

During the Reagan era conservative ideologues in Washington sought to restore the means-ends logic that Dewey decried—and the authoritarian methods that correspond with it—in order to “reform” the American public school system. Former secretary of education William Bennett couched his assault on the existing approaches to public education in the sort of devious language that became a hallmark of Reagan appointees. “Anti-determinism” and “anti-relativism” were the names he used to describe the practice he advocated—no longer making allowances for childrens’ socioeconomic, ethnic, or racial background, whether in the material used to teach them or in the standards applied to determine their success and failure. Teaching was going to get tough.⁸

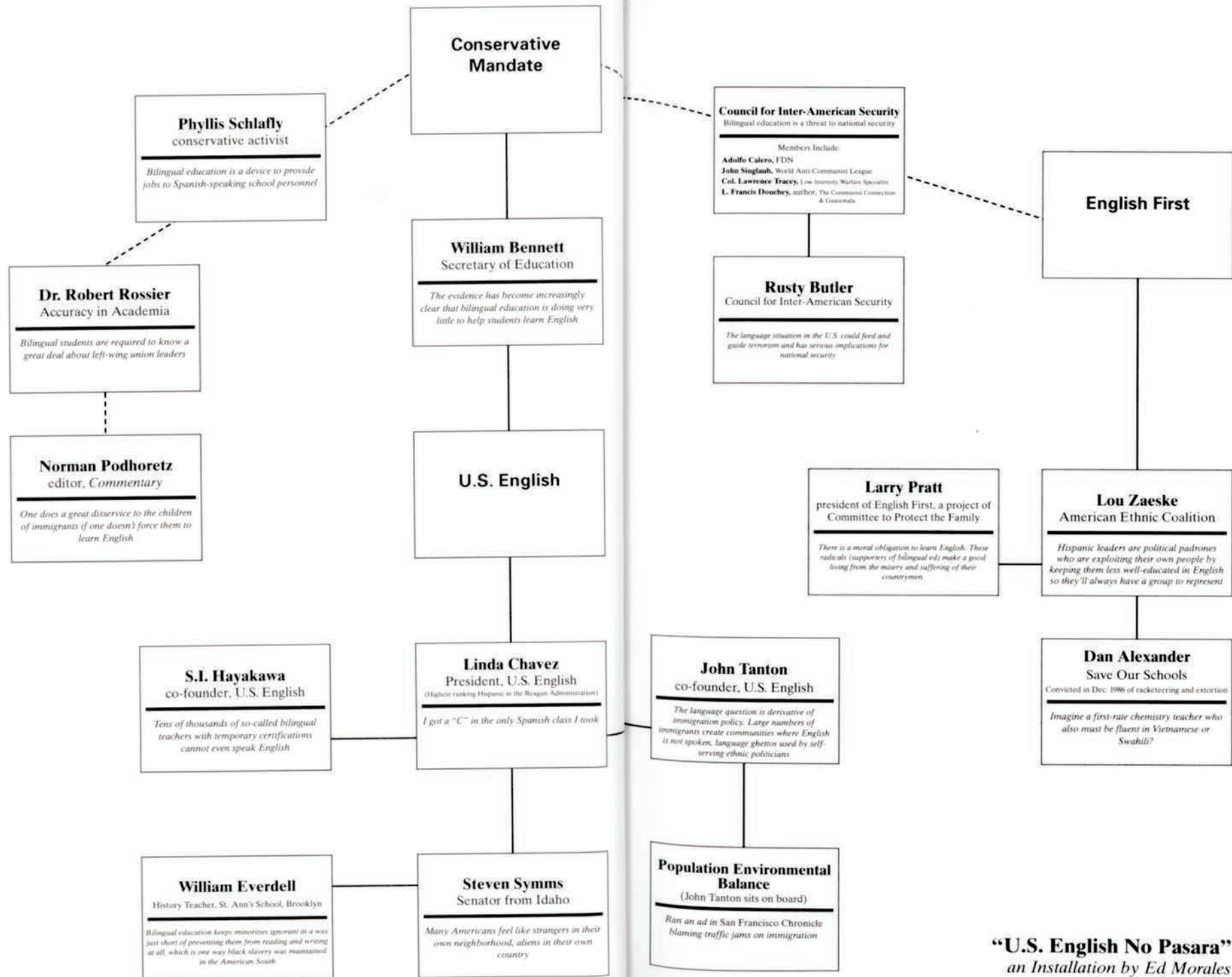
Content, character, and choice—Mr. Bennett’s “three C’s”—identified his formula for successful schools. “Content” designated an insistence on materials that derive from our “common” (read: Western, white, and largely male) cultural heritage. “Character” denoted Mr. Bennett’s plan to infuse our schools with patriarchal, Judeo-Christian family values, and the kind of

discipline epitomized by one of the education secretary’s favorite role models, Joe Clark.⁹ “Choice,” in this case, should not be confused with reproductive rights, since Mr. Bennett intended that sex education become moral education, in which lessons in sexual abstinence are taught with a liberal sprinkling of such words as “modesty” and “chastity.”¹⁰ By “choice,” Mr. Bennett referred to the parents’ (the plural, Bennett’s own, denotes his disapproval of single-parent families) ability to decide which school their children should attend; a laudable idea in theory which, in the absence of massive infusions of funds for the redevelopment of inner-city schools, would condemn certain children to very long rides in buses, assuming that there would be room for them in school at the other end.

Other considerations that have fueled the conservative educational agenda were also alluded to in Group Material’s installation. The struggle over bilingual teaching was mapped out in a diagrammatic, visually striking work called *U.S. English No Pasara*, which was created by Ed Morales, Tom McGlynn, Diana Caballero, Elaine Ruiz, and the Committee for a Multilingual New York. Consisting of strategically aligned quotations from those involved, as well as their names and political affiliations, *U.S. English No Pasara* delineated a startling genealogy of contemporary American xenophobia. It exposed the ideological basis for “U.S. English,” a nonprofit organization that seeks to ensure monolingual education in America. Among those quoted are Phyllis Schlafly, Norman Podhoretz, the members of the Council for Inter-American Security (i.e., John Singlaub, Adolfo Calero, and other belligerent patriots), and—always my personal favorite—the congenitally macho former secretary of education, chain smoker, and current drug czar, William Bennett. Bennett’s testimony consisted of the following: “The evidence has become increasingly clear that bilingual education is doing very little to help students learn English.” If ideology can be defined as that which passes unnoticed as common sense, then this nugget is ideology in its crystalline form.¹¹

Group Material’s education installation was a model of its kind. Its juxtapositions prompted a broad range of insights into its theme, foregrounding the relationship between education and social destiny, while offering proof of imaginative approaches to teaching in a climate of political torpor and bureaucratic intransigence. It also fulfilled that aspect of the group’s mandate that concerns the definition of culture and its consequences. By placing art works by well-known artists in these circumstances—and thereby extracting new meanings from them—Group Material revealed once again how contingent meaning is upon the circumstances of display. Finally, the installation

Ed Morales with Tom McGlynn, Diana Caballero, Elaine Ruiz and the Committee for a Multilingual New York, and Victory Arts, *U.S. English No Pasara*, 1988. ▶



“U.S. English No Pasara”
an Installation by Ed Morales

proved that to redefine “culture” more inclusively, as a social process rather than an ossified canon, is not to throw out the proverbial baby with the bath water—a claim that conservatives who favor the traditional, canonical view of culture invariably level at their opponents.¹²

It would be more difficult to make such undivided claims for the two subsequent installations, “Politics and Election” and “Cultural Participation.” I imagine my dissatisfaction with the former was partly unfair, having something to do with displaced anger, with my personal feeling that presidential elections have become wasteful burlesques. But if that’s the way I feel, then why wouldn’t I have relished an installation that revived the Iran-Contra Scandal and raked Ollie North over the coals, that mocked politicians and state power, that criticized the national love affair with symbolism and its impatience with substance, that ridiculed the electoral orchestration of corn pone and sentiment? Somehow it just seemed arch and, sadly, ineffectual.

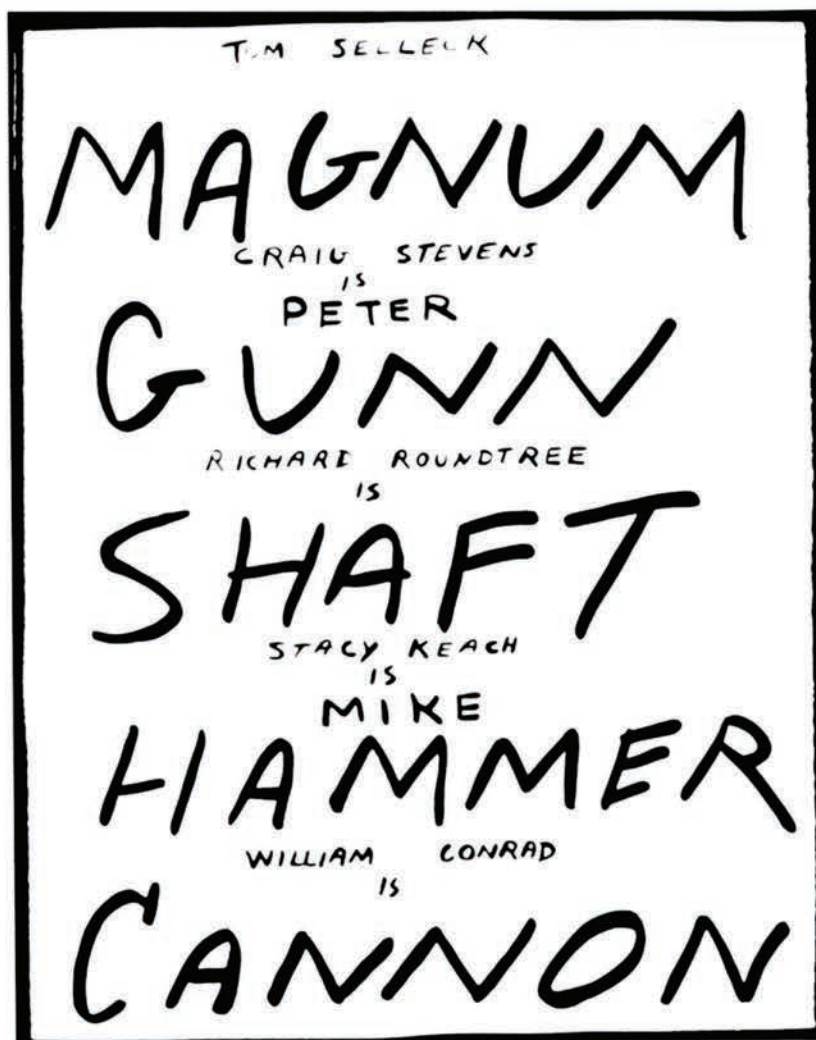
But what would have been “effectual” under the circumstances? After all, this installation contained some remarkable artworks: Leon Golub’s appropriately diminutive portraits of our petty masters (1976); Hans Haacke’s *MoMA Poll* (1970); Mike Glier’s prickly symbols of male power (*Fancy Men’s Clubs*, 1988); Christian Marclay’s electric cord that joins a microphone at one end with a hangman’s noose at the other (*Hangman’s Noose*, 1987); three of Christy Rupp’s *Rubble Rats* (1979); and more. “Politics and Election” also included signs of Group Material’s finesse. Upon entering, the viewer was confronted by the glow of the great communicator—a TV tuned in to network broadcasting—propped anthropomorphically on a white pedestal that, painted with bands of red and blue, looked more like a speaker’s podium than a pedestal. Behind it was a massive forty-foot American flag. Together, they effectively sent up the rhetorical excess of the electoral potlatch.

In retrospect, this juxtaposition may have been the most significant one in the installation. The 1988 election will be remembered as the year television staged the theatrical transformation of George Bush. In the space of one short interview, when Dan Rather ineffectually broached the subject of Bush’s role in the Iran-contra fiasco, the well-coached, not to say eager, vice president transformed himself from a reticent Northeastern Dr. Jekyll to the ever pugnacious Mr. Hyde that he remains today. The 1988 election was also the one in which television, in the hands of the Republican National Committee and its master of the grotesque, Roger Ailes, gave birth to the “negative” campaign ad. With little resistance from an inept Democratic party, the racist appeal of the revolving-door-justice pitch and the sublime environmental rhetoric of the Boston Harbor ad effectively manipulated the electorate to turn the tide and clinch the Republican victory.

Would Group Material’s installation have seemed more “effectual” had it appeared somewhere other than at the epicenter of the downtown art scene? Perhaps. I can imagine that if it had been located where a more heterogeneous public could have seen it, the visitors’ responses would have consisted of something other than heads bobbing in assent. Even so, the show still could have ventured further afield. There are, for example, ways to address the interface between American consumer culture, the construction of consensus, and the procurement of consent. Group Material is hardly oblivious to such issues and has touched on them in other circumstances. One solution to the problems with “Politics and Election” was implicit in the artists’ decision to follow it with the one called “Cultural Participation.”

Whereas “Politics and Election” represented the American electoral politics too simply as a travesty, “Cultural Participation”—an ambiguous name at best—set its sights on the effects of consumer culture on American life. Upon entering the installation, my eyes fixed upon a long line of little cellophane bags that circumnavigated much of the interior like a dado from hell. These snackfood bags—the result of Group Material’s visit to a single supermarket—carried brand names and bore designs that, consistent with advanced capitalist marketing strategies, target consumers, identifying them according to their ethnicity, class, and age. The display of snack foods suggested one possible interpretation of the title, “Cultural Participation.” Cultural participation consists to a very great extent in the seemingly insignificant decisions that Americans make by the score every day when they engage in individual acts of consumerism. Cultural identity is not arrived at genetically, nor is it only the result of learning. We define ourselves culturally every day in our seemingly involuntary and intuitive responses to a closed circuit of cultural representations. Fueled by an economically motivated compulsion to expand, consumer industries tap our desire and offer to accommodate our every wish; but first, they create those wishes. Though numbering in the dozens (with no two bags alike), this decorative product line could but hint at our national good fortune, at the abundance of our freedom to choose.

The theme of democracy as a tainted cornucopia was elaborated further by the inclusion of individual art works. Thus there was a product-line sculpture by the compulsively shopping formalist Haim Steinbach. One of Richard Prince’s photographs of Marlboro men suggested the lasting imaginary appeal of Western mythology. Six color photographs by Lance Carlson examined the representation of classy consumer goods by a local upscale department store. Four photographs by Vikky Alexander of the West Edmonton Mall in Alberta attested to the horror that is the world’s largest shopping center. But an especially significant presence in “Cultural Participation,” one



Jessica Diamond, 5 Dicks, 1988-89.

which indicated the pertinence of consumer culture to democracy and to electoral politics, was a film that Group Material screened continuously throughout the exhibition. That film was George Romero's 1979 paean to the suburban shopping mall and its implicit effects on people, *Dawn of the Dead*.

The myriad seductions of this consumer culture tend to level difference and discourage dissent. With television as its principal conveyor of messages

and the primary purveyor of acceptable, functional social types, consumer culture holds out the continuous promise of fulfillment. To enter paradise all you need is to interpolate yourself as the voluntary subject of the dominant ideology, whip out your wallet, and make another purchase. With such bliss at your fingertips, who needs politics? In his book *Captains of Consciousness*, Stuart Ewen locates in the 1920s the emergence of the historical processes that made it possible for American consumer culture to inhibit the expression of mass political dissent.¹³ At that time advertising joined with the concept of buying on credit to erode the collective social identity of those who had been commodity producers; henceforth they would gaze into the adman's mirror and see themselves as consumers. But the realization of this social transformation had to await the postwar era, when a wartime economy functioning at capacity shifted from arms production to production of consumer goods. The middle class—which had expanded considerably with full employment during the war and savings compelled by rationing—was pressed into service sustaining the growth of the consumer economy. As the construction of postwar suburbs proved, the captains of industry understood that building and selling homes was the most crucial element if the economy were to continue to grow. And as the “captains of consciousness” knew, the ideological lubricant that was essential to this machinery was a compound of the nuclear family and the American Dream. To be sure, the suppression of political dissent in this country was not exclusively the product of the new consumerism. The Cold War atmosphere of fear and rabid anticommunism also restricted social resistance. And the history of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.) during the later 1940s, culminating in its reunion with the A.F. of L. in 1955, describes the often brutal suppression of progressive forces within the American labor movement.¹⁴

Group Material's “Cultural Participation” tended to outline only the contemporary consequences of this history. The gallery was appointed with four sets of redwood picnic tables, piled with magazines, others appointed with fast-food menus, still others sporting air fresheners. Amidst the piles of mass-circulation magazines there were also some deviant titles like *Anarchy Comics* and *Artpolice*. Group Material found other ways to make sure that recreation and the quick fix did not dominate the space unimpeded. A color photograph by Tina Barney of indolent rich kids lounging in a tony interior was given edge, if not substance, by its installation across the room from five altogether more modest black and white shots of old buildings in ruinous states marked, “DEMOLISHED BY NEGLECT.” The latter were taken by members of Detroit's Urban Center for Photography as part of their collaborative work intended to stop such “neglect.” The project was initiated when a local photographer, Keith Piasieczny, tried to deliver a picture of a woman and her baby to her at home where he shot it. Discovering that she had been

evicted, he decided to fix the large print to the facade of the building.

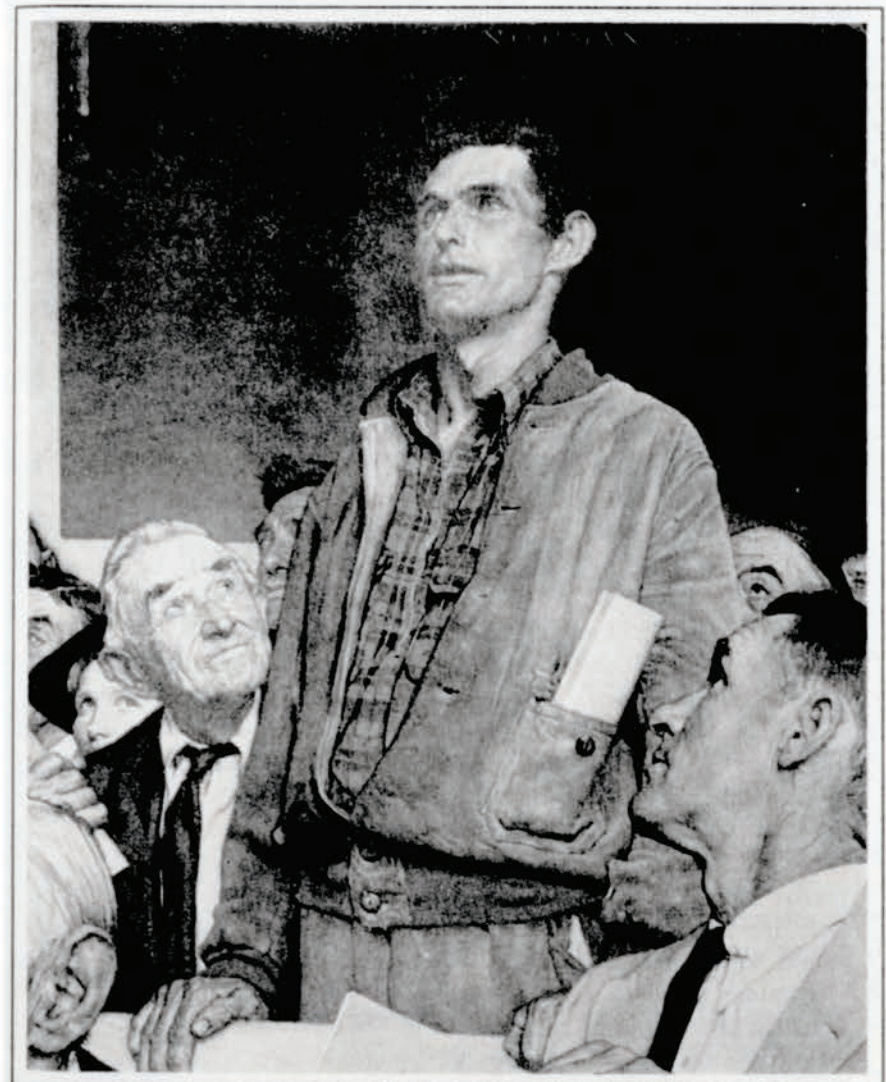
“Cultural Participation,” like “Politics and Election” before it, found novel ways to articulate its theme. Yet both shows ultimately lacked the capacity to resonate historically; or to reveal the complexity of the issues involved as “Education and Democracy” had. My point can be stated simply: “Politics and Election” and “Cultural Participation” may each have been less successful on its own than had they been reconceived as a single installation. Had that been possible—and more than scheduling problems would have made this difficult—the interdependence between the failure of electoral politics in this country and the history of American consumer culture could have been disclosed.

Accompanying each of these exhibitions was an open forum where anyone could speak out on the designated subject. What could Group Material have intended by these “town meetings”? Was there irony in that title? Would it have mattered if there was? While organizing a multifaceted examination of democracy in America, it must have seemed important to artists as committed as these to extending the limits of cultural discourse to offer a forum in which real discussion could take place. Since panel discussions inhibit debate by reinforcing the separation between those who speak from one side of a table to those who listen on the other, the idea of an open forum for discussion must have been appealing. And after all, isn’t “Town Meeting” just a catchy name to give it? Well, no. As Group Material has helped many people to understand, for everything there is a context, one that determines meaning, sometimes overwhelmingly.

The townsmen’s words were heard and weighed, for all knew that it was a petitioner that could not be slighted; it was the river, or the winter, or famine, or Pequots, that spoke through them to the Governor and Council of Massachusetts Bay.

In a town meeting the roots of society were reached. Here the rich gave council, but the poor also; and moreover, the just and the unjust. In this open democracy every opinion had utterance; every objection, every fact, every acre of land, every bushel of rye, its entire weight. The moderator was the passive mouthpiece, and the vote of the town, like the vane on the turret overhead, free for every wind to turn, and always turned by the last and strongest breath.”¹⁵

Written over a century ago by Ralph Waldo Emerson, this idyll to the town meeting is already steeped in nostalgia. This sentiment is apparent in the notion of a method of government that is the perfect and inescapable product of natural forces—of rivers overflowing their banks and harsh New England winters; and of human forces that are, in Emerson’s writing, tantamount to



Freedom of Speech

Norman Rockwell, *Freedom of Speech*, 1943.

natural ones at their most uncontrollable: those native Americans that he casts as aggressors. Emerson's enthusiasm for the town meeting echoed the sentiments of Alexis de Tocqueville and Thomas Jefferson, whose comments are excerpted in the published version of the address he delivered to the people of Concord, Massachusetts, in 1835.

Nostalgia for simpler, arguably more innocent times has lost none of its appeal. "Town meetings" are in vogue today, like many other manifestations of American vernacular taste that now possess the auratic appeal of the vaguely historical and the historically vague. Ted Koppel now stages "town meetings" for the global village on ABC television, most famously when he brought together Israelis and Palestinians in the Holy City to partake of New England's governmental legacy to the world. Frequently with the financial assistance of the Annenberg CPB Project, Fred Friendly has produced ten thirteen-part programs on a variety of topics including the constitution, ethics in America, terrorism, AIDS, and health care. As broadcast on NET, these shows partake heavily in the code of the town meeting. (The Annenberg CPB Project also distributes them as complete college courses.) Nor is the current electronic infatuation with the town meeting unprecedented. Starting in 1935, a man named George V. Denny conducted a radio show called "America's Town Meeting of the Air," which stayed on the air until ABC dropped it in 1956.

Is it only a coincidence that the "town meeting"—such as it is—should undergo a revival at a time when the range of political debate has been narrowed, and when political discussion has been sacrificed in favor of telegenic sloganeering? Ben H. Bagdikian has noted that the "lords of the global village" today are but a small fraction of the corporate and state-run entities that controlled our sources of information as little as six years ago. He has argued that satellite technology, combined with a tendency among conservative world leaders to further privatize the airwaves, has endowed these companies with unprecedented power. And yet Bagdikian claims that it is not "free enterprise," as such, that is incompatible with the purposes of public information and debate. Rather, as he points out, "It was assumed that once governments got out of the way, the 'free flow of information' and power of the public 'to ascertain and appraise events' would be made possible by free-enterprise media. They were correct. The problem today is not free enterprise but the lack of it."

In other words, the problem is that the monopolistic practices of the Murdochs, Maxwells, and Time/Warners now "exert a homogenizing power over ideas, culture, and commerce that affects populations larger than any in history." These media giants, Bagdikian continues, have two sources of enormous leverage: "They control the public image of national leaders who, as a result, fear and favor the media magnates' political agendas; and they control

the information and entertainment that help establish the social, political and cultural attitudes of increasingly larger populations."¹⁶

This is the context that dictates the mythic function and fetishistic character of the town meeting's renaissance. Still, I do not mean to claim that it is delusional for people to assemble in groups to oppose government policies and oppressive social attitudes, or to try to seize control over some crucial aspect of their lives. Clearly, the recent history of AIDS activist groups, from the People with AIDS Coalition to ACT UP and the Community Research Initiative, has disproven that bit of sophistry. But despite the best of intentions, those who traffic in a highly mythologized language are bound to some extent to become the instruments of its use. By calling these open discussions "Town Meetings," Group Material opened themselves up to the criticism that they risked playing into the hands of people who harp on the idea that, "We, at least have such open discussions in this country." And "that's democracy, and that's all there is to it."

On a less parochial note, what seemed most striking about the town meetings was just how disconcerting and contradictory they were. This was due in large part to the fact that they were understood from the beginning as symbolic events: as manifestations of the vanguard world of art. "AIDS and Democracy," which one might have expected to be a vital forum given the presence of a large and successful local activist movement, was no more vital than any other. In fact, perhaps because ACT UP holds its own public meetings every Monday at 7:30 p.m. to deal with the AIDS crisis, this town meeting contained fewer illuminating moments than others. A good deal was said about how individuals can make a difference in the face of this devastating crisis, how important and difficult it is to persevere in forging coalitions when the people you are rallying to the assistance of are considered expendable by the dominant culture. To those AIDS activists who came that night hoping to hear new voices, to learn new strategies to combat government intractability and corporate greed, or to reach new constituencies, however, the meeting was clearly a disappointment. The town meetings stopped well short of effecting that widespread sense of "empowerment" that many people in attendance considered to be their goal. And then there were individuals on hand who complained about the inappropriateness of the "art context." At "AIDS and Democracy" this took place for the fourth time in as many town meetings, thus turning it into something more like the town crier's refrain.

Through it all, the wheels of the tape recorders kept turning, provoking the vague sensation that these not-quite-public proceedings were taking place inside an institutional bubble; that at any moment, as in the great dinner party scene that concludes Luis Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, the massive garage door to the Dia space might suddenly and unceremoniously rise, revealing Mercer Street, the audience for whose benefit

all of this was taking place, and the absurdity of our gesture.

Given these circumstances it was hard not to think of Jean Baudrillard, whose theory of the simulacrum (as is all too widely known in the New York art community) implicitly argues against the logical viability of political activism today. It would be hard to refute its relevance to this situation.¹⁷ Finally, the sense of participating in something token, in something staged and recorded, of partaking in a process that, for most of those present, plays little or no part in their daily lives, foregrounded that nostalgic and mythic aspect of the "town meeting's" currency. In this way Group Material's town meetings demonstrated the danger of staging such assemblies from above, as it were. They proved, once again, how intractable are the obstacles in this society to widening the range of political debate, to opening lines of communication between constituencies with divergent interests, and, finally, to effecting a sense of urgency in the midst of a culture that militates in so many sophisticated ways against change.

1. When Dennis Cooper and Richard Hawkins organized the exhibition "Against Nature: A Group Show of Work by Homosexual Men" for Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (Jan. 6–Feb. 12, 1988) pressure was applied by some AIDS activists, who regarded the show as irresponsible and retrograde, to prevent individuals from participating in it. A panel discussion that coincided with the exhibition "AIDS: The Artists' Response," organized by Jan Zita Grover for the Hoyt L. Sherman Gallery at Ohio State University was marked by heated debate about what constitutes a legitimate response to the AIDS crisis. In November, Gran Fury executed a piece for The Kitchen in New York that stated, "WITH 42,000 DEAD OF AIDS ART IS NOT ENOUGH." They produced variations of this piece in the window of Printed Matter in New York, in the catalogue to the Ohio State University exhibition, and in the pages of the *Village Voice*—with the mortality figures increasing with every reappearance. For a discussion of this work, see my interview with Gran Fury in Russell Ferguson et al., eds., *Discourses: Conversations in Postmodern Art and Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990). For a more playful analysis of the entire debate, see John Greyson, "Parma Violets: A Video Script," in Dennis Cooper and Richard Hawkins, eds., *Against Nature: A Show By Homosexual Men*, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 1988), pp. 10–15; also see my "Ideas and Emotions," *Artforum* 27, no. 29 (May 1989), pp. 122–27.

2. "In fact, the class struggle in the ISAs (Ideological State Apparatuses) is indeed an aspect of the class struggle, sometimes an important and symptomatic one: e.g. the antireligious struggle in the eighteenth century, or the 'crisis' of the educational ISA in every capitalist country today." See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 185.

3. I want to thank Julie Ault for providing me with access to this press release, as well as to other Group Material documents that made it possible for me to write this essay. This documentation has recently been donated to the Museum of Modern Art library, where it can be found within the archive of Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PAD/D).

4. Affiliation with the Latino community associated with the Taller Latinoamericano, for example, was crucial to the success of the June 1982 show "Luchar! An exhibition for the People of Central America . . ." See William Olander, "Material World," *Art In America* 77, no. 1 (January 1989), p. 127.

5. Sometimes there is overlap. Doug Ashford of Group Material is a teacher in the New York City school system and therefore has firsthand knowledge of the issues.

6. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1916; first Free Press Paperback Edition, 1966), p. 87.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

8. See William J. Bennett, "Educating Disadvantaged Children," in *Our Children and Our Country: Improving America's Schools and Affirming the Common Culture* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), esp. pp. 32–33.

9. See Mr. Bennett's tribute to the principal with the baseball bat and the bullhorn in "Let Us Now Praise Good Schools," a title whose evocation of James Agee and Walker Evans's Depression-era tribute to the rural poor, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is an interesting example of conservative appropriations of liberal and left signifiers to suit their diametrically opposed social agenda. *Ibid.*, pp. 37–45.

10. See Bennett, "Sex and the Education of Our Children," in *ibid.*, pp. 98–101.

11. Bennett has also written, "In the last two decades common sense had been beaten, shoved, and kicked around." See "Let Us Now Praise Good Schools," p. 40.

12. Mr. Bennett opposes tampering with the Western cultural canon. See Lillian S. Robinson, "What Culture Should Mean," *Nation* 249, no. 9 (September 25, 1989), pp. 319–21.

13. Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976).

14. See William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 105ff.

15. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Town Meeting," in Ralph Waldo Emerson's Concord Address, *Old South Leaflets*, first series, no. 4 (1883), pp. 1–2.

16. Ben H. Bagdikian, "The Lords of the Global Village," *Nation* 248, no. 23 (June 12, 1989), pp. 820, 807, 811.

17. In January 1987 Group Material organized a show that was critical of this implication in Baudrillard's work, entitled "Resistance, Anti-Baudrillard," at White Columns in New York. The pertinent texts by Baudrillard are: *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss et al. (New York: Semiotext(e), Inc., 1983), and *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, trans. Paul Foss et al. (New York: Semiotext(e), Inc., 1983).