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Remembering and Forgetting in the Archive:
Instituting ‘Group Material’ (1979–1996)

Julie Ault

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My PhD submission is made up of a constellation of three elements that form a body of textual material / theory and practice event / exhibition.

(1) A dimension of critical writing or dissertation that has two parts:

(a) *Retrospective / Prospective: Activating the Archive*,
September 1, 2010 pp. 1–132

(b) an accretion of further analysis, *Archive, Archived, Archiving*, September 1, 2011. pp. 133–222

References pp. 223–226

(2) A testing of both archiving practice and its historical representation is carried out in the arms of the larger investigation, the book, *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material* (London: Four Corners, 2010 ISBN: 978-0956192813). *Show and Tell* demonstrates a primary analytic situation for the problematics of my research. [see Appendix B]

(3) An exhibition *Ever Ephemeral: Remembering and Forgetting in the Archive* (Signal – Center for Contemporary Art, September 23, 2011 – November 13, 2011, and the Inter Arts Center, September 30, 2011 – October 30, 2011). *Ever Ephemeral* encompasses the triple functions of producing, presenting, and testing research. It will bring together reference points, in the forms of artworks, artifacts, publications, and writings, which are evocative of key concerns imbedded in the subject terrain. These include the plasticity of history, archiving and unarchiving, ways art can give history form, and chronology and counter-chronology. The inclusions lay open specific dialogues, which have contoured the research arena.

Appendix A

The following textual components are part of the exhibition, *Ever Ephemeral: Remembering and Forgetting in the Archive*.

Checklist, *Ever Ephemeral: Remembering and Forgetting in the Archive* pp. 228–230

Alejandro Cesarco, *Present Memory*, 2010, text compiled by Cesarco, produced as booklet in exhibition. pp. 231–242
Time Frames: A Conversation, 2011, dialogue between Ault and Andrea Rosen about their decision to disperse Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s collection of clocks rather than archive them when he died. The clocks have been gathered from their respective owners for the occasion of this exhibition. The conversation is a take-away booklet in the exhibition.  

Julie Ault, 4195.6 feet: Geography of Time, 2010, text on James Benning (dir) casting a glance, 2007, produced as handout in exhibition.  

Julie Ault, Historical Inquiry as Subject and Object, 2010, essay on Group Material archive and book project, a take-away in exhibition.  


Rasmus Röhling, Self-Titled, 2009, text by Röhling imbedded in his work and a take-away in the exhibition.  

Julie Ault, Roni Horn, a compilation, 2010 [ongoing], text that derives from researching Horn’s journals to compose a personal chronology of the artist; exhibited in relation to a set of artists books by Horn. Extract produced for exhibition.  

Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “Untitled” (Portrait of Julie Ault), 1991, the loan form for the work includes the text, materialization specifications, and terms of agreement.  

Appendix B  


This body of research aims to illuminate the retrospective and prospective dimensions of archiving in practice. It investigates the consequences of registering previously unhistoricized art field events and practices into enduring public records. Additionally the research tests particular methods of historical representation that draw on the archive. Imbedded in this investigation is consideration of “exhibition” and “publication” as presentational forms for historical research. The liberties and limitations of each format are evaluated in the inquiry.
My research is concerned with archiving and historicizing practices, specifically how histories of ephemeral, indeterminate, and peripheral activities in the art field are registered in the archive and shaped into historical representations. This research expressly takes up the challenge of creating fitting representational forms in dynamic with particular cultural practices that have not yet been formally historicized (for example the artist Corita Kent, the collaborative Group Material).

My aim in this writing is to trace the course of my doctoral research and analyze its process and findings. It is necessary to outline my previous historicizing forays in the archive alongside the specific endeavors of the research in order to chart the effects, problematics, and yields of writing peripheral practices into art history.

Given that my art practice involves a diverse relationship to form, this consideration includes probing the path of key production shifts, for example from exhibition making to publishing and from collaboration to independent work, as well as evaluating the liberties and limitations of each differentiation in format, method, and distribution mode.

Descriptive narration, empirical information, critical analysis, multifaceted reflection, and extracts from earlier essays that demonstrate my thinking in temporal contexts are joined here. Projects generated in the doctoral framework are delineated and cross-wired with prior endeavors influential on my thinking, the further meanings of which have been clarified within the research process.
Exhibition Enthusiasm

*I love exhibitions and I love making them.* For many years I began public presentations with similar declaration. Social spaces. Immersive contexts. Experiential systems. Model worlds. Aesthetic explorations. Educatively environments. Intellectual and somatic stimulation. As a user I prize the medium for its communicative, pedagogic, and entertaining possibilities. As a practitioner I value the diverse activities and social processes that exhibition making encompass: the conceptual labor of identifying a subject and developing its shape; generating a structure; researching and distilling ideas and information; curating and editorializing; engaging symbolic, spatial, visual, aesthetic, and presentational issues; working with artists and other cultural producers and agents; collaborating with institutions on administration and realization; and documenting and representing after the fact. A thinking, finding, and formalizing process with exposure built in.

I delineated my cultural interest in the form at a conference in 2000:

Why exhibitions? Exhibitions are sites where art and artifact are made public, where social processes and contexts that art and other kinds of production come from can be described or represented to viewers. Exhibitions are social spaces, where meanings, narratives, histories, and functions of cultural materials are actively produced. They are intersections where art, artist, institution, and viewer meet.

The field of exhibition making is an arena of action which I critically address through the practice itself. I want to challenge the division of labor between artists and curators through the methods I employ making exhibitions. Although my activities as an artist sometimes appear to mirror those of a curator, I don’t call myself a curator for a number of reasons: because of its historical association to connoisseurship and elitism; in order to make visible a subjective approach which curators
don’t necessarily avow; to emphasize exhibition-making as a form of cultural production; and to claim artistic license.

Distinct from common institutional or academic curatorial models, I view the curated exhibition as akin to an artwork in which every conceptual and concrete aspect involves choice rather than adherence to convention. Therefore I think it is crucial to approach exhibition-making activities newly in relation to the particular contents or material to be exposed. Display and presentational modes are necessarily flexible. My aim is to produce exhibitions and presentational environments which self-reflexively consider the context(s) the artworks / practices extend from, as well as the new context(s) being posited by / in the exhibition.¹


Julie Ault, Power Up: Sister Corita and Donald Moffett, Interlocking, 2000, UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles

Exhibition Ambivalence

In the spring of 2005 Martin Beck and I visited the Secession in Vienna where we were invited to create an exhibition to take place the following year. The situation was a blank slate; we could do whatever we wanted provided it was financially feasible. Neither of us had ready objects to show, nor a ready subject we wanted to address. Instead we spent some time in the main gallery in search of context, perspective, and inspiration.

A group of artists seeking to escape the dominance of academicism and historicism near the end of the 19th century founded the Secession, wanting to liberate display of art from periodized environments and produce an apt modern presentational context. The Secession exhibition hall is a quintessential white cube prototype. The gallery’s cool blankness is a strong presence: a spacious symmetrical room with a gridded glass ceiling evenly distributes the fluorescent light it filters. The seemingly neutral white cube became the favored setting for modern art and has also been adopted widely by contemporary galleries and art institutions. The ubiquity of such spaces renders them nearly invisible, thereby consolidating their authority to reinforce and reproduce existing power configurations that undergird the production and circulation of art. The white cube has persistently been contested and subverted by both artists and curators in diverse ways. Deconstruction notwithstanding, the functionality of this codified type of space perseveres.²

As Beck and I entered the Secession’s sizeable gallery to look around, almost immediately I had ideas of how to symbolically intervene and invigorate it, and in the process, challenge its acquired authority. Just as quickly, enthusiasm turned to dismay: this isn’t how I want to work – relying on a set of tested tools and devices that do the trick to transform a space. The ideas were legitimate but that they were so readily apparent seemed problematic. I perceived the space in black-and-white terms as something to be affirmed or disputed. At that moment I realized I’d been making too many exhibitions for too many years. What was once a passion had inadvertently become custom. I had
internalized external expectations to deliver a dynamic and vivid exhibition product with inbuilt criticality. But I was not feeling it. A hiatus was in order in the near future.

Ultimately Beck and I fashioned an exhibition titled, *Installation*, 2006, which factored in this initial dispiriting experience. *Installation* highlighted the different branches of our practices, which include working both independently and together. Artist, designer, collaborator, curator, writer, teacher, historian, and editor suggest the primary positions and methods these practices embody. *Installation* brought diverse modes of authorship that customarily use disparate distribution circuits into dialogue within a coherent space articulated specifically for the Secession.

Beck and I had frequently used architectural alteration and color treatment to formulate a space, however, at the Secession we instead left the permanent walls “as is” to highlight the gallery’s white cube status as both historical artifact of innovation and present-day policy. We mounted a series of photographs by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “*Untitled* (Natural History),” 1990, on the permanent walls. Using twelve elements the work photographically charts a lexicon of cultural roles ascribed to Theodore Roosevelt, which are etched in the exterior walls of New York’s Museum of Natural History: Patriot, Historian, Ranchman, Scientist, Soldier, Humanitarian, Author, Conservationist, Naturalist, Scholar, Explorer, and Statesman. Superimposing the exterior of one institution onto the interior or another, “*Untitled* (Natural History) points metaphorically toward the institutional framing of artists the Secession incessantly enacts. This inclusion also referenced the monograph on Gonzalez-Torres’s work I had been editing that was being released at the same time of the Secession show, in order to underscore editorial activity as a facet of my practice which is entwined with the exhibition medium. *Installation* otherwise consisted of an arrangement of works – both individually and collaboratively authored by Beck and myself, which I won’t detail here – and freestanding installation fixtures we fashioned specifically for the Secession which functioned as display architecture.
Julie Ault, Martin Beck, *Installation*, 2006, Secession, Vienna
Exhibition Anxiety

The incongruity between the principles I proclaimed – “exhibition is an open form to be constantly newly engaged” – and what had become my routine relating to exhibition space was a dismaying dilemma that I wanted to address. There were other dilemmas as well, which seemed beyond my control. I had become increasingly disturbed by the gulf between the enormous energy put into making exhibitions and their temporal life and somewhat random usage. Employing the exhibitory form to cut together and present intricate compounds of artistic production and information and to stimulate subtle thinking seemed out of step with the average brevity of viewing time afforded them. Decipherability is further rendered superficial after the fact. Circulation of ephemeral situations to secondary audiences is important but inadequate. One or two installation photographs generally stand in as iconic representatives, a far cry from the involvedness of experiencing an exhibition. For me, the communicative effectiveness of exhibition was in doubt. To some degree, I’d lost my taste not only for creating exhibitions but also for visiting them. Sensitized to their limitations and discouraged by repetitious experiences, my passionate regard for the form as a site of excitement and possibility was waning. Another factor, which has only become discernable retrospectively, is the multifaceted change in the culture of museums and display. Over time, some of the strategies I had applied in exhibition work with Group Material and with Beck, as well as many other artists’ approaches, were being newly negotiated by museum curators, educators, and exhibition designers, which in a sense made “our” methods less necessary, changing the perspective for such work. The following discussion about one Group Material project and relevant cultural shifts observed several years later illustrates this condition.

Group Material had engaged the temporary exhibition as its medium since 1980 in part to posit exhibition as forum, a material and visual dialogue designed around a thematic. The group purposefully used a salon-style installation strategy to diagram combinations of art and artifacts as social bodies rather than emphasizing individual elements or advancing the notion of art as autonomous activity. Group Material often used material and color devices to create symbolic layers of meaning in its exhibitions, which also challenged the
supposed objectivity of curatorial activity and purported neutrality of the white wall. The following recollection of the *Americana* exhibition made for the 1985 *Whitney Biennial*, provides an example of the collaborative’s exhibition making methods in terms of both deep curatorial design and surface materialization:

Since the Whitney Museum defines its biennial exhibition as a survey of the most significant recent art, its very structure raises questions about criteria for selection, the politics of inclusion and exclusion, and the consequences of museum validation. In Group Material’s view, generally speaking, the Biennial [at that time] expressed an overdetermined narrow vision of art practices and production, manifest as a greatest hits of what had been previously validated through sales in the commercial galleries, with a trade-fair environment, and didn't attend to broader definitions of cultural production or social contexts. . . .

We developed an exhibition titled *Americana* and engaged critically with notions of what American culture is and how curatorial practices have supported a monolithic notion of American art. Group Material decided to make a model of our own biennial, a *salon des refuses*, of what was significantly absent, excluded through curatorial business-as-usual from the Whitney Museum. *Americana* took issue with the exclusivity and whitewashed picture of American art proposed and supported by dominant cultural institutions such as the Whitney, and in a non-didactic manner opened curatorial practice to scrutiny.

*Americana* included work by overtly socially engaged artists, many of whom were women and artists of color and popular “commercial artists,” as well as store-bought objects from so-called low culture. In terms of the look of the show, it was designed to be dense and layered, viewed first as a whole (as democratic) rather than as discrete (autonomous) objects. Strips of Contact Paper, the inexpensive decorative self-adhesive wallpaper, in diverse patterns, mostly coded as “American,” were laid like stripes from floor to ceiling, forming a ground of diverse
designs upon which objects were hung. Over fifty artists’ works were selected for inclusion, as well as products from supermarkets and department stores. Store-bought items, such as a selection of laundry detergents, were installed in groupings that – with a degree of irony – demonstrated “freedom of choice.” A television was hooked up which broadcast whatever was on major network programming continuously. A washing machine and dryer dominated center stage as the only other sculptural elements. A soundtrack made up of songs “representative of America” sampled from various genres was on continuous play. The total effect of Americana was over-stimulating with no space in the room left “neutral.”³
When *Americana* was shown in 1985 some critics regarded it as a pluralistic mess, and were particularly averse to the integration of popular culture and fine art. Furthermore it was characterized by some as a spectacle that did not belong in the Whitney Museum. For example Kim Levin lamented in the *Village Voice*,

> 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.4

To which Group Material replied:

> 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.” 5
Of course that was twenty-five years ago, and the contemporary art museum is, in some respects, a different animal now. During the 1990s and the early 2000s, in the aftermath of controversies over grants made in 1989 by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to exhibitions by Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano, which resulted in the field of contemporary art being branded as elite in the popular imagination as well as profound cuts in federal and state cultural funding, U.S. museum culture recouped itself in the public mind. The American art world of the early 1990s demonstrated an under-siege mentality where many arts organizations sought to counter the charge of elitism by proving their social value to larger portions of the population and quantifying that value by engaging underserved communities and marginalized groups as well as dramatically upping middle-class visitorship. Institutions competed for corporate sponsors and paying audiences. Strategies for reinvigorating and redefining museums and their programs were implemented. At the exhibition level, popularizing devices such as interactivity, social (sometimes called relational) aesthetics, educational arenas attached to shows, and exhibition design as seductive device, were all embraced. Compulsory popularization has produced a mixed bag of results: lively atmospheres that are often incredibly crowded (the overpopulating of the museum); new publics for art; perpetual expansionism in the form of new buildings galore by celebrity architects; a multiplicity of visitor engagement, appreciation, and education programs; and more. These tactics have effectively drawn ever-increasing attendance at contemporary museums. New York’s Museum of Modern Art is a prime example. Following its lavish expansion / renovation by architect Yoshio Taniguchi, finished in 2004, visitorship rose dramatically – reportedly by about a million visitors annually, as did the price of admission, from $12 to $20. Formerly a destination to behold curatorial depth, scholarship, and innovation – from the work of Alfred Barr in the 1930s to Kirk Varnedoe in the 1990s, MoMA’s transformation to some degree deprioritized scholarship in favor of marquee appeal, monumentalizing, and spectacle. The MoMA effect treats every show like a blockbuster, from the Bauhaus (Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity, 2009–2010, to Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present, 2010. The lines outside and the always-crowded galleries attest to its mushrooming popularity. This mindset of growth changes the way museums view
themselves, their personnel, and their viewers, and both subtly and dramatically reshuffles priorities.

As a consequence of these circumstances, exhibitions are commonly called upon to seduce and entertain viewers not only through the collection and interpretation of art and artifacts shown, but through aesthetic address – the creation of an object theater or spectacular environment, created with spatial and architectural techniques, alluring signage and way finding devices, textual and audiovisual interpretation and contextualization, graphic and photomural tools, wall treatments, customized display structures, and creative lighting. Exhibition design is symptomatic of this shift of attention to broad audience and has become prevalent to both positive and negative effect. In this set-up, viewer experience gets designed, if not engineered, on every level. On the positive end, presentation is being consciously attended to, distinct from bureaucratization of mechanical modernist style installation (“widely spaced at eye level”), which was de rigueur for some time, and it is often done so intelligently, with captivating results. On the negative end of the scale there is a fair amount of exhibition design that appears to rely on superficial use of color, graphic, and referential installation treatments to simply jazz things up. I perceive a discrepancy of intentions between “deep design” developed as content from an engagement with subject matter, material, and intangibles, exemplified by Group Material’s Americana, and superficial referential stylization imposed on a subject, that can result in as little as pulling colors from works to use as backdrop color or to create a sequence of colorful rooms. The current exhibition Leon Golub: Live & Die Like a Lion?, 2010, on view at The Drawing Center is a case in point. The exhibition consists of over fifty intimate drawings Golub made during the last five years of his life. A deep rust color that frequently occurs in the drawings has been used as a paint color to cover the gallery walls entirely. The small-scale drawings were then mounted equidistantly around the room on a uniform eye level. The compelling works are terribly undermined by the bold color, which there is no apparent reason for. Does such treatment stem from insecurity about the work’s ability to captivate viewers? This is but one very simple example of the tendency to “jazz things up,” “make works
sing,” “tweak the work,” etc. through “design motives,” in a bid to prove to viewers the museum is not the stuffy elitist white-washed place of yesteryear.

The institutionalization of exhibition design is a sign of the times, and to some degree reflects legitimate efforts to revive and disseminate exhibitions and combat the highbrow stiffness implied in modernist style presentation modes. Witnessing this development has been exciting and disconcerting in equal measure, and has been a strange counterpoint to the methodical engagement with exhibition as context, and with display as discourse that I have been involved with over time.

Professional Paradigm Shift

I have learned to heed such junctures of doubt like that encountered at the Secession as indication of an approaching production shift – in that instance, from creating exhibitions in art spaces to pursuing the portable enduring form of publication. But more on that advance later.

Around 1990 I experienced a work crisis that led me to act on the elusive dissatisfaction I felt putting my energies into the art field at the time. My interest in art had in large part been for its perceived radical potential and social agency. However, I had been feeling increasingly uneasy about the way politics were sidelined and timidly registered in art institutions – how cultural politics functioned as a kind of compensation. I often reflected on Group Material’s complicity in this cultural scheme.

A year later, when Group Material reconfigured the exhibition *AIDS Timeline* for the *1991 Whitney Biennial*, my frustration with this circuitry and our function reached a zenith. Whitney curator Lisa Phillips, who we likewise worked with on *Americana*, invited the group to restage *AIDS Timeline*, in the Whitney’s lobby gallery for the *1991 Biennial*. The exhibition was initially created for the Berkeley University Art Museum in 1989 and re-versioned for the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford a year later. *AIDS*
"Timeline" was composed of art, artifacts, documentary material, and information cut together in a chronologically structured tracking of the AIDS crisis in the U.S.

Group Material was then composed of Doug Ashford, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Karen Ramspacher, and myself. We were somewhat troubled with the Whitney’s embrace of "AIDS Timeline" in light of its institutional silence on the subject to date. Optimistically the Whitney curatorial team was sincere, but we could not help feeling Group Material was being asked to take care of their need to acknowledge the AIDS crisis, in lieu of ongoing responsiveness or a deeper commitment to addressing how AIDS was transforming society and culture. Felix and I had some misgivings about repeating the show, preferring to develop an altogether different strategy for addressing the subject of AIDS in an exhibition format, one that might, for instance, leave out artworks per se in favor of something more strictly informational. Karen and Doug were amenable with regenerating the "Timeline" and reluctant to beginning a project anew. However, it was important to all of us to use the platform one way or another. Unable to agree on a fresh start we opted to reconfigure "AIDS Timeline" one last time, reflecting the recent development and local specificity of the pandemic and responses to it. The exhibition was eagerly received; it was no doubt worthwhile, but the group’s practice did not develop through the rather perfunctory process. The situation was draining and highlighted Group Material’s stasis as well as individuals’ discontent. "AIDS Timeline" at the Whitney was the group’s sixth AIDS-related project in four years, which combined with personal situations and losses as well as other activist community involvements, produced a kind of emotional burnout and overload. We discussed taking a time-out to digest recent cultural shifts and to reinvent our practice, but it was difficult to actually get off the treadmill we’d been on for so long to make such a clearing.

I had been working in the collaboration since 1979. In need of change, and disillusioned with what I thought at the time to be the art world’s shallow co-opting relationship to sociopolitical practice, I enrolled at Hunter College in 1991 to study political science. The move was fueled by the fantasy of transitioning into politics proper, where I imagined a more rigorous context of ideas and collaboration existed, and a keener sense of cause and effect would be discernable. Coupled with a yearning to escape the art industry and its machinery that I was ambivalent about, made for a ridiculously naïve idealistic outlook going in.

(The decision to go back to school coincided with personal change as well. Since 1980 I had been married to Andres Serrano, the artist whose photograph, Piss Christ, 1987, channeled the outrage and rhetoric of Donald Wildmon, director of the American Family Association in 1989. Wildmon launched a national campaign against public funding for the arts using Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe’s exhibition, The Perfect Moment, as emblems of what he and many others perceived as the disastrous affects of governmental funding on the fabric of American society. Wildmon alerted Republican Senators Alphonse D’Amato (NY) and Jesse Helms (NC), and the NEA became the subject of heated debate in Congress and in the news. For many months beginning in May of 1989 the controversy and Andres Serrano were discussed in the New York Times on a daily basis. While the art world largely defended Robert Mapplethorpe’s rights as an artist, Serrano lacked reputation, market or other support structure; many art world spokespeople seemed unable or unwilling to advocate on behalf of his work. Christian groups lobbied hard and made it clear to museums receiving public support that were they to exhibit Serrano’s work, they would be boycotted and memberships would be cancelled. Serrano and Mapplethorpe were used as political footballs. The pressures of the situation and the elongated period of debate it ushered in are difficult to convey. Witnessing up close how Serrano’s work and words were distorted in the media, the collective imagination, and even in the art world was demoralizing to say the least. It also provided an education into how publicity culture works. Publicization impacted Serrano dramatically as he went from being a relatively unknown emerging artist to an (in)famous one overnight. I won’t detail the affects on him or us personally, but the circumstances
sent us in different directions and we decided to part in 1990. My general art field disenchantment was further deepened by the NEA debate and the instrumentalization of an artist I was close to for the so-called Culture War. I suspect this fueled my desire to go into seek mode and return to school.)

At Hunter College, I was surprised by the conservative terrain of the political science division, which appeared to be largely a state department and national security feeder, and by the cynical attitudes I encountered while working for two local politicians, first on policy research, and then in constituent services. While working as a research intern in New York State Senator Roy Goodman’s office, I was instructed to plow through various media reports and topical literature in search of problems that could be developed into research topics for the office. If an issue was then pursued, the goal was for the office to publish a report on the matter that Senator Goodman would present at a press conference, garnering news attention for his role as a community advocate. Identifying the right kind of theme to take up was tricky business; it had to be newsworthy, of interest to Goodman’s Republican constituency, with perhaps a touch of controversy. School dysfunction, environmental protection, landmark or land use debates, healthcare – all fine, us research assistants were told. “But don’t look into AIDS, unless it has to do with children, AIDS babies are ok.”

Working at ground level constituent services for City Councilman Antonio Pagan was marginally more elevating given that an individual’s problem, for instance housing or utilities related might get temporarily solved, but this was primarily an exercise in navigating the intricate purview of city agencies in order to trace responsibility for specific problems. For example, toxic emissions from a restaurant affecting the residents in the apartment across the alley were surprisingly not the responsibility of any agency whatsoever because the fumes fell between the oversight cracks of the Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Buildings – they both thought it was the other’s dilemma.
An anecdote is not an argument, but these glimpses into the realm of politics deflated my idealism to the point that ultimately I concluded that mainstream electoral politics were more cynical than anything I’d experienced thus far in culture. Of course this was only an impression and was not anchored in any substantial experience or critical truth. The political field at large is obviously far from monolithic, but I was fixated on mainstream politics, which are more methodologically homogeneous than the expanded political field, which includes para, marginal, alternative, and anarchistic activities and structures. My generalization was absurd, and in hindsight it appears I used my “findings” as an alibi upon recognizing I lacked the desire and ability to effectively fit into the highly codified field; the idealistic attitude and arty style I brought to the table were grossly incongruent. The option I neglected to seriously consider was channeling my cultural and political interests into political culture in one form or another rather than focusing on the politics of culture. Nonetheless, I went running back to the art field to do precisely that, with nagging though relatively diffused disquiet in tow.

After several years of one foot in one foot out, and a handful of projects, I initiated the disbanding of the group in 1996. At the time it was composed of Doug Ashford and myself; recent collaboration with two newer members since 1994, Thomas Eggerer and Jochen Klein was by then waning. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who was a colleague in Group Material as well as my closest friend for many years, died from AIDS-related causes in January 1996. (Felix’s death at the age of 38 subtly influenced my professional decisions for a long time thereafter, a thread I will pick up shortly. For one thing, I adopted a more ‘if not now when’ attitude and enacted changes I had long contemplated.) The letter I sent Doug captures my thinking on stopping our collaboration.

Group Material has to formally come to an end. We’ve been in death throes for five years, despite some OK projects and travels. Group Material has been in a state of dissolution, not as we positively framed it – reinvention or shift. From my perspective we have not had a sustained vital satisfying practice for a long time now. Rather, we’ve been upholding a fiction of continuity. I have turned this situation around in my
mind excessively and every which way, but always arrive at this same conclusion. It’s necessary to articulate GM’s ending.

Perhaps some of our confusion about continuing has come from being in between a group, a community, and an institution, and not wanting to lose histories or possibilities. . . .

I’m clear that I do not want to work on any more projects as Group Material. . . . Neither do I want to negate GM’s history. I believe the best way to honor that history is to not allow it be watered down by doing lower-level, less compelling work. . . . Holding on to Group Material as a practice and identity obscures the necessary processes of identifying other ways of working.9

With Group Material’s ending, I had the illusion of liberation. I was also paralyzed over how to proceed working. I felt self-conscious and didn’t want to be the one doing the solo album after the breakup that sounds reminiscent of the group only not as good. On the other hand, all my ideas and energy had gone into the collaboration for sixteen years, so I soon grasped that Group Material ending need not require I amputate my ways of thinking and working or switch gears altogether. Rather, I needed to shape new work structures, including individually, and possibly find new forms, while accepting that whatever was ahead extended from Group Material and was likely to overlap methodologically, as well as stylistically, to some degree. Naturally his didn’t happen overnight, but was a process of realization.

Finishing at Hunter College I became nervous about the question rumbling in my head, “what’s next?” (So anxious in fact that I withdrew from school for a semester, toying with the idea of not finishing at all, until a close friend in academia poked through my ambivalence and convinced me I should get the Bachelor’s degree I had been working toward.) While visiting a show at The Drawing Center one day I ran into Ann Philbin, its director, who asked exactly that, “what’s next?” At a loss, I simply said I had no idea. She suggested I work up a proposal for an exhibition project for The Drawing Center, as part of a competition for a substantial project grant offered by the New York State
Council on the Arts NYSCA). That proposal was selected and I embarked on the research and exhibition project, *Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC, 1996*, The Drawing Center, New York. For a host of reasons, including that Congress, since the end of 1989, had decimated public funding for contemporary art, the alternative nonprofit art network was on the verge of becoming history. The NYSCA grant was a call to historicize some aspect of the alternative arts field, with the intention of ultimately resuscitating it. *Cultural Economies* proposed to analyze the growth and decline of the movement, focusing on its preconditions and economic and sociopolitical contexts as well as its artistic and community realizations. *Cultural Economies* included artworks by individuals and groups who were closely identified with particular alternative endeavors, in combination with ephemeral material and photographic documentation that charted the activities of a range of alternative art structures. I compiled a set of adhoc dossiers on a range of spaces and groups, which constituted a research and reading area at the core of the exhibition. A sequence of articles that report on relevant activities and conditions drawn from daily and weekly press records (1969–1995), which stress real time, accessibility, and the newsworthy quality of alternative and adhoc events, comprises the accompanying catalogue.¹⁰
Cultural Economies was the first project I organized individually post-Group Material. It was motivated by a perceived collective need to examine the then current juncture of the alternative arts network, and by the desire to understand my personal history, given that Group Material’s practice was rooted in the contexts Cultural Economies took up. The project also enacted my professional shift from the group into a solo action. Exercising my individual voice in public was both welcome and formidable. Not belaboring and debating every thought and decision with collaborative partners was a new luxury as well as an unfamiliar responsibility.

I believe this turn toward historicizing was additionally stimulated by the university studies which, through the lenses of political science and art history, equipped me with new analytic tools and a deeper grasp of history as a field of study and operation. And clearly, Group Material’s earlier foray into history writing in AIDS Timeline was a foundation. Until then I had no sense of connection to history, of how personal and public narratives intertwine. Young and naïve, I’d been relatively ignorant of history in general and antagonistic to the idea of the past as subject matter. But the accumulation of life experience and endings – the AIDS-related deaths of many young friends and colleagues, parting from Serrano, disillusionment over artistic and political agency, Felix’s death, and the dissolution of Group Material, brought the notion of history “home.” New awareness of “having history” and of being “in history” took hold, which was both enlarging and inhibiting. Although I am somewhat reluctant to probe the specifics for fear of over-psychologizing and getting into it all, it seems that Felix’s death was a particularly influential context on my turn toward historicizing, (the need to decipher events and contextualize? as a distancing device?), and on another shift I would make, toward the relatively lasting form of the book as preferred medium.

Under the Umbrella Artist

While reviewing the announcement materials for Cultural Economies before they went to press I found that they read, “Curated by Julie Ault.” Shocked by the curatorial
identification I rejected the characterization and changed the material to read, “Organized by Julie Ault.” The distinction mattered for the reasons mentioned earlier – to sidestep the connoisseurship connotation, to stress subjectivity, to invoke artistic license, and because I did not want to give up the relative autonomy the artist role entails. Instinctively I felt I would be treated less deferentially if I were a curator, that I would be expected to sympathize and identify with institutional agendas over others. Remaining an artist was strategic. Artistic integrity could always be invoked at moments of conflict. And after all, I was an artist; despite that what I was doing involved and resembled curating and was later to morph in other directions as well.

Having a somewhat investigational relationship to form means I frequently take on methods from other arenas as part of my art practice. In addition to adopting curatorial activities, I’ve turned to editorial pursuit as artistic practice, using publication as a primary medium for translating exhibitory thinking into a distributable form. I sometimes employ text as medium, and sometimes take on an apparently design role. This is not linear development. What I learn in one area influences and cross-connects with what I do in another. Recurrent refreshing is built into this practice that depends on openness to form and new ways of working, as well as on the exchange between and joining of modes.

Authoring artistic identity fluidly and subtlety is a formidable challenge given how cultural forces label. Even though artists have for decades moved freely between media and methods, I find myself variously described as an artist, curator and, since operating in publishing, an art historian. Perhaps the particular confusion arises due to the contingent and ephemeral aspects of my practice, and because there is nothing at stake market-wise to necessitate or encourage firm definition. The discussion of professional categorizations and the art world division of labor they attest to is by now familiar, possibly even disingenuous to some degree. On the one hand, artist, curator, critic, historian are no longer regarded strictly as fixed positions either in theory or in practice, but rather, are widely interpreted as inclinations and processes. Many people’s overarching practices are hybrid; they move between arenas of agency and ways of working, even if they identify as one over another for professional expediency. On the other hand, twentieth century
divisions are slow to dissolve. Even as the art system seems to, in principle, embrace hybridity, indeterminacy, and free flow, these are frequently contradicted by ground level conditions. Consider for instance the criticisms and sniping over curators Catherine David, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, or Jens Hoffman, for example, who have been perceived as getting too (overtly) involved in the production of ideas and art, instead of facilitation, and thereby eclipsing the artist. How loose or intact the categorizations remain depends from what vantage point in the art field, academia, or society at large one sits. (Try explaining an indeterminate art practice to the immigration officer at JFK or Heathrow.)

The classifications of curator, artist, critic, and historian are permeable yet they can still function as boundaries that are raised strategically – for career or territorial purposes – and just as easily retracted. Mirroring this flexibility, I sway between insisting on the artist handle for its openness, answering to curator or art historian when specific goals are served by that identification, and regarding these classifications as irrelevant and outmoded. Personally I’ve grown tired of objecting to short-hand labels of mode as well as efforts to assign genre, including political art, community-based, institutional critique, and relational aesthetics. Regardless of resolve, one cannot control the tides of perception. Rather than repeating the debates ad infinitum I often opt for the path of least resistance.

From Closets to Histories

*AIDS Timeline* had been benchmark for Group Material in terms of research. We engaged in a more rigorous investigation than ever before in order to comprehend and portray how AIDS was allowed to develop into a far-reaching national crisis. The group researched the fields of medical and scientific industries, governmental statistics and policies, media representations – particularly stigmatization of people with AIDS which linked representation to public opinion and allocation of resources, and grassroots and activist responses by affected communities. A chronology of information from those arenas resulted; primarily driven by the timeline text compiled by the group.
While we believed our research to be legitimate, none of us were academically trained (or, in retrospect, had common sense on that score it would seem); we did not keep track of sources whatsoever as we selected and compiled information. We simply presented the pieced together totality as a web of uncontested facts, without stating their context, which for exhibition purposes seemed acceptable. Regarding history as construction, we cut and pasted our collected version of the chronology of AIDS.

The exhibition received a great deal of critical attention as well as visitors. When University of California Press showed interest in translating the project into a book form, we realized our limitations and opted out of a publication on the grounds that it would have been irresponsible without a thorough evaluation of the information and citation of sources – daunting tasks we were ill prepared to take on.

The difference between exhibition and publication in this case illustrates the “anything goes” mode endemic to the art field, which I was ambivalent about. Like many artists, Group Material sometimes used vague methods and employed a scattershot approach to history to elaborate complex subjects. This tendency among some artists of our generation became somewhat prevalent and problematic in the 1990s as interdisciplinary became a seductive buzzword in the art field, and artists loosely and sometimes inaccurately embraced the notion. Although Group Material did not define its work as interdisciplinary, there is a relation in terms of function. On the other hand, the freedom to interconnect ideas – whether imaginatively, rhetorically, or in a Dadaist spirit – as proposition rather than proof, is one of the productive characteristics and graces of art. Embarking on solo work in the mid 1990s, I found it difficult to project deeper in the direction of rigorous scholarship or poetic articulation.

Carrying out research for Cultural Economies entailed visiting a myriad of alternative spaces and individuals associated with groups and art activism in order to gather material and conduct interviews. During the process I encountered a motley range of saving habits, from perfectly organized and conserved, comprehensive archives to a closet piled high with water damaged boxes (the latter in an active reputable organization). Some
peripheral entities were only traceable though scraps of information, and some seemed to exist only in hearsay: I simply came up empty-handed. The goal was to apprehend a dimensional representation of the origins, missions, structures, methods, and programs of a wide range of peripheral entities – to decipher the who, what, when, where, how, and why of the key activities under scrutiny. I found out that some organizations have extensive, completist archives that document every public moment and breeze, but omit informal processes that are potentially revealing and enlivening – the effect being somewhat flat. I hungered for informal and behind the scenes material capable of situating me in the struggles and social relations of the moment. The yearlong research process for Cultural Economies demonstrated the randomness of the archive and raised questions about what becomes history. For the first time, I realized the latent potential of archiving to shape history, and witnessed the consequences of exclusion, especially as I was forced to reluctantly omit certain groups and organizations from representation in the exhibition due to lack of substantial information.

With no associated objects or available documentation circulating, peripheral and ephemeral ventures are marginalized and excluded without fanfare. Such histories frequently remain unwritten – it takes money to archive and to write history. Access to organizational and interventionist models of contestational, marginal, collaborative, and activist practices was at stake. Art history carefully eclipses its omissions, which affects not only our understandings of past events but ultimately regulates production, encouraging certain practices and discouraging others by example.

For the record

Aware that Cultural Economies would only be on view a couple months, and of the limited distribution of the catalogue, I considered deepening and extending the investigation with a book. Documentation of New York City’s highly influential alternative art culture of the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s was largely ephemeral with limited circulation, much of which took the form of press write-ups and anniversary publications
commemorating the histories of particular alternative spaces. I felt it was important to register a contextual and analytic portrayal of alternative spaces, structures, practices, and events within a given parameter into the enduring public record. A book might safeguard against their disappearance.

Part of the initial allure of publishing for me was that it was unknown and somewhat mysterious terrain I had little experience of. (Group Material had generated only three publications in its seventeen years of work, two were exhibition catalogues and the last was a book, *Democracy: A Project by Group Material*, 1990, which was a branch of the group’s project at the Dia Art Foundation.12) Had I defined myself academically or as an author I may well have been uneasy about the resolution and permanence that publishing seems to impose, which is even more dramatic for art historians than for contemporary artists, who are expected to be flexible. Historians are anticipated to take a position, not to continually change their minds, means, and focus. Generally speaking, books lean toward containment, which is potentially incongruent with critical thinking. But this is a simplification of form and function, a generality that has exceptions and which can be countered or taken up differently in practice. Clearly no media is inherently conformist or activist, despite being fraught with trends and histories. We’ve witnessed a considerable range of agendas and modes of exhibitions unfold over time. I favor affording books the possibility we project onto other media such as film, exhibition, and architecture. In this particular situation, while resolution was not a goal, permanence was, in so far as any book or cultural manifestation can be considered enduring.

The Drawing Center agreed to partner with me on pursuing a book, but did not have any resources available to produce one beyond allocating administrative assistance. In order to insure a place in sanctioned art discourse it seemed important to work with an established academic publisher. I had neither publishing nor editing experience. Nonetheless I charged ahead, in part because I thought I had an excellent and unexplored subject that surely would garner interest, and in part because I didn’t know any better. Blissfully ignorant of the protracted process to come, I made contact with a couple of
editors. Although there was initial interest the discussions quickly evaporated. Money was a key obstacle.

I wanted the volume to consist of newly commissioned texts by authors representing a range of topics, methods, and perspectives, as stated in the eventual book’s introduction:

*Alternative Art New York (1965–1985)* is composed of four intermingled layers of information: texts, images, documents, and a chronology of alternative structures. It is structured as a forum that recounts and analyzes histories from multiple perspectives. It is informed by my experience working collaboratively in this very field and is commensurate with its dialogic underpinnings. To convey histories, especially those emerging from philosophies of self-representation and cultural civil rights, is a challenge. No one person can bring together information, experience, and analysis of recent histories with the same vividness and intellectual rigor that multiple authors and voices can. Assembling a group of writers who employ different methodologies and styles to investigate their subjects is intended to highlight the value of each of these divergent processes for understanding and communicating histories. One of the tenets of the alternative arts movement has been the merit of dislodging restrictive categorizations and hierarchies (of mediums, of types of cultural practice, and of identity structures). Bringing together investigatory methods and writing styles which ordinarily are not joined – academic, journalistic, empirical, and hybrids – is in keeping with that principle.¹³

University presses do not normally compensate authors or editors; it is assumed the institutions they are employed by support them. However the majority of invited authors were not academically affiliated, and neither was I. It was unacceptable to ask people to delve into research and writing without compensation, nor did I want to do that myself. I applied to the New York State Council for the Arts for money to pay editorial, author, and design fees, as they had given a substantial grant for the original exhibition and
catalog. NYSCA awarded another grant for the book. With fees covered and an additional subvention for the copublisher on the table, through pure happenstance, University of Minnesota took on the project. That fortuitous story is worth recounting, an example of the informal way things sometimes happen.

Having encountered one obstacle after another and still lacking a publishing commitment after two years of shaping the book’s structure and focus, establishing its participants, funding, and attempting to secure a publishing context, I emailed the proposal to a friend expressing my frustration. I was on the verge of sacrificing the project. Unbeknownst to me, she happened to be hosting a friend of hers at the time, who was the coeditor of a series of books for the Social Text Collective produced through University of Minnesota Press. She spontaneously showed him my proposal and he said, “I want to publish that book.” I was ecstatic. The ball started rolling soon after.

Working with University of Minnesota Press (UMP) ultimately held both pros and cons. The press is highly revered and has excellent distribution, which makes an attractive context. The developmental input I got from the academic review process that all potential titles are subject to was quite helpful. The extensive copyediting done in house was exemplary and consequent. UMP’s marketing experience provided a valuable perspective that influenced a range of decisions, including the book’s title. Doug Armato, the press’s director, was keen to include the key words “alternative,” “art,” and “New York,” in the title to insure its appeal and that researchers could easily find it. At the time, I felt the solution *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985* was reductive and compromised. I argued for the original title, *Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC*. Armato advised me to “trust your publisher,” and in due course as I learned more about databases, search terminology, and the codes of the archive, I realized he was right.

On the negative side, UMP is a big machine that strictly adheres to its modus operandi, which made for several conflicts. Their relatively generic books are designed in-house. From my perspective, a book about visual art should reflect that focus and specifically
engage people with its visuality and design. I explained that as an artist I wanted a consulting role in determining the book’s optical and material presence. However the press was categorically opposed to my having a say in the look of the book beyond indicating where illustrations should be positioned, and whether they should fill a quarter, half, or full page. Nonetheless it was agreed that UMP would be given half of the NYSCA grant to hire an outside designer, who I would have a role in choosing in order to help shape the book. Yet when it came time to submit manuscript to design process, communications with the press became vague and dropped off. UMP executed an in-house design using a preexisting template, but nonetheless kept the funding allocated for a designer. One editor refused to show me the book cover in advance because “we don’t normally allow authors to be involved.” Eventually she gave in, although when I made a suggestion for its improvement I received no response.

I relate these details not as gripes but because they speak to a division of labor between editorial and curatorial, between handling text and visuality that I still find antithetical to the way I work, but was instructive at that time. The press identified and often treated me generically as a professor (correspondence always began Dear Professor Ault, which I was not), whose sole role was to supply manuscript according to a contract that outlined editorial control as well as every detail down to the point size and typeface it should be submitted in. All other involvement was mistrusted, and was either an uphill battle or simply denied.

None of this outweighs the advantages of publishing Alternative Art New York: 1965–1985 with UMP. It was an appropriate and effective context borne out by the currency of the book over time. (It went into second printing in 2010 thanks to another subvention from NYSCA.) The academic stamp of approval insured its use as a course book. Although I was disturbed to be excluded from the design process and ambivalent about the outcome at first, I now regard the book’s standard academic-press appearance as an asset. The volume’s distinction lies in its subject terrain and the methods by which they are taken up while tapping academic authority, identifiable in its very look. Its
nonspecific convention is effective, on a par with the so-called neutral authority of the white cube.

The ephemeral activities, events, and practices that formed New York’s alternative art network made an ideal subject through which I began apprehending the consequence of both archiving and publishing. Recently I donated all the research material that was collected during the making of the exhibition and the book to the Fales Library and Special Collections at NYU, where it forms a substantial resource for others to consult.
New Models, Diverse Forms

During the period of Group Material winding down, while finishing the political science studies which outfitted me with new knowledge and rhetorical skills, including the ability to argue from a perspective I don’t personally share, and at the same time working on *Cultural Economies*, I was attentive to research driven artistic practices that use the exhibition medium, including those of Fred Wilson, (*Mining the Museum*, 1992), Fareed Armaly, (*Brea-kd-own*, 1993, and *Parts*, 1996), Renee Green (*Import-Export Funk Office*, 1992), and Martin Beck (*Produktion Pop*, 1996, and *storage displayed*, 1997). Additionally, the emergence of collaboratively organized research exhibitions and “exhibition as production space” for cultural and political practices taking place in Europe, for example in the Shedhalle in Zurich under the direction of Renate Lorenz, Ursula Biemann, and Marion von Osten (*Game Girl*, 1995, *Nature TM*, 1995, *Sex & Space*, 1996), and at Kunstverein Munich under the extended guidance of Helmut Draxler
(Die Utopie Des Designs, 1994), seemed connected to the decentralized thematic expositions of Group Material. Most importantly, they were further evolving models of complex exhibition production in which historical inquiry, critical narratives, and active social and political engagement intermingled in fresh formalizations. All of this was fortifying food for thought at the stimulating intersection, where I contemplated how to renew my work interests and reconfigure structures. Using what forms, and with whom?

Martin Beck and I began collaborating in 1998, with Outdoor Systems, a project engaging issues of display and production of space that unfolded in a variety of sites over time, including billboards, exhibitions, and publications. We continue to work together on a project-to-project basis. Since 2000 we have intermittently provided curatorial counsel and created designs for exhibitions when we are particularly interested in either the subject terrain or the curatorial approach being employed. We took up this type of work as an extension of our exhibition making practices. In that capacity the shift in exhibition design policy from meaningful articulation to superficial stylization was particularly apparent. Although our collaboration has formed a major branch of my practice the last ten years, I refrain from detailing its character here, as it does not speak to the subject of archiving and historical representation as clearly as my individual focus does.

Engaging Sister Corita

I work as an artist using ephemeral forms such as exhibitions, in contrast to making tangible art objects. Typically, I investigate something I am moved by, and share that search through installations, publications, and events. This practice has curatorial and editorial dimensions, and sometimes involves discovering a sensibility I want to connect to. So it was with Sister Corita.₁⁴

In 1996 I began a long-term relationship with the work of Corita Kent [1918–1986]. The previous year I received one of her silkscreen prints as a gift. Based on the maritime international signal for the letter “o,” the composition is a brilliant yellow and red field
with the words “O my god” written on it. After living with the work for a while, I felt the need to learn more about the artist. I visited the New York Public Library (this was before internet primacy) and found a book illustrated by Corita as well as a couple of articles, one of which contained the reproduction of a 1962 print composed of red, yellow, and blue discs titled wonderbread.¹⁵ The idea of a Catholic nun appropriating product design to make a beautiful abstract pop work of art took me by surprise.

I learned from the article that Corita had lived at the Immaculate Heart Community (IHC) in Los Angeles between 1938 and 1968 so I gave them a call. Sister Stephanie Baxter oversaw the collection at the time and welcomed me to visit. Analogous to barging into publishing in part because I had no experience, not being raised Catholic meant I had no predisposition or inhibition about visiting the convent.¹⁶ (My parents migrated from Protestant Congregational to the Bahá’í Faith to numerous new age organizations, including the Brotherhood of Mt. Shasta when I was growing up. Their constant seeking was somewhat tedious at the time, but seems to ultimately have played a healthy role in my internal formation.) A few weeks later I visited the IHC and encountered the extraordinary: hundreds of Corita’s prints, one more exciting than the next for its graphic innovation and spirited language combining advertising slogans with literary and scriptural extracts. Her work from the sixties in particular captivated me with its dazzling colors and compositional exuberance, political convictions, populist character, playfulness, and insightful recodings of commercial slogans. I was amazed that such an inventive body of work was neither celebrated in the art world nor recorded in art history.

Subsequent visits to the Immaculate Heart were as exciting as the first and were infused with Corita’s presence. Her prints cover every wall in every room. The women who work there consistently reference her creative principles in conversation. I poured over the informal archive; more prints, press clippings, publications, writings, as well as Corita’s extensive slide collection. Corita was an avid photographer, documenting her travels, her students’ work, and happening-style Mary’s Day processions she and her colleagues choreographed in the mid sixties. She was inspired by Charles and Ray Eameses’ photographic documentation of the everyday. Her slide archive formed a visual pool for
teaching and was inspiration for her artmaking. It includes the categories cookies, toys, ads, presents, flowers, seeds, billboards, puppets, trade fairs, mountains, artists’ work, coke bottles, signage, and boxes. This image collection greatly illuminated Corita’s creative production and process.

I informed Stephanie of my desire to show Corita’s work in an exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, which would juxtapose her 1960s prints with graphics, media, and art works from the 1980s by artist, designer, and AIDS activist, Donald Moffett. I warned her that it was to be a three-way dialogue in the form of an exhibition: that I would be the third artist, creating a bold display environment. She was enthusiastic and open-minded. As we discussed logistics, Stephanie confided, “we’re not really set up here for shipping the prints – it would be much better if you just buy the ones you want for the show and take them with you.” (I’m still not sure if this was a marketing ploy or not.) I chose nearly fifty prints, went and bought a portfolio at a nearby supply store, and carried them back to New York, all the while feeling like a bandit. The serigraphs were priced the same since the ’60s, from $25 to $100 each.

Power Up

The exhibition Power Up: Reassembled Speech. Sister Corita and Donald Moffett, 1997, Wadsworth Atheneum, and 2000, UCLA Hammer Museum, extended some of the key exhibitory ideas I’d been working with. For instance, the lively atmosphere of Power Up was rendered educative and functional by integrating ephemeral materials and resources gathered during my research, which informed and deepened my understanding of Corita and Moffett, their works, and the periods the works were made in, into the display. Art, artifact, and documentation intertwined non-hierarchically in the installation. Three-dimensional multipurpose fixtures designed to accommodate this ancillary material and encourage viewers linger in the environment acted as platforms, seating, and display surfaces. Power Up’s exhibition design derived from the aesthetic features and key strategies of Corita and Moffett’s artworks. The intended effect was that upon entering the exhibition the viewer crossed into a dynamic visual and contextual environment.
When I first encountered Corita’s work Group Material was ending and I was looking for role models. I found a woman of many talents, insights, causes, and networks. I identified with Corita’s collaborative spirit, and the community she was a part of. During the 1960s the IHC was embroiled in dispute with local church authority over their interpretation of the Vatican II decree. I was inspired by hers and their creative drive in the face of oppressive authority structures, and by hers and their courage to go their own way. In 1968 Corita left the convent and the church; a year later the IHC dispensed with their vows and reorganized as a voluntary community inspired by religious ideals, beyond church authority. I admired Corita the artist, Corita the catalyst, and Corita the teacher, and mostly, her ability to fuse celebration, aesthetics, and critical consciousness in her practice of life and art. Although we never met, she has been an immense mentor.
Divergent Archives

When Stephanie retired in 1997 she was replaced by Peggy Kayser, who had museum experience. Kayser formalized the collection into the Corita Art Center, raised the print prices, and sought to fill out their archive as well as make it archival. One day in 1999, Peggy mentioned that perhaps some of the gaps I had encountered in their collection might be filled in with a visit to the Corita collection at the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts at UCLA. I had been researching for three years, yet had never come across this crucial fact of another archive! Apparently, Corita had a casual conversation in the mid-1960s with a UCLA professor, during which either he suggested or she offered that her personal collection of serigraphs eventually be donated there. Twenty years later, with no further discussion or formal agreement, Corita specified the gift to the Grunwald in her will, and left her remaining inventory, slide archive, and paper trail from the 1950s and 1960s to the IHC. I wanted to make an exhibition with Corita in Los Angeles and this opened the door. The Grunwald is connected to the Hammer Museum, and Ann Philbin,
whom I worked with on *Cultural Economies* at The Drawing Center, was its new
director. She was enthusiastic about the idea, which would be the first showing of their
Corita collection. Ironically Corita had insured the conservation of her work on paper by
giving it to UCLA, yet it had not been consulted once at the Grunwald in the decade plus
since her death. In 2000 an expanded version of the *Power Up* exhibition was created for
the Hammer.

The IHC and the Grunwald Center are capable of telling different stories about Corita’s
work, by way of what is included as well as what is excluded in the respective
collections. Even the site of the archive affects the interpretation of what is archived. In
an essay about the process of learning about Corita through the two institutions I
observed some key differences.

The Grunwald is an archival archive within which everything is
catalogued and well protected. Its chief responsibility is to conserve and
protect its holdings for perpetuity. . . . The director of conservation
dictates how and with what frequency materials in the archive can be
exposed to public view. Works on paper are particularly vulnerable to
light. Therefore, unlike in the IHC, Corita’s prints were not hanging on the
walls but are stored in darkness. . . . After I had got through the formality
of the Grunwald Center, Corita’s flat files proved to contain treasure upon
treasure. I came across many works I had not been previously aware of, as
well as ones I knew only from reproductions. The collection also
contained numerous variations on compositions which demonstrated that
Corita recycled ideas. . . . While the Corita collection housed at the
Grunwald was tremendously exhilarating to explore, I couldn’t help but
notice the sharp contrast of that environment to that of the IHC. The
center’s sober and bureaucratic milieu seemed an unlikely match for
Corita’s artistic legacy, at least on the surface. But, although I was initially
sorry to see so much energy, color, force, and passion lying dormant in the
storage facility, were it not for the Grunwald’s conservative attitude and
protection, her works might have prematurely and unnecessarily deteriorated, or, worse yet, might not even exist any longer.

The Grunwald archive, though seemingly complete as it contains one of nearly each of her prints, depicts Corita’s artistic practice through the relatively coherent, enduring form of art objects. But even taken as a whole, her prints provide only a partial picture. Other interpretations of her artistic practice emerge once the frame of research is expanded to include the IHC ephemera collection. Looking at images such as the ones of the visually dynamic Mary Day processions Corita choreographed, or at pictures of advertising signage she fragmented through cropping, offer an expanded perspective of her creative practice and impact upon understandings of Corita’s prints as well.17
In addition to the exhibitions, brochures were made for both.\textsuperscript{18} I wrote about Corita’s practice in several European art journals and lectured on her work in various art institutions in the late ’90s.\textsuperscript{19} Martin Beck and I published an extensive essay on Corita in the prominent design journal, \textit{Eye} in 2000.\textsuperscript{20} But despite all this engagement it nagged at me that there was no book about Corita’s art written from a current perspective. Exhibitions and leaflets are ephemeral. Books last, and as I learned with \textit{Alternative Art New York}, they have the authority to confer historical legitimacy. Unfortunately, in consultation about a potential Corita book with the Grunwald director, we found financing to be prohibitive, particularly considering that no high quality photography of Corita’s prints existed and would be costly to make. I put the idea on hold after a couple of years of getting nowhere.

Then, out of the blue, at the beginning of 2005, I received an email from Elinor Jansz informing me of her London based enterprise Four Corners Books. She expressed interest in Corita’s work and wondered if I could imagine making a volume on the subject. I was ecstatic and we began planning immediately. Four Corners was a relative newcomer; at our point of contact they had only released three titles. The book we produced, \textit{Come Alive! The Spirited Art of Sister Corita}, 2006, built a strong word of mouth and garnered a great deal of press attention. It went into second printing in less than a year of its publication, evidencing a thirst for Corita’s fortifying buoyant sensibility.\textsuperscript{21} It seems logical to conclude that a highly regarded university press (for example M.I.T.) or renowned specialized trade press (such as Phaidon) is not necessarily requisite for effective broadcast or for circulation to flourish. In this instance, the combination of a worthwhile untapped subject, a confirmed author, an apt and well-produced object, and good distribution work effectively. (Four Corners Books had no track record or U.S. distribution but as I had recently edited a monograph on Felix Gonzalez-Torres, which was distributed with the American company, D.A.P., we were able to secure similar distribution for \textit{Come Alive!}) I do not mean to suggest that the affirmative reception the
book acquired would have been different with a larger or more established publisher, but the book itself certainly would have been.

Large presses tend to rely on the established series, formats, and design they formulate to distinguish the identity, interests, and niche of a particular imprint. This is understandable, and a good match in many instances, but can make for disjuncture when a subject and/or editorial approach warrants different methods, structure, and form. Customary procedures preempt other ways of doing things, meaning certain subject matter and methodology can either get excluded, or if engaged, done so routinely at the cost of concession and even distortion.

Four Corners Books is a small hands-on independent operation run by Elinor Jansz and Richard Embray. They specialize in books as projects by artists and books about art, tailoring each volume to the specific needs of the venture rather than plugging content into existing process and form. Elinor and Richard take on projects that require their developmental input on every level, in my experience, making for absorbed collaboration. Reminiscent of an alternative art space in the best sense, Four Corners is artist and author centered. While editorial control is typically and contractually the domain of publishers, Four Corners’ contracts outline responsibility within an alliance of trust in which editorial control rests with the author or artist. Four Corners resists codifying itself or its titles, is open to shifting format and works with a variety of designers, finding a suitable match for each project and its unique requirements. (Of course it remains to be seen if they will continue to work in such a customized manner over time or as they expand.)

Four Corners’ open form orientation meant I could consider structure and ingredients as well as scale and mode freely and creatively, which in the case of Corita was a real asset. Their approach resonated with my philosophy of exhibition as an open form, which I was now applying to publication. Such prospect distinguishes and furthers my publication work as artistic practice. The only limitation was budget, but even that increased dramatically as we developed the book concept and excitement brewed. I was invited to
suggest a designer I thought would bring a special perspective to Corita, and selected the London-based Nick Bell who, for many years, was design director at _Eye_ magazine where Martin and I had published “All you need is love: pictures, words and worship by Corita Kent.” Nick Bell’s content-driven design engagement resulted in a fresh and illuminating visual materialization that I learned from. So I thought of him immediately as an apt partner for the book. He agreed, and Richard, Elinor, Nick, and I spent two days initially discussing Corita, the material, ideas, and goals for the book. That dialogue produced the scheme as we thought through the meaning of each aspect of the potential volume: scale, production specificity, printing method, image character and treatment, textual modes, audiences, relationships between textual and image layers, hard or soft cover, retail price, number of pages, atmosphere and feel, and more.

Using a conventional monographic format for a book on Corita was neither a default decision nor the result of plugging Corita into an existing series, but a strategy of providing a familiar authoritative frame through which to view her exceptionality. Given that the majority of the powerful and vivid images in _Come Alive!_ had not been previously published, the importance of reproducing the serigraphs and selected images from Corita’s slide library of ephemeral events such as Mary’s Day happenings with as high quality as possible, called for a large-format layout. This determined the page size. Los Angeles photographer Josh White agreed to photograph the prints at a nominal fee, in part because his mother was a huge fan of Corita in the sixties. Once he was working on this, Josh was so excited by her work that he offered to photograph all of it free of charge for the IHC so they could have a high quality image data base for their archive. The IHC’s existing photography was made adhoc and had frequently been deemed unpublishable. The new documentation has allowed Corita’s work to circulate in reproduction far more widely since. The archive photographs diverge dramatically in quality from the this new documentation; each required a different treatment so we separated them into sections of the book, departing from my initial desire to intermingle Corita’s ephemeral and lasting forms throughout. Instead, at Nick’s suggestion, we treated the serigraphs as plates in order to get the most out of them production wise and make a strong uninterrupted showing of her 1960s prints.
Corita juxtaposed fluorescent colors to elicit dynamic effects in many of her serigraphs of 1967 and 1968, making a visual affinity with both political graphics and psychedelic concert posters from the time. A four-color printing method would distort and flatten them. Although it was very costly and complex to implement, a print mediator, Martin Lee, was engaged to oversee using fluorescent inks on a few plates. We shipped my Corita serigraphs to London so they could be consulted for accuracy during pre-production and printing. These options are simply not within the realm of possibility of university publishing or large trade publishers like Phaidon but such production decisions and their execution greatly affected the book.

My essay in *Come Alive!* advances the notion that although the signature on the prints was Corita’s, deeper inquiry shows that the IHC art department’s achievements as well as Corita’s artworks were the results of social processes and myriad collaborations. Since the essay explores Corita’s practice beyond process and printmaking to include teaching and events she choreographed in the collaborative communal context of the Immaculate Heart, we imbedded her own photos from the archive in it. The plates follow and, together, function as a visual essay by Corita, whose “word as image” mode is clarified by this arrangement. The final print reproduction contains a text by the poet, Jesuit priest, and anti-war activist Daniel Berrigan: “When I hear bread breaking I see something else; it seems almost as though God never meant us to do anything else. So beautiful a sound, the crust breaks up like manna and falls all over everything, and then we eat; bread gets inside humans.” This leads immediately into an essay by Berrigan, who was a close friend and colleague of Corita’s, which vividly portrays her spirited personality and the tumult of the 1960s in the Catholic Church and at the IHC. Berrigan’s medium is language so Nick Bell created a spatially and typographically generous treatment, to visually stress voice. *Come Alive!* sought to represent Corita’s creative methods, her work, and the context it derived from, and do so in a dynamic visual manner – an important aspect of the representation. The monographic format made sense given the goals. I believe fossilizing Corita was avoided by the particular narratives and nuance expressed in *Come Alive!*
handle with care!
Divergent Exhibitions

*Come Alive! The Spirited Art of Sister Corita* was launched in London in the fall of 2006. Concurrently a small show was mounted at Between Bridges, a gallery run by the artist Wolfgang Tillmans, and a selection of Corita’s slide archive was imbedded in Beck’s and my show, *Installation* at the Secession. The book publicized Corita far more widely and effectively than individual exhibitions and writings had. Tillmans is known for having his finger on the pulse of culture’s cutting edge and his interest in Corita gave the book added traction.

Pioneering curator and museum director Kasper Koenig saw a copy of *Come Alive!* and immediately wanted to stage a solo exhibition of her work at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne. He had not known Corita’s work and was floored by it. Having already produced my ideal Corita installations I did not relish the idea of working on another ambitious exhibition at the time or developing a new exhibition perspective. However it seemed important to broadcast her art and I agreed to co-curate a modest show with one of the Ludwig’s assistant curators, Nina Guelicher. Resources were not abundant, so all things considered, a conventional show using the museum’s usual display tactics and publicity templates was planned. Previously I had freely shaped presentational formats to complement Corita’s vital art. I did not critically consider in advance how it would be to work this other way around – plugging Corita into existing means rather than fashioning a suitable framework from scratch.

The exhibition, *Luete wie wir, Grafiken von Sister Corita aus den 1960er Jarhren* (People like us, Graphics of Sister Corita from the 1960s), 2007, was nonetheless a hit, attracting many visitors and extensive media coverage. The Ludwig is known for its extensive collection of Pop Art, which Koenig wanted to bring Corita’s work in dialogue with. It was also the most prestigious institution to exhibit her serigraphs in quantity to date. Koenig acquired fifteen prints from the IHC’s Corita Art Center for permanent collection, specifically to supplement the Pop Art holdings. While Corita’s works had
somewhat haphazardly made their way into numerous museum collections in former
decades, the Ludwig acquisition was focused and intended to register Corita into the
trajectory of Pop their collection demonstrates. On the surface this was all good news,
however I felt both excitement and a degree of compunction about her work being
institutionalized in these ways.

Serigraphs are the most lasting and coherent of the mediums Corita employed, but in
addition to prints and other publication formats, she produced large temporary exhibitions
and choreographed events and celebrations held at the Immaculate Heart College where
she taught and chaired the art department in the mid-1960s. Corita primarily considered
herself a teacher. These facets of her practice and the generative community context she
lived and worked in were alluded to in Luete wie wir, but are not expressly taken up when
the serigraphs are displayed exclusively. After the exhibition was over, one could visit
the Ludwig’s permanent collection, assume Corita was a printmaker, and leave it at that.
However, when the frame of reference is redirected a different perspective of Corita
unfolds. Realizing I was complicit in potentially truncating her practice, and my own, as
the exhibition lacked the specific “artistic” engagement I usually applied, was disturbing.

During the fall of 2007 I stayed in Malmo on an IASPIS residency with the express
purpose of working on a project with a not-for-profit exhibition space, Signal. My initial
idea was to develop a dialogue with Signal’s four principles, Carl Lindh, Emma Reichert,
Fredrik Strid, Elena Tzotzi, to critically and fruitfully examine their mission and Signal’s
relationship to its local and larger contexts, their working process and curatorial methods,
and programming and implementation. I was to bring a new voice to the mix and share
some of my art field experience, including using collaboration methods. I considered the
dialogue itself to be the project, which would not necessarily result in something tangible
such as an exhibition but would hopefully have a variety of subtle and observable
consequences.

The directors of Signal and I began a series of in depth discussions as planned, but they
also wanted an exhibition for their space and were enthused by Sister Corita. They
proposed we coproduce a Corita exhibition as an action oriented manifestation of our dialogue – a testing site for the issues we were discussing. In the aftermath of the Ludwig I was keen on using the opportunity to bring forward dimensions of Corita’s practice that were less prominent in that presentation. The result, *Wet and Wild: The Spirit of Sister Corita*, 2007–08, contained no silkscreen prints but instead focused on the ephemeral aspects of her creativity and teaching methods. A slide show curated from Corita’s archive conveyed her context at the Immaculate Heart College’s revolutionary art department in Los Angeles in the 1960s, and was displayed on two perpendicular screens similarly to how Corita screened films in her classroom. Baylis Glascock’s documentary, “Corita Kent: On Teaching and Celebration,” from 1964 was on continuous view nearby. Key publications by Corita such as the *Irregular Bulletin, Footnotes and Headlines*, 1967, and the inexpensive box of offset prints she made for Pilgrim Press in 1968 were taken apart and displayed on the walls. The usable exposition was furthermore activated as a platform for events that link contemporary design, pedagogical, and cultural practices to Corita’s methods. *Wet and Wild* was organized in collaboration with Signal as well as the graphic design team New Beginnings. I was eager to freshly engage Corita’s sensibility with others and build up ideas for the spatial display, accompanying events, and brochure jointly. This effort resulted in an expressive environment that functioned as exhibition, research arena, and frame for events including a silkscreen workshop deriving from Corita’s appropriation of advertising slogans, and a debate about art educational methods.

While my first two exhibitory explorations of Corita had exposed her printmaking alongside documentation of her and the IHC’s ephemeral practices, the Ludwig and Signal shows together provided a similarly wide view of Corita. *Wet and Wild* was the antidote to *Luete wie wir, Grafiken von Sister Corita aus den 1960er Jarhren*, and vice versa. At the time I considered the Ludwig show as something of a personal failure. However in retrospect I think it was productive beyond its broadcasting function. It clued me in more specifically to the vulnerability of work such as Corita’s in the cultural economy. Each exhibition had its strengths and spot lit essential lessons through the processes of negotiating Corita in these differently scaled and operated institutions.
Entering the Canon, Expanding Art History

In different ways the book *Come Alive!* and the Ludwig exhibition infused Corita with art historical legitimacy. Being a populist, Catholic, woman artist had rendered her work marginal, even nonexistent, in art history discourse. Corita regarded printmaking as “a very democratic form, since it enables me to produce a quantity of original art for those who cannot afford to purchase high-priced art.” Her large editions of silk-screens were deliberately priced inexpensively. Her artwork did not primarily circulate in the fine art system, which she perceived as elitist, nor had it ever achieved “fine art” status in the eyes of art world professionals. Although some prints were sold from galleries, including one in Los Angeles run by her sister, they were also sold from churches, community centers, and vans driven by IHC members to various cultural and religious gatherings. Despite Corita’s foresight in bequeathing her print collection for permanent conservation to the Grunwald Center, exhibiting and most significantly historical representation in publication form were requisite to reanimating her artistic language.

Having been inspired by Corita’s creative production and pedagogic work it seemed natural to share it – to circulate and analyze her work and communicate its historical context. Several other likeminded artists and curators have sought to transmit Corita over the last decade, and her work is now represented in the New York Chelsea gallery, Zach Feuer. Judging from the responsive interest of viewers across generations as well as the fields of art, design, pedagogy, history, religious studies, and more, Corita’s cultural contribution is significant and vitalizing. Her artistic and graphic innovations of the 1960s speak freshly to current art and design practices. Her political consciousness and anti-war stance are relevant again. Her playful recasting of advertising lingo for spiritual purpose captivates viewers. The warmth of her address is inevitably “cool.”

Although she did not aspire to fine art classification, one result of renewed viewership is that Sister Corita Kent is currently being registered in the Pop Art canon via inclusion in exhibitions in American and European museums – the Whitney Museum for American Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Hirshhorn, MASS MoCA, MoMA P.S.1,
the Pompidou in Paris, the Kunsthalle in Vienna, among many others. Vexing questions emerge about what is gained and lost with these developments.

Corita’s exceptional qualities are potentially narrowed as her work is established in the art field. Her serigraphs qualify as fine art and can therefore enter the account of modern art that curators and museums tell through art objects. Only rarely does that narration extend to address generative social contexts and ephemeral activities. The IHC and larger sociopolitical environment Corita worked in get invoked in press write-ups but are usually not visible in tandem with the presentation of her prints. Corita’s crucial context is obscured – perhaps unintentionally, simply by retrofitting her prints into survey shows and museum collections under the header Pop Art. In time, context may be altogether lost as they move about, accompanied by an increasingly simplified blurb about their maker, revised repeatedly to incorporate the styles of hosting institutions. Of course this danger is not specific to Corita but potentially applies to all art. However in her case there seems to be a lot to lose.

On the other hand Corita changes and complicates the discourse of Pop – which has been something of a done deal – and of post-war art history. American Pop Art is almost exclusively the domain of male artists, including Rauschenberg, Johns, Hamilton, Warhol, Oldenburg, and Lichtenstein. (I am frequently asked if Corita knew the work of Andy Warhol. I’m sure she did, but I often wonder if Warhol knew the work of Sister Corita.) Furthermore, Corita’s inclusion in the formal discussion of recent art history, which I must add is neither consistent nor assured in the long-term, highlights previous exclusionary modes and therefore fissures historical narrative. One wonders, what else has been marginalized and barred from the grand story of art as told by objects and approved practices? How hermetic is the canon? Can it be expanded? What does it take to do so? Authorized history is challenged by the reemergence of what has been omitted, again and again.

While I’ve outlined what happened in the case of Corita, questions also emerge about the different trajectories that might ensue if an academic historian entering through the front
door of history writing, rather than an artist using the side door had identified her as a
worthwhile subject. Would Corita be even more celebrated? Would American museums
jostle to acquire the remaining coveted prints? Would other scholarly investigations
ensue as a result, further insuring her “place in history?” Depending on the status of the
imaginary art historian, a tentative yes to all of the above. But would Corita have even
been approved as a subject by a doctoral advisor or publisher? If so, in what type of
program? Given Corita’s compound marginality, particularly the Catholic connection and
populist position, it seems unlikely that any art history PhD program in the U.S. would
support the subject nor can I imagine there are advisors familiar enough to take on
dissertation oversight. Cultural studies, philosophy and religious studies, and education
are more likely settings. Yet even in those disciplines, I am only aware of one such
dissertation – unpublished, by Barbara Lotse, made at the School of Education at
Gonzaga University. 25 Would a scholarly undertaking find a publisher? Judging from
recent titles in major university presses’ art departments it seems unlikely. I suspect it
would be difficult in the absence of marquee appeal and either academic or collector
backing to potentially lubricate the market. Given that it hasn’t happened yet, I argue that
entering art history through the side door, as an artist engaging the role of historian and
amplifier, has proved an effective alternative for writing previously overlooked histories
into the record. This parallels the situation with the NY alternative art field. Although in
that case I believe it was simply a matter of time before art historians would have taken
on the subject.

Institutional Pathologies

In March of 2010, while participating in a conference at University of Southern
California (USC) – “Museum of Ideas,” a well-known museum curator declared her love
for the museum at the outset of her presentation – not only the one she works for, but
generally announcing, “I love the Museum.” Melodramatically my mind wandered during
her presentation.
I used to love the museum. I thought it could change. But like any ill-fated attraction of opposites built on faith that transformation is possible through love, our relationship went awry. You hold on for too long, believing in miracles. Believing in Love. Wanting to channel its transformative power.

The museum seemed to really want change – even invite it. That’s how we met. Its desire to absorb change was met by my – our – longing to be heard, understood, recognized, and attended to. The museum offered itself – an embrace – a safe place where we could envision and represent ourselves, speak openly, intimately, and critically. We affected one another. We shared. There was sympathy. We respected one another’s desires and limitations. It was great. It couldn’t last. The publicness of our relationship sealed our connection as well as its fate.

There were one-night stands, flings, and long-term relationships. We were passed around. Telling us what we wanted to hear. (I want you.) Always seducing. (I need you.) Never satiated, we went from one museum to the next. Believing in the merit of our performance, our righteousness. It felt good to love and be loved, but in the morning the yearning for more intensified.

In hindsight, it went on too long – locked in codependency, needing the museum to function, to be. We knew too much. We’d gone behind-the-scenes. Mystery was destroyed. Authority dissolved. Respect lost, as well as hope. Too many compromises all around. Resentments accumulated. “You promised you’d change!” We didn’t realize the tenacity of the museum’s conservative core. Its commitment to self-preservation.

Finally, there was only dead space between us. Nothing that hadn’t already been said. We knew each other’s thoughts, moves, and
capabilities. Nothing to look forward to. No adventure. Only routine and repetition. Faded passions. Faded interests. Stale mate. We grew apart. We went in different directions.

I used to regard museums optimistically, as places I wanted to know better and contribute to. Why did I no longer regard them as particularly provoking sites? What changed for me internally and in culture in recent years?

Economic transformation of the museum sector is one factor. The financial dependency of U.S. museums on the private sector and paying audiences is largely a twenty-first century phenomenon, a repercussion of public funding deterioration, which has dramatic and subtle affects on the who, what, why, and how of programming. This is symptomatic of a larger shift toward privatization of government programs, from prisons to education. Bureaucratic and business model mind-sets with competition at their core currently guide all variety of arts institutions; fixed procedural rules that are insensitive to practitioners and do not accommodate diverse ways of thinking and doing are part and parcel. Artists and art are treated somewhat generically, thereby narrowing the scope of possibility to shape projects and exposure freely. In this set up institutional reproduction powers up while draining creative practitioners, short-circuiting ideas, and shortchanging viewers.26 Museums were never independent but the widespread allegiance to a modernist conceptualization of art as independent – even if in part illusory, in conjunction with reliance on individual patrons and, beginning in the 1960s on governmental support that broadened the scope of access and resultant programs, seems a relatively considered and in some respects more open-ended context. Within that arrangement there was a capacity for critique as well as institutional reflection compared to the burgeoning aggressive overcapitalized cultural economy of the early 2000s and the “anything can happen – as long as it brings in revenue” version of programming, witnessed for example at the Museum of Modern Art. At post-expansion MoMA this general position has resulted in an ascendancy of art as spectacle through sensationalized exhibitions that read in part as gimmickry. Popularizing the museum visit in this way comes at high cost.
On another note, a change in my general orientation was set in motion a few years ago: I grew tired of fulfilling the role of diagnostic opponent. While critically taking issue with how things are done as well as broadcasting alternative methods, subjects, and models had been sincere and imperative throughout my career, I reached something of an internal limit once I recognized the pattern of call and response that was defining my artistic identity as well as guiding my relationships with institutions. Being independent, and unaffiliated has made me well positioned to challenge status quo conditions and shake things up momentarily, through exhibitions, teaching, speaking, consulting, and writing. While I was motivated by the idealistic belief that critical and outspoken participation in the art system constructively contributes to its transformation, after twenty-five years in the field it seems apparent that while some things change the big picture stays relatively static. It took me a long time to comprehend that the temporary transgressions I set forth were primarily symbolic and ultimately simply part of the process. Witnessing institutions of all size and attitude fixed on preserving their authority and infinitely self-reproducing as though solvency and existence were enough has been to some extent, dispiriting. Reality trumped fantasy. The mystery, excitement, and challenge of creating a museum exhibition diminished as my experience increased – not speedily, but over time.

Book as Exhibition

I used to get irritated when people said things like, “have you ever thought about turning this exhibition into a book?” believing they were misguided in wanting to limit the role of exhibitions to leisure activity or simply lethargic (“visiting an exhibit should not be work,” “too much to read standing up.”) The separation of exhibition and publication seemed yet another outmoded division of labor worth disputing in practice. Traditionally, exhibitions present art without a lot of on-site explanation save the occasional disembodied wall text. Judgment is implied in the very selection and fact of presentation as curatorial authority speaks for itself. Further elucidation is contained in an accompanying catalogue, charged with the task of conveying background information and expert interpretations that contextualize the exhibited works. On the surface the
division between exhibition and publication seems pragmatic. However this partition of formats encourages the belief in objective curatorial authority as well as transcendent aesthetic experience while relegating scholarly elaboration and historical representation to a portable more intimate form, thereby differentiating functions of art and of audiences.

I have long been interested as a practitioner and an exhibition user in exhibitory situations that take up the operations commonly associated with publication, not simply by lengthening wall texts but by using visual, spatial, and discursive tools among many other strategies. For example, in one of the Impressionist galleries at the Musée D’Orsay in Paris, two versions of Claude Monet’s Woman With Parasol hang in proximity. Rather than a traditional aestheticized presentation advancing a single painting as an uncontested masterpiece, by seeing them installed together we have access to art history and are better able to grasp the project of impressionism. The two works are not mounted on the same plane but on either wall of a corner so they don’t cancel each other out visually. I found this simple installation act highly illuminating, the painting themselves are made to speak volumes of information normally exposed in didactic wall texts and accompanying publications.

While I have mainly favored presenting in-depth investigations in the social space of an exhibition hall – treating exhibition as a contextual environment in which the research that informed and deepened my understanding of the subject, works, materials, and their conditions are somehow integrated into the display, at some point I became less defensive about the separation and considered the challenge of making a book instead of an exhibition. An appealing thought given some of the growing frustrations with the exhibition form described earlier. How could an exhibition covert into a book? What would distinguish such a book, what might it book be like and look like? Previously collapsing publication terrain into exhibition, I subsequently wanted to collapse exhibition into publication. An added incentive: the book form requires no secondary representation but indefinitely represents itself. A bid for some semblance of durability for my work was also a factor, and remains so, though I doubt I realized it or would have
admitted it at the time. In some ways I fell into making books; they fit my temporary needs, aims, and temperament. Like many production shifts this was both purposeful and happenstance. Felix’s death and my own aging set the stage for producing lasting objects in book form that might negotiate the clash between ephemerality and the enduring.

I began making self-contained, self-sufficient books, distinct from catalogues that accompany exhibitions, beginning with *Alternative Art New York*, but I would say began employing the mode even more consciously for the Corita book, *Come Alive!*, and in the dialogic monograph, *Felix Gonzalez-Torres* also published in 2006, by steidl. Publishing permitted me to create lasting objects and largely circumvent the museum and art space circuit that, from my perspective, had become temporarily staid.

Rather than detail the thinking process and resulting volume on Gonzalez-Torres here, which essentially translated methodological features of exhibition practice into the course of making a book as well as set the stage for future undertakings, I will delve into this line of inquiry through the example of *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, which has been produced wholly in the context of my doctoral research.

My application to do doctoral research in Visual Art at Malmö Art Academy, Lund University, occurred at a specific juncture. Having fulfilled all my exhibition, book, and project commitments, I was eager to carve out a substantial period of time unburdened by institutional agendas, production deadlines, and the pressures of reputation in order to deeply engage a creative analytic method of inquiry and practice under the dual purpose header, Retrospective / Prospective. My application proposed the following:

My research will be two-fold: working through my relationship to form, intent on form-finding anew, as well as gaining understanding and analysis of art field coordinates for current and future work. I am planning to shed work structures that structure me. To perceive new interests and continue authoring an artistic identity according to my present I need to force a clearing and carve out a period of time that is unencumbered by
production deadlines, which is how I have been working for some years, and unburdened by prospects defined by past interests, enterprises, and resulting expectations. I want to consciously embrace transition, reengaging creativity rather than over focusing on production and representation . . . My research armature will be an overarching project of retrospective assessment and apprehending prospective for new work focus . . . My plan is to retrospectively articulate an understanding of various incarnations of my collaborative and solo art practices and perform an archeology of past work involvements and their features, contexts, effectiveness, reception, as well as discover the formative consequences on my ways of thinking and working.29

Group Material, For Example

In the practice of History (in academic history and in history as a component of everyday imaginings) something has happened to time: it has been slowed down, and compressed. When the work of Memory is done, it is with the things into which this time has been pressed . . . In the theatre of the past that is constituted by memory . . . we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being’s stability – a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, wants time to ‘suspend’ its flight. In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time. That is what space is for.’

—Carolyn Steedman30

Language has unmistakably made plain that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium. It is the medium of that which is experienced, just as earth is the medium in which ancient cities lie buried. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct
himself like a man digging. Above all, he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the “matter itself” is no more than the strata which yield their long-sought secrets only to the most meticulous investigation. That is to say, they yield those images that, severed from all earlier associations, reside as treasures in the sober rooms of our later insights – like torsos in a collector’s gallery.

—Walter Benjamin

Stories condense time the way maps miniaturize space. But somehow condensing time seems to distance the past from us rather than to bring it closer. What unfolds in a story – what really happens in a story – is language. Whenever something is said there is also silence.

—Matthew Buckingham

Group Material’s cultural practice was temporal and the forms employed were primarily ephemeral. When the group formally disbanded, in 1996, I was intent on preserving its ephemerality, on not becoming history. I resisted our work being defined or objectified in a monograph by an art historian, and reserved the right to cohere our history at some future point. Soon after I wrote:

The fragments that contribute to any history can be selected and configured to make a particular structure – to shape the past and / or to mobilize the present. That Group Material has an interest in it’s own historicization, in how it’s done, is intrinsic to the group’s working paradigm. Producing such a book is enticing “as a project” in which the investigative and representational methods Group Material utilized would be mirrored and enacted in relation to its own history. Conversely there is a certain appeal in preserving the ephemeral aspect of the entire project by not bringing documentation together in one packaged history. . . .
are certain challenges specific to a process of the historicization of the conditions and impacts of group activities. For a complex understanding of activities that sought to divert and subvert master narratives it’s important to propose alternatives to streamlined narratives that operate along linear logic in which one thing leads to another. Providing an orderly view or encapsulation of debated events and meanings is to some extent a revision of events whereby conflicts and contradictions are ultimately resolved, at least in their representation.33

I continued representing the group’s work through live narration and writings, and responded to inquiries on a case-by-case basis. As the only founding member who remained until its conclusion I felt a responsibility to keep recounting the group’s practice. Long-term member Doug Ashford has done similarly. Previously preferring collaborative representation whenever it was feasible, once the group formally dissolved we decided to represent it separately, speaking from individual perspectives.

In retrospect I believe describing Group Material during the years since it ended has been as much about concealment as exposure.34 Telling has supplied me with the illusion of a positive, active relationship with the past, while in actuality routine narration and automated responses have prevented deep reflection into the collaborative’s legacies and my experiences within its framework. (For instance, the question What is Group Material? triggered the recitation of a succinct explanation.) Despite live empirical explanation that renders the past vividly, I have to some degree perpetuated a static storyline of Group Material.

After a decade of active narration and historical management, I decided it was time to relinquish responsibility as well as control and address Group Material’s history more deeply and with lasting effect. I needed to tackle the material traces that had infiltrated every closet, cabinet, and spare spot in my apartment, as well as the psychic traces that permeated memory. Getting the collection into a public archive was the first objective. Collecting material saved by other members as well and joining it all together in an
archive would permit researchers access to Group Material in a more coherent way than previously possible, and open the opportunity for academic engagement.

Interest in Group Material had been consistent since its conclusion and has increased in recent years. Perhaps curiosity persisted so because it remained indistinct and unhistoricized. Access has been fragmentary, mostly articles and interviews in newspapers and magazines, mentions and reproductions in books, one extensive essay by Jan Avgikos in But Is It Art?: The Spirit of Art As Activism, 1995, and interviews and writings produced by former members after the group ended. Googling Group Material furnishes scanty information. Anyone wishing to gain in depth overview has confronted this scattershot condition. To really dig in requires a formidable process of chasing down and piecing together information as well as carrying out primary research, such as probing former participants. This sketchy state of information has made it possible for people to mythologize Group Material and project onto its practice, tilting it in different directions – activist, curatorial, socially minded, aesthetically subversive, as well as variously labeling the practice to suit their purposes – populist, community-based, political, institutional critique, relational aesthetics.

Life and Death in the Archive

External interest notwithstanding, defying archiving as a life-extending strategy has proved to be somewhat deadening. In retrospect resistance seems futile. As Norman Mailer commented on a visit to the archive he was to donate his papers to, “We all wind up in boxes anyway.” Perhaps this is faulty logic, but alternatively, it seemed that archiving might enliven and expand. Despite that archival institutions are regarded as crypts, they provide access to information for historiography and for “mobilizing the present,” thereby insuring the possibility of infinite connection and use. In other words, archives are living entities.

Near the beginning of Archive Fever Jacques Derrida asserts that:
If there is no archive without consignation in an *external place* which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction. Consequence: right on that which permits and conditions archiviation, we will never find anything other than that which exposes to destruction, and in truth menaces with destruction, introducing, *a priori*, forgetfulness and the archiviolithic into the heart of the monument. Into the “by heart” itself. The archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself.\(^{37}\)

Derrida goes on to shed theoretical light on how archiving and the archive are conditioned by interrelationships between life, death, and revivification. “*On the one hand*, the archive is made possible by death, aggression, and destruction drive, that is to say also by originary finitude and expropriation. But beyond finitude as limit, there is, as we said above, this properly *in-finite* movement of radical destruction without which no archive desire or fever would happen.”\(^{38}\)

As I consciously began reconsidering Group Material (even before reading *Archive Fever*) I fleetingly wished that neither I nor anyone else would have saved any trace, or that a fire would have destroyed all evidence, so that the quagmire of the archive and its complex interactions with authority, history, death, the present, and the future would not require transaction.\(^{39}\) But given that the material *was* in hand and historical awareness was in mind, along with the desire to relinquish the responsibility of live mediation, it seemed crucial to address how Group Material’s archive would be cohered and contextualized to reside in an archival institution.
One Way of Ending

The AIDS activist collective Gran Fury was formed in 1988 as an agitprop branch of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in order to exploit the power of art to end the AIDS crisis. Like Group Material, Gran Fury used mass transit, the street, and print media to distribute their succinct slogans (for example, Kissing Doesn’t Kill, and, ART IS NOT ENOUGH. TAKE COLLECTIVE DIRECT ACTION TO END THE AIDS CRISIS) and drew on the support of art institutions to produce temporary installations, notably at The New Museum of Contemporary Art and at the Venice Biennale. By the mid-1990s, feeling their usual methods were not up to the task at hand and unable to reinvent their practice, Gran Fury disbanded and at once donated their document collection “as is” to the New York Public Library (NYPL) for it to be archived and made public. For the most part the members also ceased representing Gran Fury verbally. In 1995 they distributed a flyer titled “Good Luck . . . Miss You,” which articulated the origins of the group, its general strategy, and some of the personal and cultural reasons they were splitting:

By 1993 the effort involved became too demanding for different members. Most people worked full-time if not more, running their own businesses. More importantly, for all the effort involved, it began to feel routine. We had settled too clearly into one way of working. As the AIDS epidemic had evolved, along with the governmental and institutional responses to it, the early solutions are no longer appropriate.

Gran Fury members thereafter directed all inquiries to the NYPL even though it took several years for the collection to be archived and made available for public use. They were pragmatic in cutting the cord, which perhaps was more straightforward for them than it could be for Group Material given their much briefer collaboration. I envied how they had handled the transition, but could not imagine similarly discontinuing to represent Group Material and felt obligated to see what we had started not only to the end
but also beyond. Since Group Material had been my sole art practice for seventeen years my identity was entangled with the formation and it was hard to just “let go.” (It’s tempting here to make an analogy to romantic break ups: Gran Fury opted for a complete separation method, with no further discussion, and Group Material choose the one foot in one foot out technique of remaining accessible and continuing to speak.)

The appealingly uncomplicated choice would have been to simply deposit Group Material’s collection with all its arbitrariness and absent narration into a library when the group dissolved, and let archivists handle it per usual procedure. However, it seemed abrupt to simply designate what was in hand on a given date as “the archive,” and Group Material’s paper trail was further dispersed among former members. Chiefly, I had been too close to the whole thing to let go and wanted the distance of time to both build up individually and develop a different and less emotional perspective on the group than I had at its finish.

False Evidence

Most archives exhibit a fragmentary and perhaps even random dimension in terms of what is included and what is excluded. Documents and artifacts are not intrinsically truth telling. Archivist Marvin Taylor sometimes regards archives as “false evidence.” In her review of two recent books concerned with history writing Jill Lepore asserts “There is not and never can be any such thing as true history [English writer William] Godwin insisted: ‘Nothing is more uncertain, more contradictory, more unsatisfactory than the evidence of facts.’ Every history is incomplete; every historian relies on what is unreliable – documents written by people who were not under oath and cannot be cross-examined.”

Several years ago, I analyzed my experiences researching Sister Corita during which I came to similar conclusions:

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 can also “lie” through omission, or mislead. Connecting the dots between discrete documents and discovering relations between pieces of information – producing meaning – is what is at the heart of research. But the “facts” housed within a particular archive are not necessarily systematic. They are often fragmentary, disconnected from context, and sometimes even random. Crucial pieces of information which might answer questions, suggest particular narratives, or unlock mysteries are not necessarily archived.\textsuperscript{43}

Deficiency in the archive is inevitable, as is discrepancy. Some gaps stimulate research, but some are better filled, such as fleshing out the collective’s archive with individual members’ material. While there is no assured way to mitigate the uncertainty of the archive or the relationships between truth, evidence, and memory, without exercising an absurd degree of control, I was reluctant to accept the situation at face value. I wanted to test the ability of the Group Material archive to communicate despite its omissions, and address the ways it came up wanting. This could be considered a case of founder’s syndrome: an overprotective attitude and inability to let go. Mainly though, Group Material’s concernment with discursive practices and representation, combined with a preoccupation with historical analysis and history writing in my work since the group ended, compelled fresh consideration and participation cohering the archive and stimulating its use.

Permanent Host

The inevitability of formulating the Group Material archive in a publicly accessible institution gained traction upon meeting Marvin Taylor, who in 1993 founded the Downtown Collection at the Fales Library and Special Collections at NYU.\textsuperscript{44} I was immediately impressed with Taylor’s focus on documenting the New York downtown arts scene that evolved in SoHo and the Lower East Side during the 1970s through the early 1990s as an arena of directly and tangentially interconnected individuals,
collectives, communities, and practices. Taylor seeks out complementary collections that cross-reference and contextualize each another. The Collection encompasses art, literature, music, theater, performance, film, activism, dance, photography, and video. The Downtown Collection has internal coherence. Additionally, Taylor regards archives as living entities and has generated a vibrant collection and a decidedly non-stuffy research atmosphere that counters the cliché of the archive as somber crypt or bastion of elitism.

The Collection’s broad cultural reach seemed the ideal context for Group Material’s ultimate “institutionalization,” particularly as Taylor, clearly an activist archivist himself, was excited by the notion of Group Material’s collection being consciously cohered and structured by former members, even though the more common course is to simply deposit a relevant collection with its randomness and gaps intact and let people make what they will of it.

Institutionalizing the archive implies “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. According to Mark Wigley, “Archives of historical documents are not quiet, stable repositories for inactive traces of old work. To enter an archive is to enter a space of questions rather than answers. Archives provoke experiment by challenging our assumptions and emerging forms of practice. Far from a collection of inert fossils, the archive is an incubator of new life.”

Group Material’s archive would relocate agency from the group as working entity to others who activate its bodies of information, including for historical representation. Institutionalization, or instituting, also entails a reassignment or sharing of authority with the Downtown Collection and NYU as permanent hosts.

The Downtown Collection is preferable in this instance to the MoMA library or other art museums because it has a broader cultural base than “fine art,” and specifically documents the cultural environment of downtown New York where the group’s practice germinated and evolved. An educational institution seemed a better match for Group
Material, which was originally incorporated as a New York State educational organization. While MoMA and the Getty are prestigious, they are also perceived as elitist and can be off-putting to some visitors. The Downtown Collection is accessible to anyone who wants to visit and they have ample staffing, funding, and resources. Additionally, their average turnaround time for processing archives and making them accessible is a year to eighteen months. By way of contrast, the New York Public Library can take up to five years to process material and is reliant on governmental funding – often dwindling or in jeopardy.

Despite the collaborative’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 minutes of meetings 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. Taylor’s enthusiasm came through loud and clear during his initial site visit to my apartment; we were on the same wavelength and the arrangement was sealed.

Testing the Archive

Embarking on the concrete project of Group Material’s archive and historical representation I formed dialogues with two people who had minimal foreknowledge of the group or the period. Both situations came about organically. Rasmus Røhling was an art student I met while visiting Århus Art Academy. Subsequently he visited New York and we informally worked together for several weeks – the dialogue eventually extending much longer. Sabrina Locks, a student at Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, did her summer internship with me while I was conceptualizing the archive endeavor. I had both Rasmus and Sabrina read through the paper trail of the first year of Group Material’s activities, which includes meeting minutes, internal correspondence, mission statements,
press releases, press articles, and a motley selection of other material. I wanted to get their impressions of the data and find out how effectively it communicated to uninformed readers, see how they used a document collection, and gage their interest in particular facets of Group Material. Their responses helped me think through which aspects of the group’s practice and production might be of particular interest to a younger generation of artists and curators. To stimulate our discussions we read key texts on history writing and archiving by Hayden White and Derrida. Sabrina and I met several times with Marvin Taylor to discuss the Downtown Collections’ archiving philosophy and procedures and think through a fitting approach to the process ahead. Both Rasmus and Sabrina became primary intellectual partners throughout the making on the archive and the book.

Witnessing their interpretations, enthusiasm, misunderstandings, and puzzlement illuminated and delimited the capacity of the material to convey Group Material. Rasmus and Sabrina were each taken aback by the group’s business-like meeting minutes from its initial year, which did not reconcile with Group Material’s looser persona. What the archive does not tell is the group diligently documented its process in order to meet guidelines for New York State incorporation as a not-for-profit organization. Once incorporated, the minute taking stopped. As the group shrank from twelve to three members the group communicated in person and by phone, and the paper trail of internal dialogue dwindled. Another example: 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, accounting for the discrepancy. Sabrina and Rasmus’s initial engagement with the material clarified that some qualifying narration was essential to portray Group Material with more dimension and accuracy than archival material with its holes and silences is capable of. Sabrina and Rasmus’s initial engagement with the material clarified that some qualifying narration was essential to portray Group Material with more dimension and accuracy than archival material with its holes and silences is able to. This formative period of discussion and conceptualization produced an array of ideas for projects that might take place in the archive to help achieve this goal.
Proposed Subprojects

Context
A Group Material chronology will be developed as a project that extends GM’s process and methods and forms. This chronology could accompany the archive as part of the finding aid and front matter providing contextual and historical information. It might also be for publication, possibly as a section of a larger book. The chronology could also be cohered as a website which links with other information, including individual documents, images, sites. The chronology may be composed by numerous people and will include objective and subjective information.

Configure, Reconfigure
Analyze and depict Group Material as bodies rather than as a body. Each time the constitution of the group changed, GM became another body, which expressed different goals and produced differentiated projects. This dimension, as well, as the fields of interconnections GM had with other individuals and social bodies over time could be traced through diagrams, lists, texts, and sociograms that depict and play with GM and its composition across time. The archive’s organizational structure could perhaps itself be sectioned according to the group’s various incarnations.

Narration
Conduct interviews and oral histories with members of Group Material. These could be uploaded into the front matter of the archive, could be part of a chronology / context website, as well as be used in publication formats. Extend the interviews to include people in various roles and relations vis-à-vis Group Material: artists who participated in exhibitions, collaborators, curators, institutional liaisons, art critics, art historians, funding agents, installation crew, guards who looked after the shows,
viewers, etc. Individuals’ empirical narration and commentary on the subject would collectively portray the subject. This could be edited to form a section of a publication, as well as used in the finding aid and timeline, etc. This idea picks up on the *Chaos as Usual* model – a book on Fassbinder consisting of interviews and statements from people who worked with him, which creates a kind of 360 perspective on his process.

Fiction and journal as possible modes of telling; think about speaking voice in general (GM on GM) and in particular.

**Documents**

Annotate documents from various perspectives. Annotation can show various layers of processing and multiple perspectives. Annotation is text that doesn’t go on the physical element. These texts can be put on collection, series, subseries, or folder level in the archive and its finding aid. Select documents to form a focused body for publication (i.e. GM’s first year), perhaps as a section for a larger publication. During GM’s first year, minutes of meetings were kept and lots of internal communiqués changed hands including loose notes on ideas for exhibitions and GM’s mission, proposals for splitting the group (since it began splintering almost as soon as it started), and various position papers. There is also a good trail of how GM represented itself that year, and the reception to its projects.

**Images**

Make a sequence of images that show Group Material’s development of exhibition as a medium through installation photography, which demonstrates how the group regarded the projects. In the earliest years pictures primarily focus on individual works rather than exhibitions overviews. As GM developed its purpose and form, this changes: exhibitions as visual forums are increasingly stressed. Such an image trail also demonstrates GM’s increasing awareness of, and investment in, representation, its own history, and archiving. This sequence could be
used as a slide show, or in conjunction with an essay as part of a publication. Other visual sequences will be organized including a selection of images that have become iconic through repeated circulation, perhaps juxtaposed with “outtakes,” and images that show the chronology of projects – to be used variously.

Reception
Chart the critical reception to Group Material’s work over time – ’80s, ’90s, and beyond. A selection could be collated and potentially published to show what Group Material’s practice and projects have meant during various cultural periods.

History
Collaboratively make a history project such as a publication, which might bring together in some fashion much of the above.

Methods and principles
Initiate inventive interpretations of key aspect(s) of GM’s practice (as projects) in order to activate those methods / principles in the present tense.48

Also emerging from the initial brainstorming period was a set of points, issues, and questions that caption the entire investigation and articulation.

How is the threat of disappearance felt?
How does it manifest and propel the thinking behind the archive?
Archives deaden and enliven, expose and suppress; archive as endpoint and beginning, archive as set of paradoxes.

How does bringing documentation together imply shaping / making history?
How do artifacts – whether material or informational – communicate?
How to address the complexity of a period and the climate of conventions and perceptions that informed the making of a specific project?
Can contexts be in effect communicated?

How does the archive archive? How will this archive structure the content of GM?
How will it construct relationships to the present and future?
What limits to place on reproduction rights, exhibition use, and restagings?
Is the archive archiving a form? Is the gesture of archiving a formal gesture?
Where does the archive end? What defines its frame?
What are the criteria for inclusion and exclusion?
What tense is the archive?

What kind of continuity existed in GM externally? As a public persona? Internal continuity? How will these continuities cohabitate in the archive?
What purpose has making private processes, the group’s collaboration for instance, public?

What is the import of GM working in “our” archive?
How does the subjective transform material to a public sphere without manipulating it?
What can the collective subjective do when given the chance to write its own history?
What archival structure and practices will animate and complicate without over determining meanings?

What is gained and lost in the process of subjecting ephemeral and peripheral activities to conservation? From inducting them into history?
How to make what is missing evident as a layer of historicising?
How to give voice / space to the fragments; gaps as essential to its historical memory?
What kind of suitable forms can be shaped to embody the historicising processes, gathered knowledge and diverse purpose that drive this inquiry?
Can one effectively challenge history writing while writing history?
Archiving Group Material using a hands-on activist manner was to involve deliberately configuring material for transfer to a public entity in conjunction with generating discourse and contextualization in the process. In this situation, archiving was considered to entail initiating investigations and catalyzing historiography along newly perceptible directions that would emerge while reviewing the amassed documentation, and reconsidering the acts and histories at stake.

Armature and body

In anticipation of cohering the archive archiving issues apparently stimulated a dream one night. My mother, grandmother, and I were poking around my great aunt’s house. The old farmhouse had been renovated but my vague memories of how it once was lingered behind the superimposition. As if I were a little girl I stood on a chair and opened the kitchen cupboard. Aunt Jo’s dishes and cans and boxes of food were intact inside. I was very excited that this one pocket revealing her lived experience and way of arranging things still existed in the midst of the once familiar environment in which all other material traces had been erased and exclaimed, “we have to protect this, this is special, these are Aunt Jo’s things just like she used and kept them.”

I first learned about “original provenance” in discussion with Marvin Taylor. Original provenance refers to the organizational configuration of things as they were saved, which is then applied in the archive. (I recently had another moving experience of how things are saved, this one while awake, when I visited my Aunt Dot’s house several months after she died. I drifted aimlessly, opening closets and cupboards, looking for indications of her presence. Upstairs in her bedroom, I opened one of the bureau drawers and discovered it was filled with brightly colored bows and ribbons waiting to be reused. An optimistic collection. Aunt Dot. Instantly I recalled her gleeful salvaging and a lifetime of Christmas and birthday celebrations.) How things are saved: Taylor encourages maintaining such formative features when transferring collections to the library because an individual or group’s procedures, priorities, and principles are revealed through its
organizational systems. Group Material’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. The prospective collection was actually a commixture of several individuals’ saving habits and classification systems stimulated by idiosyncratic, conceptual, and practical factors. The resulting amalgamation of methods is emblematic of the collaboration. This somewhat unruly composite structure was worth preserving to a certain degree, as opposed to rearranging, as some repositories might, according to an archiving system organized by material type (for example, uniting all correspondence, press releases, etc. chronologically). However, in keeping with the logic of original provenance the group’s archive would remain sectioned according to individual members’ collections, and categorized as such, for example, Julie Ault Papers, Doug Ashford Papers, Marybeth Nelson Papers, which seemed antithetical to how Group Material was conceived, regardless of the separate paper trails. This would have in effect degrouped the group. Conversely, I sought to regroup material into a larger framework – The Group Material Archive – in lieu of distinguishing individuals’ savings. Within that, the logic of original provenance and adhering to significant saving methods such as the random mixing of source material where advertisements, newspaper clippings, theoretical essays, popular cultural artifacts, and brochures combined without designation, order, or hierarchy, was preserved. These situations attest to the consequence of negotiating each aspect of archiving in relation to the specificity of Group Material as opposed to completely relinquishing influence over archiving methods as Gran Fury had done.

According to renowned archivist Thomas Staley, “Ten per cent of an archive represents ninety per cent of its value.” Decentralized, members kept their own paper trails or not. 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 regret to say that due to the constraints of my apartment I dumped whole files and boxed of material more
than once, thinking “we’ve finished these projects and don’t need to keep all this paper anymore.”) The material I’d stored for years included what I had saved as well as that given to me by former members Tim Rollins and Mundy McLaughlin upon their departure, and whatever was in Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s files when he died. Doug Ashford kept a lot of material stored at his house as well as his ongoing notes tracing projects as they developed, which were integrated into the archive. It was important to solicit all former members for documents, notes, and images in order to make the most coherent multifaceted and multivoiced archive possible. Building the archive is ongoing; some individuals’ papers have been folded in and some are forthcoming.

The material traces of Group Material finally came out of their boxes, closets, and crannies of dormancy to temporarily inhabit a space at the Fales Library in fall 2008. The situation was an “archiving laboratory” in which the conceptual and practical activities and procedures involved in organizing and preparing Group Material’s archive for permanent residency in the Downtown Collection were actively integrated. While formalizing the archive sought to make Group Material newly public, the process was also conceived as a laboratory in which to investigate the logic, structure, implications, and practice of the archive. This processing and research site produced a fertile ground for generating new contributions to the archive. The HBO detective series “The Wire,” which posits evidence rooms and bulletin boards as active contingent sites for discerning narratives, patterns, and contexts around the cases the detectives are working on, inspired the archiving laboratory. We thought of ourselves as detectives “solving the cold case” of Group Material.

I spent several months processing the material in its soon-to-be permanent home: handling, reading, and looking at every paper, image, and item; taking note, cross-referencing, recollecting, and reflecting. After just a few days of 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. The more I reviewed the more deeply I understood the malleable and fallible nature of memory, and memory repeatedly threw documentary fact into question. Alternatively edified and mystified, the experience demonstrated the utter insecurity of the categories subjective and objective.

I cannot say I have had no inking 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? When invited to art institutions to provide an overview of Group Material for instance, I usually sought to convey a sense of the collaborative’s origins, structure, contexts, process, changing composition, chronology, aims, agendas, aesthetics, and use of forms, as well as present numerous exemplary projects and discuss their reception, even though fitting all this into a sixty-minute show-and-tell scheme was unwieldy and reckless. I was uneasy with expediency and habitual representation and sometimes was disinclined to speak about Group Material whatsoever, but felt accountable since there was no comprehensive published source to direct people to.

Determining the criteria of what would be included in the archive – delimiting what is Group Material and what is not, is more complicated than it initially appeared. For instance I had several large files filled with articles, advertisements, brochures, flyers, bumper stickers, etc. that are indicative of popular and subcultural activities of the 1980s and early 1990s. I culled from this resource pool for research and teaching during the period and Group Material derived elements from it for exhibitions and publications. It is impossible to say what was clipped or preserved for general interest and what was saved with Group Material in mind. Artifacts gathered by other members may also be included therein. Furthermore, Group Material’s shared interests and perspectives essentially informed my thinking and looking during that time. While only some items can be traced to the group’s projects, it seemed to me that the whole lot should be part of the archive as it speaks to its contexts. How would other members feel about parallel files in their
cabinets? Is this too much information to make accessible? Would it make more sense to specify only ephemeral items exhibited or published in the official production of the group be included? Should shared references that informed Group Material’s internal processes and underpinned its production be omitted from or contained in the archive? (Taylor agreed that general source materials are additive and they are part of the archive.)

Questions of privacy and publicity and inside and outside also arose. Is there information that should be withheld to respect the private machinations of group interaction? What are the ethics of exposure, of history? Should personal reflections on Group Material from our notebooks or sketchbooks be put into the archive? Are some things too personal to expose? Unwilling to discard or hide anything due to its personal nature, I decided if had been saved then it goes in the archive, regardless of embarrassment. The overarching goal is to make Group Material transparent as is possible to people beyond our lifetimes.

The ethics of exposure came to the foreground for me while researching for making the book on Felix Gonzalez-Torres. In the late 1980s, Gonzalez-Torres, who lived in New York, frequently corresponded by letter with his boyfriend Ross Laycock, who lived in Toronto. Ross died early in 1991 and Felix retrieved the letters he had sent him, joining them with the ones he had received. In 1991 Felix photographed fragments of some of Ross’s letters up close, which he formatted as framed photographs and photographic puzzles. Marieluise Hessel, an art collector and the major benefactor of the Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, acquired several of Gonzalez-Torres’s works including one or more of these photographs. Evidently she and the artist had a conversation about the actual letters and she asked him to consider the Curatorial Center’s Library become their permanent home. As far as I know nothing contractual ensued between them, but the artist is said to have agreed in principle. Some years after Felix died, Andrea Rosen, who represents his work, sought to follow up on Hessel’s and Felix’s agreement. (Unwilling initially to give up the original love letters, she had a set of archival copies made for the purpose.) I read the complete correspondence in search of insight into Felix’s thinking and work. The letters held promise on that score, particularly as Felix was often quoted to claim his Ross was his public, the person he made his work for. Having been friends with
Ross and had a close friendship with Felix I felt all the more entitled to read the letters, and all the more embarrassed once I did. From my perspective, with the exception of one letter that contains a drawing of two clocks and refers to his work “Untitled (Perfect Lovers),” 1991, very little if any of their contents provide information into Felix’s practice or work or adds to its understanding beyond what is accessible in his works themselves or writings about them. Neither Felix or Ross could have guessed at the start of their relationship that the letters would be read by others; they are very personal and clearly written with privacy in mind. After reading the private correspondence I advised Andrea to reconsider and perhaps not make them accessible in the context of the curatorial center’s library, where they would sit separated from his other correspondence and papers stripped of their context. However, she wanted to honor what she believed to be his wish and proceeded as planned.

Do I have an ethical double standard here? For I published the beautiful letter Felix sent Ross with the side-by-side clocks drawn on it along with a selection of letters he had written to Andrea Rosen, and others in which he spoke about his work in the book I edited. Including them there was additive as they represented another aspect of Felix’s voice in relation to his work, interviews, and writings, and, through his words stressed the importance of his dialogues with Ross and Andrea. Perhaps a future researcher will ascertain some work related significance I did not in the letters now available at Bard. I have no right to close that door out of protectiveness. The situation generated questions I have since grappled with abstractly. Are some things too personal to expose? Who makes the judgment? What are the ethics of destroying private material? What and who is being protected in their withholding? Will such privacy matter twenty years from now, fifty, a hundred?

Recalling an exchange with his brother at his mother’s funeral, in Nothing to be Frightened of, 2008, Julian Barnes wrestles with related issues. Who can speak for the dead? What validity do claims made on behalf of the deceased have? Barnes narrates his disappointment over his niece arriving at the funeral in a car other than his mother’s car, which she ostensibly gave her granddaughter after having a stroke. “I think Ma would
have wanted C. to come in her car.’ . . . [My brother] pointed out that there are some wants of the dead, i.e. things which people now dead once wanted; and there are hypothetical wants, i.e. things which people would or might have wanted. ‘What mother would have wanted’ was a combination of the two: a hypothetical want of the dead, and therefore doubly questionable. ‘We can only do what we want,’ he explained; to indulge the maternal hypothetical was as irrational as if he were now to pay attention to his own past desires."\(^5\) Barnes’ brother’s logic echoes my thinking in relation to Felix’s wishes when he was alive that Andrea Rosen feels committed to enforcing, despite that no one can say if he would want that still, were he making decisions in shifted contexts with different bearings.

While I wanted to limit the reading of Felix and Ross’s correspondence, Andrea, who oversees Gonzalez-Torres’s estate, was countering my desire to publish snapshots of Felix in my book because his policy had been to reject requests for his image; preferring pictures of his work circulate. I wanted to print casual pictures of Felix with his family and with Ross in a chronology in the book. Andrea was understandably resistant but after much impassioned discussion we agreed on publishing some of what I’d selected, as long as they were small – less than a quarter page. Her commitment to Felix and what she perceives as his desires are laudable. She, like any estate executor, is charged with the formidable responsibility of balancing competing agendas of privacy and publicity, of what the deceased wanted and what makes sense in the present, of then, now, and the future.

An idea comes to mind thinking about Group Material’s archive, whether information and documentation (or facsimiles) from individuals and institutions Group Material worked with should also be sought out and integrated into its archive. Wouldn’t potential understandings of Group Material be meaningfully elaborated by such inclusivity, 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. Taylor is against actively filling out the archive and prefers to collect overlapping collections, so I left it at that, also as it would require time and financial resources to do otherwise.
What about material that played an informal role in our practice? For example the exhibition *The Castle*, 1987, included a soundtrack of “easy listening” versions of revolutionary songs that is part of the archive. But what about two other then-current cassettes – Public Enemy’s “It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back,” and the Beastie Boys’ “Licensed to Ill” – which we listened to incessantly during the month of preparations and installation of that project while in Germany? I have no doubt they affected our attitudes and subtly influenced the installation. Should they be in the archive? Would their inclusion require annotation, which may result in information overload? Does that matter? What is too much detail, too much information?

I realized 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.”53 But to a point, these speculations are warranted. What defines the archive’s parameter? The archive can be contracted or expanded depending on how these questions are engaged.

Another notable factor determining the very substance of the archive is that some Group Material members are intensely invested, some are detached, and others are dead and uninvolved in its history. Such disparity proliferates from the archive. Some members took notes and saved them, others did not. The majority of the archive was formed from what I had in my apartment and Doug had at his house. Doug had an eye to personal archiving and habitually kept his own notebooks, which are now archived. No one else saved his or her notes or notebooks. However lamentable, the asymmetry of individual reflection in the archive is reality.
Delimiting Use

The transfer to the Downtown Collection necessitated imagining future use. Exemplary scenarios need to be conjured including those beyond our lifespan. Our 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 Group Material’s temporal and context-specific work places limits on remaking art (installations, projects) from the archive, but directives and restrictions nonetheless need to be articulated.

In recent years several curators have asked us 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.\(^{54}\) For the time being the Downtown Collection has been prohibited from loaning material for reconstruction purposes, but certainly this issue needs to be redressed periodically.
Group Material boxes in the Lewis Carroll room at the Fales Library, NYU, 2008

Sabrina Locks and Julie Ault in the Group Material archiving lab, 2008
Analog Meets Digital

Whether or not archiving institutions digitize their paper holdings and make them accessible for online use is an issue of much recent debate. “We are always on the threshold between the past and the future, but we are also currently in the midst of an extended transition between the paper and the digital eras,” stated Richard Pearce-Moses in his Presidential Address at the Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting in 2006.\textsuperscript{55} Harnessing technology to generate digital libraries, potentially for universal access, is at the core of the digital revolution in archiving. Availability of information for as many as possible for as little cost as possible to the individual (financial, time, or otherwise) seems desirable. But it is worth examining the prospective advances and losses involved in translating paper archives to digital files in tandem with instant availability via the Internet.

The positives are obvious: unconstrained access is convenient and, more significantly, it appears to be democratic. Geographic distances are overcome as information is widely and indiscriminately circulated to remote users. The ability to access archives in a digital environment attracts non-traditional users who are unlikely to visit an archive. Additionally, the aura and authority of the archive as the institutional foundation of legitimate record dematerializes. Allegiance to analog and ink-on-paper appears to uphold the culture of the archive as a distinct place, preserving heritage, atmosphere, authority, and exclusivity. Digital archiving assumes the progressive role and the naysayers of unrestrained electronic distribution are largely considered conservative luddites.\textsuperscript{56}

But before accepting the digital archiving revolution, it is advisable to imagine the consequences of this fairly new option. The “placelessness” of the web eclipses the experience of the archive as physical context. Papers are made immaterial in their converted electronic state. In this setup, documents and artifacts are flattened, the nuance of materiality is leveled, and texture is forfeited. Paradoxically, as historical material becomes nearer to its user the electronic delivery platform also produces disconnection
between researcher and document. The vital experience of conducting hands-on research in the archive potentially disappears, as does access to tangible detail and impression which looking and touching entails.

Another factor is the formidable expense of technology and labor involved. Librarian Brewster Kahle makes a case for “universal access to everything,” which is also the motto of the organization he founded in 1996, Internet Archive, and puts forward cost guesstimates for digitizing all the books in the Library of Congress, as well as loose documents, audio recordings, and video and film annals.\(^{57}\) The extensive investment of time and money that is required to generate electronic archives from existing material collections in a sense preselects institutions, the well-endowed Getty Trust for example, as pioneers of the so-called democratization of the archive. But the pioneer spirit fueling digital archiving operates in both not-for-profit and commercial entities (such as Internet Archive and Google Books). The excessive expense organizations assume to digitize in turn relieves individuals of the costs associated with research travel and time dedication, which in principle opens up the possibility of delving into all kinds of exploration that was previously out of reach for many. Most public institutions are intent on electronic storage and access and clearly the future of archiving pre-digital age documents, images, and artifacts will combine analog and digital preservation.

In her stock-taking essay about studies done on information seeking behavior in the digital environment Krystyna K. Matusiak notes:

> Digital libraries are complex systems that serve a diverse audience, involve multiple cognitive tasks, and often pose usability problems.\(^9\) Many researchers comment on disoriented user behavior and feelings of uncertainty and confusion in the process of searching for documents in digital libraries.\(^{10}\) . . . Disorientation occurs because of the overloading of short-term memory and user’s difficulty in forming a mental model of the information space.\(^{58}\)
On the positive end, because digital archiving is a field in formation, the tendencies, problems, and preferences of user behavior are being studied and the conclusions taken into account by information designers and web developers. For example how do people seek and retrieve information? What mental models guide users’ methods? What are the affectivities of keyword searching compared to browsing? How can points of access be provided for navigating complex unfamiliar systems? Pearce-Moses cites Beth Yakel and Polly Reynold’s work on transforming finding aids interactively so that users comments, questions, and discussions can be integrated into finding aids that were formerly the domain of archivists. They are also developing responsive finding aids that recommend “relevant content based on searches,” which is already standardly used by Amazon.com and other commercial sites.59 The electronic archive environment is bound to research and development for the forecastable future, which results in users influencing the digital archive design and possibly even client-authored modes.

The discussion here focuses on electronic formatting of analog collections and does not get into the emergent issues around the dominance of digital means that have rapidly replaced earlier communication media – a condition which necessitates archiving take on entirely different methods of storage, preservation, and use. “Born-digital” information and interactive user-sharing sites such as Flickr create the possibility for continual archiving and ongoing instant documentation. Uploading personal stuff that friends can interface for instance (Flickr, Facebook) is a communication form but is not necessarily forever. The longevity of such data is uncertain. Paths and trends of correlated data management are just now taking shape and whether or not pools of accumulated data will be maintained as lasting archives is unknown.

The general reasons for archiving probably won’t change, but the means have and will continue to. Technology and form are also content, which will exert unforeseeable affects on archiving and researching methods. No doubt as more and more information becomes available public expectation for access will expand and make new demands. The problems of rapidly changing technology will require massive amounts of data transfer and rounds of updating to new storage and delivery media, another costly commitment.
Kahle poses fundamental questions to the larger community, “Will access be open or proprietary? Will it all go under digital rights management, or are we going to help push some of these systems to be more open to fulfill the democratic ideals that are baked into our profession? Will the future of libraries and archives be public or private?”

As digital multiplies we have to wonder what will become of paper archives. In a recent essay D. T. Max recalls, “I once asked [Thomas] Staley [director of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at University of Texas at Austin] what role he saw the Center fulfilling fifty years from now, with its boxes of yellowing rough drafts typed out on manual typewriters and piles of letters written with fountain pens by candlelight. ‘There will be these bastions, whether the ruins of Athens or these archives, and they will be all the more valuable, he said.’

The tempo of archive use has traditionally been determined by cycles of requesting and reviewing material and consulting archivists and finding aids to ascertain what’s available and what’s next. “Archives are like books without indexes: you know in a general way if you’re interested in the subject, but there is no shortcut to finding out if what you’re really looking for is in there. . . . The finding aid is an overview of what an archive contains – drafts, letters, newspaper clippings, foreign contracts – but it does not detail what each item says, who is mentioned in it, or why it matters. Usually, the only person to have read the entirety of an archive is the author, and the authority on its contents is the scholar who has studied it the most.” When working with actual material where one is dependent on the call and response with librarians, research routes are customized at a careful pace and researchers tend to inspect reasonably cohesive bodies of material. Electronic access profoundly influences the pace of research. Internet speed permits, and to some degree encourages a more restless and scattershot approach to recovering and discovering, resulting in irregular and labyrinthine paths of investigation.

The web model of data organization and its instantaneity liberates information from traditional frameworks. It also appears to short-circuit thought processes and instigate reorganization and disorganization. Neuroscientists are finding that electronic abundance,
excessive net interaction, and Internet use in general are capable of rewiring our brains and producing fractured thinking and lack of focus. I do not mean to suggest either orderliness or disorder is inherently beneficial to a general notion of historical research, nor do I want to generalize methods of knowledge gathering. These observations are intended to raise questions about some key differences between these forms of archive and the research methods they inspire.

Instant universal access to seemingly everything. Microsoft’s 1994 ad campaign “Where do you want to go today?” promptly comes to mind. The researcher’s information pursuit is a different game altogether from the scholarly hunt of former times; continually stimulated by cross-linking possibilities built into web and internet formats, the vastly increased volume of “finds” outpaces anything imaginable in the analog archive. Variety of sources is key; one can go from here to there to anywhere, which is simply not possible in a physical archive. The potential for incidentally cross-connecting information across traditional topic, subject, and disciplinary boundaries during a standard information seeking session on the Internet seems newly productive. Start any search of an event, person, or topic on Google and within thirty minutes you will have traversed a considerable array of material from wildly divergent sources that no doubt led you to unexpected places and unintentional cross-connections. Or you can visit the New York Public Library digital gallery and view, for instance, the entire catalog of Gran Fury’s graphic interventions and installations within minutes. Perhaps not so much is lost in digital versions of texts, but the physical character of the AIDS activist graphics is dramatically reduced to uniform screen-size likenesses, which, though technically comprehensive, are nonetheless deficient. Once seen, a visit to the archive to view the material in person becomes less imperative, and may even seem superfluous. The explosion of information and open access is paradoxical; it excites and engulfs, and channels and destabilizes simultaneously.

This crucial discussion factored into identifying an appropriate archive for Group Material. At first glance digital access seems congruent with Group Material’s populist orientation. However I was already veering toward NYU’s Downtown Collection. Taylor
has not sought to digitize and has no plans yet to do so, in part because he believes in the
collection of researchers’ experiences consulting and handling actual material in the
archive. All things considered the benefits of the Downtown Collection outweighed the
possible advantages of digitalization and the threat of empirical education in the archive
being bypassed in lieu of instant availability helped settle the decision. That said, as
digital continues grow, it seems likely that the Downtown Collection will eventually
digitize a substantial part of their holdings in order to go with the flow of archiving
trends, but there is no rush.

Archive Authority

Carolyn Steedman asserts, “The historian’s massive authority as a writer derives from
two factors: the ways archives are, and the conventional rhetoric of history-writing,
which always asserts . . . that you know because you have been there. There is a story put
about that the authority comes from the documents themselves, and the historian’s
obeisance to the limits they impose on any account that employs them. But really, it
comes from having been there (the train to the distant city, the call number, the bundle
opened, the dust . . .),” from having scrutinized actual documents, made connections
between them, and passed judgments on their relevance as puzzle pieces in the history
being shaped. Authority is awarded to she who makes the effort and invests the time in
persistent pursuit of her subject, even sacrificing along the way. The credible historian
proves her worth by overcoming whatever obstacles may ensue including vast amounts of
labor, personal investment, blockades to information, misinformation, profound
contradictions, and the riddles imbedded in the silences and gaps in the archive.

The ceremonial character of entering and deciphering the archive abruptly vanishes as
archives are digitized and at every turn made available online. But does it stand to reason
that the “historian’s massive authority” simply gets dispersed equitably in one fell swoop
as formality gives way to informality and analog yields to digital? Over time, such
 technological innovation is bound to transform the future of historical representation. To
what degree is the authority of the electronic archive undermined by the state of placelessness, eventually rendering it less influential and diminishing the role of the historian and status of history writing in the process. Does the archive sustain its import when anyone can use it? What deems historical representation credible when anyone can write it? If historical representation is always in part concerned with broadcast, control, and galvanizing the present in which its investigation and methods occur, does it potentially become obsolete when the archive is constant, omnipresent, and open to any and all participation?

Steedman’s claims that, “The Archive then is something that, through the cultural activity of History, can become Memory’s potential space, one of the few realms of the modern imagination where a hard-won and carefully constructed place, can return to boundless, limitless space, and we might be released from the house arrest that Derrida suggested was its condition.” Although Steedman does not necessarily envision the obsolescence of the archive, this theoretical reality of history (memory) unbound is echoed by Pearce-Moses fantasy that “In the best-case scenario [of the future], no one ever asks, “What is an archivist?” because we are an integral part of people’s lives. Records are more than a commodity. Archives are more than a place. Records are reliable, authentic memory ever present in people’s lives. Archives are the focus of a dynamic community. . .”

The archive is not history but history writing and representation emerge from there, the archive is a site of production based on a controlled pool of sources. Steedman states “The Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mental fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and just ended up there . . .” Not everything is preserved. In the electronic environment where utterances, images, and events proliferate randomly and indefinitely will we find that the entire notion of history writing is eventually rendered irrelevant and redundant? Will historical representation and history writing per se – the mediation of annals and memory, the making and interpretation of meaning from the archive using the medium of language be necessary if the archive is opened in such a way that anyone and everyone can
contribute to it, access it, and construe it at anytime or all the time? (Another complex of questions might begin, what happens to individual and collective memory in this shift?)

Another dream triggered by archiving anxiety: I was in the company of a distraught woman who had inherited an artist’s estate and was holding a press conference about the artist’s death. There was the sense that she was beset so after it ended I stuck around to help field calls and visits. The estate, which she was to represent, included a lot of photographs. A doctor came calling to offer his services. She wouldn’t see him but I spoke with him. He was very nice and claimed that because he was a bona-fide doctor; he could help “read” the photographs accurately. I believed him and recommended the woman contact him when I passed on his card to her. Following Freud’s assertion that all dreams are expressions of wish fulfillment, my simplified interpretation is that I would like an expert to come to the door and take on the responsibility of archiving and interpreting Group Material. Relationships to authorizing and authority are tremendously complex and harbor untold latent dimension. The dream tapped into my lingering childish desire to have things determined and conclusive. Yet this couples with awareness of the futility of such hope as well as critical consciousness about power structures and the social relations that expert authority embodies.

Though avidly consumed and to some degree venerated, when history is at stake, narration from the horse’s mouth so to speak is regarded as problematically subjective and quasi-legitimate. The written record (imprint) is generally privileged as trustworthy authority. Of course neither archives, written or spoken histories are unbiased. Various authorial modes embody specific expressions of authority. Memories and histories intertwine and actively condition and contextualize any event, throwing contradictions into relief and potentially rendering resolution absurd. Derrida highlighted this counterbalance:

In spite of resorting to what he holds to be a model of auxiliary representation, he [Freud] invariably maintains a primacy of live memory and of anamnesis in their originary temporalization. From which we have
the archaeological outbidding by which psychoanalysis, in its archive fever, always attempts to return to the live origin of that which the archive loses while keeping it in a multiplicity of places. As we have noted all along, there is an incessant tension here between the archive and archaeology.  

With all this in mind, it became clear that 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, between multiple ways of telling and knowing.

From Archive to Book, Impression to Imprint

Books, as repositories and containers of record and histories are a literally conservative medium.

— J. Abbott Miller

Three years after disbanding, an art historian who I profoundly respect and is also a close friend of mine as well as Doug’s, proposed writing a book on Group Material. This occasioned the opportunity to think through the scenarios of an art historian making the first book on Group Material in contrast to us doing one. I can think of no finer scholar or author, but it was nonetheless clear that our collaboration – mine in particular since I had been in the group from start to finish and informally held the role of archivist, would entail a great deal of work, commitment, and trust. The timing was not good for me personally as I was involved in advancing a solo practice and beginning to collaborate with Beck as well. It also struck me as too soon for a book. Primarily though I thought we should reserve the right to cohere our history in the way we saw fit at some later point. I feared this art historian’s authority would define Group Material’s work according to her perspective and interests, which she said entailed emphasizing the aesthetic dimension of the practice. As a newly tenured art history professor in a prominent university she was
under pressure to publish, searching for the right subject. This dictated the academic mode and publishing context for the potential volume. I was disinclined to partner on Group Material’s first book with these added pressures of external career and institutional agendas in the mix. Ultimately we rejected the prospect. Other less formulated invitations came about in the ensuing years although none as compelling as the earliest. All were discouraged and we continued the course of adhoc representation.

The prospect of former members making a book was an open question that had surfaced intermittently since Group Material’s conclusion. I was abstractedly committed to making a book at some time, but didn’t know when that would be and was waiting for the right time personally, professionally, and culturally. During the process of researching and conceptualizing the archive it had become clear that a book would be an ideal form to contain and distribute many of the subprojects that were under consideration. A website could have functioned similarly but I have no experience with that and was told it would be extremely costly. Books are for the record and still carry more authority than websites. They last and can be reprinted. My experiences with previous publications that introduced unhistoricized subjects (the alternative art movement, Sister Corita) made obvious the power of publication to affect discourse and recent art history.

What Kind of Book? By Who? With Who?

Because collaboration with a publisher impacts every aspect of a book, it is important to weigh the options and match project with publisher well. What type of publisher was suited for this title – academic, art house, trade, independent? What interests define a particular publisher? What books would ours be alongside? What is the scope of their editorial and financial resources? It would take money to make a high quality book; full color was imperative given Group Material’s consistent use of bold color. What is the publisher’s distributional scope? Far-reaching and focused distribution is desirable, as is broad access via Amazon. Who has editorial control? Editorial control in the hands of the editor(s) was a must for this project. One obvious choice would have been an academic
press with a solid publishing context, editorial resources, and good distribution. However control always rests with academic publishers and I did not want to face a frustrating process of competing agendas and uneasy compromises. Equally important, most university presses are suffering financially and have been for years, so they are not keen on expensive-to-produce books. Cultural publishing burgeoned in the 1990s but as most publishers downsized in the last decade they have not been taking risks and are producing books formulaically, in part, because it’s cheaper than addressing the form, structure, content production, and design of each title anew. Furthermore, university presses – even those devoted to visual art – do not normally privilege the visual dimension of their books beyond a marketable arresting cover. My experience partnering with University of Minnesota Press on *Alternative Art New York: 1965–1985* is typical. No matter how I tried to change the terms of the book’s visual and material production – even supplying subsidy to hire a designer and upgrade paper, the press resisted. I did not want to confront a similar situation for a subject I was so closely affiliated with. I decided that despite their relatively brief track record the London-based Four Corners Books was the ideal partner. Having experienced their capability on the Corita book, I felt confident that we could work well together editorially, creatively, and materially, and we already had a climate of trust from our previous collaboration. Four Corners’ principles, Elinor and Richard were immediately enthusiastic and we agreed to work together again.

It was clear by then that a self-historicizing endeavor would ensue. But what would have been so problematic if an art historian, an outsider to the group, would have written the first Group Material history? Essentially, authorizing an historian to write Group Material’s initial history would by definition produce a grand narrator, and establish a primary interpretation of the work. Most likely any art historian taking on the subject would be influenced by academic convention and be obliged to situate Group Material’s work in an art historical genealogy, thus entering the group into dialogues with canons or counter-canons. Academically rooted art historians are required to make a mark by staking out new territory and a particular position. Any art historian who would take on such an ambitious project would do so in part because there was no book on Group Material and it would be a worthwhile and alluring subject from both an intellectual and a
professional perspective. Although it wouldn’t necessarily prevent Group Material from producing a book, once a subject is addressed and material used, it becomes more difficult to get a publisher and usually a monograph eclipses other monographs from being made for at least several years. Art historians are required to publish and to do so in academic publications, where editorial control lies with the publisher. It is a rare for an author to have editorial control. So what happens when conflicts over method and meaning occur in the production of a manuscript? My past experiences and others’ I’m privy to reveal that the publisher has the upper hand and more often than not compromise gets skewed toward the publisher’s perspective, which naturally embodies marketing and institutional agendas. This is neither good nor bad by definition, but was worth taking into account in this case. On the other hand, an outside researcher would bring a fresh view to the subject, with the advantage of having relative objectivity in shaping a perspective. A respected author would also expand Group Material’s reach through his or her own audience. Certainly an academic press would likewise expand the public for Group Material. Biases notwithstanding, in relation to Group Material it seemed to be realistic about the kind of historicizing treatment the group’s work had so far attracted and was likely to, and the institutional and publishing limitations an author would face.

The practice of art history is of course much more diverse than my prejudice portrays. There exists a vast range of art historian from cheerleaders to hyper-commentators in search of critical truth; from those who exclusively engage the written record to gather information and subject it to a specific manner of description and accepted modes of cross-connection and interpretation to more idiosyncratic undertakings and innovative methods and forms. Art history results from any number of subjective and public motivations. (Confession: I feel unduly annoyed reading art history and criticism that focuses on situating an artist’s work in a lineage of reputed artists, which is not to say a social context. Or by the aroma of boosterism. Or the kind of (mostly American) art history writing institutional curators are prone to that states in the first paragraph, “Clearly so-and-so is one of the most important artists of the twentieth century.” Or the kind in which the ambition and authority of the author overshadows the subject. Or that which relies on fanciful stretches, say to link an artist’s practice to an historian’s
fascination with Buddhism. These are subjective prejudices and I can certainly think of examples of the last two varieties that I give exception to [Dave Hickey, Dick Hebdige]. On the other hand I feel illuminated by art history that creates multiple points of entry to its subject and fashions a dimensional consideration. Or that which contextualizes and questions. Or that which digs deep to excavate the conditions of the work and its contexts. Or that which privileges the perspective of social process. Or that which reveals it’s subjective stake in the matter. Genet’s brilliantly reflective piece on Giacometti being a case in point.69 Or the kind of art history that is unafraid to problematize its own authority. Caveat: a lot of artists love to complain about the dearth of solid art criticism, the absence of serious historians who are up to the job. The job being to write about their (our) work. All to be taken with a grain of salt.)

The book I envisioned would expect readers to interpret Group Material for themselves in the spirit of the group’s exhibition practice, while a single-authored declarative would short-circuit that process to some degree. A documentary primer by members of Group Material does not close down the possibility for future titles by historians. In fact, the book that subsequently came about, Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material makes future scholarship more likely.

Two exemplary models of self-historicizing heavily influenced my thoughts on how to approach a volume on Group Material. Using different narrative methods both Eames design. The Work of the Office of Charles and Ray Eames70 and Michael Asher, Writings 1973 – 1983 on Works 1969–1979 present a completist compendia of work without interpretation.71 The Eames office book comes close to being a catalogue raisonné but the Asher volume does not really fit the category; it is survey that exhibits Asher’s editorial hand by use of an outwardly objective mode, which clearly extends from Asher’s materialist practice. Both books are structured by chronology: the Eames’ complex production from 1941–1984 (designed objects, furniture, slide shows, films, exhibitions, lecture series projects, and graphic campaigns) and Asher’s sequential organization of a decade of works. Pictorial history figures in largely in each.
Eames design is organized by year. A list of the then-current staff and notations of temporal professional activities including lectures, events, and publications appears in a running band at the top of each page. Additionally the strip contains reproductions of the occasional announcement card and many private snapshots – some of which show the Eameses in playful mode. The rest of each spread (about four fifths of very page) is filled with a project description and related pictorial material – photographs, drawings, plans, and documents. Photography is not perfunctory but approached creatively here privileging dynamic images of products and projects, many of which show usage. Images of process also proliferate. There are differently sized images and scale shifts within and across images further accentuating the lively visual attitude of the Eameses’ design. Grids of images, for instance, film stills, occur intermittently. A great deal of information is packed into each layout; the book resembles the Eameses’ information dense exhibitions, for example, Timeline: “Men of Mathematics,” 1966. The book effectively balances density with a clear methodical system and page design.

Eames design is a comprehensive trek through the history of the office. The team of three author-editors, which includes Ray Eames, have evidently mined the office archive thoroughly for visual material and data as well as anecdotal information in the descriptions, which often highlight procedural moments that otherwise leave no trace. The descriptive mode is past tense and simple. Consider one example from 1945.

Experimental Chairs
As orders for war-related plywood products declined in anticipation of war’s end, the Molded Plywood Division applied the knowledge and expertise gained from working on the war projects to chairs and other furniture with renewed intensity. The long period of experimentation and germination, supported by the company’s wartime work, culminated in a number of prototypes that could be adapted to assembly-line production. Concepts were worked up into full-scale models in both wood and metal in order to resolve technical and aesthetic problems. Several two-part prototypes were built with compound curves in the seats and back sections.
Many types of leg solutions were tied in model form and in full size, including three-legged and four-legged wood and metal versions, T-sections, and rockers. The chair legs incorporated an axial movement with a back-to-front tilt.

One of the most difficult obstacles to surmount was that of connecting material to material to join one part of a chair to another. Although the use of flexible rubber disks attaching the back and seat sections to the connection spine afforded a measure of resiliency, the method of attaching the disks to the wooden parts was a problem. Different kinds of glues and other methods were tried and discarded. Staff member Norman Bruns conducted numerous partially successful experiments with electronic cycle-welding, continuing the ideas attempted by Eero Saarinen and Charles for the “Organic Design” chairs.72

The second model, Michael Asher, Writings 1973–1983 on Works 1969–1979 attests to the artist’s conviction to resist interpretation of his work. The works are organized chronologically under headers formatted with date first, title of work, institutional venue, place, e.g.:

May 11–June 28, 1969
The Appearing / Disappearing Image / Object
Newport Harbor Art Museum
Newport Beach, California

Each project is elaborated by Asher’s first-person description and a selection of photographs of the sites, the works in situ, floor plans, and announcement cards. The author conveys the precise data of each architectural site the works respond to as well as all relevant dimensions of the transformation that the works perform. Reproductions are extensively captioned. The book contains no design embellishment; it is a seemingly dry and straightforward communication of the works in their full material detail.
Michael Asher is known for his refusal to interpret his work. Even when confronted with plausible deductions he resists agreement or disagreement in favor of leaving meaning open. For example, an exchange between he and Buchloh during the question and answer period following Buchloh’s lecture at the Santa Monica Museum on the occasion of the artist’s 2008 solo exhibition turned on subtleties as Asher listened intently, filled in some information gaps, but nimbly detoured conjecture and foreclosed conclusion. Open to interpretation is a tenet of Asher’s practice, which he abides by in all representation.

Asher’s book seeks to provide the reader with as much specificity as possible excepting the artist’s intentions (beyond those self-evident in the description of what he did) or mention of reception to the work – either of which signify “reading” and could therefore predispose or direct the viewer. The following example demonstrates the artist’s explanatory manner. The who, what, when, how, and where are all covered – only the why is missing. Nonetheless, or perhaps because of this, I find his narration generous, scintillating, and effective in its aim.

January 8–January 11, 1973
Gallery A402
California Institute of the Arts
Valencia, California

Gallery A 402 was a student-run gallery where exhibitions were organized by Suzanne Kuffler, who was at the time a graduate student at the California Institute of the Arts. The gallery functioned as an exhibition space for both artists and students to make their work accessible to the Institute community. In late 1972 I was invited to exhibit a work there. The gallery measured 27 feet 7 inches by 16 feet 8 inches, with a ceiling height of 9 feet. Two rows of fluorescent light fixtures – the gallery’s only source of light – extended the entire length of the room. The floor was covered with brown wall-to-wall carpeting. A series of rectangular wall facets – floor-to-ceiling wall projections which formed
short strips of wall surface or wall planes on a north-south and east-west axis – interrupted the exhibition wall planes, breaking up any continuity that the installation space might have had as a rectangular volume. There were two rectangular wall projections on the east side and one large 6-by-9 foot wall projection on the west side. Looking straight ahead into the southeast corner of the room, there was another short rectangular wall projection. All of these projected wall surfaces were permanent and accommodated utilities and air-ducting. Only the southwest corner was not interrupted by any projections.

Given this architectural configuration, I developed a proposal for all of the white wall surfaces. My idea was to paint the six parallel, opposing surfaces on the north and south side with the white Dunn-Edwards paint that was normal used for wall surfaces throughout the Institute. The seven east-west surfaces I wanted to leave as they were, yellowed, spotted with fingerprints, and broken through in various places.

It didn’t occur to me to tell the gallery director what I planned to do, other than saying that I would paint the gallery. The morning I arrived to do the installation, I found all the walls freshly painted. I was really shocked because it was like having painted the work away. After thinking about it for a couple of hours I decided to adapt the idea slightly. I kept all the east-west opposing wall surfaces painted with Dunn-Edwards Beau-T-Wall-White since the gallery organizer had used that paint. On all of the north-south opposing wall surfaces, I then applied Sherwin Williams Nu-White. Both paints were matte-white, and close in tone and value, but the Nu-White was intended to diffuse the light from the fluorescent fixtures while the Dunn-Edwards carried the light. The interior surfaces were identifies therefore in terms of their distinct response to light rather than their chromatic difference.\textsuperscript{74}

Buchloh states in his Editor’s Note that:
This volume . . . is an attempt on the side of the author and the editor to make accessible to readers and viewers the documents of an artistic practice that one could characterize as being both extremely ephemeral and transient . . . The book’s paradoxical function – to document as discourse what operated as practice at one time (or, to be more accurate, as both, practice and discourse) – results partially from the fact that the work seems to have generated the same resistance on the side of the institutions (and the historians and critics and collectors) that it performed itself with respect to the notion of visual culture that they represent. . . . It is one of the paradoxes of this book to transfer from practice to discourse what was defined as a temporally and spatially specific and efficient operation. . . .”

Group Material shares points of contact with the Eameses (collaboration, complex shifting production) and Asher (ephemeral site- or institution-dependent practice) as well as with the goals of both books. *Eames design* draws from the archive; it combines efficiency and depth to create a precise expression of the design team’s work and sensibility. Secondary representation is essential to trace Asher’s work. *Michael Asher, Writings 1973–1983 on Works 1969–1979* retrieves and extends the artist’s practice congruently. Both of these self-motivated and generated books inspired my thinking while developing a fitting approach, form, and format for Group Material’s historical representation.
Certain criteria lingered in my mind for years: the book would be self-generated and not be grounded in outside expert perspectives; informative presentation of the group’s process and projects would form its basis as opposed to interpretation; it would use a chronological rather than thematic structure so as to further avoid construal though emphasis and classification; it would reflect Group Material’s methods, principles of practice, and style. The schematic went through various permutations but this general strategy to compile a chronicle of Group Material persisted. I moved from speculation to actual planning in 2008, twelve years after the group’s end. The proposal for the book follows:

*Chronicle: A Project by Group Material* is the first monograph on the New York based artists’ collaborative known for its sociopolitical art practice. The book is being organized in keeping with the methods and aims Group Material employed. It is initiated and guided by Julie Ault; other former members are providing input in varying degree, most notably Doug Ashford.

The book is structured as a chronology that charts the origins, processes, developments, and projects of the group’s activities. Consisting of pictorial and textual elements brought into dynamic relations, the volume draws heavily from Group Material’s archive, including original documents, photographs, drawings, correspondence, artifacts, and anecdotal information. Its chronographic form takes account of multiple perspectives and descriptive modes. Group Material’s projects will be rendered in the chronology though installation photography and information from original proposals, exhibition statements, announcements, press releases and responses. A portrayal of the group’s practice by Sabrina Locks will examine the social relations of one emblematic exhibition, *AIDS Timeline*, and feature newly conducted interviews ranging from participating artists and organizations to the commissioning curator to audience members. The book as a whole will demonstrate, describe, conserve, and historicize Group Material’s cultural
practice. Essays by group members Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, and Tim Rollins will further illuminate the methods and principles of Group Material’s practice.

Who would ultimately organize, edit, and author the book remained an open question for some time. Since I had initiated the project I was in a guidance role as well as its de facto organizer. But my hope was that other members, specifically Doug Ashford and perhaps more minimally Tim Rollins would collaborate on generating the volume. In keeping with this, the working title I had in mind was *Chronicle: A Project by Group Material* in order to relay to the group’s only other book *Democracy: A Project by Group Material*. But I wondered on what grounds Group Material could legitimately tag the book. What exactly would make it a Group Material project? Editorial participation of multiple members? Merely employing the principles of Group Material’s practice? How much involvement by how many members would qualify for collaborative authorship / editorship? Doug and I talked about some scenarios and agreed that whatever happened, we wanted the book to be accurately credited. For instance if he and I edited the book, we would be listed individually and not credited as simply Group Material. Another thought was that other interested parties, for example Sabrina and Rasmus, might join in. Inspired by reading about the collective of mathematicians who coauthored numerous books under the pseudonym Nicolas Bourbaki, I considered concocting a fictitious art historian who could be attributed with a volume that would in fact be collaboratively generated. Of course obscuring multiple identities behind a fictional historian is unlikely to work in current culture as it did in the 1930s and 1940s. And ultimately I realized my desire to fudge acknowledgment was misguided.

How did this play out? Doug was involved in a couple of meetings with the publishers and he and I met periodically, during which I brought him up to date on the decisions, direction, and progress, and he was invariably in agreement. Despite his enthusiasm and willingness to review information, substantive participation did not unfold in terms of methods, direction, or coediting, primarily because, instead, Doug decided to focus his energies into forging a substantial essay for the book. (Tim contributed with a brief essay
as well.) Former members Thomas, Mundy, Marybeth, Hannah, Peter, Lili all expressed enthusiasm and Mundy in particular reviewed the chronicle text when it was ready. Others reviewed relevant entries and provided further information. I invited Sabrina and Rasmus to propose contributions; Rasmus however got accepted to California Institute for the Arts to do his graduate studies and could only participate with critical feedback on the book generally. Sabrina engaged *AIDS Timeline* as a case study in our social process of exhibition making, resulting in a set of interviews with various practitioners involved in the project, which forms new research in the archive and is excerpted in the book. Although no one from the group emerged copartner in terms of organizing or editing the book, it did not strike me until deep in the publication’s development that the subtitle, *A Project by Group Material*, would simply not be accurate. Not only was I primarily responsible for the book’s structure, methods, and ingredients, I was shaping it according to specific interests in historical inquiry I’d developed in my solo work, particularly book making. I thought about modifying the subtitle to “A Project About Group Material” and simply omitting an editor credit altogether to keep authorship vague, however the publishers rejected the idea. Ultimately it was clear in the discussion with Four Corners Books that naming myself as the editor was honest, and it was essential to take responsibility for the work.

Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material

Each person who sits down to write faces not a blank page but his own vastly overfilled mind. The problem is to clear out most of what is in it, to fill huge plastic bags with the confused jumble of things that have accreted there over the days, months, years of being alive and taking things in through the eyes and ears and heart. The goal is to make a space where a few ideas and images and feelings may be so arranged that a reader will want to linger awhile among them . . . . But this task of housecleaning (of narrating) is not merely arduous; it is dangerous. There is the danger of throwing the wrong things out and keeping the wrong things in; there is
the danger of throwing too much out and being left with too bare a house; there is the danger of throwing everything out.

—Janet Malcolm

Tackling the mission of recuperating Group Material as a two-pronged “housecleaning” operation involved gathering and organizing the pool of material to constitute the archive and simultaneously distilling from that body of information to make the book. Malcolm’s wise words seemed to speak directly to me as I embarked on compiling for the book and specifically the chronicle that would be its main section. Faced with the paradox of having too much and not enough, I was reminded of several occasions giving presentations on Group Material, where I found myself randomly accessing a massive muddle of memory, unable to balance detail and background in a proportional fashion. Determining what to include in the book and what to leave out felt like a weighty responsibility complicated by my collaborator status that made the process easier in some ways but also more complicated than I imagine it might be for an impartial historian.

Each aspect of cohering the archive and making Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material, 2010, embodied specific and abstract purpose. While retrieving Group Material for myself, for the group, and with the larger purpose of public representation in mind, inhabiting the dual roles of observer and observed created a central methodological challenge, which at times was confounding. Flipping between my own and other members’ muddle of memory as well as the accumulation of material sometimes felt dizzying. But, ultimately my insider relationship to the subject in conjunction with a more independent association to the potential for archives to shape historical representation seemed to productively balance one another.

Compiling and editing information into a coherent mass was a concrete task at the outset. Sounds reasonable, but what are the risks of this endeavor? For one, coherence implies organization and management of an unruly body of material, which is double-edged. The editorial process of including and excluding sounds reasonable – choices must be made – but it is also a somewhat violent process. Why include this and not that? Bits and pieces
of information get ripped from their contexts. Ultimately much more is abandoned than incorporated. I feared that an orderly synopsis would by definition advance a reconciled representation that is a poor substitute for the complexity of lived experience.

It is still somewhat uncommon for an art historian or institutionally affiliated curator to reveal their vested interests in engaging particular subjects, or to expose and reflect their own psychic context that inevitably fuels work. As one curator recently told me, “art history is not written using first names.” But I could not, and did not want to erase my subjective investment in the showing and telling operations the book enacts and instead choose to highlight subjectivity as an inherent dimension, which whether hidden or exposed factors into all history writing.

The guidelines and criteria I concocted are laid bare in the end section of my essay contribution to the book, “Case Reopened: Group Material.” What follows is that descriptive segment divided into parts (in red) which I reflect on here, revealing the deeper logic of the methods and choices, and inquiring of them further.

Private and public information intertwines 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.

What is intended by this structured interlocking of public and private? The making of the group as a specific context along with its structure and process are inseparable from its public creations, yet the bulk of existing representation focuses on the group’s projects. The aims are to widen the focus to include conveyance of internal and behind the scenes workings in each layer of published material, to stress aspects of the process that are otherwise invisible, and to emphasize the symbiotic relation between the collaboration
and the exhibitory formations it produced publicly. The book takes its ingredients from
the archive, which embodies both private and public material.

How is this different from other versions of art history writing? Representation of artistic
process and private information features into some art history writing, though inclusion
of the latter in art writing beyond the basics is largely considered irrelevant and frowned
upon as journalistic or sensationalizing. It is not unusual for anecdotes to be worked into
some art writing, and Phaidon’s monographs regularly incorporate snapshots of the artist
in back matter. However, there are tacit boundaries between biography, art history, and
art criticism. Biography is often perceived as a guilty pleasure that sullies more
intellectual genres.

Why is this public-private principle important in this case? The distinction here if of form
and emphasis. Snapshots and formal installation photography alternate on equal footing
in Show and Tell. A four page incendiary letter Tim Rollins wrote to the group in 1980, A
PROPOSAL FOR LEARNING TO GET THINGS OFF OUR CHESTS; BEHAVIOUS,
DISCIPLINE AND OUR PROJECT, is exposed in full,
alongside press releases and
write-ups that represent a more harmonious collaboration. (Just a snippet: “Sometimes I
wonder if there hasn’t been a strain of mononucleosis artificially 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
practice – all this I suspect gets us quite depressed.”) Contradictory evidence is at the
heart of the archive and prominently figures into a dimensional portrayal of Group
Material. Why publicize Tim’s contentious letter? Tim’s letter rants and rails with
emotion and rhetoric that unquestionably communicates major clashes in the group in its
first months; it also shows how seriously he regarded the collaboration and what was at
stake with Group Material’s overarching project. Janet Malcolm nailed the significance
of correspondence in her tour de force on the subjects of biography, documentary truth,
and vulnerability of the archive, The Silent Woman.
The letters were abashingly real. They brought the story that Anne and Olwyn had told me back to its emotional source. I felt like the possessor of a great prize – the prize that the narrator of *The Aspern Papers* goes to such extreme lengths to try to get. Letters are the great fixative of experience. Time erodes feeling. Time creates indifference. Letters prove to us that we once cared. They are the fossils of feeling. This is why biographers prize them so: they are biography’s only conduit to unmediated experience.77

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.

*What thinking generated this idea and solution?* Group Material came to life in the archive. I was struck by the vividness and changing character of internal correspondence, minutes of meetings, exhibition proposals, press releases, and project announcements the group had fashioned. Emotional intensity is palpable in early communiqués, proposals and press releases are borderline bombastic, topics and debates of the times are glimpsed through language, and graphic design bespeaks period styles. It occurred to me that a selection of those documents could convey the group’s intentions, motivations, and actions far better than writing that depicts from the distance of time, either by those inside or outside the group. So I decided to animate the documents in the context of the book. This material would commonly be regarded as research, a starting point for history writing, rather than an endpoint to be presented.

*Is the scrapbook a relevant model?* Perhaps these traces could be substance for a scrapbook but the analogy ends there, due to design. In fact, despite the multiple layers of
motley material that compose the chronicle, the goal was not avoid a scrapbook sensibility and bring the elements into a carefully designed formal system that stresses all the incorporated material as primary and equivalent. All of the documents are reproduced at actual size. The majority are U.S. letter size, which resolved the page dimensions for the book. One aim is to encourage they be regarded as primary texts rather than ancillary items or illustrations. Nick Bell clarifies his graphic design logic for their treatment: “All documentary images bleed off page edges. So as not to elevate them to the status of art works as would be the case with framing them within margins. Other elements on the page are sometimes placed over these images so long as important parts of these images are not hidden. This prevents these images from becoming too precious. Images / documents butt up against each other in the gutter.” Presentation is a primary agent for situating things, including the past, in the present. The look, feel, and atmosphere of the book are engaged to speak of Group Material. I asked the design team to not copy Group Material’s style but to situate its evidence in a visual field that translates the group’s sense and spirit, and to draw on Group Material’s exhibition principles in activating every inch of a room in book form.

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.

How did you come to this decision about narrative point of view, and how are the desired results achieved? This text was conceived as though a knowledgeable but unspecified guide is matter of factly stating information in the midst of the documents and images that make up the chronicle. This necessitated a third person perspective. The text combines the functions of caption, report, digression, disclosure, and background – blending casual commentary into a formalized stream of information. The guiding text was built from three strata: the hard data of the archive, my memory, and the recollections of other group members I consulted. No author is named at the chronicle’s outset but at the end states it is written by Julie Ault. The informal revealing tone
employed derives from lived experience, coalescing subjective and objective knowledge into a seamless voice intended to anchor and augment the archival matter. *How could this have been done differently?* Alternatively the guiding text could have been written from a first-person viewpoint, suggesting myself or another group member is the participant cum narrator who reflects retrospectively. However, I sought a common voice to avoid that kind of “post-post *this is what really happened*” point of view associated with the technique. The grand narrator outlook of a single group member (“I remember”) or first-person plural (“we did”) is likewise eluded. Then again, it could have taken the form of a primary analytic survey written from a first-person historian’s vantage. However that technique positions the author as decoder and reaffirms the division of labor between artist as creative producer and critic as interpretive judge. An art historian writing a survey essay would likely consult the same sources of archive and former members, yet it is highly unlikely she would select and commit identical information to print, or do so in a similar manner. Most would consider the information recounted in the guiding text simply as raw material.

*Why use the present tense to explain past events? What are the implications of this?* At the outset of writing the guiding text I had to decide what tense and perspective to use. Having no background in physics I consulted Dan Falk’s clear explanation of scientific conceptions of time, *In Search of Time. The Science of a Curious Dimension.* Falk’s discussion of how language is used to depict past events indicating either a tensed view of time – “the everyday notion of time in terms of past, present, and future” that speaks from now, or pointing toward a linear model that situates events as fixed in relation to other events on a timeline, resulting in a “timeless array of events” unrooted in the concept of now, inspired me to test writing the guiding text both ways to better comprehend the effect of tense. For example:

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

The tensed version invokes the voice of a narrator, begging the question who is speaking? And with what authority? Whereas the “timeless” timeline version does not. Rather, information seems to be self-evident, and builds on other information alongside it to articulate a block of time. Subjecting past events to present tense telling perpetually places readers in the time of the articulated events, rather than the time of the telling (retrospective vantage).

What tense is the archive? Carolyn Steedman’s words speak to this condition: “Foucault suggests . . . that History clutters up and occupies our memory. At the same time, History (the formal written history, or history-writing) has provided a way of thinking about what is in a particular place – a place which for the moment shall simply be called Memory. To interrogate that place, we have to be less concerned with History as stuff (we must put to one side the content of any particular piece of writing, and the historical information it imparts) than as process, as ideation, imagining and remembering.” If one conceives of the archive as a place for infinite use, connection, and reproduction – “a space of questions rather than answers,” an “incubator of new life” as Mark Wigley purports, then the archive is in principle timeless and up for grabs.

Several topics are carried through the guiding text, 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 are expressed vaguely although “the silences and absences of the documents always speak to us.”)

What are the editorial criteria? The trains of information that run throughout represent the kind of knowledge – much of which is “inside” or behind the scenes – that is crucial
to understanding the internal process of Group Material over time as well as the who, what, when, where, how, and why, but would otherwise not be present or traceable in the documents and images. Some information is central (“Summer 1986. The group had stopped requiring monthly dues a couple years previously, and now regularly receives NEA funding for general operating costs and NYSCA support for special projects. For the most part, hosting institutions finance the respective exhibition and project costs.”), and some is incidental (“1994. The resulting Democracy Wall 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.”) Variances are integral to collaboration. Highlighting moments of internal discord is honest and also counters the tendency towards revisionist resolution in historical representation. For example:

July 1980. 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.”

And

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 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.84

As a whole, the guiding text derives from and represents a close reading and distillation of the archive and associated memory similar to the descriptions in *Eames design*, although using narrative present tense and sporadic casual tone.

*Shouldn’t some things remain private? Is there a responsibility to let bygones be bygones and positively portray the group at this time?* Yes, some things are private and were protectively omitted from the book, or didn’t seem additive, for instance, that founding members Tim Rollins and Patrick Brennan were boyfriends at the time. Their alliance did affect group dynamics in some ways, but ultimately I decided as an isolated fact this did not contribute to further understanding and that the influence was too complex and subtle to voice in this setting. Some internal issues are articulated vaguely, for instance in the entry, “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 clashes around ideological priorities and personality clashes.”85 This is ambiguous primarily because no one can really say with any deeper accuracy why these four members left the group. There is nothing in writing beyond Hannah Alderfer’s letter of resignation, which is reproduced across from this entry, and the former members found it too complicated in hindsight to apprehend their reasons and commit them to print. As for exclusively presenting a positive unified
portrayal, that is antithetical to the collaborative which held difference, debate, conflict, and contradiction dear to its practice as methods.

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.

_Are there other, perhaps more effective ways to register these changes?_ Diagrams might have been a good way to illustrate the changing arrangement and were considered early on, but not followed up on. In addition to the member listings that appear within the yellow band that contains the guiding text, I attempted to include photographs of the various configurations when available, and to show as many of the members as possible. Unfortunately some members were not photographed in the group context.

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.

_What motivated this layer? How were these excerpts determined?_ Perusing the archive and conceptualizing the structure for the book happened concurrently. While reading I took note of lots of interesting segments in all types of documents, initially regarding them as source material for writing the guiding text and my essay. As the basic concept for the book was established and the main part was conceived as a chronicle composed of reprinted documents, images, and guiding text, an ideal parameter was also set. In order to keep the retail cost affordable, and to keep the project from burgeoning, the publisher and I agreed the book should be fewer than three hundred pages. This narrowed the number of whole documents that could be reproduced and I began distinguishing those
that seemed additive in full, and those that didn’t require that could be simply excerpted textually. This led to the idea of creating a layer of diverse extracts varying in author (though many are by Group Material), purpose, length, and style. These filter throughout the chronicle and permit the inclusion of other voices that otherwise wouldn’t fit conceptually in the chronicle.

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.

Ending and Beginning

Upon receiving the first copy of Show and Tell I experienced a combination of contentment, elation, and regret. Usually I am mildly alienated by a finished exhibition or book, which seems a poor substitute for the process that led to its outcome. It takes a while to get used to the object status of a book that previously inhabited one’s mind in the form of ideas and emotions and one’s workspace as an unwieldy monster – piles of papers, stacks of source materials, pools of images, countless revisions, communiqués and conversations. But Show and Tell didn’t look like a foreign object, if felt fresh. It looks and feels like Group Material. I hear feedback: people react to its color, materiality, boldness, and accessibility as points of entry and elements of content. Initial conclusion:
Show and Tell is an apt representation and a layered and complicated project, which appears to communicate effectively to those who knew Group Material’s work first hand and to those encountering it anew.

In spite of all this, a part of me regretted taking the road of conservation that making the book implies instead of leaving what was ephemeral ephemeral, if only to harbor an illusion of radicalism. New questions arise: What does it mean to now have Group Material as an object? After so many years of being nomadic and indeterminate what does it mean for Group Material to occupy a location in the archive and on the bookshelf? Does the book avert the fear of disappearance? (Yes, momentarily.) To what degree is it a substitution – not just in the sense of representation, but a compensation for the loss of time and fellowship and for the missing figures and friends who died during the group’s lifespan? What does it mean to have this neat package that answers the question, What was Group Material? Is the group still disbursed among the memories of its core members and sometimes participants, the institutions it collaborated with, and the fading recollections of people who saw a Group Material exhibition, perhaps not even aware who made it or why? Group Material is simultaneously gone, disbursed, and locatable. Is Group Material now off limits, filed away in some obscure part of my memory? Does Show and Tell harness my relationship to the group once and for all? Am I done? Can I refrain from speaking further or will my connection to the period of practice keep changing and wanting expression. The questions persist but ultimately, second thoughts faded, trumped by belief in the consequence of advancing collaborative models of artistic production, artmaking as social process, the notion of the book as a fitting agent of visual art, and the fulfillment of giving something back to Group Material, my formative educative upbringing.

The making of the archive was bound to lead to Group Material’s history being committed to print one way or another, and Show and Tell accomplishes a first uncompromised articulation, while fertilizing the research terrain others will travel. Show and Tell opens Group Material up to scrutiny and unlocks its myths. Show and Tell is an invitation to dig deeper. (Nagging concern: Is Group Material fossilized here? I don’t
think so; the book, by design, does otherwise through its methods and words. Time, use, and further analysis will confirm or dispute.) That this self-historicization took the form of a publication was in part a necessity, given the ways in which, as outlined in this study, cultural forces determine the induction of ephemeral and peripheral activities into lasting art discourse. While I began this project thinking it would be an ending, I realize the opposite is true. Group Material is revivified and its history is just beginning. Many of the questions that guided this overarching exploration were addressed in the process. Although one continues to haunt: Can history writing be effectively challenged while writing history? This continuing inquiry is best pursued in practice.
Dream remnant, August 28, 2010: Along with an unfamiliar woman I was rummaging through some boxes in a classroom that seemed to have come from a women’s shelter or halfway house of sorts. My friend Roni was also there, waiting to see what we would find. I came across an old calendar and noticed a secret compartment taped into its back cover. Separating the tape I found six tightly folded letters in different inks and handwriting. Messages from another time. I excitedly showed them to Roni; we both felt like we’d struck gold.

I believe this very pleasant dream refers to the unfinished business of a collaboration begun with Horn that has been tabled for the moment, yet hovers in the back of my mind. While working on the Group Material project, the artist Roni Horn invited me to develop a “creative personal chronology” for her forthcoming retrospective catalogue. A central theme of Horn’s art is the mutability of identity, making for an interesting prospect for composing a personal history. I asked her to let me read her archive of private journals, work-related notebooks, unpublished writings, and examine her files and personal snapshots. Parallel to working on Group Material’s social history, it seemed germane to overarching concerns about archiving and history writing to build a depiction of an individual and their formative past and to analyze the differences between these processes as well as the inhibitions and liberties that might emerge in the two authoring operations.

My initial focus was on Horn’s history of reading and engagement with particular authors (knowing she is an ardent reader), influential relationships, and places of import such as her original landscape, her life-long home of New York City, and Iceland as her adopted home, (landscape and Iceland are central to her work) – with the intention of highlighting private and familiar ephemeral realms in relation to her art work, which is oft characterized as enigmatic and formal. From there, I composed a sequence of statements of fact, observations, and aphorisms that alternate with excerpts from Horn’s private journals and unpublished writings. This constructed dialogue is both biographic armature and fragmentary personal chronology. An excerpt follows (JA = roman and RH ital):
She is self-possessed. She is full of herself.

*I have this almost pathological desire for privacy. Maybe I’m just imitating the sense of memory.*

*I started thinking how who I’m talking to affects who I am – because who I’m talking to affects how I am – and how affects how I’m seen – that is, how you see me. So this circle of perception affects the outcome of me at any given moment. And the question then became what moment do I take to be me? So then a confusion of selves arose, even though over the years I noticed that I do bear a likeness to myself in some ways. But what about all the times when I hardly recognize myself?*

She habitually listens to Shirley Bassey singing *Goldfinger*. Sometimes she makes it a duet.

*I have a sister. And I figure that it’s her presence that allows me so much solitude.*

She considered having impersonations of herself made by Tommy Lee Jones, Renée Zellweger, and others.

She is demoralized by mundanity, the aggressive subjugation of nature worldwide, and America’s widespread ignorance of history.

Once completed, Horn decided not to include the piece in her catalogue, feeling it was too close to the form she was using in another part of the publication, which is a subject index composed of entries by invited authors mixed with extracts the artist took from her own writings. (Although she didn’t say so, I intuited she was also ambivalent – squeamish even, about the focus on her private domain once the piece was tangible.) We agreed instead to further develop the text collaboratively to make a small publication for the “Between Artists” series published by A.R.T. Press at some future date.

While working on her retrospective exhibition and publication, *Roni Horn a.k.a. Roni Horn*, the artist poured over photographs of her she collected from various sources and selected a set of images that alternate between childhood, teenage, and adulthood, which she cohered into a photographic installation called *aka*. Chronology is jumbled therein, countering any notion of linear evolution. Using the archive, *aka* proposes configuration
and reconfiguration and advances identity as dynamic process – contingent and flexile. This emblematic work will likely be represented in our publication, and I wrote about it at length in a recent essay.86

Meanwhile I have added a second section to the initial “chronology” I wrote that consists of journal-style reflections on the process of reading and learning in Horn’s archive. It is also a questioning of biographical formats and relationships between memory, history, and the archive. An account of the purpose and methods of the endeavor is built into the essay. My ruminations on the process of delving into Horn’s personal papers are best apprehended in the text itself.87 A glimpse:

I am sitting in her studio reading her private papers from the past thirty years. She works nearby customizing letterforms for a vocabulary of weather. They look liquid and whimsical and remind me of Dr. Seuss.

Usually she works here alone. For the time being, I am in her daily milieu reading and absorbing. The open-plan arrangement of her workspace along with the newness of our proximity encourages access: out-of-the-
blue we make comments and ask each other questions. After a couple
days, she starts playing loud music, most frequently a playlist that includes
*Knocking on Heaven’s Door, Sympathy for the Devil, Goldfinger, Play
With Fire, Desperado,* and *Sinnerman.* It depletes my reading
concentration, but I’m getting the full-on Roni-in-her-studio experience,
so I don’t protest.

I presume the notebooks provide direct admittance to her former present
tense – taking me where I get to know Roni long before I knew her.

Every once in a while I look up and exclaim, “this is so juicy,” to which
she smiles, looks intrigued, and immediately returns to what she was
doing. I feel like a snoop despite permission. She has not read her early
journals in decades and might well be stunned by the intimate yearnings,
which were formerly lodged in her mind and found voice in diaristic
privacy. She rendered situations, sensations, and emotions with raw
sensitivity: hard evidence of feelings written in their time. I am flushed
from what she felt, and have difficulty reconciling with Roni who sits in
front of me. In and out of time.

The most profound difference between working on this inquiry and the Group Material
situation is the sense of freedom and poetic license I experienced when *not* addressing a
subject I am tied to through memory. This also has to do with Horn’s sensibility and the
intimate poetic voice I encountered in her early journals. I perceived a kind of
senselessness in adhering to chronology in the case of understanding and portraying an
individual (this individual at least). Whereas studying Group Material’s chronology –
what happened when, and in relation to what circumstances – a reconstruction of sorts,
seemed the most illuminating manner to apprehend and convey the shifting identity and
practice of the group. The sense of responsibility to the “truth” of the group *in time* was
always an issue. With Roni, there was no clash between memory and record to be
reconciled. I relied on her writing and my reading of it, her work, our conversations, and my knowledge of her as a friend.

One last example of fitting form to situation in the telling of past conditions. Notions of historical representation and time are taken up in James Benning’s film, *casting a glance* (2007), a close meditation on Robert Smithson’s Spiral Jetty consisting of seventy-eight one-minute shots filmed during sixteen trips made there between 2005 and 2007. Dates expressed textually, ranging from April 30, 1970 to May 15, 2007 are interspersed with images to highlight the parallel between water levels during Benning’s two-year period of shooting and the Jetty’s lifespan in relation to the shifting level of the Great Salt Lake, which is responsible for its alternating exposure and concealment. Interestingly, the final date registered in the film – May 15, 2007, occurred after Benning had stopped shooting. When queried about why it is nonetheless included he said it was “just a future guess.”

*Casting a glance* fictionalizes the matching chronology of shooting to a chronicle of change in the Jetty’s conditions and appearance, creating confusion in many viewers who presume a one-to-one relationship between the dates and the images exists and therefore
believe Benning literally filmed the Jetty over its thirty-seven year span. Benning’s philosophy of duration and of landscape as a function of time invited further research. He does not announce the film as history writing but it is a sophisticated historical representation that in fact takes issue with other representations. In the subsequent essay I wrote about the operations of the film in relation to time, history, and chronology I observed:

Spiral Jetty first went underwater in 1973, the year of Smithson’s death, and it did not reemerge, except sporadically, until 2002. The jetty’s visibility since 2002 is mostly the result of drought. During its period of invisibility Spiral Jetty became well known through aerial images from 1970 picturing it basking in sunshine, fully exposed above water. These photographs were instrumental in transforming the work into an icon, particularly as no documentation of Spiral Jetty in its submerged state circulated. Until the jetty’s resurfacing it was publicly perceived as static, frozen in time, and was inadvertently objectified. Benning regards Spiral Jetty as a vital formation and wants to show how it changes over time as a result of climate, season, weather, daylight, industry, and tourism. *Casting a glance* shows us Spiral Jetty fully exposed, partially underwater, and completely submerged, and in this way representationally restores its periodic vulnerability and variety.88

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The practices of archiving, and historical investigation and representation are contingent on purpose and situation. What makes sense, in principle, is that research methods, archiving practices, interpretive means, form-finding, and communicative modes be taken up anew in relation to each case of historical discovery, recuperation, and representation.
The situations elaborated here seek to illustrate the logic of this tenet and some examples of the approach. Each complex of ephemeral histories demands its own representational method and form. From this perspective, formulaic engagement in any media implies treating a subject generically within pre-determined confines that risk diminishing subject matter, practitioner, and viewer. (How I lament the Sundance affect that gained currency in the early 1990s. The Sundance stamp of approval on independent documentary films virtually guarantees marketplace success. Far too much recent filmmaking suffers from tailoring work to fit the prescription. The affect is visible in documentaries from the credits to the arty treatment to the horizontal rather than vertical engagement with a subject.)

Notwithstanding the enthusiasm for the book form I’ve expressed here in relation to particular subjects taken up in practice, it is clear that books are not the be-all or end-all through which ephemeral and peripheral art histories might best find distribution or duration. Nor are they inherently suitable. But they are one significant venue to be employed.

How far can the notion of pursuing differentiation in form (and methods) for each exploratory manifestation of histories extend? I’m tempted to say all histories deserve a custom-made approach but this sounds far-fetched, or at least unrealistic and ahistorical. Is history by definition ephemeral? Is history writing always an attempt to make the ephemeral permanent – whether it is a life, a practice, or a set of circumstances or events? With the archive appointed as supreme mediator?

The limits and depths of historical inquiry are not prefigured. Archives are constantly infused with fresh topics and bodies of information; they are places of increasing diversity. They are also in a state of extraordinary flux amidst society’s digital transformation. Although it is probably eternally the case, in this context, the future of the past, insofar as history writing and archive authority is concerned, is particularly unpredictable.
Archive, Archived, Archiving
Julie Ault

An accretion of further analysis, September 1, 2011

Once a collection has been instituted in a formal archive further additions are permissible. However, new material does not get smoothly integrated; it is kept separate as an accretion. In this way, production of the archive is registered as happening over time.

That was then. Then something else was added.

The addition is in light of the archive. The designation of a subject as worthwhile by the establishment of an archived collection enables something to be added. (Collect as much as you want, the archive must agree to accept it.) Collection produces more archive.

Consider, for instance, a set of letters in a box in a basement. Like any unaccounted for trace, they are vulnerable and can get lost, discarded, or end up on a table at a flea market. But the existence of a specific collection to which these letters are relevant means the correspondence will likely be accessioned. No longer in jeopardy, they will reside in a designated body, in the archive.

My research engages the intersectorial space of archiving, memory, and historical representation in practice, and in respect to working out fitting methods and forms for registering previously unhistoricized art events into enduring public records. Activating the archive of the artists’ collaborative Group Material, of which I was a member for its active duration [1979 to 1996], and committing the group’s initial historical representation to print, has been a primary testing ground. My research additionally encompasses the exploration of a number of other artists’ methods, and the ways that art and artifact can give history form.

My overall investigation has been continually nourished by revisiting and rethinking ideas, references, actions, and deductions. It has likewise been stimulated through
incorporating fresh experiences, dialogues, and reflections, and continues to be a dynamic process.

This writing engages pivotal questions, which have been posed from outside and within, explicitly and implicitly, to the articulation of my research project made one year ago. This writing constitutes an accretion to that critical reflection submitted September 1, 2010, *Retrospective / Prospective: Activating the Archive*. That account remains a valid expression of the probing period, which preceded, and as such, is an artifact I would like to preserve rather than smoothly update. This accretive logic is a lesson of the archive, which teaches the wisdom of provenance, and that artifacts are evidence that should not be tampered with.

Tracking, recording, and displaying my research is a case in point. Treating *Retrospective / Prospective* as an artifact permits me to preserve the period of development, so I might witness and critically reflect on the overall process and its stages in the operation of recounting. Seamless revision privileges culmination, and in the process, endangers the legibility of development.89

The archive. It sounds so stern, so solid. The commencement and the commandment, where Derrida began.90 Legacy. Heritage. Proof. At the beginning of my research,91 I knew from experience that the archive was not reliable. In principle, I understood it was permeable, which is not to say wide open – but actionable. I realize this more intensely now. Instituting the Group Material Archive,92 and cohering *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material, 2010*,93 in tandem, allowed me to temporally conjoin “archiving” and “history writing,” and in the process investigate their interdependency.

No stage in the process of learning is expendable. Archive ambivalence fed assumptions and intuitive resistance; curiosity and need led to research and action; archive enthusiasm brought more research, which generated disenchantment and obsession in equal measure. I crossed a threshold when I entered the archive as a place to derive from and contribute
to. The archive has likewise infiltrated me; once archive consciousness takes hold, it is
difficult to suspend.

My initial reading of Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever* was impatient. At the time, my
research mood was activist; I wanted to find things out by doing – by “taking on” the
archive, and that attitude influenced how I read. Research is colored by what one is
searching for, and I was looking to confirm the suspicion that the archive is a tomb for
past lives, conservative in every sense of the word – the opposite of memory, which is
uncontainable and messy. Archive as collective death drive. Looking for corroboration
in *Archive Fever*, I did not fathom its refusal to assure the notion of archive whatsoever.

On the other hand, I came away equipped to embrace the prospect of death by history – to
fill in the space of Group Material’s missing body with archive and publication, hoping to
revive its principles and methods in the process. A liberatory dimension clarifies as I
circle back to Derrida after instituting and inscribing Group Material into these systems
of history: the responsibility of memory is consigned to the archive and to its future use.

Archive proliferates all the time, and in turn, so does history. The establishment of
collections and subjects continually alter and expand the contents and scope of the
archive. In the process of cohering the Group Material archive I wondered, “where does
the archive end?” At what point does the frame of inclusion go too far afield, or become
too encompassing and exhaustive. The question seemed spatial at the time, but it is also a
temporal issue. The letters found in the basement of an abandoned house. The manuscript
that turns up at an antique store. The found document that no one knew existed, which
has the potential to change everything. What about the phantom that *does* respond to our
inquiry, albeit unwittingly, through recouped and uncovered artifacts?

Artifacts communicate but they do not tell more than their physical facts. They have the
capacity to bespeak. As historical traces they function as indicators, and may represent
infinite ties to the past. But what exactly they infer and link to depends on what one is
looking to find. They are not oracles. They do not tell stories. They do not contain the
past. They do not narrate what they represent. Artifacts are revealed through interpretative engagement. We extrapolate, we project, we disclose, we represent, we speak. Any number of relations between documents may exist, but it is the researcher who makes the relationships, and has the capacity to render associations visible, build cases, and establish histories.

There are many ways to make use of an artifact. You come across an object in an archive. You are somewhere between knowing nothing and knowing too much. Consider for instance a photograph that sits in a file. One person looks at the photograph and wants to know more; in fact she wants to know everything she can learn from it. She traces as many connections as possible, seeking origins, circumstances and consequences, stories and histories, and modeling chains of events the photograph suggests. She doesn’t know where to stop; the photograph points to countless roads and she can only take a few. She chooses the sure paths and follows others on the hunch that they may be revealing, and perhaps lead to new knowledge. Another person encounters the photo and is immediately absorbed; she recognizes the thinking behind it, or perhaps is gripped by its point of view, or something. Utterly inspired, she seeks no further information. Someone else comes across the photograph and barely notices – it does not concern her study. For another, the photo confirms her thesis. She will use it on the cover of the book she is writing.

Historical Contexts and Interpretation

The call for historicizing Group Material more broadly in relation to historical periods – intellectual turns, cultural turns, and social trends, including postmodernism, multiculturalism, feminism, post feminism, and pluralism, gives rise to specific topics of method. What informed the decision to not take such an approach in the first retrospective representation of Group Material? Why does Show and Tell take a different route, and with what intentions and implications? Does the book embody critical
methods, is it a critical history itself, or does it simply record Group Material’s history of critical practice?

The Road Taken

An initial motivation for reopening the case of Group Material was the desire to stop actively narrating the group. Soon after Group Material’s dissolution in 1996 my live narrations fossilized into memorized short, medium, and long versions of the story, coupled with memorized enthusiasm. I repeatedly activated “habit-memory” and in the process, obstructed active recollection, which makes it possible to “remount the slope of our past,” and forge new relationships and meanings.

Paul Ricoeur reminds us that active recollection, or what he calls “recollection memory,” involves recognition, which memory out of habit does not. Habitual memory exists in a mental file cabinet, accessible on demand with the right call number. Only the call number requires recognition. For years I regarded memorized telling as a necessary and pragmatic solution for repeatedly speaking to the same topic. At some unpinpointable moment I realized this was insidious. I had the impression of being divided, and of my voice speaking without me and sounding hollow. Rupturing that dead-end circuit required purposely entering memory of a different order, “present memory,” as part of the larger process of apprehending, relearning, and gaining fresh insight into Group Material through archiving and publishing.

The modality used for the “present representation of absent, past things” is dictated by purpose. Faithfully representing the group (to ourselves) for the sake of articulation, conservation, closure, and regeneration, influenced the mode of Show and Tell. The proposition of writing this history involved mourning, and, by extension, liberation, which proper mourning is said to usher in. Group Material’s collaboration was intimate and long lasting. The commitment to work together others in close alliance, to create and evolve and convey shared ideals in practice and in public required devotion. Its inauguration in 1979 was cause for elation, yet when the group disbanded it barely felt
like a group. There was no clear object of mourning. The final entry of the guiding text, written in 2010, in the chronic section of Show and Tell, demonstrates:

Fall 1996. Felix Gonzalez-Torres died from AIDS-related causes in the beginning of the year (January 9, 1996). His death 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 or shift. 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 and Doug feel it is time to formally bring the group to an end and cease activity, and not let permit Group Material’s history to be watered down by unmotivated, less compelling work. Julie and Doug decide they will continue to individually represent the group’s histories through live narration and writings. They plan to think about making a book at some future date.105

This “conclusion” expresses several tenses at once: what was, what is – as it is written in present tense, and what will be. Cohering the archive in public, literally taking it out of our hands, and making the book, are in part, formalities for mourning the death of the group and the demise of the idealism that underwrote its course. I will turn to the conditions of this wider loss later.106

On the local level faithful resemblance is tested through recognition, by ringing true. Do I recognize Group Material in this book? Do other participants? Does the depiction do justice to personal and collective memory? Do those who encountered Group Material’s projects in real time recognize and recollect? But turning past events into “history” is only partly for those who remember. The prime social reason for reopening the case was to stimulate action in the future, which is meant to include the instantly vanishing present.
Further affinity is aspired for. If faithful resemblance is achieved, it follows that future identifications will ensue and multiply.

My experiences attest to the necessity of recognition as part of active recollection, which, in turn, necessitates latitude for identification in Group Material’s historical representation. But on what grounds? What sorts of identification? Can rapport be predicted? Does the artist-historian engineer identification by tapping into social memory? Or does she trust it will be a natural outcome of accomplishing similitude?

Given the ease with which authorial intentions take on a fixative dimension and set the stage for subsequent reception, attaching retrospective declarations of intent to the group’s original work was avoided. Artists’ intention is implanted in cultural memory both formally by way of published statements, interviews, didactics, gallery tours, live presentations, and miscellaneous information that circulates on the Internet, and informally by word of mouth – hearsay. Shorthand descriptions proliferate: my work is about . . . I was trying to get at . . . I meant to . . . . Access to a work or body of work is extended to the artist herself, anchoring art in the familiar terrain of explanation.

The artist as her own interpreter symbolically stands alongside the work imparting clues, and pronouncing intentions in hindsight. Each time an author speaks about his work, especially in these times, when even informal talks are podcast or otherwise documented and distributed, he contributes to the record. Via the archive such informational artifacts imply potential repetition ad infinitum. Intentionality is somewhat integral to expression, but when an author’s alleged design obstructs or supersedes viewers and readers’ interpretation processes, it is problematic.

Because Show and Tell inaugurates Group Material’s “history,” it has the ability to define what Group Material “was all about.” In Show and Tell, intentionality is implied in the details of the documentation presented, but it is not summarized retrospectively. As much as the book appears to be a documentary endeavor it exposes my – and, to include all levels of collaboration involved in the process – “our,” subjective relationships to the
subject. The paramount intention to *represent faithfully* and *generate affinity* dictated its methods.

In the aftermath of cultural presence, when any iteration of Group Material is by definition history, interpretation is inevitable. Interpretation is suffused in every moment of searching, finding, curating, editing, assigning relevance, and connecting dots between documents that constitutes research, including not leastly, presenting, or making present. However, I have stopped short of overt interpretation as an explicit means. Yes, Group Material could be considered an example or product of larger trends, a “sign of the times,” but such framing risks sacrificing its special dimension and particular dynamics. Grounding Group Material’s portrayal within larger social frameworks, which, at the time, appeared to be limitless, but have since been bounded and periodized by historicization, is at odds with composing a historical representation to launch clearings so that social memory and imagination in its infinite terms might be tapped. It is important that readers have the opportunity to engage Group Material by their own power of association.

Group Material needed to be given account as both a specific and a notional framework of cultural agency. The questions of whether or not Group Material needed to be accounted for in order to *be history* and to be adequately consultable are unanswerable. Group Material was nomadic for most of its years of activity. After its dissolution information was scattered and access was sketchy. The seemingly opposing goals of being, on the one hand, recounted, and on the other hand, open-ended, beckoned. Group Material is now locatable in its reconstituted body of material in the archive, and on the bookshelf in *Show and Tell*. However, by design, Group Material remains undefined in so far as overt historicizing interpretation and retrospective summary are mostly excluded from *Show and Tell*.\(^{108}\)

In its collaborative essence, and through its exhibition practice, Group Material embodied decentralization as it created contexts in response to precise conditions, conflicts, and affinities. The objectives that guided Group Material to resist making declaratives in its
exhibition practice in favor of fashioning multivoctal forums guided me to follow suit in the book. Avoiding historical contextualization invites a multitude of individual and social interpretations by the book’s users, along their own lines of understanding, instead of prescribed ones, in essence, making it possible for readers to do the work of interpretation and historicizing.

Take The Other Road

The historicizing overview terminology of movements and periods (that were once operative and now finished, “you, young reader, were not there”\(^\text{109}\)) seems incompatible with the overarching social aim of representing Group Material’s histories to precipitate consequent affinity in practice, and thereby extend its integral communal perspective and investment in cultural agency and cultural democracy. Periodizing contains and entombs and in this sense is antagonistic to the generative goals that extend from a philosophy and not only a timeframe, for example, from principles of cultural democracy rather than from “a period of cultural democracy.”

Consider the eighties for instance. In recent years the eighties has been used as a framework for staging major exhibitions and publications, including Flashback – Revisiting the Art of the 80s, curated by Philip Kaiser, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel, 2005, and Artforum’s 40th Anniversary double issue “The 1980s,” 2003.\(^\text{110}\) Others are in the works. This Will Have Been: Art, Love, & Politics in the 1980s, curated by Helen Molesworth, opens at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Chicago, 2012, and Chus Martínez heads a research / exhibition project focused on the intellectual debates of the eighties, Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), forthcoming. Group Material has been invited to participate in each of these in some fashion. I am not suggesting these specific projects epitomize the problems of periodizing structures, nor is this the place to analyze them one-by-one. I note them as examples of the eighties being used as an organizing structure.
It is true that Group Material was founded in 1979, came of age in public during the eighties, and was less prolific in the early nineties before disbanding. Does that warrant the label, “eighties artists”? Once so branded, it is difficult to transcend such classification. The effects of labeling cannot be underestimated. Being branded by a decade negates individual chronology; the time capsule is severed from lived experience, and from the continuities and discontinuities of social existence.

Period frameworks encapsulate and tend to be reductive. The attempt to relate art production to larger cultural and social circumstances implied by highlighting a decade, and conjuring a timeframe of dominant trends, risks doing so iconically. Even without explicit articulation, cultural terms that float in the social memory echo as backdrop: eighties’ excess, the glamorous eighties, Po Mo, Wall Street, neo-geo, commodity art, neo-expressionism, appropriation. Such terminology can unwittingly fuse as a classification system held in mind and applied by viewers and readers.

Decade periodization deriving from media and promotional culture is sometimes used as a convenient formatting structure at the expense of developing more complex ways of showing or proposing history. Decade formats are macro, and risk racing through histories: there was this and then there was this and don’t forget this was happening too. Typically, they are hierarchical. The role for Group Material in such a package is preassigned to sidebar at the edge of main events, such as the symbolic battle between neo-expressionism and appropriation, or between aesthetics and activism. Were these really battles? To what degree are such depictions rhetorical fabrications of polarization that in the process encourage conceiving culture and society as continually polarized?

On the other hand, mapping a period and drawing lines between artists, practices, and contexts can be fruitful. Periodizing can be taken up in the spirit of a partial or opinionated timeline, to lay open or propose relationships between events, and make complex or concealed histories discernable. Predictable renditions, of the eighties in turn call for counterrepresentations. (I suspect that Molesworth’s and Martinez’s endeavors will represent meaningful confrontations of ideas and practices.) The interplay between
common classification devices, how we perceive ourselves, others, and society, and what we do as cultural practitioners is at stake in the negotiation of formats.\textsuperscript{113}

Historicizing formats encourage certain readings and practices and discourage others; they can act as entrance and / or obstacle, depending on the attitude and depth of the author(s). I may be overly reactive to the loading of meaning that historicizing formats based on packaging, periodizing, and delimiting movements exert. Just as I respond this way, others may well find such parameters focusing. However, even if I am particularly sensitive to such devices, I wonder whether any artist identifies with the handles that get attached to their work. I have never heard anyone say their work is about relational aesthetics, or I am a postmodern eighties neo-geo painter. To great extent classifying terminology is imposed by promotional culture, of which the art industry is a part. I include art history and criticism (and myself) in the art industry.

Defining periods and movements also involves judgment, who is in who is out, what and who were important then, and by exclusion, what was not. The Eighties Show: you may not want to be in it but you cannot afford to be left out. Histories are so written. One can be written in and written out.\textsuperscript{114} In the spirit of Barbara Kruger, I have to ask, \textit{whose eighties, whose history?}

Someday, when a future researcher studies the cumulative eighties exhibitions she will note that certain artists were repeatedly included. What meaning will she read into that? She might ask, How accurate were those versions of the eighties. Eventually new scholarship will take place. And history will expand with corrections and accretions. The process is on endless repeat. (My own involvement in the recuperation of Sister Corita’s practice that was excluded from the canonic history of sixties Pop Art, is a case in point.)

Referring back to my notes during the “archiving laboratory” period of the Group Material test case, I find: “Initiate inventive ‘interpretations’ of key aspect(s) of Group Material’s practice as projects in order to activate those methods / principles in the present tense.” \textit{Show and Tell} is one of those projects, a carrying on and reworking of
practice and precepts, and in itself an interpretation that hypothesizes Group Material as both particular and infinitely timely, opening its practice rather than narrowing it. Offering example for others to relate to and improve on, in so doing, setting up conditions for furtherance and multiplication.

Group Material cofounder Tim Rollins recently asked me, why the resurgence of interest in Group Material now? On the surface the interest and response seems to say something about what might be lacking in current artistic culture, or about filling a void, or being the right model at the right time, but in fact I believe a similar reception could occur at any moment, because the principles that Group Material embodied and the issues that the group’s work spoke to are not time bound, despite that though the practice was time-based.

Perhaps it would be different if cultural and political conditions had changed dramatically since Group Material’s disbanding. Then, it might arouse interest purely for historical value. There has been lots of change but no sea change. The spirit of Group Material as well as its example of collaborative practice and the strategies used are all valuable to the present. Vivid enduring effective collaboration is always timely.

Returning to the question: Why not historically contextualize Group Material more broadly? There is paradox in situating a practice that sought to “question the entire culture we have taken for granted” and the master narratives and dominant institutions of that culture, within an anti-grand narrative, such as postmodernism – a “discourse of delegitimation.” In spite of its critical design, such discourse can function as an alternative account – a history of dissent, counterculture, and of constellations of critical intellectual debate, that takes shape as a quasi-grand narrative of Opposition. I do not mean to suggest that historians and theoreticians plan this course. Although Group Material sometimes portrayed culture as a battleground, for the most part, it sought to cut across such a territorialized notion of the cultural economy, and of society, and speak in terms of “for” rather than “against.” In the long-term, Group Material did not speak the vocabulary of opposition or dissent so much as participation, agency, and multiplicity.
For Group Material to be recognized it needs to reinforce itself. *Show and Tell* refuses to speak in terms of oppositions. The apparent dichotomies of dominant and marginal, culture and counterculture, Left / Right, righteous and corrupt, aesthetic and political, etc., lost their soundness over time in practice. On behalf of Group Material, *Show and Tell* takes a less contrast-driven, less aggressive stance. By refusing to affirm such disunion in representation *Show and Tell* stays true to the group’s history of lived experience and does not further replicate polarizing notions of culture.

Historical staging is blunt. Why historicize in terms of one context over another? Given that the group did not delimit it’s practice or identify with any particular movement, -ism, or classification, it would be somewhat arbitrary to fasten onto historical scaffolding.

Framing devices can be changed like backdrops in a photo studio, to change the sitter’s appearance in relation to different settings. A figure is clearer in front of a solid background, than against a patterned one made from other texts, so to speak. Group Material would be one thing in relation to punk and another in relation to postmodernism, or conceptual art, modernism, or activism.

When local history is situated in or against a historicized context which is larger and pre-established as a subject / discourse, it is in danger of being absorbed. The larger configuration tends to “explain” the microhistory of a specific group of people, and their experiences, decisions, and actions. The microhistory gets thematicized and rendered an illustration of larger phenomenon. (This is analogous to the frequently heard accusation that curators use artworks to illustrate their thesis.) Because of the tendency of historical contextualization to function as explanation, the position taken here rejected *all* frameworks, to instead focus on one microhistory and its capacity to accentuate and register cultural conditions and change, through the lens of itself.

A specific example. Consider, for instance, were Group Material to be historicized by Multiculturalism? As soon as the term is put forward its potential to take over is expressed. It is true that Group Material was in itself heterogeneous and reflected various
multiplicities in its exhibitions. But this was not because of “multiculturalism,” it was because culture is multicultural. That society is made up of multiple cultures is an undeniable fact. Culture was multicultural before the term multiculturalism was active in any arena.

Clearly I do not mean to diminish or denigrate any theoretical inquiry and articulation, or any lived experiences associated with multiculturalism, postmodernism, or feminism, etc., including my own. The impetus is to question the consequences and value of sweeping up the histories of the works and investigations of any artist, writer, or practitioner, into periodizing models, intellectual debates, or social movements at the expense of their potential open-endedness. In its self-iteration Group Material’s status is meant to be protected as untheorized historically. That this is in itself a theorization of Group Material indicates the orientation of Show and Tell as a critical enterprise engaged with history writing.

The question why not contextualize Group Material in broader historical or periodized terms asks Group Material to relocate its frame of reference. Show and Tell, in turn, invites a shift of focus to ground level social processes, and maintains that, in this case, historicizing is the domain of others. Others can use the book as resource to inspire and aid their studies and analyses, whether that means situating Group Material in a specified field of cultural activism, in relation to histories of curatorial practice, or postmodern art, or anything else.

Vantage

As it shows and tells, Group Material’s book spotlights atmosphere; its ground-level orientation conveys that the collaboration was serious and it was fun; a sociable context. The formal structure of the design of the book’s chronicle section is intended to show this interior / exterior and process / project structure of the chronology. A photographic analogy is helpful: the book’s perspective is akin to a ground-level human-scale way of looking, while perspective situated in larger historical discourse is
comparable to an aerial, bird’s eye view. Each method omits. The ground shot includes only glimpses of surround, the longer view makes it difficult to see what’s happening close up – social process.

Ricoeur raises the issue of scale, and distinguishes its effect: “what can be seen on a large scale are the developing forces. But what can be seen on a small scale – and this is the lesson of microhistory – are the situations of uncertainty within which individuals . . . attempt to orient themselves . . . . Therefore, when you write macrohistory, you are more likely to work with determinisms, whereas when you work on microhistories, you have to engage indecisions, that is to say, indeterminism.”

Ricoeur proposes that history writing employ scale shifts or moving through scales as productive method, and that scope be regarded as dynamic rather than as static.

The scale fluctuations in Show and Tell occur after the ground-level chronicle segment of the book. The essays that follow the chronicle include my own, “Case Reopened: Group Material,” which speaks pragmatically (akin to my role in the group) to issues of methods and the ideas and purpose of the archive and book; and an essay by Tim Rollins, “What Was to be Done?” which looks back to the origins of the group – the cofactors that led to its founding and its initial spirit (Tim was the original spirit of the group); and an essay by Doug Ashford, “An Artwork is a Person,” which zooms out for a wider view to situate Group Material’s work in the eighties as extending from social movements of the sixties (Doug often inhabited the role of intellectualizing).

The essays by former group members are followed by Sabrina Locks, “Tracking AIDS Timeline” and “Behind the Timeline,” which zoom in to her research on AIDS Timeline, 1989, done in the freshly cohered archive, and written while she was a curatorial student finishing her masters degree at Bard Center for Curatorial Studies. In essence Locks’s investigation was designed as an example of using and contributing to the archive.

To summarize, the essays begin at ground level, with the micro- microhistory of the archiving and history project, then make a temporal turn to look at origins, then zoom out to look on the larger social developments of the times, then move back in to look closer
within Group Material’s chronology, and microscopically examine one project, which is a timeline project that maps the development of the AIDS crisis between 1979 and 1989. I belabor this to clarify the use of scale in the book as a whole. The book’s 200-page chronicle section, which my comments here take up in detail, is primary, but it is one part in relation with other ways of telling. The overall book engages temporal and scale shifts and brings contributions from several vantage points into proximity.

By specifically stressing *AIDS Timeline* in the final section of *Show and Tell*, the dual operation of close-up perspective on one project, and opening out onto larger developments and macrohistory through the methods of that project is accomplished. The complexity of scale and temporal operations involved in historical representation is thereby pointed to.

Emphasizing actions and dynamics at ground level seeks to highlight social process over effect and judgment. This emphasis works to create a multivalent space that can be engaged, and projected into and out from, a space to harbor multiple points of entry and identification, and rouse interest, inspire imagination, critical consciousness, and analysis. Readers and viewers might relate to the spirit of idealistic enterprise Group Material embodied (a bunch of friends chipping in money and energy to open an exhibition space together), or the power relations of collaboration, or relate in terms of style. They might feel visual affinity or be affected by the liberal use of color, or be intrigued by different graphic design moments, or the suggestiveness of the exhibition titles. They may want to follow members’ participation, or the involvement of one member, or may simply be taken with interlocking stories and histories, intrigued by what is exposed and what is not, or any other possibility.

Contemporaries who revisit the period through the lens of Group Material attend with their individual awareness and interests as well as with an expanse of cultural memory. Those who are less familiar with Group Material’s period of activity are invited in at eye level to witness actions and circumstances through re-collection of evidence and memory, conveyed in a present tense telling. The use of present tense is intended as inclusive, to
increase accessibility and regenerate a fundamental sense of cultural agency. The potential for cross-connecting information is left open, according to viewers’ lived experience, historical awareness, biases and allegiances.

Chronicle

It is worthwhile to distinguish chronicle from timeline. Chronicles record rather than historicize. Chronicles impart events and sequence. Both chronicles and timelines are linear at heart but the informational reach of the timeline format is broader as it encompasses multiple lines of inquiry and is capable of bringing seemingly incompatible information into confrontation. The timeline format is more global and less strict than the chronicle format. Chronicles and timelines both periodize; they can both function as narrative armatures.

Answering the question “why did things happen like that and not otherwise?” requires turning past events into “followable story,” which Hayden White distinguishes from historicizing a completed story. Chronicles are capable of telling followable stories, but timelines endeavor to answer other questions, which call for judgment: “What does it all add up to?” “What is the point of it all?”

The timeline mode Group Material used on occasion as an exhibition format was conceived as a spatial articulation of extending lines of inquiry out from a linear layer or chronicle. As such, the timeline is a history-mapping tool used to generate diagrams of past events and their interrelations. Timelines potentially combine a horizontal notion of events with a vertical spread that takes in other events to posit their interconnectedness and propose potential readings of cause and effect. As a guiding device, a timeline sets a linear horizon and performs an anchoring purpose, acting as a focus from which viewers’ perspectives venture. The timeline itself is endowed with a double function of systematizing and releasing information, opening views to what is above and below it.
Timelines make larger explanation and historical analysis possible by what they include and exclude. And they do so with apparent objectivity.


Because Group Material had used the format; I briefly contemplated making the book a timeline with Group Material as its driving subject, but rejected the idea for the same reason – *because* it was a form so associated with the group. The idea seemed clever and potentially trite beside Group Material’s past exhibitory timelines. Secondly, similar
dilemmas arose as when considering historical contextualization. What to choose, what events to link to? What to implicate in Group Material and vice versa?

There is a substantial difference between timeline as exhibition, which in Group Material’s case included objects, images, multiple media, documents, text, etc., and book version timelines, which are inherently graphic, rely on reproduction, and in so doing tend to level information on a single, seamless platform. Timeline exhibitions are capable of creating space for viewers to make connections between documents and take a prominent role in narrativizing or making history. Graphic timelines, common to media and magazine culture, are easily consumable – a type of compressed history lesson. In graphic formats the timeline’s capacity for conveying the past as an intricate web of interconnected actions and events is dramatically decreased, in part because elements are reduced in scale and made equivalent. Graphic seamlessness and page scale dramatically alter the space for users, and give the appearance of events being illustrations in a chronology. The graphic smoothness indicates that narratives have already been written and committed to print, ready to be consumed, as opposed to “put together.”

Hayden White points out that a key problem of the (objective) chronicle or chronology is the notion that events tell themselves, in lieu of a narrator (subjective). At first glance the chronicle of Group Material does exactly that, given that artifacts, facts, and anecdotes are made present through themselves as well as by using a depersonalized present tense mode. The archive shows itself, albeit through the prejudiced curatorial eyes of its participant interlocutor(s), who, were once in the action; who represented actions in their time; and who now re-represent those actions without additional self-analysis. Narration is not absent in Show and Tell. The narrator is conceived and configured as a “collective subjective,” constituted by the group that once was, and a more abstract version of the amalgam Group Material, which is conjured to do the telling in the present. Past is grammatically articulated as the present. Readers are guided by subjective and collective narration.
Books tend to streamline material, and ground or position readers by imposing a point of view, that of the narrator. *Show and Tell*’s chronicle is decentralized, in other words, it does not privilege one point of view – much like a decentralized Group Material exhibition environment in which there is no ideal view; all views are potentially ideal and multiple perspectives are spurred. One can enter anywhere. Framing or summarizing from a post-mode of narration proposes a position of “This is what it was all about.” Such conclusive modes potentially short-circuit viewers’ processes of discovery and *conclude* rather than extend Group Material in the process. While it could make good sense to use such a method in other situations, depending on the researcher-historian’s purposes and relationship to the subject, in this case of “self-historicizing” a collective practice, these danger signs became clear in the process of thinking and working through what is at stake.

“The chronicle is usually marked by a failure to achieve narrative *closure*. It does not so much conclude as terminate. It starts out to tell a story but breaks off in *media res*, in the chronicler’s own present; it leaves things unresolved or, rather, leaves them unresolved in a story-like way. . . . The Chronicle represents [historical reality] *as if* real events appeared to human consciousness in the form of *unfinished* stories.”128 While pointed out here by White as a peril of the chronicle form, I concur the Group Material chronicle does this and does so on purpose. The chronicle section of *Show and Tell* finishes and unfinishes, as closure of the group and continuance of its precepts are sought. Referring again to the final lines of the chronicle: “Julie and Doug feel it is time to formally bring the group to an end and cease activity. . . . They plan to think about making a book at some future date.”

Unhistorical / Historical

*(Young, naive, and rebellious: we did not for a minute doubt our ability to change the world and alter society’s course by coming on the scene and by our actions. However, we were not hoping to “make history”; our prospect was the present.)*
For several years, Group Material was rather unhistorical, not quite like the carefree beasts and children Nietzsche conjured, but mostly unaware of being in history or of having one, capable only of being “honest.” Over time, historical consciousness took form in each of us for various reasons and it solidified in the group as a whole. The salient trigger was the AIDS crisis and the close up witnessing of its casualties. Historical perception took hold in the larger sense of social development. Waking up to the “bad news” of History, we perceived a pile up of events colliding in the AIDS crisis, which seemed like a slow motion disaster. The group responded with no less than seven projects between 1989 and 1991, including exhibitions, a bus advertisement, a publication project distributed over eleven art magazines, and a sound installation. Recently reflecting on the time, Ashford and I noted, “The accumulation of AIDS-related illnesses and deaths of young friends and colleagues informed our daily lives. For our own edification and for public purpose the group embarked on constructing a history of the conditions that transformed the epidemic into a full-blown national crisis.”

A secondary strata of historical awareness coincided: group self-consciousness of its own “history.” The realization of being in history and having chronology – a career so to speak, subtly disrupted the group’s process, and threw a monkey wrench into its rhythm. Due to these notions of local and larger history the fresh “honest” aspiring tone of the group’s work deflated to some degree. For example, conceptualizing a multiform four-part project on Democracy (albeit crisis in democracy), with minimal irony, would not have been possible if not for the group’s idealistic belief in cultural practice – in our practice – to impact the social present. Somewhere between working on the first part of Democracy, Dia Art Foundation, 1988, entitled Education and Democracy, and the last, AIDS & Democracy: A Case Study, a change in undercurrent was palpable. The slide into awareness of “having a history” is difficult to pinpoint and describe, but for the group, it seemed to go hand in hand with the urgency and death toll environment related to AIDS. By then, Group Material had existed for ten years, so it is likely that hitting the decade limit sparked realization and nervousness. (It’s been ten years! Now what do we do?)
Temporal awareness of time period, anniversary, and accumulation, in tandem with the profound recognition of mortality we experienced simultaneously, shifted the tone of Group Material. The larger backdrop of the “bad news” of history – that we are in a flow of disasters, exploitations, self-determination struggles, etc., framed by the historical conjunctions of American culture as economically stratified, competitive, polarized, and so on, was overwhelming. These interrelated strains of historical consciousness contradicted the idealism and critical exuberance that had previously motored the group. On the other hand, historical consciousness galvanized new work and a reinvestment of commitment in the group. As Locks noted in her investigation of AIDS Timeline for Show and Tell: “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.”

The notion of intervening and consciously using interventionist strategies clarified in the group at the time. It seemed the “us” and “them” lines were clearly drawn around AIDS. Those that it was happening for and those that it was not. Those who were fighting AIDS and those who were creating the conditions for its furtherance. Positions morphed into oppositions. Even the usage of terms like interventionist and strategy are telling and were somewhat new to the group’s vocabulary of practice. Not that our previous work was agendless, or without motive, but the notions of targeting and strategizing that were inherent to AIDS activism, gave things a different energy and spin. Suddenly, everything seemed ideological. The shift of perception to the more sinister and entrenched aspects of history was accompanied by a change in disposition, which contributed to the group’s eventual dissolution. The practice we had regarded as serious fun turned just plain serious.

It is interesting that curators and historians repeatedly pick up on AIDS Timeline. Perhaps this is because it recalls a historical conjuncture that deeply affected the art field, and embodies coming of age moments for many people working in the field. In recent years several curators have inquired about reconstructing the exhibition. In principle, one could gather the artworks and artifacts that composed it from the archive and other sources, and attempt to mimic their original installation. Most of the more ephemeral matter was saved.
and now sits in Group Material’s archive at New York University. Artworks were returned to the participants and lenders but most are locatable. But history was conceived in the project as an active field linking to the present. Recuperating AIDS Timeline would fossilize it as an exhibition-scale artifact.

Beyond the calls for its possible reconstruction which former members and I have declined and instructed the archive not to allow, there are two current manifestations of fragments of the project. A selection of material about and from AIDS Timeline is being loaned from the Group Material Archive for the 12th Istanbul Biennial Untitled (12th Istanbul Biennial), 2011. The curators, Jens Hoffman and Adrian Pedrosa, initially sought to recreate a fragment of the timeline, which I steered against, encouraging them to visit the archive and figure out an alternative that does not involve reconstruction of the exhibition whatsoever. Coincidentally, Ashford and I were invited to take part in the “100 notes 100 thoughts” publication series accompanying the forthcoming dOCUMENTA (13). Artistic director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev suggested picking up an aspect of the Timeline. We decided to publish the AIDS Timeline text itself, which structured the exhibition, and was compiled in 1989. This is the first publication of the text beyond the copyshop handouts distributed in the original exhibition. (Remarkably, between the four members involved in its making, only one copy could be found to place in the archive). The only occasion Group Material was invited to or participated in a biennial type exhibition was documenta 8 in 1987. Reminding people about Group Material through Show and Tell kindled the present interest, which will, in turn, likely generate further affinities. The archive continually produces more archive and reproduces history.

In “Uses and Abuses of History” Nietzsche equated happiness and being in the moment with the “capacity to sense things unhistorically,” or to “forget” at least some of the time. In White’s interpretation, “to forget what he knows – more, an ability to deny what he knows; he has an ability to dream, to frolic in images, and to clothe the terror, pain, and suffering caused by consciousness of his own finitude in dream-like imitations of immortality.” In the same essay Nietzsche linked the ability to think outside of history,
at least momentarily, to high-level creative focus leading to Art, and asserted that, “Only when history undertakes to be turned into an art work and thus to become a purely artistic picture can it perhaps maintain the instincts or even arouse them. Such historical writing, however, would go completely against the analytical and inartistic trends of our time; indeed, they would consider it counterfeit.” A possible reading: when the artist liberates herself from history and from the confining notion of “historical truth,” she can then apply artistic vision to “writing history,” in the form of art.

The archive burdens and liberates variously and simultaneously. Nietzsche’s proposition, “for the health of a single individual, a people, and a culture the unhistorical and the historical are equally essential,” echoes in its halls and digital storage systems. Being oblivious to history (honest, free), and learning to deny and forget history are two very different states. What are the means to forgetting? Is this where the archive, and history writing, or history work, come into the picture?

Archiving, like the boundary of a timeline, releases and structures simultaneously. The archive institutes both remembering and forgetting. It is an active apparatus of recollection and an operational depository of disremembering. Archive, and the written record that emerges from the archive (while producing more archive), are collective instruments for locating and containing history and therefore for infinite remembering and disremembering. The notion of archive as container is somewhat misleading, for the archive is endlessly uncontainable and in a constant reproductive state. (It is also increasingly unlocatable in digital culture.)

(“We are all suffering from a consumptive historical fever.” Is there any escape from our obsessions with the past? A Leonard Cohen lyric comes to mind, “I can’t forget, I can’t forget but I don’t remember what.” If only it were possible to be unhistorical. But thinking and memory are inextricable, are they not? Ricoeur: “The mind and the memory are one and the same.”)

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(Can actively forgetting history produce anything other than repetition? We seem to spend decades apprehending our life stories, and then begins the incessant process of loosening their grip on us, and delinking ourselves from our case histories. The Group Material history project a case in point. How to unarchive memory?)

Against Interpretation

There are many ways to work with an artifact. In keeping with Paulo Freire’s instructions on how to read I have, in the past, regarded an essay as a fragment or manifestation of larger bodies of information – the author’s other texts and chronology for instance, as well as socio-historical conditions of the time and place of the original writing. I believed research into these contexts was crucial to understand what an author was responding and contributing to. While I still agree in principle with Freire’s approach I no longer regard it as exclusive. One can easily get mired while attempting to trace the conditions and debates of the times in order to place the text in the author’s chronology of texts, in situ. One can get lost in references to references to references, which all require further research. One can also get caught up in the various competing lines of historicization applied to an author or a set of concerns. I am not talking about getting productively lost, but just lost.

There are other ways of reading a text. A text can be engaged in self-contained terms, akin to an artwork presented without explicit historicization. Essay as artifact: a single untethered fragment to engage through a current lens instead of situating it historically. Freire also advises: “When reading a book, we subject-readers should be receptive to any passage that triggers a deeper reflection on any topic, even if it’s not the main subject of the book. Sensing a possible relationship between the read passage and our preoccupation, we as good readers should concentrate on analyzing the text, looking for a connection between the main idea and our own interest.”
Activating this trigger and relay potential: Susan Sontag’s “Against Interpretation” links to the arguments in favor of and against historical contextualization. Sontag’s polemic likewise lends itself to the subject of how interpretation surfaces in exhibition making, curatorial policy, and exhibition didactics.

When Sontag addressed the project of interpretation of art some forty years ago she distinguished between the older respectful variety that lays itself on top of what it speaks about without obstructing, and construal that excavates, and in the process, depletes. At the time, Sontag thought the “taming” of art through overemphasis on content and explanation was “the revenge of the intellect upon the world. To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world – in order to set up a shadow world of ‘meanings.’” (She nonetheless claimed that the influence of interpretation depended on context, and could be liberating or reactive). Sontag laments, “None of us can ever retrieve that innocence before all theory when art knew no need to justify itself, when one did not ask of a work of art what it said because one knew (or thought one knew) what it did.”

Entwining Sontag’s purity with Nietzsche’s unhistorical honesty: is the forgetting and denying of history to extend to that of art itself? (I am somewhat purposely clouding “interpretation” and “contextualization,” and “history” and “content,” or more accurately, I am trailing what may be a productive confusion in hopes of clarification.)

Sontag’s critique focuses on interpreting art in terms of content, and the problems of approaching art as a detective on the mission to find and inspect evidence of content using agreed upon criteria. Interpretations by critics, historians, and curators leave traces and enter the archive, permanently linking to the history of the object of discussion. These activities form a system and industry of interpretation that, institutes, or in fact has already well established, how art “should” be used, understood, valued in the broader field of reception. The stage is set for viewers to seek interpretation, one way or another.

Does art require contextualization? All art or only certain art? How much information is enough? How much is too much? The salient issues are less to do with quantity than with the spirit and intention of interpretation, how it is made and its manner of broadcast.
That the value of interpretation, and whether it expands or diminishes its object of focus, is to be considered on a case-by-case basis follows. Yet Sontag invokes spatial and procedural terminology – laying on top of is respectful versus digging beneath “for subtext,” excavation, snooping behind, which depletes – suggesting that particular methods are also at fault. Do certain spatializing relationships between work and explanation, and between work, explanation, and viewer, improve and others depreciate?

Speaking on behalf of art and its receivership, and for protecting clearings for experience as precious, Sontag can be read as prescriptive: interpretation should be vigilant about its separation from its object of comment. Tread discretely.

The rift between the belief in the self-evidence of art, its capacity to speak for itself, and the belief that art is by definition coded and in need of mediation, whether that be historical, biographical, social, etc., is a persistent one. I remain ambivalent, often witness to changing my tune, depending on the situation. In light of the problematic, this ambivalence gains clarity as a healthy skepticism of any programmatic approach implied in taking sides.

My perspective as a viewer and exhibition visitor, as well as a practitioner activates my internal fluctuation. I have increasingly heard myself articulating and identifying with a variety of positions about the benefits and perils of mediation. As a viewer I alternate between the frustration of unawareness – being left alone to make what I want of a work or set of works, and the liberty to do so, which is uncharted terrain imbued with responsibility.

“Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, comfortable.”¹⁵³ Yes, but not only. Interpretation has the capacity to illuminate and aid understanding. Interpretation can open up meanings and make them legible. Interpretation can take many forms and angles.
In a culture that bids us to constantly seek the comfort of explanation, unlearning ways of dependent seeing and thinking is strenuous. The “too much information” character of current technology-driven culture moves us in the opposite direction of self-reliance. Society is constantly in a “need to know” state. If you use a mobile or iphone you can look it up, whatever “it” is. No need to sweat over ignorance or forgetfulness – full data is waiting to be summoned. Current technology encourages free-ranging information. Anyone can gather facts, interpretations, and historicize and interpret from the endless digital “archive” almost anytime and anywhere, including while visiting an exhibition or otherwise engaging in art. How this impacts individual and collective memory is yet to be seen.

The position that art is self-contained and autonomous can be read (and therefore dismissed?) as conservative, modernist, regressive, and guilty of upholding the division of labor between producer and interpreter, the delineation of practices. The thinking goes something like, in the spirit of more recent phenomena of boundary and category dissolution in art and other fields (rendered as criticality) shouldn’t we redress ideologies of classification and move into the present? Art is not autonomous; it is socially and politically impinged.

If one accepts that formative contexts are inherent in work in one way or another, without judging their legibility or obscurity, other elucidation does become tricky, aggressive even, like someone speaking while someone else is speaking. It is confusing for the speakers and for the listeners. Of course, the voice-over might well say something worthwhile, intriguing, or illuminating. Regardless, a dilemma ensues for the viewer. Who do I listen to harder, who do I screen out? How do I experience my experience? What to privilege? (In the case of audio guides, the voice-over is literal. Many museums offer portable “audio guides” to their collections and major exhibitions. Viewers move through galleries wearing headphones, tuned in to a voice of authority that instructs and informs their encounters.)
Proximity and temporality can be hazardous. Placing interpretation too close can inadvertently obscure what it seeks to explain. I am sure I am not alone in being susceptible to the battle for attention that takes place between works and labels installed nearby and on the same visual plane. I want to just see the work but the label taunts and tempts and almost always wins. Once the label is read, looking is altered if not occluded. Suspending and delaying interpretation are worth considering, as are methods of articulating and presenting interpretation.

Exhibition pedagogy

Connie Butler mounted the exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles, 2007, with a surprising move: there were no explanatory labels or contextualizing wall texts commenting on the works included in the show. The works were made to hold their own and be engaged, or not, according to their self-evidence. The practice in American museums of affixing narrative explanatory labels next to works, also known as didactics, was quite common by the mid-nineties, in part a result of the broadening of the gate as institutions “embraced” diversity and formerly excluded art and artists gained entry.

The remarkably multicultural *1993 Whitney Biennial* curated by Elizabeth Sussman put ‘identity politics,’ and a “framework of institutional explication”155 at center stage.156 The exhibition was largely regarded as political and preachy and generated criticism from both popular and academic press about the aesthetic validity of much of the work as well as the flattening effects of the didactic efforts.157 Summing up the press response, David Deitcher observed, “Critics might praise the museum’s greater openness to art by members of historically marginalized groups only to condemn the art it contained. This they criticized for its “strident tone,” for being “numbingly didactic, easily summed up in a sentence or two,” for reducing complex social themes into “the dichotomy of victim / oppressor . . .”158
Although artists’ statements had on occasion been judiciously used at the Whitney, the extent of pedagogical devices including descriptive labels and wall panels of artists’ statements in proximity to every work as a prominent layer of the show was unprecedented. This explanatory campaign seemed, on the one hand, an attempt to provide access to the works to uninitiated audiences, and on the other, to function as justification. Miwon Kwon commented, “it is assumed that the artists are very theoretically engaged, that their work is incredibly difficult material, and that in order for the audience to get it – which is not necessarily to engage it critically – the artists must speak.” The 1993 Whitney Biennial was benchmark for flagging certain art, as different and demanding.

Not all art gets so marked or commented, but there is a tendency in mainstream contemporary museum culture to flag that which is perceived as belonging to some other context than the “average” museum visitor, thus requiring explanation, social context, politicization, and / or justification for being exhibited and engaged. Institutional framing can be implemented with a light touch or heavy-handedly. As American museums have sought to counter their elitist reputations and popularize in the wake of dramatically restricted public funding since 1989 the use of extended explanatory labels and didactic wall texts has become widespread, not only to mark “difficult” work but to provide historical information and artists’ biography, presumably as points of access for audiences. Nonetheless, some art is regarded as sacrosanct, for instance the primary collection of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, is allowed to “speak for itself,” and I have yet to come across a didactic treatment of Robert Ryman’s paintings or any other “blue chip” artist or “modern master.” The authority of such works is historically established and considered to be self-evident. Their status is such that marking or interfering with them at their site of display, i.e. with extended label explanation or an artist statement, would seem, from an institutional standpoint, ludicrous. (Although some uninitiated visitors might welcome supplementary information on Ryman’s work for example.) Just as explicit institutional framing evidenced in Sussman’s Biennial impinges the works, this stealthy manner of institutional framing “masterpieces” as self-evident and unmarkable does so as well.
Butler’s decision not to didactically commentate the exhibited work in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* seemed refreshing in so far as the work was not subjected to running narrative or overlay in the show after the initial introductory wall, but also in staking out the question of interpretation in curatorial practice. Withholding narrated context effectively made a case for the works themselves embodying histories and contexts. And it reclaims that idea from being interpreted as “conservative.” By extension, a case is made for the exhibition as an embodiment of overlapping contexts that by design make clarifications possible. My positive reaction to the lack of didactic framing is special to an interest in the topic itself. Probably most visitors did not ponder the absence of explanation but simply viewed the show as they might any other exhibition, meaning more or less equal – no doubt a point Butler intended to make.

Curatorial interpretation and institutional framing intersect with larger issues of art literacy and legibility. I suspect some viewers are grateful for extra information and others find it interfering. To say viewers *should* have unfettered experiences of work leans toward advocating an ideal engagement with art, which is not a case I want to make. I do not mean to construe prescription from either Butler’s or Sussman’s strategies but to draw attention to specific poles of the dynamic relations between art, exhibition pedagogic practice and didactic trends, in relation to work that has been historically excluded and discriminated against by curatorial and institutional practice.

Formats and modes have histories of development and function but are not in themselves conservative or radical. Pedagogical contextualization, interpretation, and “marking,” are neither monolithic nor synonymous – interpretive operations are contingent on particular purpose and setting. I have mostly considered bringing contextual information into an exhibition a radical intervention that “rescued” work from the ubiquity of “autonomous” orientation and generic modernist-style treatment. Such strategy is double-edged: aggressive illumination opens up and constrains simultaneously. There is no stable solution: interpretation and presentation are contingent on circumstances.
Remaining open and flexible and present to possibility in some sense necessitates being anti-method. Method is defended as pragmatic, “you can’t reinvent the wheel every time.” Constantly changing methods potentially risks short-circuiting the possibility for deepening within the usage of a particular method. In my practice, I veer toward anti-technique, anti-method, and advocate operating case-by-case. However, it is important this not be defined as formula or understood as a guarantee. Anti-method combats the deterioration that adopting a creative or analytic modus operandi can bring about.

Entrenched technique narrows and risks obscuring other ways of thinking and doing. The inability to imagine other ways is imbedded in routinization, including of artistic method. In the interest of countering both auto-alienation and generalizing relationships (for instance, between curator, artist, artwork, institution, viewer), anti-method loosely frames a reflexive approach. Perhaps this is not so much anti-method as rejection of standardizing methods. To some degree this is an issue of temperament and a reflection of long-standing attentiveness to the hazards of habit and stultifying allegiances.

I have discussed the conjuncture of archiving and history writing vis-à-vis Group Material in detail. I have reflected on the arguments for and adjacent to the methods and forms I used to transmit Group Material and formally register its practice in public record. I have articulated the rationale and effects of becoming involved with the book form and publishing as artistic practice. I began this writing with a memory of a representation: “I love exhibitions and I love making them. For many years I began public presentations with similar declaration.”

Coming full circle is immanent. In essence, I’ve backed myself into a corner with only one way out, through the door marked Exhibition. I’ve travelled from exhibition enthusiasm to ambivalence and anxiety, to professional shifts and from closets to histories to divergent archives, from expanding art history to book as exhibition, to testing the archive and beginnings and endings, to historical context and interpretive exhibiting. Machinations of method and snapshots of remembered exhibition exuberance contour the trail.
Looking Back

To synopsize the route I have taken in exhibition practice vis-à-vis interpretative and contextualizing modes so far: beginning in Group Material, whose agenda was to overtly fuse aesthetic and sociopolitical interests and challenge what we considered to be the false neutrality of the prevalent modes of circulation, my perspective was antagonistic to the notion of art as self-evident and its reverent handling, which I regarded as elitist.

Group Material regarded exhibition as its medium, and conceived exhibition as a decentralized forum that, in the abstract, diagrams a multiplicity of perspectives, and in the particular, articulates a specified thematic or thematic universe. The formats used by the group (timelines, salon-style installations, roundtables, town meetings, democracy walls, advert distribution networks) reflected collaboration, collectivity, social process, and cultural democracy, which were the group’s fundamental values. Every object or element within a Group Material installation was contextualized by its proximate
relations to other works or artifacts, creating crossfire of meaning and interpretation by design. Projects were all site or context dependent. In contrast with the more prevalent conceptions of art as autonomous and the use of white cube space and modernist-style installation, Group Material’s methods had a jolting effect.

However working in the group was not like belonging to a political party. Throughout those years I was also an active and diverse viewer and had strong dialogues with a number of artist friends involved in object-making practices, and who believed in the ability of their work to speak for itself in exhibitions. In other words, that meaning is in the work and need not be unlocked, supplied, or created by relations to information, social context, other art, material, thematic, etc.

When Group Material ended, and I continued to work with exhibition as medium, I embraced the challenge of bringing contextualizing information into proximity with artworks, in order to historicize artistic production. My independent exhibition making since has been primarily concerned with animating specific models of cultural production I am studying, and making their generative contexts visible as an integral dimension; in effect historicizing them. This involves thinking and working through the translation and enactment (through presentation) of research in exhibition form, and taking up methods of materialization in direct dialogue with what is to be shown.

Exhibition space had traditionally been considered aesthetic domain (Sontag’s wish?), and contextualizing information has likewise been relegated to the space of the publication. *Power Up: Sister Corita and Donald Moffett, Interlocking*, UCLA Hammer Museum, 2000, is a good example of how I sought to challenge that division between “exhibition” and “publication,” and “aesthetics” and “information” in exhibition practice. This was accomplished by integrating ephemeral materials and information gathered during my research process that deepened my understanding of the artists, their practices, and the periods in which their works were made, into the exhibition itself. This was done in a visually engaging way using presentational devices that enlivened and aimed to appropriately contextualize material rather than render it rarified. By design, *Power Up*
was emphasized as a functional arena. Three-dimensional fixtures extended the content of the show from the walls into the open space of the room. These structures were ascribed with multiple functions – at once pedestals, platforms, seating, furnishings, sculptural elements, and display surfaces for presenting ephemeral material including photographs, publications, magazines, and quotations of the artists. (An interesting intersection with Sussman’s pedagogic policy for the 1993 Whitney Biennial. Why do I see my method as valid and Sussman’s as running unfortunate interference? Were the strategies used in Power Up any less intrusive or aggressive? ) In that instance, I was not so much the exhibition’s curator as I was the third artist, whose role included conceptualizing, curating, and determining the material character of the exhibition.

A similar mode of thinking has extended to the installation work I have done with Martin Beck over the past ten years. Together we regard exhibition as a malleable set of spatial, ephemeral, formatting, and display concerns to be discovered and tested in regards to a specific sets of information or materials, and as an interpretive form. Exhibition designs made with Beck (distinct from the installations we author) derive from similar principles, and are concerned with giving form and structure and visuality to constellations of art and artifacts. Our design philosophy has been focused on comprehending the body of material to be shown through research, and by learning through the curator’s eyes in order to understand their relationship to the material and objectives in exhibiting it. We then find ways to spatially, visually, and graphically express key principles and histories relevant to the material, as well as to curatorial purpose. This process does not prescribe visual or conceptual solutions per se – its results can be strong, even totalizing, or moderately visible or even subtle – often strong and subtle solutions intermingle in one design. We create a particular viewing environment tailored to the ideas driving the works and its potential relationship to the present as understood by the curator (historian).

A singular example from my work history: In 2003 I was commissioned to make a permanent public work for a newly renovated humanities building at Queens College, City University of New York (CUNY). The cross-disciplinary, multi-use character of Powdemaker Hall, and the democratic educational orientation of the school at large, forged a compelling context, leading me into the work of key thinkers and practitioners involved with democratic ideals in education and radical pedagogy, including Paulo Freire, John Dewey, Ira Schor, and bell hooks. I decided to extend and rethink the custom of educational institutions (and courthouses) that proclaim a maxim at their entrances with a single motto, or inspirational quote, by constructing a dialogue of written extracts to be distributed throughout the building. The lengthy research process involved identifying provocatively open-ended extracts, as opposed to sloganistic ones, and curating them into a pairings and the overall dialogue. (Each entrance / exit pairs quotes: a quotation installed inside and one on a proximate exterior wall.) The final twelve quotations, *Points of Entry*, 2003, were fabricated in stainless steel using the same signage mode seen elsewhere on campus so they would appear to be part of the institution. The quotes are distributed at key entrances and exits of the building. In essence *Points of Entry* is an exhibition of textual artifacts. (The books the extracts come from, as well as all the books I researched from, were put in the library for people who want to read further.) By way of example, these two quotes now flank the interior main entrance of Powdemaker Hall:

> Education for domestication is an act of transferring “knowledge,” whereas education for freedom is an act of knowledge and a process of transforming action that should be exercised on reality.

—Paulo Freire

> Thought is no longer theoretical. As soon as it functions it offends or reconciles, attracts or repels, breaks, dissociates, unites or reunites; it cannot help but liberate and enslave.

—Michel Foucault
This seems to me a worthwhile example in my exhibition work history of a somewhat different approach. Although it is interpretive through selection, juxtaposition, inclusion, and presentation, the textual artifacts are nonetheless permitted to speak for themselves. The extracts function as points of entry to a reservoir of larger discourse and individual authors, similarly to *Show and Tell*’s chronicle and archive. In this sense, *Points of Entry* is “unfinished.” An aspect of the project that remains promising is the combination of exhibiting research and arousing further research in the process.

Julie Ault, *Points of Entry*, 2003, Queens College, City University of New York, [quote: Michael Apple]
The modes of authoring exhibitions described above overlap substantially along lines of method (and anti-method), including the intermingling of art, artifact, and information. Taking stock, it is clear that I have primarily developed highly interpretive modes, whether by producing a contextualizing environment, or by thematicizing art and artifact, or by putting work in strong juxtapositions, or by employing information and ephemeral material as raw material, which is then transformed into “my” or “our work.”

It is difficult to form a present judgment on these ways of working as models, because from my perspective, exhibitions are manifestations of complex and dialogic research processes. The research subject terrain is typically tangled in process as it expands and contracts, goes awry, spirals out of control, and distills. Resultant exhibitions are temporary materializations of long-term investigations, but unlike the shape shifting lead-up, they freeze the configuration of ideas and methods and material, as it is understood at
that moment. In this way exhibitions are snapshots of process, perhaps even contrived endpoints to punctuate or frame a period of research.

Much of my exhibition work has resulted in dynamic and somewhat dense and layered designed environments that create specific contexts; a threshold is crossed on entering. They are objectifications of process. From today’s perspective my past exhibitions appear somewhat heavy handed. However, I am loyal to them in so far as they have been effective laboratories for animating ideas and convictions, and were seemingly effective broadcasts. Their visual flavor and attention to setting the stage for a particular body of material, distinguished them from prevalent presentational techniques, and by contrast rendered more common “neutral” modes visible. Whatever their focus, these exhibitions sought to faithfully represent and to generate affinity, goals I identified for Show and Tell and for previous books as well.

It would be interesting to work anew with the same bodies of material to test other ways of transmission, in order to learn to what degree the modes I have outlined gained contour and traction from their time.

The information-heavy “For Interpretation” approach I have variously employed had the goal of bringing ancillary or ephemeral illuminating information into the space of an exhibition during periods when presentation of art tended more towards excluding information and reverentially privileging art. The cultural tide of exhibition and museum culture previously discussed, and the “too much information” character of current technologically proliferating culture, gives shape to a different cultural environment, which requires being taken into account in relation to any current exhibitory proposition.

So where is the material evidence of my ambivalence over mediating art in exhibition practice? There is not much, other than that making decisions which impact directly on the possible readings of work have appeared more weighted to me in recent years, and I tend toward more subtle solutions than in the past. I have been waiting, in principle, for a presentational occasion that conceptually necessitates refraining from overt mediation.
Ever Ephemeral: Remembering and Forgetting in the Archive, is a test site in which to address and analyze these issues anew.

Situating Research, Exhibition as Research

Ever Ephemeral picks up on developing ways to share research with viewers and readers. The exhibition extends the curatorial thread running throughout my work history, but it does not continue the “exhibition as medium” theme in the same embodied way as in past practice. Ever Ephemeral will inhabit two proximate Malmö venues, Signal and the Inter Arts Center; its diffusion intends to infuse viewers’ experiences with recollection as well as counteract the “installation threshold” tendency, which can totalize. The situation provides the opportunity to step back from interpretive presentation and overt contextualization, and to judiciously withhold and resist “marking” the works, so that they may perform within an orchestrated arrangement without overt interference.

Ever Ephemeral is conceived as a space to visually and conceptually reference and continue my inquiry process. The works lay open relationships between archiving, memory, and historical representation, and speak to questions that propelled the investigation: what tense is the archive? How can art give history form? How to effectively call history writing into question while writing history – and to topics including, the plasticity of history, consequences of archiving and unarchiving, and understandings of chronology and counter-chronology.

Interchange with other artists continues to be essential nourishment for the evolution of my practice. The inclusions denote specific dialogues, which have contoured and shed light on the research arena. Here, works stand for themselves, for influential dialogues, and for practices, essentially representing a dialogue of inquiries.

How does curatorial voice make itself known? Does it intervene on the works or integrate with them? Using what modes? And in what tense? To what degree is curatorial
introduction, for instance, in the form of a wall text, redundant to an exhibition, or alternatively, additive as orientation? The challenge is to balance competing agendas of refraining and revealing: to what extent can I reveal and disclose points of entry and activate questions and considerations the artists and works generated in my thinking, without taking over or talking over? Are objectives and curatorial subjectivity sufficiently imbedded in the exhibition or is another layer of communication required or beneficial?

While my exhibition making curatorial voice has been declarative in the past, here it is invested with discretion, in search of a light touch. Trusting the works’ power to show themselves and interact, and trusting the facility of exhibition to infer connections rather than declare them, so they might be discovered. (Are all exhibitions research environments?)

Drawing lines between works using spatial means, visual means, setting angles and positions, constructing parallels and intersections. As was the case with Show and Tell, “Interpretation is suffused in every moment of searching, finding, curating, editing, assigning relevance, and connecting dots between documents that constitutes research, including not leastly, presenting, or making present.”

The curatorial inclusion of texts and publications in Ever Ephemeral as “works” organizes the exhibition as a space for reading and viewing to intermingle. Some textual work is integral to what is shown, such as the booklet by Alejandro Cesarco that goes with his projection work, “Present Memory.” The publications by Roni Horn are her work in the show. I have chosen to show Horn’s book works over wall works to highlight the union of photographic investigation and reading that the artist has innovated and evolved. Large-scale visual works that are primarily textual, by Danh Vo and by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, encompass and anchor each exhibition space. Texts I have written speak to the included film by James Benning, and to proceeding from and contributing to the archive, via Horn, Gonzalez-Torres, and Group Material.
Inspired by “A Narrative Table of Contents” that John McPhee placed before the conventional table of contents in his part travelogue, part geological study, *Annals of the Former World*, I plan to mimic the manner in which McPhee circuitously and subjectively accounts for the body of material that follows. “A Narrative Table of Contents” foregrounds the author’s unwieldy research itinerary in contrast to tying it all up chronologically. How does one thing lead to another in research process? By purpose and happenstance with unexpected turns and connections throughout.

I will write my “Narrative Table of Contents” for *Ever Ephemeral* during the period of installation, as the exhibition becomes concrete. Its precise form and how it will be manifest in the exhibition is not yet determined, and in this case of continuation of research, will necessarily be articulated as the arrangement of works and artifacts comes into focus as an exhibition. A formal checklist, akin to the conventional table of contents that follows McPhee’s narrative in *Annals of the Former World*, will be part two of the table of contents. This material uses the vocabulary of table of contents as opposed to checklist or exhibition ingredients to overlay the “exhibition” with “publication.”

Chronology is raw material that gets inspected, analyzed, reorganized, and played with in several works in the show. The tension between chronology and counter-chronology captions the Inter Arts Center gallery in the form of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “*Untitled (Portrait of Julie Ault)*,” 1991, a dateline text portrait, which, resembling a frieze, is painted directly on adjacent walls at the point where they meet the ceiling. This seemingly poetic run-on of events and dates emblematically tosses personal history in the air, in this case – my personal history. Formative past moments are recollected and strung together, and made to stand in for the foundation of a life. Faithful resemblance happens specifically for the subject and the maker of the portrait. The portrait embodies the dialogue they had about its formulation, the exchange of accounting for oneself, and of memories and self-revelation. On another level this is less a portrait of an individual than a metaphorical template for any life; the work acts as a prompt to consider the structural links between memory and identity. Faithful resemblance is abstracted, inviting everyone into the proposition and into the game – catalyzing self-consideration and recollection.
Gonzalez-Torres proposes the individual as emblematic site of the interdependency of memory and identity and the imbrications of personal and social memory. Ricoeur asks, “Is memory primordially personal or collective? This question is the following: to whom is it legitimate to attribute the pathos corresponding to the reception of memories and the praxis in which the search for memories consists?”

The portrayed subject is a lens to look into and project out from, a compilation of private and public events attached to dates. The dates are not ordered chronologically; time is mixed up. Cause and effect are thrown into narrative disorder, resembling the unruiness of memory and its transgressive relationship to time. How does one narrate himself? How does one see herself? How does one represent herself? The art of memory. Memory Work. Memory as history.

In a gallery room – in the piece – and hereby meaning the construction presented to us – its deconstruction is always, already actively inherent. However the foundation of this deconstruction relies on the meaning that this order produces rather than that it relies on the order itself.

By using the piece as an index, and by combining it with our knowledge and memory, we no longer have to read the piece sequentially to get to this meaning.

By memory work we shift perspective and can now navigate in the chronology the same way one shifts gear in a car with manual transmission. We can now go directly to the platforms of meaning.

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1 This applies not only to art making but to any kind of representation. In general the motivation for this investigation is a concern for the mechanisms behind representation. How do they work – and why do they often produce a dual reading of the mechanisms behind the represented and the represented itself - Often to the point that the represented presents itself as autonomous. I want to connect the represented with the mechanisms producing it. I want to locate that space within the space of the presented.

2 This new perspective reveals the plot of the chronology – so to speak. From this perspective the piece is not an autonomous universalizing final stage, but instead a part of a process. Once this relation becomes clear, the real “virtuous act” for the viewer to witness is how the artist navigates on this cultural map by exporting material from a subjective sphere (the chronology) into a public (the exhibition).
existing in the chronology – generated either by the artist, by history – or
by reflections in the viewer’s own subjectivity.¹⁶⁶

Rasmus Røhling picks up “the plot of chronology” in Self-Titled, 2008¹⁶⁷ (version with
footnotes quoted above), a three-pronged video installation and text that sprang from
analyzing the structure of representation and the problematic of linear modeling in
relation to “the artist’s chronology” – the archive. Self-Titled diagrams the work of art as
indexical representative of the artist’s larger body of work, organized by time in the form
of chronology. The artist establishes his chronological history in order that it is
perpetually accessible by himself and others (viewers). Once he is grounded in
chronology, the artist is at liberty methodologically and formally, free to shape shift and
transcend his own time. (This echoes the impetus of establishing the history of Group
Material in Show and Tell in order to conserve and release simultaneously.) Røhling
analyses the province of the artist’s chronology, which, populated by works that signify
the terrain – or “portals,” functionalizes timeline as a navigation tool, similarly to the
paradoxical capacity of the archive to provide containment and liberation simultaneously.

Knowing this, we are able to apply a more modular quality to the editorial
mechanism of pulling specific points from the chronology into the piece.

By combining the memory’s nonlinear way of navigating with conventions of
formality – we are able to detach particular points from the chronology and bring
these into the piece – without it affecting the surround cells.¹⁶⁸

Discussion with Røhling was very fruitful during the initial period of figuring out how to
approach the Group Material archiving endeavor – what was at stake, and the negotiation
of the hazards of subjecting the history of Group Material to chronicle format and to the
centralizing tendency of the book form. (To stimulate our dialogue we read Archive
Fever, and watched the documentary on Derrida, Kirby Dick, Amy Ziering [dirs], 2002,
and one on James Benning, Circling the Image, Reinhard Wulf [dir], 2003, among other
material.) Just as our exchange filters through the methods of Show and Tell, Self-Titled
springs from shared research ground. The dialogue is represented by the reverberation of
Instituting Group Material is represented in *Ever Ephemeral* by a single artifact borrowed from the Group Material Archive, the February 16, 1987 issue of *People* magazine, “Liberace 1919–1987.” For me, this artifact, which was previously exhibited in *AIDS Timeline*, speaks volumes as a reference to the AIDS crisis and symbol of the turning points in the group’s historical consciousness as well as in mine. Time frame is invoked by the dates of Liberace’s life; date of birth and date of death pointing to cycles of presence and disappearance, beginning and ending that underscore the impetus of archiving. Here, the magazine is the synecdochic “portal” into Group Material, and by extension, the time period of its activity. This past publication will be shown (on the wall) in relation with copies of the current archiving publications on Group Material, *Show and Tell* and *AIDS Timeline*, as well as the draft version of the finding aid for the Group Material Archive that is soon to be published online as the collection is made public. The formal processing of the archive is just now completed, three years after the material was transferred to NYU.

Another substantive dialogue across practice brought to bear here is with the artist Roni Horn. (I discussed our exchange around researching her journals to compose a personal history for her at length in part one of this writing.) The ephemeral nature of memory and the mutability of identity are continual themes in Horn’s work. By way of example, *This is Me, This is You*, 1999–2000, marked the threshold of Roni Horn’s retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, entitled *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, 2009. The grid of forty-eight photographs of the artist’s niece Georgia taken over two years candidly charts Georgia’s range of expression, mood, and style as she vamps freely for her aunt. But this is only half of the work. A matching framework of twin shots made two or three seconds after the initial ones was installed two floors below at the same entrance position. Separation is structured into this work. Horn never brings the two sections together in one line of vision, but strategically mounts them on different planes – around the corner from one another or on facing walls, thus teasing our recollection. The
correlating pictures in each half of the work make a similar impression, but we notice slight differences that activate our memory – the girl moved her arm, tilted her head, opened her mouth, or widened her smile. *This is Me, This is You* performs several of Horn’s essential themes – doubling, differentiation, and the dynamic process of identity. A selection of the artists’ bookworks using photography to explore the continuous process of becoming, including *This is Me, This is You*, are planned for *Ever Ephemeral*.  

Specific research into rationales for archiving and “unarchiving” continues in the project of gathering and temporarily reuniting a set of vintage “optimistic” clocks designed by George Nelson and collected by Felix Gonzalez-Torres during the last years of his life. After the artist’s death at age 38 in 1996, I, along with his friend and gallerist, Andrea Rosen, were responsible for taking care of his personal possessions, among which were more than a dozen clocks designed by George Nelson in the 1950s, as well as hundreds of plastic toy figures collected by the artist, and his books. We distributed the objects among Gonzalez-Torres’s intimates, friends, and colleagues. I have rejoined the clocks as a means for investigating the implications of dispersal vis-à-vis memory as opposed to archiving, and in effect, to detour them temporarily, so that their itinerary and narratives will be registered publically. This project additionally involves Rosen and I examining our previous decision anew, in light of “archive consciousness.” I staged a conversation to this effect from which an edited version has been derived to accompany the sole public exposure of the “clock collective.” (The conversation is at the end of this essay.)

In the Signal space, Alejandro Cesarco, in *Present Memory*, 2010, further explores the overlapping of tense and the tenses of memory. *Present memory* is a portrait of the artist’s father, precipitated by his father’s diagnosis with cancer, and made in anticipation of his eventual absence. The work uses film and video as narrative devices that denote time and memory. In its first iteration, the work was repeated at the same spot on different floors of a building. In this way recollection was built into its viewing. Cesarco’s film is accompanied by text in the form of a booklet, which is a compilation of quoted extracts about nostalgia, mortality, absence, and memory.
*Present Memory* investigates the complex mental operations in such explicit foreknowledge – predicting and resisting thoughts of death and future absence. Cesarco mediates their shared awareness through visually representing the convergence of tenses. He suggests the conceptual terrain using simple operations, first filming his father in his office (he was a doctor), then recording him a second time using video, with the film projected behind / in front of / onto him. There is no dialogue. *Present Memory* embodies silence and gap metaphorically.

Several elements in *Ever Ephemeral* require both applying and furthering my research into archiving, memory, and historical representation. Across the board, curatorial decisions involve both philosophic and pragmatic dimensions. For instance, Cesarco’s *Present Memory* includes a text. On occasion Cesarco has produced small booklets, which he designs, to accompany his film installations. Typically they are composed of a text and a single emblematic image reproduced on the cover. We are producing a booklet for this showing of *Present Memory*. Cesarco and I share an ongoing work dialogue that relates to our respective forays into archiving, concepts of memory and history, and concepts of temporality. Cesarco also has a strong relationship to Gonzalez-Torres’s work and recently acted as publisher for the book, *A Selection of Snapshots Taken by Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, 2010, for which I lent several snapshots I received from the artist, and, which, incidentally, includes a photograph of some of Gonzalez-Torres’s clocks in situ in his apartment.

Cesarco suggested fashioning the conversation between Rosen and myself about the clock collection into a booklet, in keeping with the character and design he employs, so we might link the motivations of *Present Memory* and the reunion of clocks, and visibly connect the them along lines of mourning, emotional memory, and renewal. The critical poetic reflections that compose his booklet are extended by the conversation in the second booklet, and vice versa. Together they speak to the tense of the archive.

In 2008 Danh Vo asked me to write for a catalogue that would accompany his 2009 exhibition, *Where the Lions Are*, at Kunsthalle Basel. Rather than directly interpret or
describe Vo’s “history-driven” practice, which in this case included, among other things, the procurement of highly symbolic artifacts – the chandeliers from the Hotel Majestic ballroom in Paris that were “witness” to the 1973 Paris Peace Accords between North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the U.S, I selected and linked together five texts that reflect Vo’s thinking, methods, and outlook, and titled the sequence, “Death Sentence.” The curated essays include, for example, “The Dead Astronaut” written by J.G. Ballard in 1968, connected to the artist by analogy. In Ballard’s dark tale the widow and best friend of astronaut Robert Hamilton, who, dead in his capsule, has been orbiting the earth for twenty years, wait in a remote location for the capsule’s descent to earth. When it does, they race alongside rogue relic hunters and covert military personnel to win his remains, which in the end contain poisonous radiation levels. The short story denotes the revenge of “progress” in the form of deadly artifacts falling to earth. (When reading it I envisioned Vo as a kind of relic scavenger.)

Vo’s subsequent work included here, Death Sentence, translates the sequence of texts into a visual form. The artist regarded the configuration not only as a contribution to his catalog that ends there, but as starting point of information and ideas to work with over time. The work mimics the format of the type of labeling system familiar to natural history and ethnographic museums that commonly runs underneath wall-mounted vitrines to provide historical data about each artifact displayed. Vo’s version displays the curated texts transcribed by hand by his father, who does not speak English or French – the languages of the texts.

Death Sentence is planned for proximity in Ever Ephemeral with the collection of clocks so that they might cross-comment on one another and further open up and refract relationships between artifacts, interpretation, individual history, and collective memory.

The plasticity of history and chronology resurfaces in relation to the recollected clocks in the Signal exhibition with James Benning’s 16mm film Casting a glance, 2007. Casting a glance is a close meditation on Robert Smithson’s Spiral Jetty consisting of seventy-eight one-minute shots filmed between 2005 and 2007. The film fictionalizes a
chronicle of change in the Jetty’s conditions and appearance, which in the filmmaker’s words “maps the Jetty back onto its 37-year history.”

Ranging from April 30, 1970 to May 15, 2007, dates are interspersed with images to highlight the parallel between water levels Benning encountered on his visits to the Jetty, and the shifting level of the Great Salt Lake, which is responsible for the Jetty’s alternating baring and secretion. The water level of the Great Salt Lake fluctuates dramatically due to climate change and seasonal shifts. The water level rises in spring due to mountain runoff and recedes in summer when extensive sun exposure causes the rate of evaporation to exceed inflow and rainfall. Because of the exceptionally shallow nature of the lake, even modest changes in level can enlarge its area, thereby swallowing the Jetty. Spiral Jetty first went underwater in 1973, the year of Smithson’s death, and it did not reemerge, except sporadically, until 2002. Due to drought, the Jetty has been mostly visible since 2002.

When Benning visited on May 15, 2005, to begin filming, he coincidently found the water level was at 4195.6 feet, exactly the same as when Smithson made the piece in 1970. While reviewing water level notes from his trips about a year later, he realized he could mimic the conditions of earlier times with matching levels, and decided to superimpose the Jetty’s history onto his images.

Benning’s casting a glance extends the game of tag in Ever Ephemeral across a constellation of works and investigations into the relationships between chronology, history, memory, and identity – to include “natural artifact” as measure of temporality.

The Simultaneity of Time

The double operation of recollection of memory and object – their coproduction in fact, is the fertile ground of this entire research. The clock collection project is as emblematic as
the Group Material archive and *Show and Tell*. What will happen when the clocks are altogether in public for the first time ever, exposed by the arc of the conversation, which captions the collection in its state of exhibition? For me they express the irreducible simultaneity of past and present, and clocks are meant to keep ticking, so future is also implied. For others they may be just clocks – artifacts that do not speak beyond their physical fact.

The works that constitute *Ever Ephemeral* embody symbolic tensions that drive the overall research, between past tense and present tense, between remembering and forgetting, between closure and exposure, continuance and completion, and between history for living and the continuity of transience, tensions that unfold in the archive.
Julie Ault: Last night I read this letter that Felix sent to you in 1993, which at the time accompanied the gift of a clock. Until I read it, I had not consciously been thinking about the emotional content of reassembling the group of clocks. I’ve been mostly focused on the practicalities. The letter begins, “This is not a clock. It’s more than just a machine that marks time,” and ends, “To more time.” It threw me into an emotional state, which was not how I’d planned to begin our conversation.

One interpretation of Felix collecting “optimistic clocks” the last couple years of his life is that he was buying time. But I never liked that explanation, in part because it doesn’t reconcile with Felix as I knew him. Perhaps the clocks were not amulets so much as they were beautiful, tough objects that fed his process of working through the complex relationships to time, which the conditions he was living in, and with, brought forward. Perhaps the clocks were about facing time. Diagramming a situation of no escape. You can’t ignore time when you have a dozen clocks on the wall.

What led me to regather the clocks was the desire to see them together again, and generate an occasion to recollect our memories of thinking through what to do with Felix’s things when he died, specifically his books, the clocks, and the toys he collected. I’d like to revisit our decisions to disperse those things as we did and reflect on how they sit with us fifteen years later. There is also a desire to symbolically stage a reunion of community that was united around Felix and is now diffused, although particular bonds remain active.

Andrea Rosen: The movement between emotionality and objectivity you are talking about is a really essential part of this dialogue, because these positions were always fused in Felix’s work. The work is a guiding force, or example, in that it imbues something with one’s own personal emotionality but at the same time allows it to be stripped of anything personal in order that it might have some greater existence.
I’m remembering how museum curators would ask Felix, “Do you mind if we don’t allow people to take sheets of paper from the stack during the opening?” and he’d say, “No, I don’t mind,” and I’d say, “But Felix, why did you agree to that when dispersal is at the essence of what you believe and what the work is about?” Referring to institutions, he explained how you have to allow for the nature of what things are. Then, there was a situation when the stacks were shown at a gallery, and the gallery had hired people to roll up sheets from the stacks and give them out at the opening. At that point Felix said he actually hated seeing people take them at openings. Felix maintained the works no longer belonged to him, and these kinds of shifts and ambiguity helped me realize that the work can only really transcend itself through other people.

I think we used Felix as our example when we made those decisions about his things, which is to say, it’s not that the clocks weren’t imbued with meaning, it’s not that you can’t read them as being about holding onto time, it’s not that anyone shouldn’t have considered them precious or representational. But Felix set up an agenda. No matter how essentially private or however much something is saturated with emotional content the only thing you can do for that to continue is to give it up. Felix set an agenda for us.

JA: We proceeded with dispersal in step with his principles, but it amazes me that we never talked about it in those terms. My memory of the period is vague, as is my recollection of the physicality of the experience and whether we dismantled his apartment over a few days or a few weeks. Although I don’t recall the contour of our discussion I am reasonably certain that we didn’t explicitly address what should happen with his things in analytic terms. I don’t think we even considered keeping the toys he’d amassed, or the clocks, or even his library together, or talked about any of these being institutionalized in the form of an archive. At that moment his things were somewhere between life and becoming artifact. Your reading of the situation mirrors mine, that the resolution happened organically, that it was the only thing to do that made sense.
AR: Felix was not didactic, he didn’t say this is what my work is about, or this is what I want you to do, but he trained us in a way of thinking. He exposed a realm of possibility.

JA: I’m hoping to activate my memory through tapping into yours. Do you know when Felix started getting the Nelson clocks, or recall any fragments of discussions about them, or being with him when he found a clock? I thought he collected clocks for about two years before he died, but the letter he sent you was written in February 1993, indicating it must have been at least three years.

AR: There had to have been a time when he could only start affording such things, but I think that he had one clock that began it. I would guess, although I don’t know why, that it was the multicolored one.

JA: I also recall it was one of the atomic clocks. I remember him being very taken with those around the same time that he got excited about Sputnik lamps, which were also symbolic period objects alluding to the paradox of progress.

AR: His fascination was with all George Nelson things—it was chairs and furniture—and probably started less with the consciousness of a clock and more with awareness of Nelson’s design. The letter is 1993, so he must have already been collecting them well before, because otherwise he would not have been giving one to me.

JA: It seems to me it was probably only a couple months before that he began. The fact that he gave you one, and wrote about optimistic design in the letter indicates a newfound pleasure that he wanted to share. He wouldn’t have bought a lot of clocks already and then decided to give you one. I suspect he wanted to share the excitement he felt immediately.

AR: It’s such a condensed time period. One could ask what difference does it make whether it was 1993 or 1994 or 1995; they’re very close together. But between them there was a huge expanse of time in terms of what happened in Felix’s life. Post Ross’s death
there were a number of relationships, exhibitions, and so much progression. I’m surprised how finite his letter sounds, how much it has to do with a feeling of him already being at the end.

JA: That’s certainly what unleashed my emotions reading it—the sense of prediction, fate, a rehearsal of saying goodbye. Even though he probably didn’t start getting the clocks until much later, I consider their time frame to be January 1991, when Ross died, and January 1996, when Felix died. The letter is midway, at an incredibly complicated period.

If you were in the situation today that we were in 1996 would you do the same? I’ve felt some regret about scattering Felix’s books, but I don’t know if it’s legitimate.

AR: My only major concern is about how we archived our choices. I think there was hastiness in treating the recording of the books the same way we did other things; thinking that we only needed to write down “book” or “three books” and who they were given to.

JA: You and I kept a lot of books, though I’ve since given some away. And we gave some of his close friends books that related to their shared histories and interests. Some choices were very specific, for instance we sent Felix’s dog-eared copy of *Remaking History* to Barbara Kruger because she edited it, thinking she would appreciate his margin notes and use. But I think we had a different relationship to the clocks and saw them as more elevated than anything else because of their symbolic content, especially at that moment.

AR: Felix chose to amass the clocks into a collection, which was different than selecting a certain chair, for instance. There was something about the collectiveness. At Felix’s memorial Mario Nunez said everyone in this room is like a part of a library and we’re all responsible for remembering different chapters—together we make up this library that is
Felix. I believe we had dispersed the objects prior to that, but I remember how profound that was to me.

We never felt that his objects should stay together or that we were sacrificing them to fulfill the agenda of distribution. Keeping Felix’s collected toys together would have been a strange misplaced relationship of trying to hold onto something that didn’t exist. There was also the acknowledgement that if you have two of the toys for instance, you have the essence as if you had all of them, whereas holding onto all of them would express a false sense of possession of something else.

JA: One reason we didn’t want to keep these things together reflects that Felix felt one could never own or depend on anything; you have to let go. Archiving would have created illusions of permanence and coherence that seemed contrary to his philosophy. I have a different consciousness now about archiving. I wouldn’t change our decisions, but I think if we were in the situation now we would discuss whether or not to keep his books together. Were they part of his papers?

AR: I guess they were a slightly gray area. We thought about people who would want something Felix used and wrote in, something referring to his intellect. Something that touched on work and not only the light side. There’s also the fact that a book with margin notes has Felix’s hand in it. Nothing else left in his apartment had his hand in it like that. I think it’s worthwhile to go back and contact everyone we gave a book to, and ask them what book it was and what edition, and to photograph the covers. Beyond that I don’t regret not having those tangible things. It’s impossible to interpret why Felix underlined a certain passage in a book. And I’m skeptical when a curator says, “I want to look at Felix’s library, I want to look at every single thing he underlined, and I want to read every note he ever wrote.” But what happens if this thing were all together? I would be happy to provide someone with a list of every book that was in Felix’s library and leave it at that. But if I had every one of those books, would I want people to look at them?
JA: But eventually you won’t be around. The books contain notes he wrote for himself; they are precious like diaries and work journals. Even an enigmatic notation in a book becomes precious to a researcher.

AR: But there’s an assumption that he read each book equally or with equal intention, and in fact we don’t know when he read them or with what intentions or what order, or whether he underlined for a class or for something else.

JA: On one hand there are no assumptions that are legitimate, but on the other all assumptions are legitimate—maybe this is intrinsic to both research and historical representation. Someone tries to find the puzzle pieces and put them together in order to form a picture for him or herself.

AR: Felix did not want the picture to be about him. It’s the work. Whatever he digested from readings that margin notes might reflect went into the work. He didn’t want the subject to be him or him personally. I really believe in his desire to keep the separation between what went on with the work and him as a person.

JA: As you know, when I was working on the book on Felix’s work I also wanted to read and see everything, and did, but I did not write explicitly about Felix’s work or reveal inside information about his process. For me, looking at everything I can get my hands on during research has to do with absorbing sensibility, tone, inference, and various content, ideas, and angles—all stimulating the process, but it does not imply a one-to-one relationship with portrayal. There’s a difference between taking it all in and what you do with it.

I don’t think that we sufficiently considered the difference between books and the other collections like toys and clocks. A library is accumulated over time and reflects periods in one’s life and growth. It’s eclectic. It’s not the same as comprehensively collecting certain kinds of toys or Nelson designs. And because it shows the pathways and idiosyncrasies of one’s thinking processes it’s illuminating to researchers. Dispersing
books is somewhat radical, because it goes against conservation and the notion that if you keep annotated books together you can apprehend a person’s intellectual itinerary. Such a collection or archive would support that idea, which many people probably do not regard with skepticism but consider being a sound method. And to some degree the logic makes sense: if I read and see everything and consult every image and piece of information possible then I am going to get to a deeper understanding of the thinking and process and conditions of the person I’m studying. I subscribe to this too but also stand by the conclusion of not objectifying Felix’s reading through archiving the books.

AR: The work needs to stand on its own. Felix used those books for him to make the work. And the work is what exists. The work can only be open for interpretation. Felix was very poignant about this to me; the work needed to stand on its own. The idea that his books should be disseminated came from this root, and maybe over however many years it is since Felix died, we’ve lost that part of how rigorous he was about that.

JA: There is great value in archiving. At the same time archive authority has to be taken with a grain of salt; if they had been archived, the books would apparently say, this is what Felix was reading. But he was also reading other things that didn’t get saved. We don’t know the scope of what he read and if and to what degree anything he read or saw influenced his thinking and his work. Anyone who approaches the archive and tries to get a handle on a subject must to some degree understand the ambiguity of what’s encountered within, and understand archives are partial and sometimes random.

If we had chosen to keep the books together then I would have made a case for the clocks being archived too; they are potentially as important as the books. There is the work, and then there is everything else. There are lines that can be drawn, but I don’t think it is only his books that speak to his intellectual exchange. The clocks do too, and the toys. Everything could.

I’m just beginning to think about what it means to see the clocks together again. They’re really beautiful and compelling, but there’s some sadness about the whole thing, not only
about Felix’s death, but that the community is so different. They represent a specific community as well as a larger context made up of overlapping communities that Felix’s work emerged from that not only changed but eventually disappeared. Addressing the inevitability of dissolution is one of the reasons I wanted to organize this reunion.

AR: That’s the interesting thing about community; it can’t be what you expect. You can’t have an expectation of what all that effort to create community will be. The community of who Felix touched in his lifetime could only be so much and we are not bound together. That’s what’s so interesting about his work. It can’t be insular. If you keep the group the same it only has its limitations. Yet someone can write me a letter that tells how Felix’s work affected him or her that I would never have anticipated.

Out of the toys and books and everything Felix had the clocks are content-wise the closest things to his work. In the end this clock is an object and it doesn’t represent Felix. But this letter is Felix. We can detach ourselves from these objects. They don’t hold Felix. It’s harder for us to think about giving up those things that have his handwriting on them. There’s an assumption that a book Felix read and annotated is Felix more than that clock is Felix.

JA: There’s a continual paradox—“that object is not Felix, but it also is Felix.” And the paradox keeps upping the ante. So those papers of Felix’s that do remain, enter the archive, and become accessible take on tremendous weight.

AR: Yes, those things that exist are disparate and disproportionate, but I feel he specifically chose to keep the things he kept, though in no way is it a complete record. What we’re striving to do is create broader archives so these things have contexts. For instance there’s a picture of a bracelet of the dolphins. We can assume that that picture was not the source but a source for his idea of continuous dolphins. And then there’s a history of the dolphin stack and the decisions made around that work. I’d like to see that information exist in as many files as could potentially be relevant. It is one piece of information in a history of information.
At the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation we are working with the idea of case studies, how decisions were made in Felix’s lifetime and after: Why did this thing happen, how did that next thing happen? Almost no decision that we make is done on speculation or on my assumption. We go back and see how decisions were made, what happened in that exhibition, and in that one. This tracing also becomes part of the archive, as well as any information or oral history that goes into it. A document or element may go into a section about a particular stack piece, and it may go into a segment about stacks in general, and it may go into an archive about a particular exhibition like the Guggenheim show. So the idea is that information exists in many places. To sift through that archive autonomously, as though these are the only things left in Felix’s archive, seems to me to be irrelevant. We take that material and integrate it elsewhere, not the original piece of paper but a copy, so it is in the context of other relevant decisions and those case studies perpetually growing.

JA: Of course there is also the original piece of paper. Where does that live? What you’re saying makes sense, Felix’s work and his thinking and the archival traces don’t synch comfortably with the boundaries and classification system of the archive. There’s also the problem of interpretation, the tendency to articulate one-to-one relations between artwork and source, which is often reductive or just wrong (though in some instances might be accurate). Searching for sources and connecting the dots and creating genealogies happens frequently in art history writing. You’re speaking of an archive based on cross-referencing as a set of possibilities, which is designed with the capacity to generate lots of readings and a context of cross-connecting information to other information rather than confining particular informational artifacts or turning them into specific stories.

AR: It’s like your book on Felix; it’s about contradiction. That piece of information contradicts another, and you’re going to be able to see the contradictions. I’m much more interested in that situation of differences than in, “oh, here it is.” Maybe it is the closest way of letting people experience Felix’s way of thinking; the way he almost trained us to
think; the responsibility to not take something at face value and to be responsible for evolving the information and constantly re-contextualizing.

JA: This letter is a good example. I’m glad I never saw it before, or if I did see it I screened it out. I read yours and Felix’s correspondence years ago, and I feel like I would have paid attention to it, but maybe not, maybe I read it and it had nothing to do with what I was thinking at the moment, and I just didn’t take it in. Of course if you start applying this letter to thinking about the works with two clocks, “Untitled” (Perfect Lovers), well, that’s a valid connection to make but it’s not sure or singular.

This is an exciting challenge, to make such a new kind of archive. At its core Felix’s work requires that all formats for enacting it be tailored or rethought. Tailoring the archive extends from that.

AR: My intention with the archive and foundation is for its format to be a replication of Felix’s intentions. It’s taken years to do that. It has its own ambiguities and open-endedness and it’s not instructive or didactic, it provides a way of thinking that will hopefully guide someone’s strategies of how to make future decisions.

JA: It might take another ten years but I don’t think that matters. It’s not about getting it done fast and simply creating access. You’re charged with the responsibility, and there’s a time when the ideas of how to make information, including that which has been private, accessible in a fitting way, and how to structure it takes as long as it takes.

AR: It’s not even a choice. It has its own organic time frame and it has to unfold as it unfolds. The risk of that is like the urgency of Felix’s letter, that he was in a situation where he felt like we all live with the illusion that we’re going to be around for another however many years.

JA: In the second part of the letter, like in other correspondence from Felix and even in the clocks, there was clarity.
AR: As much as he’s telling me in it to think with certain optimism, you can’t ignore the finiteness of this letter. And the clicking of the clock is way more finite having read this letter, even though it wasn’t his intention.

JA: In only a few sentences in Felix’s letter multiple intentions are expressed. “And then it will always remind you of the good times, the growing times or times of growing, the important time, the urgent time, the beautiful time we had the luck of having together, by chance.” It implies different tenses. That’s one of the things I find so beautiful about the clocks, that they invoke ephemerality and permanence, memory, history, and questions about perception of time. What tense are these objects? What tense is the archive?

(This conversation took place on July 7, 2011 in New York City.)
5 Group Material letter to The Village Voice, (excerpt), April 1985, in O’Neill, p. 36.
6 MoMA’s Bauhaus exhibition omitted the substantial segment devoted to education from the version that took place in Berlin; The Bauhaus in Berlin, 2009, Martin Gropius Building, organized by Bauhaus Archive / Museum of Design Berlin, the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, and the Weimar Classics Foundation in collaboration with MoMA.
7 Since Group Material ended I’ve frequently heard comments like, “I saw a show at the such and such museum that looked like a Group Material show,” which invariably means it used strong color and / or salon style presentation.
8 The use of paradigm here simply refers to pattern or model – the overarching regard for collaboration and working in the field of art that I had been operating with.
9 Letter from Julie Ault to Doug Ashford, December 7, 1996.
I kept all the research material and collected documentation together after the show, and in 2008 donated it to the Downtown Collection at Fales Special Collections, New York University, New York.


Comments delivered at panel, Sister Corita Kent, American Film Institute–Immaculate Heart Community, Los Angeles, March 11, 2007.

Now, a complete database of her prints can be consulted online at www.corita.org/.

Some colleagues, including a Coritaphile even, steered clear of delving deeper into Corita research in so far as it required visiting the Immaculate Heart. They explained that having been raised Catholic, and felt conflicted about Catholicism, psychological blocks inhibited their visiting the IHC.


The brochure made for my initial exhibition with Corita’s work is online at http://www.wadsworthatheneum.org/pdfs/Matrix%20134.pdf. A brochure was made for Power Up at the Hammer as well.

For example see “Somebody had to break the rules,” in springer Bd. III Heft 4 (Winter 1997), and “Building and Unbuilding,” in Mathias Dusini, ed., Covering the Room: 8 Ausstellungsflächen (Salzburg and Vienna: Salzburger Kunstverein and Montage, 1998).

Julie Ault, Martin Beck, “All you need is love: pictures, words and worship by Corita Kent,” Eye 35 / 00, Spring 2000.


I am not saying this happens specifically at the Ludwig or in any other collection or showing, but that the potential is present.

*Sister Corita* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1968). Glascock’s video and several publications by Corita were also included as ancillary material in *Luete wie wir*, where as they were primary ingredients in *Wet and Wild*.


Matthew Buckingham, “Mahheakantuck – Everything Has a Name,” in *October* 120, Spring 2007, p. 179.


Ibid., p. 98.

Having now disclosed these fantasies, some who encounter the Group Material archive may wonder if some particularly juicy or inflammatory documents inadvertently found their way into a fireplace. The final sentences of *Archive Fever* stimulated this thought. “We will always wonder what, in this mal d’ärhive, he [Freud] may have burned. We will always wonder, sharing with compassion in this archive fever, what may have burned of his secret passions, of his correspondence, or of his ‘life.’ Burned without him, without remains and without knowledge. With no possible response, be it spectral or not, short of or beyond a suppression, on the other side of repression, original or secondary, without a name, without the least symptom, and without even an ash.” Ibid., p. 101.


See: www.actupny.org/indexfolder/GranFury1.html.


D. T. Max, “Thomas Staley believes that the best archives have an internal coherence. He conceives of the Ransom collection as a group of ‘nodes,’ a term he has borrowed from ‘Finnegans Wake.’”


This working plan was prepared in September 2007 by Ault, with input from Locks and Røhling.

49 D. T. Max, “Thomas Staley, director of the renowned literary archive The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center located at University of Texas at Austin has coined several maxims about the acquisition of archives, including what he calls Staley’s Law.”

50 Marybeth Nelson, and Hannah Alderfer contributed their remaining files and notes. Some members saved nothing and Karen Ramspacher and Liliana Dones have promised to retrieve material from the periods of their involvement for the archive.

51 Sabrina Locks first mentioned the analogy to “The Wire.”

52 A complex (and beautiful) philosophical treatise on death, the archive, personal history and its methods of telling: Julian Barnes, *Nothing to be Frightened of* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), p. 6.

53 Rasmus Røhling used this term when we were discussing these issues.

54 This section about imagining future use also appears in my essay “Group Material: Case Reopened” in *Show and Tell*, p. 212.


59 Pearce-Moses.

60 Kahle.

61 D. T. Max.

62 Ibid.


64 Steedman, 145–146.

65 Pearce-Moses.

66 Steedman, p. 68.

67 This dream gave me a field day for self-analysis, but I won’t try to unravel or interpret it here except to impart some relevant information. The woman I was accompanying seemed to be Michelle Reyes, who is the director of the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Michelle and I worked closely together on the book I edited, *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, which like it or not, is regarded by some as an authoritative analysis. Felix was a close friend and collaborator in Group Material who died in 1996, the year Group Material realized its final project. In the dream I felt very sympathetic to Michelle being overwhelmed by the idea of having to represent and authorize the artist’s work. The doctor reference probably relates to medical doctors who “save lives,” and to the fact that this investigation of archiving and historical representation is part of my PhD research project, which should result in me being given the title of “doctor.”

68 Derrida, p. 92.


Neuhart et al, p. 53.

January 26, 2008, Santa Monica Museum of Art.

Asher in Buchloh, p. 64.


Malcolm, pp. 109–110.

E-mail to the author, February 20, 2009.


Ibid. “The British philosopher John McTaggart (1866–1925) spelled out this distinction in his influential essay ‘The Unreality of Time’ in 1908. He called the two ways of thinking about time the ‘A series: and the ‘B series.’ The A series is simply the everyday notion of time in terms of past, present, and future; it is sometimes called the ‘tensed’ view of time. Any event can be located in time with respect to the A series when the speaker states how long ago the event happened – or how long we must wait till it happens. The B series, in contrast, refers to fixed labels that we attach to specific moments in time – 5:00 p.m. GMT on June 30, 2009, for example. (This is sometimes called the ‘tenseless’ view of time.) Events described in terms of the B series can be marked “earlier than” or “later than” each other – but ‘now’ never enters into it.

When we describe events in terms of the A series, our statements seem to be contingent: the phrase ‘I had eggs for breakfast yesterday’ is true if I say it the day after having the eggs, but it may or may not be true if I say it on some other day. Statements described in terms of the B series have a different feel: sentences like ‘The Declaration of Independence was signed more that a year after the battles of Lexington and Concord’ or
‘The eclipse of 2017 will happen five years after the London Olympics of 2012’ seem to have a more permanent truth: they appear to describe unchanging attributes of world history. I have used tenses in the usual ways in those sentences, but one could, with a little practice, develop the habit of omitting past and future tenses when using the B series perspective, and just making do with the present tense. One could say, for example: ‘The Declaration of Independence is signed more than a year after the battles of Lexington and Concord.’ One can capture the essence of past and future – absorbing the A series into the B series, so to speak – by eliminating any references to ‘now’: instead of ‘The eclipse will happen nine years from now,’ say, ‘The eclipse occurs nine years after this utterance.’ It is not our natural way of speaking, to be sure, but philosophers would argue that it conveys the same information.” pp. 145–146.

81 Steedman, p. 67.
82 Wigley, np.
83 See guiding text in Ault, Show and Tell, p. 116 and p. 193.
84 Ibid., p. 11 and p. 183.
85 Ibid., p. 49.
86 “What a Pair: Roni Horn aka Roni Horn,” in Roni Horn (Bregenz: Bregenz Kunsthau, 2010).
87 “Roni Horn, a compilation” is a work in progress.
88 The essay is called “4195.6 feet: Geography of Time” and is drawn from here for this synopsis of the film.
89 Writing on a computer virtually unarchives the progression of the writing being done, where as the accumulations of drafts and versions that sit in countless archives are consultable.
91 This phrase in itself is a short circuit; my research into archiving practices did not begin four years ago but is tracked further back in Retrospective / Prospective: Activating the Archive, 2010.


“But beyond finitude as limit, there is, as we said above, this properly *in-finite* movement of radical destruction without which no archive desire or fever would happen.” Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 94.

“*Consignation* aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration.” Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 3.

Marvin Taylor, director of the Fales Library and Special Collections at New York University (NYU), says they are “acquiring like crazy” and consequently are increasingly backlogged with processing and cannot accommodate spatial demands of incoming collections. Conversation with the author, February 3, 2011.

Reference to Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 62, and the larger discussion of Freud and Yerushalmi. “Naturally, by all appearances, we believe we know that *the phantom does not respond*. He will never again respond, Yerushalmi knows it. . . . “Freud will never speak again. . . . because he had *already* responded . . . He will never again respond because he will have been in a position to have, *already, always* responded. He will never again respond because it is a phantom, thus a dead person.”

It was particularly unsettling to realize that enthusiasm is vulnerable to memorization.

Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 431. Ricoeur recounts two forms of memory Henri Bergson theorized in *Matter and Memory*, “*habit-memory, which is simply acted out and lacks explicit recognition, and recollection-memory, which is not without declared recognition.*” [Ricoeur]

Bergson quoted in ibid. “Spontaneous recollection is perfect from the outset; time can add nothing to its image without disfiguring it; it retains its memory in place and date.” In
short: “The memory of a given reading is a representation, and only a representation”; whereas the lesson learned is, as just said, “acted” rather than represented, it is the privilege of representation-memory to allow us “in the search for a particular image [to] remount the slope of our past.” To memory that repeats is opposed memory that imagines: “To call up the past in the form of an image, we must be able to withdraw ourselves from the action of the moment, we must have the power to value the useless, we must have the will to dream. Man alone is capable of such an effort.” p. 25.

101 Ibid., p. 336.

102 “Memory no longer consists in recalling the past but in actualizing what has been learned and stored in a mental space. In Bergsonian terms, we have crossed over to the side of habit-memory.” Ibid., p. 62.

103 I’ve borrowed the term present memory from artist Alejandro Cesarco to suggest, in this instance, memory that is present that takes place in the present and makes present, or represents the past, simultaneously, which can happen with live narration. Cesarco’s work, Present Memory, 2010, is a part of my research exhibition, Ever Ephemeral.

104 Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting, p. 138.


106 Mourning the loss of idealism has been relatively private. I hesitated expressing this depletion publically because I did not want the first book on Group Material to be a tragedy.

107 I witnessed an amazing slide presentation by Louise Lawler at the Cooper Union in the mid-1990s. She refrained from talking while showing images of her work. When questioned she explained she did not want to give the audience any more information than we would have if we saw the work.

108 Doug Ashford’s essay, “An Artwork is a Person,” is to some extent an exception in that Ashford takes an overview vantage situating GM’s practice within what he regards, to some degree, as polarized society. He does so sensitively and artfully; his text is essential to the book. Ault, ed., Show and Tell. pp. 220–225.

109 I’m reminded of the comment Stacey Allen made when she was a curatorial student at Bard in 2003 and Artforum’s double issue on the 1980s was circulating, “Everyone talks
so much about how interesting and great the ‘80s and early ‘90s were. It’s kind of depressing for us to feel like we’ve just missed out.” [Artforum, 40th Anniversary, “The 1980s” part one, March 2003, vol. 41, nr. 7; part two, April 2003, vol. 41, nr. 8] It is this sense of something being “over and done with” or finished, that strikes me as problematic in relation to imparting past events within a strict decade periodization.

Each issue contained columns entitled “Time capsules,” “Milestones,” etc. Group Material’s inauguration and two small photographs were included in a timeline of the 1980s, and Dan Cameron interviewed Doug Ashford and myself for the issue. Flashback – Revisiting the Art of the 80s at the Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel, 2005, included documentation of three GM exhibitions via a slide show and printed material, which I compiled. This Will Have Been: Art, Love, & Politics in the 1980s, Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Chicago, 2012, is curated by Helen Molesworth and will include Group Material’s AIDS & Insurance, exterior bus advertisement, 1990.

The eighties could likewise be characterized by a set of iconic political events: Solidarity, Tiananmen Square, Reaganomics, AIDS, the fall of the Berlin Wall, etc.

At a 1994 slide talk made at CalArts Group Material screened an NBC 30-minute program on the 1980s on a monitor installed kitty-corner to the slide screen. The program was a compilation of video bites providing glimpses into “newsworthy” events that took place between the beginning of 1980, marked by the election of Ronald Reagan and the release of the Iran hostages, and the fall of the Berlin Wall at the close of 1989. The group contrasted reflection with that TV version of the decade.

A pertinent anecdote. When I was preparing the manuscript for Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985 (University of Minnesota, 2002) I proposed “Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Art Movement,” as a title. I believed that calling the various practices, structures, events, and spaces that the book analyzed a “movement” would authorize them and create momentum in the field at the time, which, despite being in relative decline, was nonetheless active. The publisher argued that the activities did not constitute a movement and the term could not be used. Lesson learned; calling it a movement does not make it one.
“You were such a good artist. What happened . . . you disappeared?!” “Wasn’t it amazing? So fertile then. I miss the eighties.” “Why weren’t you in that show?”

“Our project is clear. We invited everyone to question the entire culture we have taken for granted.” Group Material inaugural statement, 1980. Reprinted in Ault, ed., Show and Tell, p. 23.

Referring to Lyotard’s argument in The Postmodern Condition that the discourses of legitimation have failed, and then talking about the “grand narratives” proposed by Christian Theology and Marxism which have lost their credibility, “We are engaged, whether we like it or not, in a discourse of delegitimation.” Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting, p. 313.

Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting, p. 218. “As microhistory has already verified, the initial benefit of a variation in scale is that it shifts the accent to individual, familial, or group strategies that call into question the presupposition of submission by social actors on the bottom rank to social pressures.”

I am speaking generally about the United States.

This was the stance I took as the book’s editor, and not a “group decision.”

Links to cultural and sociopolitical circumstances and contexts are invoked by the work, which is chronicled. The detailed data of the exhibition history near the book’s end, of venues, institutions, places, participants, and collaborators are coordinates that portray context, inscribing a larger field of action and social relations. The exhibition titles of documented work chart a compendium of concerns and objectives.

This comes across for example, in the types of selected material and the interplay between casual photography, professional installation shots, and snapshots of the group in different settings, chosen to show members at work, sometimes posing, or in off moments, and sometimes smiling.


Locks, pp. 228–55.
“Behind the Timeline,” is a set of interviews Locks conducted with people who were involved with or participated in AIDS Timeline twenty years later.


Ibid., p. 5.

Cofounder Tim Rollins was never “unhistorical.”

See Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, “On the Use and Abuse of History for Life,” (orig. published 1874), translated by Ian Johnston, revised edition, 2010. Accessed from http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/nietzsche/history.htm. (An art historian friend who enthusiastically recommended this translation, which she considers “far superior to the one in book form,” directed me to this version.) “For the man says, “I remember,” and envies the beast, which immediately forgets and sees each moment really perish, sink back in cloud and night, and vanish forever. In this way the beast lives unhistorically. For it goes into the present like a number without any odd fraction left over; it does not know how to play a part, hides nothing, and appears in each moment exactly and entirely what it is. Thus, a beast can be nothing other than honest.” Hayden White clarifies, “In reality Nietzsche believed that human forgetting is quite different from animal oblivion.” *Metahistory*, p. 347.

Ricoeur quotes Walter Benjamin’s description of the angel confronting the past in Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus*, “His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling up wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feel. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.” Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 499–500.
See Show and Tell, pp. 156–189 of the Chronicle section.

Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, “Group Material: AIDS Timeline,” 100 Notes – 100 Thoughts 032, dOCUMENTA (13) and Hatje Cantz, 2011.


Locks, in Show and Tell, p. 229.

The title references the title structure Felix Gonzalez-Torres used in his work; Gonzalez-Torres is the primary inspiration for the exhibition that focuses on art that effectively fuses aesthetic innovation and political articulation. The Biennial premise is widely circulated, for instance, at http://www.e-flux.com/shows/view/9136.


White, Metahistory, p. 339.

This concept can feed into what seems like an outmoded notion of the artist and a concomitant caveat: one cannot create and analyze at the same time. Or, that Art is achievable only by freeing the mind and internal artistic communion. Of course one cannot legitimately rip the points of Nietzsche’s larger argument out of its time and then-current conceptions of art and paste them onto “art today.” Nonetheless I find contemplating the notion of sensing unhistorically in correlation to the socially minded and sociably exuberant moments of creative practice I remember in Group Material stirring.

Nietzsche, “On the Use and Abuse.” Hayden White: “In Part IV of “The Use and Abuse of History,” Nietzsche argued that history could serve life by becoming a form of art. He insisted that the tendency to turn history into a science is fatal to its life-giving function. “The knowledge of the past is desired only for the service of the future and the present, not to weaken the present or undermine a living future.”
“Nietzsche’s purpose was to destroy belief in a historical path from which men might learn any single, substantial truth. For Nietzsche—as for Burckhardt—there were as many “truths” about the past as there were individual perspectives on it. In his view, the study of history ought not to be merely an end in itself but should always serve as a means to some vital end or purpose.” White, *Metahistory*, p. 332.

Nietzsche, “On the Use and Abuse.”

Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 102


One can easily be overwhelmed by what they don’t know, and turn to a less consuming source, like reading a Wikipedia entry.


I once overheard a guard at the Dia Art Foundation explaining to a visitor the installation view by Robert Gober, which included wall-to-wall floor-to-ceiling imagery of woodland, was influenced by the fact that he had bought a country house in upstate New York.

I do not use a mobile phone, but I notice how others do. Someone recently asked me how large was the town I grew up in. I had no idea but within three minutes he had looked it up and told me the population of Winthrop, Maine c. 1970. In the meantime we lost the train of discussion.
There was an enormous amount of explaining: even though much of the work makes an attempt at direct communication, it is still surrounded by a framework of institutional explication and pedagogy-gallery tours, panels, the catalog, and wall labels.” Silvia Kobowlski, in “Politics of the Signifier: A Conversation on the Whitney Biennial,” Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Silvia Kobowlski, Miwon Kwon, Benjamin Buchloh. *October*, vol. 66, Autumn, 1993, p. 14.

“This understanding of American culture as the totality of polyvalent, often conflicting expressions of a fragmented collectivity established the overarching theme for the 1993 Biennial – the first to be fully organized under Ross’s direction. For the first time in Biennial history, the vast majority of the show’s participants were members of marginalized groups. Where the 1991 Biennial suggested a harmonic model of multiculturalism, the 1993 Biennial proposed a more radical, inharmonious model of cultural democracy, establishing a context in which virtually all of the art on view could, and often demanded to be read in political terms.” See David Deitcher, “Polarity Rules: Looking at Whitney Annuals and Biennials, 1968-2000,” in Julie Ault, ed., *Alternative Art New York 1965–1985* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press and The Drawing Center, 2002), pp. 201–246.

For instance, Robert Hughes, “A Fiesta of Whining.” *Time*, March 22, 1993; Eleanor Heartney, “Identity Politics at the Whitney,” *Art in America* 81, no. 5 (May 1993); articles by Hilton Als, Glenn O’Brien, Bruce F. Ferguson, David Rimanelli, Jan Avgikos, Greg Tate, Dan Cameron, David Deitcher, Thomas McEvilley, Liz Kotz, and Laurence Chua in *Artforum* (May 1993), 7-17; and Kobowlski et al., *October*. Robert Hughes: “The key to the show, the skeptic might say, is its inclusion of the tape of the police bashing of Rodney King taken by George Holliday, a plumbing-parts salesman not known for his artistic aspirations before or since. The 1993 Biennial is anxious to present all its artists as witnesses, just like Holliday. Witnesses to what? To their own feelings of exclusion and marginalization. To a world made bad for blacks, Latinos, gays, lesbians and women in general. It's one big fiesta of whining agitprop, in the midst of which a few genuine works of art and some sharp utterances (mainly in video) manage to survive.” Retrieved from http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,978001,00.html.

For example, writings by Agnes Martin were presented as wall texts nested within sequences of her paintings in the survey, Agnes Martin, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992.

For instance, justification along the lines, potentially, of, This is not here because it’s great art, which you would see for yourself if it was, but is here because the work addresses black rage, which in light of the previous year’s L.A. rebellion, we should be thinking about. See Rosalind Krauss, “Politics of the Signifier,” pp. 5–6. Krauss describes her positive encounter with Lorna Simpson’s work, which was then undermined by the curatorial text and reading Thelma Golden’s specific interpretation of the work in the catalog. (Also see note 31 in “Politics of the Signifier.” The videotape of Rodney King being beaten by Los Angeles police officers was installed in the exhibition on continuous play is listed in the catalog as George Halliday’s Videotape of the Rodney King Beating, 1991.)


Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “Untitled (Portrait of Julie Ault),” 1991, paint on wall. Gonzalez-Torres’s text portraits are composed of private and public dates and events significant to the subject’s formation, initially determined by the subject and added to / subtracted from and sequenced by Gonzalez-Torres. In 1991, Gonzalez-Torres asked me for a list of formative dates and events which a word, name, place, or phrase could denote, from which he would make my portrait. I enthusiastically called on memory, letting people, places, and events surface. I obsessed over the responsibility of memorializing key relationships, and myself. It was largely a conscious activity relying on active memory – searching for and considering “benchmarks.” I thought about what conditions formed me and about what I would want to be reminded of on a daily basis.
since the work would be installed in my bedroom. Finally, FGT selected from my pool and sequenced the entries non-chronologically.

A few years ago I repainted the room and did not reinstall the work. FGT’s portraits are not static; they may be modified by whoever owns them, whether that is the subject or another individual or institution. My portrait has had two subsequent permutations: for an exhibition of portraits of artists by artists organized by Independent Curators Inc. (ICI), 2004, I self-consciously modified it for being in public, which it has not been. And for the occasion of Danh Vo’s “Rundgang,” school exhibition at the Städelshule, 2005, I restructured it with all new entries except for one in order to “remake” myself. Each reformulation is an accretion to the archive of the work.
As the owner of the work, I am using this occasion rematerialize the portrait and modify its composition. In light of the overarching research into using and making the archive, variety of memory, and representation of pasts, over time, I put together a larger reservoir of possibilities, making note of references to compelling memories that popped into my head – “memory as appearing, ultimately passively, to the point of characterizing as an
affectio – *pathos* – the popping into mind of a memory.” I distilled that into a smaller pool, and invited my mother to make the final selection, which I then sequenced non-chronologically. The work requires being painted by hand where the wall meets the ceiling, to wrap around one or more corners onto other walls. Phung Vo, who is Danh Vo’s father, will do the painting on site.

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167 Rasmus Röhling, *Self-Titled*, 2008, video installation. *Self-Titled* engages the notion of the artist’s chronology, and in some measure extends from Röhling’s and my discussion about historicizing and issues of archiving and self-historicization. The work uses extracts from a documentary on Derrida, a scene from Spiderman 3, a racecar driver rapidly shifting gears, and a recitation of an essay written by Röhling for the work.

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168 Ibid.

169 The Group Material Archive in the Downtown Collection can be viewed by appointment: Fales Library and Special Collections, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University, New York.

The Group Material Archive has been made accessible to particular researchers and curators in the interim, and material has been loaned to several exhibitions. Now that the collection is fully processed and accounted for it can be consulted freely.

While Roni Horn was researching and conceptualizing the retrospective of her work in 2009, she and pored over photographs of herself she collected from various sources, choosing twenty-four, which she then composed into pairs for use in the publication, *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn* (Steidl Verlag, copublished by Tate, London, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2009). Subsequently Horn selected a larger choice of photos for the work *aka*, 2009. The images are made uniform scale and alternate between childhood, teenage, and adulthood. Personal style is variable. Horn jumbles chronology, countering any notion of linear evolution. Not in fact autobiography, *aka* combines portraiture, documentary, personal excavation, and biographic proposition, verging on a fresh genre. I wonder what was revealed to the artist, what she experienced as she surveyed the history of her looks and encountered evidence of former selves. What was she studying? What (or who) was she seeking? Identification? Foreshadowing? A prototype in childhood? Was she always recognizable to herself? Was there disidentification? Are those images included in *aka*? Was indication of her enduring chameleonic appearance puzzling, reassuring, or somehow out of synch with her internal images? What remembrances did the experience of looking open onto? Any thesis to be garnered from *aka* is met within itself by antithesis; the work is a conundrum. Horn has ostensibly made herself a subject while also making herself an object—of study of self and of identity.
On July 7, 2011, fifteen years after the dispersal of the artist’s belongings, Ault and Rosen reflected together on their decisions.
On first viewing, this work reminded me of the dedication page in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*: “It is sheer good fortune to miss somebody long before they leave you. This book is for Ford and Slade, whom I miss although they have not left me.”


For decades Benning refused to convert his 16mm films to other media because if he did, it would not be film. Benning has recently allowed some transferral to digital media, and transferred *casting a glance*, 2007, 80 min., 16 mm to DVD for this exhibition.

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181 Conversation with the author, June 11, 2009
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Matthew Buckingham, “Mahheakantuck – Everything Has a Name,” in *October* 120, Spring 2007.


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Felicity D. Scott, Living Archive 7: Ant Farm (Barcelona / New York: Actar, 2008).


______, The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality, in Mitchell.

Appendix A

The following textual components are part of the exhibition, *Ever Ephemeral: Remembering and Forgetting in the Archive*, Signal - Center for Contemporary Art, Monbijougatan 15, Malmö, September 23 – November 13, 2011, and Inter Arts Center, Bergsgatan 29, Malmö, September 30 – October 30, 2011.

Checklist, *Ever Ephemeral: Remembering and Forgetting in the Archive*

Alejandro Cesarco, *Present Memory*, 2010, text compiled by Cesarco, produced as booklet in exhibition.

*Time Frames: A Conversation*, 2011, dialogue between Ault and Andrea Rosen about their decision to disperse Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s collection of clocks rather than archive them when he died. The clocks have been gathered from their respective owners for the occasion of this exhibition. The conversation is a take-away booklet in the exhibition.


Julie Ault, *Historical Inquiry as Subject and Object*, 2010, essay on Group Material archive and book project, a take-away in exhibition.


Rasmus Röhling, *Self-Titled*, 2009, text by Röhling imbedded in his work and a take-away in the exhibition.

Julie Ault, *Roni Horn, a compilation*, 2010 [ongoing], text that derives from researching Horn’s journals to compose a personal chronology of the artist; exhibited in relation to a set of artists books by Horn. Extract produced for exhibition.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “*Untitled*” (*Portrait of Julie Ault*), 1991, the loan form for the work includes the text, materialization specifications, and terms of agreement.
“Ever Ephemeral: Remembering and Forgetting in the Archive”

Curated by Julie Ault

Signal - Center for Contemporary Art
Monbijou gatan 15, entrance from the backyard
SE 211 53 Malmö
September 23, 2011 - November 13, 2011

Inter Arts Center
Bergsgatan 29
SE-214 22 Malmö
September 30, 2011 - October 30, 2011

Signal Checklist

Danh Vo
Death Sentence, 2009
Ink on sixty pieces of paper
Text compiled by Julie Ault and handwritten by Phung Vo

Julie Ault, Danh Vo.
Where the Lions Are, 2009
Publication [Kunsthalle Basel]

Twelve vintage clocks designed by George Nelson and collected by Felix Gonzalez-Torres
Loaned by Julie Ault, John Connelly, Amada Cruz Harman and Rick G. Harman, Jim Hodges, Roni Horn, Michelle Reyes, Andrea Rosen

Julie Ault and Andrea Rosen,
Time Frames: A Conversation, 2011
Booklet [published for the occasion]

James Benning
casting a glance, 2007
16 mm film transferred to dvd, 80 min.

Julie Ault
4195.6 feet: Geography of Time, 2010
Text handout

“Viruses”
November 3, 1986
Time magazine
Loaned by The Group Material Archive, Downtown Collection at the Fales Library and Special Collections, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University

The Fales Library & Special Collections
Web page, finding aid, not yet published

Julie Ault
*Historical Inquiry as Subject and Object*, 2010
Text handout

Julie Ault, ed.
*Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, 2010
Publication [London, Four Corners Books]

Doug Ashford, Julie Ault
*Group Material: AIDS Timeline*, 2011
Pamphlet [Hatje Cantz, dOCUMENTA (13)]

Alejandro Cesarco
*Present Memory*, 2010
Color video, no sound, continuous loop, 4 min.

Alejandro Cesarco
*Present Memory*, 2010
Booklet [published for the occasion]

Inter Arts Center Checklist

“Liberace 1919–1987”
February 16, 1987
*People* magazine
Loaned by The Group Material Archive, Downtown Collection at the Fales Library and Special Collections, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University

The Fales Library & Special Collections
Web page finding aid, not yet published

Julie Ault
*Historical Inquiry as Subject and Object*, 2010
Text handout

Julie Ault, ed.
*Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, 2010
Publication [London, Four Corners Books]
Doug Ashford, Julie Ault
*Group Material: AIDS Timeline*, 2011
Pamphlet [Hatje Cantz, dOCUMENTA (13)]

Felix Gonzalez-Torres
“Untitled” (*Portrait of Julie Ault*), 1991
Paint on wall

Rasmus Røhling
*Self-Titled*, 2008
Video installation

Rasmus Røhling
*Self-Titled*, 2008 / 2009
Text handout

Roni Horn
*You Are The Weather*, 1997
*Another Water*, 2000
*This Is Me, This Is You*, 2002
*Dictionary Of Water*, 2002
*Cabinet Of*, 2003
*Index Cixous*, 2005
*Doubt Box*, 2006
*Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, 2009
*aka*, 2010
*Well and Truly*, 2011
Publications [various publishers]

Julie Ault
*Roni Horn, a compilation*, 2008–present
Text extract on wall

“Ever Ephemeral” is part of Ault’s doctoral research in fine and performing arts, Malmö Art Academy, Lund University.
All this must be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel. The subject of nostalgia comes into the picture: it belongs to the precarious hold that a person may have on the inner representation of a lost object.

Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. Rather, it remains behind a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not belong to the experience the person may have on the inner representation of a lost object.

The subject of nostalgia comes into the picture: if belongs to the precarious hold that a person may have on the inner representation of a lost object.
If a person very close to us is dying, there is something in the months to come that we dimly apprehend—much as we should have liked to share it with him—could only happen through his absence. We greet him at the last in a language that he no longer understands.

Cisplatin, Pemetrexed, Avastin.

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceeded radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share.

The photograph as souvenir is a logical extension of the pressed flower, the preservation of an instant in time through a reduction of physical dimensions and a corresponding increase in significance supplied by means of narrative. Temporally, the souvenir moves history into private time. The souvenir involves the displacement of attention into the past. The souvenir is not simply an object appearing out of the past; it involves the displacement of attention into the past. The past, its function is to envelop the present within context, an object from the past incongruously surfacing in the present.

The photograph as souvenir is a logical extension of the present. Its function is to envelop the present within context, an object from the past incongruously surfacing in the present.
Endlessly I sustain the discourse of the beloved’s absence; actually a preposterous situation; the other is absent as referent, present as allocution. The singular distortion generates a kind of insupportable present; I am wedged between two tenses, that of the reference and that of the allocution: you have gone (which I lament), you are here (since I am addressing you). Whereupon I know what the present, difficult tense, is: a pure portion of anxiety. Absence persists—I must endure it. Hence I will manipulate it: transform the distortion of time into oscillation, produce rhythm, make an entrance onto the stage of language (language is born of absence: the child has made himself a doll out of spool, throws it away and picks it up again, miming the mother’s departure and return). Absence becomes a creation of fiction which has many roles (doubts, reproaches, desires, melancholies, etc.).

"This staging of language postpones the other’s death: a very short interval, we are told, separates the time during which the child still believes his mother to be present and the time during which the child will believe his mother to be absent. To manipulate absence is to extend this interval, to delay as long as possible the moment when the other already dead. To manipulate absence is to extend this interval, to delay as long as possible the moment when the other already dead."

I wanted to do a show that would disappear completely. It had a lot to do with disappearance and learning. [...

"That’s what I think a personal film has to do—has to show a personal being open. I think they can be open to themselves. But by referring to my own being, to make of them, to make a skin, to make a time that isn’t just a skin, to make a film of a problem—not to make a film that just puts it all together, that makes it all personal work not to make part of the past part of making personal work is not to make personal work a paradigm. He has commented: ‘It is not hard for me to tell things about myself personally—that’s the easy part. The hard part is to tell things about myself personally—what’s the easy part?’"

The methodological centrality of the personal carries through his complete oeuvre. He has commented: “It is not hard for me to tell things about myself personally—that’s the easy part. The hard part is to tell things about myself personally—what’s the easy part?”
We found by way of explanation that in mourning time is needed for the command of reality-testing to be carried out in detail, and that when this work has been accomplished the ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost object. We may imagine that the ego is occupied with analogous work during the course of melancholia; in neither case have we any insight into the economies of the course of events.

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Nothing sorts out memories from ordinary moments.

Later on they do claim remembrance when they show their scars.
It is now a commonplace assumption to believe that some thing essential is lost, or at least attenuated, in the process of growing up. Whether it is called vision or imagination, or vitality, or hope, lives are considered to erode over time (the idealization of childhood and adolescence is reactive to this belief). And it is, of course, integrated to this story to conceive that makes surprise attacks—and not as of a piece with our lifelong or hope, lives are considered to erode over time (the idealization of childhood and adolescence is reactive to this story). Whether it is called vision or imagination, or thing essential is lost, or at least attenuated, in the process of growing up. Whether it is called vision or imagination, or thing essential is lost, or at least attenuated, in the process of growing up. Whether it is called vision or imagination, or thing essential is lost, or at least attenuated, in the process of
And even when the bird walks, one still knows him winged.

Flux and transformation, lensed sounds and images, caught up in a ceaseless process of subtle entities, but a constellation of diverse and highly patterned. Implied in each of those psyches, it is not a coherent and monolithic, housed in all of the psyches that have ever existed. To be physically in the world, it remains there, marking time and being even with death. Long after a given being has become a becoming. And this becoming does not achieve stabilization even with death. Long after a given being has

For both art and life depend wholly on the laws of optics, on perspective and illusion; both, to be blunt, depend on the necessity of error. Life is composed of everyday life is marked by an irony which is its own creation, for this temporality is held to be *initially* nonreversible and, at the same time, characterized by repetition and predictability.

Pages falling off the calendar, the notches marked in a tree that no longer stands—these are the signs of the everyday, the effort to articulate difference through counting.
Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech (in many instances, of complaint or indictment) and an element in a dialogue. 22
Published on the occasion of *Ever Ephemeral* curated by Julie Ault.
Signal, Malmö
September 23 – November 13, 2011.

TIME FRAMES
Julie Ault and Andrea Rosen
The artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres died in 1996 at the age of 38. His friends Julie Ault and Andrea Rosen were responsible for taking care of his personal possessions, among which were at least a dozen clocks designed by George Nelson in the late 1940s and '50s, as well as hundreds of plastic toy figures collected by the artist, and his books. Ault and Rosen distributed the objects among Gonzalez-Torres's intimates, friends, and colleagues. Now the clocks are on loan to *Ever Ephemeral*, which is part of a larger investigation of the intersection of memory, history, time, and archiving. On July 7, 2011, fifteen years after the dispersal of the artist's belongings, Ault and Rosen reflected together on their decisions.

**AULT:** Last night I read this letter that Felix sent to you in 1993, which at the time accompanied the gift of a clock. It begins, "This is not a clock. It’s more than just a machine that makes time. It makes ends. To more time. It makes me into an artist. This is not a clock. It’s more than just a machine that..." I’ve been mostly focused on the practicalities. The letter brings the emotional content of reassembling the group of clocks, which I didn’t think about until I read it. I had not consciously been thinking about the emotional state of the gift of a clock.

**JULIET:** Last night I read this letter that Felix sent to you.
One interpretation of Felix collecting “optimistic clocks” the last couple years of his life is that he was buying time. But I never liked that explanation, in part because it doesn’t reconcile with Felix as I knew him. Perhaps the clocks were not amulets so much as they were beautiful, tough objects that fed his process of working through the complex relationships to time, which the conditions he was living in, brought forward. Perhaps the clocks were about facing time.

Diagramming a situation of no escape. You can’t ignore time when you have a dozen clocks on the wall.

What led me to regather the clocks was the desire to see them together again, and generate an occasion to recollect our memories of thinking through what to do with Felix’s things when he died, specifically his books, the clocks, and the toys he collected. I’d like to revisit our decisions to disperse those things as we did and reflect on how they sit with us fifteen years later. There is also a desire to symbolically stage a reunion of community that was united around Felix and is now diffused, although particular bonds remain active.

ROSEN: The movement between emotionality and objectivity you are talking about is a really essential part of this dialogue, because these positions were always fused in Felix’s work. The work is a guiding force, or example, in that it imbues something with one’s own personal emotionality but at the same time allows it to be stripped of anything personal in the same line allowing it to be stripped of anything personal in the work. The work is a guiding force, or example, in that it imbues.

I remembered how museum curators would ask Felix, “Do you mind if we don’t allow people to take sheets of paper from the stack during the opening?” and he’d say, “No, I don’t mind.” I remember how museum curators would ask Felix, “Do you mind if we don’t allow people to take sheets of paper from the stack during the opening?” and he’d say, “No, I don’t mind.” I remember how museum curators would ask Felix, “Do you mind if we don’t allow people to take sheets of paper from the stack during the opening?” and he’d say, “No, I don’t mind.” I remember how museum curators would ask Felix, “Do you mind if we don’t allow people to take sheets of paper from the stack during the opening?” and he’d say, “No, I don’t mind.” I remember how museum curators would ask Felix, “Do you mind if we don’t allow people to take sheets of paper from the stack during the opening?” and he’d say, “No, I don’t mind.”
AUL T: We proceeded with dispersal in step with his principles, but it amazes me that we never talked about it in those terms. My memory of the period is vague, as is my recollection of the physicality of the experience and whether we dismantled his apartment over a few days or a few weeks. Although I don’t recall the contour of our discussion I am reasonably certain that we didn’t explicitly address what should happen with his things. As a result, I think it’s the only thing you can do for that to continue being institutionalized in the form of an archive. At that moment his things were somewhere between life and becoming artifact. Your reading of the situation mirrors mine, that the resolution happened organically, that it was the only thing to do that made sense.

ROSEN: Felix was not didactic, he didn’t say this is what my work is about, or this is what I want you to do, but he trained us in a way of thinking. He exposed a realm of possibility.

AUL T: I’m hoping to activate my memory through tapping into yours. Do you know when Felix started getting the Nelson clocks, or recall any fragments of discussions about them, or being with him when he found a clock? I thought he collected them for about two years before he died, but the letter he sent you was written in February 1993 indicating it must have been at least three years.

ROSEN: There had to have been a time when he could only start affording such things, but I think that he had one clock that began it. I would guess, although I don’t know why, that it was the multicolored one.

AUL T: I also recall it was one of the atomic clocks. I remember him being very taken with those around the same time that he got excited about Sputnik lamps, which were also symbolic period objects alluding to the paradox of progress. His fascination was with all George Nelson things.
it was chairs and furniture—and probably started less with the consciousness of a clock and more with awareness of Nelson’s design. The letter is 1993, so he must have already been collecting them well before, because otherwise he would not have been giving one to me.

AUL T: It seems to me it was probably only a couple months before that he began. The fact that he gave you one, and wrote about optimistic design in the letter indicates a newfound pleasure that he wanted to share. He wouldn’t have bought a lot of clocks already and then decided to give you one. I suspect he wanted to share the excitement he felt immediately.

ROSEN: My only major concern is about how we archived books, but I don’t know if it is legitimate. And when they were given to, then we only needed to write down “book” or “three books” of the books the same way we did other things—thinking about choices. I think there was hesitation in writing the receipt. I think there was hesitance in writing the receipt.

If you were in the situation today that we were in 1996, would you do the same? I’ve felt some regret about scattering Felix’s books. But I don’t know if it is legitimate. The letter is midway an incredibly complicated period. The letter is 1996, when Felix died, and January 1996, when Ross died. I considered their time frame to be January until much later. I considered their time frame to be January 1996, when Felix died. Even though he probably didn’t start getting the clocks—it—the sense of prediction, fate—a rehearsal of saying goodbye. Even though he probably didn’t start getting the clocks—

AUL T: That’s certainly what unleashed my emotions reading the letter. I think he probably didn’t start getting the clocks—

ROSEN: It’s such a condensed time period. One could ask what difference does it make whether it was 1993 or January or January 1996, the very end of 1995? How might the letter sound, how might it have been adapted for exhibition? And was there a number of exhibition—Felix’s life. I thought Ross’s death there were a number of exhibitions that were a huge expose of time in terms of what happened in 1993 or 1994.

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thing to read every once an..." But what happens if these
I want to look at every single thing he understood and I want
skeptical when a curator says, "I want to look at Felix's library,
ROSEN: Felix chose to amass the clocks into a collection,
which was di...erent than selecting a certain chair, for in-
stance. There was something about the collectiveness. At Fe-
lix's memorial Mario Nunez said everyone in this room is like
a part of a library and we're all responsible for remembering
different chapters—together we make up this library that is
Felix. I believe we had dispersed the objects prior to that, but
I remember how profound that was to me.
Felix: I believe we had dispersed the objects prior to that, but
our different chapters—regular we make up this library that is
a part of a library and we're all responsible for remembering
his movement. I want to say everyone in this room is like
something that is. There was something about the collectiveness.
Felix: Keeping Felix's collected toys together would have been a
symbolic container, especially at that moment,
then as more cleaved than anything else because of their
esence as if you had all of them, whereas holding onto all of
that if you have to of the toys for instance, you have the
ting that doesn't exist. Keeping Felix's collected toys together would have been a
one with a list of every book that was in Felix's library and leave it at that. But if I had every one of those books, would I want people to look at them?

AUL T: But eventually you won't be around.

The books contain notes he wrote for himself; they are precious like diaries and work journals. Even an enigmatic notation in a book becomes precious to a researcher.

ROSEN: But there's an assumption that he read each book equally or with equal intention, and in fact we don't know when he read them or with what intentions or in what order, or whether he read for a class or for something else.

AUL T: On one hand there are no assumptions that are legitimate, but on the other all assumptions are legitimate—maybe this is intrinsic to both research and historical representation. Someone tries to find the puzzle pieces and put them together in order to form a picture for him or herself.

ROSEN: Felix did not want the picture to be about him or his work. He didn't want the notes which reflect went into the work. He didn't want the work to become peripheral to the readings that margin.

There's a difference between taking it all in and what you do with it. I don't think there are sufficiently considered the difference. Passive absorption and thought about the process, but it does not draw analogy from one's previous experience and various content, absorbing everything that passes through my mind. I can get my hands on during research has to do with the work and him as a person.

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desire to keep the separation between what went on with the subject to be him or him personally. I really believe in this.

Despising books is somewhat rational because it goes against one's thinking process. It is illuminating to researchers. And because it shows the pathways and interruptions of one's life and growth. It's eclectic. It's not the same as coming between books and the other collections like toys and clocks. I don't think that we sufficiently considered the difference between taking it all in and what you do with it.

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together you can apprehend a person's intellectual itinerary. Such a collection or archive would support that idea, which many people probably do not regard with skepticism but consider being a sound method. And to some degree the logic makes sense: if I read and see everything and consult every image and piece of information possible then I am going to get to a deeper understanding of the thinking and process and conditions of the person I'm studying. I subscribe to this too but also stand by the conclusion of not objectifying Felix's reading through archiving the books.

The work needs to stand on its own. Felix used those books for him to make the work. And the work is what Felix was very poignant about this to me: the work needed to stand on its own. The idea that his books should be disseminated came from this root, and maybe over however many years it is since Felix died, we've lost that part of how rigorous he was about that.

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AUL T: There is great value in archiving. At the same time archive authority has to be taken with a grain of salt: if they had been archived, the books would apparently say this is what Felix was reading. But he was also reading other things that didn't get saved. We don't know the scope of what he read, and if and to what degree anything he read or saw influenced his thinking and his work.

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If we had chosen to keep the books together then I would have made a case for the clocks being archived too; they are potentially as important as the books. There is the work, and then there is everything else. There are lines that can be drawn, but I don't think it is only his books that speak to his intellectual exchange. The clocks do too, and the toys. Everything else.

Anyone who approaches the archive and tries to get a handle on a subject must understand the ambiguity of what's encountered within, and understand archives are partial and sometimes random.

I'm just beginning to think about what it means to see the clocks together again. They're really beautiful and compelling but there's sadness about the whole thing: not only about Felix's death, but that the community is so different. They represent a specific community as well as a larger community. They are a mirror of what was and what could have been.
ROSEN: That’s the interesting thing about community; it can’t be what you expect. You can’t have an expectation of what all that effort to create community will be. The community of who Felix touched in his lifetime could only be so much and we are not bound together. That’s what’s interesting about his work. It can’t be insular. If you keep the group the same it only has its limitations. Yet someone can write me a letter that tells how Felix’s work affected him or her that I would never have anticipated.

Out of the toys and books and everything Felix had the clocks are content-wise the closest things to his work. In the end this clock is an object and it doesn’t represent Felix. We can detach ourselves from these objects. They don’t hold Felix. It’s harder for us to think about giving up those things that have his handwriting on them. There’s an assumption that a book Felix read and annotated is Felix more than that clock is Felix. At the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation we are working with the idea of case studies, how decisions were made in Felix’s lifetime and after. Why did this thing happen? Why did this thing happen? What did it do? In the end we think that’s what decisions were made in Felix’s life. We can assume that that picture was not the source for his idea of continuous dolphins. And then there’s a history of the dolphin stack and the decisions made around that work I’d like to see that information exist in as many files as could potentially be relevant. It is one piece of information in a history of information.

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AUL T: There’s a continual paradox—that object is not Felix, but also is Felix. And the paradox keeps popping up in the text. So those papers of Felix’s that do remain enter the archive and become accessible take on tremendous weight.
let to thinking about the works with two clocks, "T Delaware, and in that one.

I just shite take it in. Of course if you start applying this tech-

nothing to do with when I was thinking at the moment, and

paid attention to it, then maybe, maybe I read it and it had

Reiko's correspondence years ago, and I feel like I would have

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Perfect Lovers

Well, that’s a valid connection to make, but it’s not sure or singular. 

is an exciting challenge, to make such a new kind of archive. At its core, Felix’s work requires that all formats for enacting it be tailored or rethought. Tailoring the archive extends from that.

ROSEN: My intention with the archive and foundation is for its format to be a replication of Felix’s intentions. It’s taken years to do that, but it has its own ambiguities and open-ended nature. I’m not about getting it done fast and simply creating access. You’re charged with the responsibility, and there’s a time when the ideas of how to make information, including that which has been private, accessible in a fitting way, and how to structure it as long as it takes.

AUL T: In only a few sentences in Felix’s letter multiple in—

ROSEN: It’s not even a choice. It has its own organic time.

The risk of that is like the urgency of Felix’s letter, that he was in a situation where he felt like we all live with the illusion that we’re going to be around for another however many years.

AUL T: It might take another ten years, but I don’t think that

ROSEN: We must try to understand it wasn’t his intention.

The clocks, that they invoke epistemically and performatively, that they invoke the illusion of time, has one of the things I find so beautiful about the letter: the way of having together, by chance, It implies that he had the luck of having together, by chance.

ROSEN: As much as he’s telling me in it to think with, etc.

AUL T: In the second part of the letter, like in other correspondence from Felix, and even in the clocks, there was a pronouncement from Felix, and even in the clocks, there was an optimism, you can’t ignore the hintlessness of this letter—

ROSEN: What tense are these objects? What tense is the archive?

AUL T: It’s not sure or singular. There’s a valid connection to make, but it’s not sure or singular.

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Published on the occasion of *Ever Ephemeral*
curated by Julie Ault.
Signal, Malmö
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COVER: George Nelson clocks owned by Felix Gonzalez-Torres and re-collected for the exhibition. Installed and photographed for the purpose of this conversation at Andrea Rosen’s office prior to shipping.

DESIGN: Alejandro Cesarco
A great artist can make art by simply casting a glance. A set of glances could be as solid as any thing or place, but the society continues to cheat the artist out of his “art of looking,” by only valuing “art objects.” The existence of the artist in time is worth as much as the finished product.

—Robert Smithson, (1968)

Between May 15, 2005, and January 14, 2007, I made sixteen trips to Spiral Jetty. Created in 1970, the Jetty is a 1,500-foot-long spiral-shaped jetty extending into the Great Salt Lake in Utah constructed of rock, mud, salt crystal, and algae. The resulting film maps the Jetty back onto its own thirty-seven-year history – looking at and listening to its recurring changes.

—James Benning (2007)

Had you not read or heard James Benning describe his film casting a glance (2007) prior to watching it, you’d likely assume that the sixteen dates that delimit its chronological structure and herald its constellation of eighty one-minute shots made at Spiral Jetty indicate when they were filmed. Each group of shots is introduced with a date, starting with April 30, 1970, which marks the jetty’s beginning, and ending with May 15, 2007. The fact that the imagery is in fact the result of Benning’s visits between 2005 and 2007 is not apparent in the film.

Benning claims it was not his intention to fool people into thinking he had been filming Spiral Jetty for thirty-seven years; he characterizes the conflation of chronologies as “a metaphor for history, a metaphor on time.” Nonetheless some viewers find the designated time span confusing or feel hoodwinked when they realize the discrepancy. Others walk away in awe of what they believe to be the filmmaker’s durable commitment
to recording the jetty. For those who follow Benning’s work closely, the superimposition of time frames – thirty-seven years, eighteen months, and eighty minutes – is far more artful and complex than a ploy; it is a valuable methodological manifestation of his persistent investigation into time, duration, and landscape.

The link between the history of Spiral Jetty and Benning’s filming of it is the water level of the Great Salt Lake, which fluctuates dramatically due to climate change and seasonal shifts, and thus determines the jetty’s concealment and/or exposure. The water level rises in spring due to mountain runoff and recedes in summer when extensive sun exposure causes the rate of evaporation to exceed inflow and rainfall. Because of the exceptionally shallow nature of the lake, even modest changes in level can enlarge its area, thereby swallowing the jetty.

When Benning visited on May 15, 2005, to begin filming, he coincidentally found the water level was at 4195.6 feet, exactly the same as when Smithson made the piece in 1970. While reviewing water level notes from his trips about a year later, he realized he could mimic the conditions of earlier times with matching levels, and decided to superimpose the jetty’s history onto his images.²

Spiral Jetty first went underwater in 1973, the year of Smithson’s death, and it did not reemerge, except sporadically, until 2002. The jetty’s visibility since 2002 is mostly the result of drought. During its period of invisibility Spiral Jetty became well known through aerial images from 1970 picturing it basking in sunshine, fully exposed above water. These photographs were instrumental in transforming the work into an icon, particularly as no documentation of Spiral Jetty in its submerged state circulated. Until the jetty’s resurfacing it was publicly perceived as static, frozen in time, and was inadvertently objectified.

Benning regards Spiral Jetty as a vital formation and wants to show how it changes over time as a result of climate, season, weather, daylight, industry, and tourism. Casting a glance shows us Spiral Jetty fully exposed, partially underwater, and completely
submerged, and in this way representationally restores its periodic vulnerability and variety.

When filming Spiral Jetty, Smithson used multiple vantage points and scale shifts ranging from extreme close-ups to aerial views to photographically portray the earthwork. In his film *Spiral Jetty* (1970) he used ground-level perspectives to show the sculpture’s construction and helicopter shots when depicting its finished state. Benning’s methods derive from and expand on the artist’s strategy. Except for several overlooking shots made from a twenty-foot ladder, Benning positions his camera exclusively at ground level. He employs a “to-and-fro” method that intersperses shots from various ranges and perspectives, thereby countering the notion of a singular ideal vantage point.

Benning believes in the virtues of focused attention and duration, viewing both as active forms of learning integral to his practice. They also reflect the influence of Henry David Thoreau. While living in the cabin he built on Walden Pond, Thoreau wrote: “No method nor discipline can supersede the necessity of being forever on the alert. What is a course of history, or philosophy, or poetry, no matter how well selected, or the best society, or the most admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking at what is to be seen?”

*Casting a glance* has a personal dimension and interweaves public biography with autobiographic references. At the outset we learn the film is “in memory of Robert Smithson,” and the final shot is accompanied by the sound of a small plane, a reference to Smithson’s death. Four of the sixteen timeline dates that introduce the film’s sections harbor personal associations that point to mortality: January 2, 1971 (Smithson’s birthday, 1938); July 20, 1984 (Smithson’s death, 1973); December 28, 1970 (Benning’s birthday, 1942); and April 11, 2002 (his daughter Sadie Benning’s birthday, 1973).

Another compelling dimension of *casting a glance* is its soundtrack, which was mostly recorded on location. We listen to the coactions of wind and water, punctuated by birds, thunder, insects, and the occasional indication of civilization. Soon after we settle into the
film’s nearly sublime atmosphere, strange human yelps shatter the sense of solitude. Then we’re confronted with gunshots, a trademark of Benning’s films. Later we hear a fighter jet overhead, dispatched from an Air Force base just west of the jetty.

Benning incorporates two extra audio segments that were not captured on-site. About three-quarters through the film, a 1973 recording of Gram Parsons and Emmylou Harris singing the beautiful and mournful duet “Love Hurts” ruptures the section captioned March 19, 2005. Like Smithson, Parsons died in 1973. He was twenty-six. The volume increases and decreases as the shots transition, suggesting a fluctuating distance to the source – perhaps a tape deck in an off-screen car. The song seems remote, ghostly. Its emotional content is intensified by images of the jetty engulfed in the cool colors of dusk and the warm tones of last light.

During his editing process Benning happened to watch Mono Lake, by Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson, a film that charts a trip they made with Michael Heizer to the hypersaline California Lake in 1968. When Holt edited their footage thirty-six years later, she included two romantic songs by Waylon Jennings, whom the three had seen perform a week before going to Mono Lake. Benning speaks about using music, like Holt, to invoke the psychic pain of witnessing the death of a loved one. He refers to Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson, to Emmylou Harris and Gram Parsons, and relates through his personal experience of witnessing the death of a close friend in 1979.5

A second inserted acoustic fragment accompanies footage of five people walking on Spiral Jetty. We hear a man’s voice intermingled with ambient sound, but it is muted; his words are indecipherable. Although unidentified, the voice is Smithson’s, which Benning sampled from Mono Lake.

Normally a stickler for precise equivalency, the eighty shots that compose casting a glance are only approximately one minute each. Benning has deviated from his usual methods when it comes to each segment’s length, as well as to his customary allegiance to symmetry, by introducing variation in the number of shots that form the film’s
sections. He is nonchalant about such anomalies: “I somehow didn’t care this time,” and on another occasion jokes, “I’m getting too old to count.” While the filmmaker’s transgressing his own logic might be initially destabilizing for some Benning aficionados, it is striking the way Benning embraces change in his own methodology. *Casting a glance*, while documenting Spiral Jetty, is a measure of his transformation as artist and filmmaker.

Benning obsessively explores what engenders a sense of connection for him here. The film attests to alliance, influence, and veneration. I can’t help but think of *casting a glance* as an offering – a love letter, essentially – to Smithson, who died without experiencing the full evolution of Spiral Jetty. It is also a dialogue – an unwitting collaboration with the deceased artist. While Benning frames Spiral Jetty through his particular brand of “subjective objectivity” and formal simplicity, the inverse also occurs: he is framed by Smithson and thus comes into focus. Through this we get to experience the quintessential Benning via Spiral Jetty, which we find to be an ideal context for enacting the filmmaker’s philosophies of looking and listening and landscape as a function of time. Smithson’s vision manifest in Spiral Jetty amid the multifaceted splendor of the Great Salt Lake, and Benning’s vision manifest in the conceptual and formal grace of *casting a glance*, coalesce into an articulation of complementary sensibilities and convictions, particularly in respect to understanding landscape as an infinitely dynamic process.

In a recent conversation Benning reflected on that initial day of filming and the coincident measurement of 4195.6 feet. He recalled, “A violent storm blew through later that day and the water rose and dropped two feet. The jetty disappeared and then reappeared allowing me to witness its historical range in just a few hours (maybe eighty minutes); perhaps this was what made me think a year later that I should map my film back across the jetty’s full history.”

The obvious story told in *casting a glance* is the life of Spiral Jetty; Benning and Smithson’s communion of methods is an implicit focus, and the overshadowing theme is
time. Inquiring of the relationship between chronology and narrative, the film’s timeframe seems illusory, throwing “now” and “then” into question; casting a glance is somehow tenseless. Geological time, calendar time, clock time, perceptual time, and cinematic time are concurrently invoked, which makes a compelling methodological point of contact with Smithson. In 1996, Jack Flam insightfully hypothesized, “…Smithson takes time itself not only as one of the main themes of his art, but also as one of his most important mediums.” This reflection could well extend to Benning and his embrace of temporality in casting a glance.

Oh, and did I tell you what a beautiful film it is?
1 Benning in conversation with Lynne Cooke on the occasion of a screening of his films at Dia:Beacon, September 21, 2008.
2 E-mail to author, April 15, 2009.
4 E-mail to author, April 2, 2007.
5 Benning, Vienna Filmmuseum, November 1, 2007.
6 For example, sixty one-minute shots create One Way Boogie Woogie, 1977; thirty-five two-and-a-half minute shots compose El Valley Centro, 2000; and ten ten-minute shots form Ten Skies, 2004.
8 Conversation with the author, June 11, 2009.
9 Physicists and philosophers widely agree that “the flow of time” is a creation of consciousness that we rely on for order. See Dan Falk, In Search of Time: The Science of a Curious Dimension, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008).
Historical Inquiry as Subject and Object

Julie Ault

Each person who sits down to write faces not a blank page but his own vastly overfilled mind. The problem is to clear out most of what is in it, to fill huge plastic bags with the confused jumble of things that have accreted there over the days, months, years of being alive and taking things in through the eyes and ears and heart. The goal is to make a space where a few ideas and images and feelings may be so arranged that a reader will want to linger awhile among them…. But this task of housecleaning (of narrating) is not merely arduous; it is dangerous. There is the danger of throwing the wrong things out and keeping the wrong things in….

—Janet Malcolm

Since the New York-based artists collaborative Group Material disbanded in 1996, I have continued its representation through live narration and writings, and responded to inquiries on a case-by-case basis. As the only founding member who remained until its conclusion I felt a responsibility to keep recounting the group’s practice. (Long-term member Doug Ashford has done likewise.) Group Material’s cultural practice was temporal and the forms employed were ephemeral. When the group ceased its activities I was intent on preserving its ephemerality and not becoming history. Fearing a revisionist encapsulation in which conflicts and contradictions of collaboration are resolved in their representation, I resisted our work being defined or objectified in a monograph by an art historian, and reserved the right to cohere our history at some future point.

Following a decade of active narration I decided it was time to relinquish responsibility (and control) and address Group Material’s history with lasting effect. I needed to confront the material traces that had infiltrated every closet, cabinet and spare spot in my apartment, as well as the psychic traces that permeated memory. Collecting material saved by other members’ as well and joining it all together in an archive would permit access to Group Material in a more coherent way than had been possible, and open the door for further historical representation.
Tackling the mission of recuperating Group Material as a two-pronged ‘housecleaning’ operation involved gathering and organising the pool of material to constitute the archive, and simultaneously distilling from that body of information to make a book. While formalising the archive sought to make Group Material newly public, the process was also conceived as a laboratory in which to investigate the logic, structure, implications and practice of the archive. I spent several months processing the material in its soon-to-be permanent home – the Downtown Collection at New York University: handling, reading and looking at every paper, image and item; taking note, cross-referencing, recollecting and reflecting. The more I reviewed the more deeply I understood the malleable and fallible nature of memory, and memory repeatedly threw documentary fact into question. Alternatively edified and mystified, the experience demonstrated the utter insecurity of the categories ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’.

Looking back, I realise while telling the story of Group Material these past years I have unwittingly told some lies. This discovery occurred when encountering information in files that I had long since blotted from memory. Surprised, I read on and the divide between recollection and fact expanded. Certain retrieved information was basic while some signalled that Group Material is much more complex and debatable than I had meanwhile fabricated. It seems I had convinced myself that the streamlined storyline, which I repetitiously recounted for years, was accurate.

Of course documents and artefacts are not intrinsically truth telling either; they are fragmentary and disconnected from context. Archives set the stage for history writing, yet they can mislead and even lie through omission. Essential pieces of information, which might answer questions and redirect research, are not necessarily tangible or archived.

While retrieving Group Material for myself, for the group and with the larger purpose of public representation in mind, inhabiting the dual roles of observer and observed created a central methodological challenge, which at times was confounding. Flipping between my own and other members’ muddle of memory as well as the accumulation of material sometimes felt like too much and not enough. But, ultimately my insider relationship to
the subject in conjunction with a more independent association to the potential for archives to shape historical representation seemed to productively balance one another.

Each aspect of cohering the archive and making *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material* has embodied specific and abstract purpose. A set of vexing questions fuelled the work. How does bringing documentation together imply shaping history, and writing history? How do artefacts – whether material or informational – communicate? Can contexts be in effect communicated? What archival structure and practices will animate and complicate without over determining meanings? How does the archive archive? What tense is the archive? Where does the archive end? What defines its frame? What can the collective subject do when given the chance to write its own history? What is gained and lost in the process of subjecting ephemeral and peripheral activities to conservation, from inducting them into history? What kind of suitable forms can be shaped to embody the historicising processes, gathered knowledge and diverse purpose that drive this inquiry? How to make what is missing evident as a layer of historicising? How does the subjective transform the material to a public sphere without manipulating it? Can one effectively challenge history writing while writing history?

The book’s main section was conceived as a chronicle composed of reprinted documents and images, with a guiding text running throughout. *Show and Tell* takes its ingredients and methods from the archive, which embodies both private and public material. The making of the group as a specific context along with its structure and process is inseparable from its public creations, yet the bulk of existing representation focuses on Group Material’s projects. *Show and Tell* widens the focus to include conveyance of internal workings in each layer of material that forms the book, and stresses aspects of the collaboration that are otherwise invisible.

Group Material comes to life in the archive. Working through the material, I was struck by the vividness and changing character of internal correspondence, minutes of meetings, exhibition proposals and press releases produced by the group. Emotional intensity is palpable in early communiqués, proposals and press releases are bombastic, topics and debates of the times are glimpsed through language, and graphic design bespeaks period styles. A selection of documents is reprinted in their original form and
scale in Show and Tell. They are valued as ‘original language’, which vividly conveys what we perceived we were doing at the time far better than writing that depicts from the distance of time would, whether by someone inside or outside the group. This material would commonly be considered source for writing rather than substance for presentation. By design the book encourages that the documents be regarded as primary texts rather than ancillary illustrations. This method situates readers in the archive, inviting a multiplicity of interpretation.

Contradictory evidence is at the heart of the archive and prominently figures into this portrayal of Group Material. A four-page incendiary letter written by cofounder Tim Rollins to the group in 1980 is fully reprinted alongside documents that represent a more harmonious collaboration. Tim’s letter rants and rails rhetorically. It evidences major clashes in the collaborative’s first months but it also shows how seriously he regarded the collaboration and articulates what was at stake for the group. As Janet Malcolm asserts, ‘Letters are the great fixative of experience. Time erodes feeling. Time creates indifference. Letters prove to us that we once cared. They are the fossils of feeling… conduit to unmediated experience.’

The guiding text that filters throughout the chronicle was conceived as a nonspecific voice imparting otherwise inaccessible circumstances, facts and anecdotes alongside the archive materials. It represents a close reading and distillation of multiple documentation and composite memory. This text captions, reports, digresses and discloses, coalescing subjective and objective knowledge into a seamless voice that augments the material. A depersonalised present-tense mode is used, intended to situate readers in the times of events and suggest collective subjectivity, distinct from first person retrospection. Trains of information such as the continuities and discontinuities of the group’s composition, conflicts and contradictions endemic to its process, and how Group Material structured itself and financed its work run throughout.

While reading through the files I noted many interesting segments in all types of documents, initially regarding this as source material for the guiding text. The number of full documents that could be reproduced was limited by the budget, which led to creating a layer of diverse extracts varying in author purpose, length and style. Unified by typographic design treatment, these also filter throughout the chronicle.
Image wise, snapshots portraying the various members and incarnations of the group, although in some cases there are no photos, and formal installation photography of the collaborative’s forty-five projects are presented on equal footing.

Despite the multiple layers of motley material that compose the chronicle, the goal was to bring the elements into a carefully designed formal system that stresses all the material as primary and equivalent. The book’s visual tone builds on Group Material’s aesthetic style. Analogous to the decentralised thematic exhibition format the group advanced, the chronicle is thought of as an exhibition space in the form of a book.

Revisionist and interpretive tendencies have been restrained in Show and Tell in favour of creating a useful documentary foundation and introduction to Group Material’s archive. The organisation of the archive and the response to that process through the book provide a platform and base interpretation to use, negotiate and take issue with. The project is also a case study in archiving, historical investigation and history writing, shaped from the questions and problems enmeshed in an amalgam of personally, collectively and socially vested inquiry.

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2 Ibid., pp. 109–10.
Introduction

Group Material’s work was primarily topical and temporal, fueled by our personal and collective observations—and by the social urgencies we perceived. Our horizon was the present tense. In 1989, the curator of the MATRIX Gallery at the Berkeley University Art Museum, Larry Rinder, invited us to address the subject of AIDS after seeing our exhibition at Dia Art Foundation the year before, "AIDS & Democracy: A Case Study". At the time, Group Material consisted of Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Karen Ramspacher. By 1989, we had witnessed several years of the epidemic with severely inadequate public response. The accumulation of AIDS-related illnesses and deaths of young friends and colleagues informed our daily lives. For our own education and for public purpose, the group embarked on constructing a history of the conditions that had transformed the epidemic into a full-blown national crisis.

Along with Berkeley intern Richard Meyer, we researched events and developments in several arenas—medical and scientific industries, governmental policies and statistics, grassroots responses and activism within affected communities, and media representations of AIDS, as well as artistic responses and popular culture of the relevant period. To form the exhibition, selected artifacts and documentary material from these fields were joined with artworks by individuals and collectives in a chronological structure. A thick black line bifurcated the display, marking the temporal horizon of the AIDS crisis, beginning with 1979, the year the Centers for Disease Control started tracking cases and deaths due to a new immune-suppressive virus, and extending to the then-present, 1989. The increasing number of new AIDS cases and deaths each year appeared on the timeline, and text—information curated by the group from the same research arenas—ran close to the line. Documentary material was keyed to the timeline, as were some of the more directly pertinent artworks, while other indirect and metaphoric works were not anchored to points in time.

At first glance, the timeline format promoted a linear reading; however, once one got involved with the histories and stories and images, cross-referencing became inevitable. AIDS Timeline’s ingredients were presented not as disparate elements or facts but as a web of intertwined events that described social processes and demonstrated the connectivity of actions and events. Virtually all the major social inequities that compromise democracy in the United States were reflected in that decadelong history of AIDS. The group’s arrangement of information posited a history of the political and social conditions in which AIDS was not only allowed but encouraged to become a national crisis, and broadcast some evidential responses made in the arms of the crisis. The timeline related the widespread stigmatization of people with AIDS, demonstrating the links between representation and judgment and between representation and allocation of resources. Further, it documented the impact that homophobia, racism, heterosexism, and sexism had on the formation of public policy.

Aesthetic practice and social practice merged in AIDS Timeline. The project involved layers of collaboration in and beyond the group with both individuals and community advocacy organizations. AIDS Timeline proposed models of history writing, curatorial method, artistic practice, and social process, as well as a compound of temporal contexts joined together that reflected the climate of circumstance and perception, the complexity of the period. The exhibition sought at once to contextualize the AIDS crisis and to create a context itself—a didactic exhibit environment that examined recent events to account for present conditions, with the hope of influencing what was to come.

Agency was our horizon, and history—not only that of the 1980s, but history as a continuum extending from earlier than 1979 and going on indefinitely. Chronology as guiding device set a linear horizon and performed an anchoring purpose, acting as a focal point from which viewers’ perspectives could venture. Within such a setup, the horizon is endowed with the double function of systematizing and releasing information. The horizon opened views to what was above and below the timeline. It opened views to the larger set of conditions articulated by the arrangement of information brought into narrative armature, to reveal the far-reaching associations between political and cultural events that render the historical period legible.

Doug Ashford (b. 1958) is an artist, writer, and Associate Professor at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York. Julie Ault (b. 1957) works as an artist, curator, editor, and writer.
Lesweise; sobald man sich jedoch in die Historien und Erzählungen und
de Arbeiten nicht zeitlich verankert wurden.

ergänzt durch dokumentarisches Material und einige unmittelbar auf das Information zu den gleichen Forschungsfeldern. Die Zeitleiste wurde

Zeitleiste, und parallel zu ihr verliefen Texte – von der Gruppe kuratierte

Advancement of Science and Art in New York.

Die begann 1979, als die Centers for Disease Control begannen, Erkrankungen

und freizugeben. Der Horizont eröffnete Ausblicke auf das, was oberhalb

Chronologie als Leitfaden bildete einen linearen Horizont und diente als

AIDS Timeline

Dokumentations-Environment, das aktuelle Ereignisse untersuchte,

und der Bereitstellung von Ressourcen auf. Darüber hinaus dokumentierte

Anker; sie fungierte als Blickpunkt, von dem aus sich die Betrachter neue

eine Kontinuum, das vor 1979 begann und sich unendlich fortsetzt. Die

herangezogen. Da wir die Ereignisse und Entwicklungen an verschiedenen Schauplätzen – in

AIDS zu beschäftigen, nachdem er im Vorjahr in der Dia Art Foundation

kräfte auf die Herausbildung der öffentlichen Ordnung ausübten.

handlungsorientierte didaktische Ausstellungs-Environment, das aktuelle Ereignisse untersuchte,

Handlungsmacht war unser Horizont, ebenso wie die Geschichte – nicht

sich den Einfluss des AIDS auf die Entwicklung der Darstellung und der Darstellung der Leidenschaften und der Klima der Verhältnisse und der Wahrnehmung und die Komplexität

Ausstellung »AIDS & Democracy: A Case Study«

Zusammen mit dem Berkeley-Praktikanten Richard Meyer untersuchten

jener Zeit widerspiegelten. Die Ausstellung zielte darauf ab, die AIDS-Krise

Handlungsmacht war unser Horizont, ebenso wie die Geschichte – nicht

die Demokratie in den Vereinigten Staaten beeinträchtigen. Die Anordnung

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seit 1980 werden die Informationen zu den gleichen Forschungsfeldern
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und Kollegen. Zu unserer eigenen Erbauung und für öffentliche Zwecke

sich den Einfluss des AIDS auf die Entwicklung der Darstellung und der Darstellung der Leidenschaften und der Klima der Verhältnisse und der Wahrnehmung und die Komplexität

beruflichen Interessenverbänden.

1989 blickten wir bereits

dokumentarische Materialien aus diesen Gebieten mit Kunstwerken von

narrativen Gerüst ausdrückten, um die weitreichenden Zusammenhänge

und parallel zu ihr verliefen Texte – von der Gruppe kuratierte

im Kontext der politischen und wirtschaftlichen Entwicklungen und die Populärkultur des betreffenden Zeitraums.

die betroffenen Communitys zu einer nationalen Krise wurde, und

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Die damaligen Mitglieder von Group Material waren Doug Ashford, Julie

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beruflichen Interessenverbänden.
Doug Ashford,
Julie Ault,
Group Material
AIDS Timeline
In a gallery room – in the piece – and hereby meaning the construction presented to us – its deconstruction is always, already actively inherent.\(^1\)

Looking at this construction we soon discover that we are forced to look at the deconstruction in order to identify the construction, as – the piece in front of us, the *now* – is only an accumulation of *before*.\(^2\)

One could say that the piece is the castle one builds on a piece of land in order to claim it as his kingdom. Even though this construction has a surface, the surface of the art piece has more in common with the index of a book, than it has with the wall that defines the border of a piece of land.

Standing in front of the art piece with this knowledge – the viewer (being aware of his carnal limitations) might ask: “how do I penetrate this facade – How do I access this land behind it?”\(^3\)

The answer is – By doing memory work. By memory work and knowledge we are able to go though the facade of the art piece and into its deconstruction. While inside the deconstruction we will discover that this structure depends on a linear model, and that time is the fiber that holds it together. Just like gravity shapes a landscape, time is – by its sequential way of ordering of things - the foundation of this structure.\(^4\)

\(^1\) This applies not only to art making but to any kind of representation. In general the motivation for this investigation is a concern for the mechanisms behind representation. How do they work – and why do they often produce a dual reading of the mechanisms behind the represented and the represented itself – Often to the point that the represented presents itself as autonomous. I want to connect the represented with the mechanisms producing it. I want to locate that space within the space of the presented.

\(^2\) In other words the construction is the signifier to another context. The architectural metaphor is used to point to the geographical dilemma of location – If this space of deconstruction is always, already at work – where is it located – how do we access it psycically?

\(^3\) At this point – the text is accompanied with images from computer-generated landscape. The question of location – *how do we go to this eccentric center of the represented deconstruction* – has many similarities with a simulator. A place that is physically unavailable, but that we visit with a relative relationship to the laws of time and gravity. Using history, knowledge and memory we access this deconstruction. However since it is only available in this post-mortem state – we must also move as ghost; between “times”, through walls etc.

\(^4\) As opposed to sequential transmission – with manual transmission, the user (in this case meaning the viewer) does not have to go from 1\(^{st}\) gear to 2\(^{nd}\) gear, 2\(^{nd}\) gear to 3\(^{rd}\) gear – and so on. The user does not rely on a sequential order and can for an example jump from 5\(^{th}\) gear to 1\(^{st}\) gear. This mechanism is very similar to how our memory works. As viewers we don’t have
However the foundation of this deconstruction relies on the meaning that this order produces rather than that it relies on the order itself.

By using the piece as an index, and by combining it with our knowledge and memory, we no longer have to read the piece sequentially to get to this meaning.

By memory work we shift perspective and can now navigate in the chronology the same way one shifts gear in a car with manual transmission.\(^5\) We can now go directly to the platforms of meaning existing in the chronology - generated either by the artist, by history - or by reflections in the viewer’s own subjectivity.

From this perspective we can study the process of the chronology transforming from a grid, and into the body of work that is presented to us in the gallery setting.\(^6\) As the chronology is too complex to be presented as a whole, what the artist must do is to pick out essential intersections in the chronology and pull these points into the construction as the final piece.

However since the chronology is sequentially connected (meaning that time is the fiber that holds it together) the artist must be very aware that in stretching one specific point from its context – the surrounding parts of the context will follow – potentially creating unintentional gaps for the viewer to enter with his own subjectivity.\(^7\)

To avoid this we have invented conventions of formality within forms of representation. By using these conventions we can avoid unnecessary bubbles of mystery that would encourage the viewer to enter with his own interpretation at unintended points. When these formal tools are used correctly - leaving out parts of
to go through the whole learning process (the chronology) that the artist went through preparing the exhibition – we don’t have to access the chronology form the same perspective as it was written but can tap in wherever.

\(^5\) This new perspective reveals the plot of the chronology – so to speak. From this perspective the piece is not an autonomous universalizing final stage, but instead a part of a process. Once this relation becomes clear, the real “virtuous act” for the viewer to witness is how the artist navigates on this cultural map by exporting material from a subjective sphere (the chronology) into a public (the exhibition).

\(^6\) If for an example the artist wants to pull out a phenomenological topic from the chronology – this layer could potentially be imbedded in “local” matters, which are only relevant to that specific point in the chronology.

\(^7\) The imagery illustrating this paragraph is from Spiderman 3 – from a scene called *The Birth of the Sandman*. Sand’s porous texture makes an ideal example of a system that tends to be conceived as a whole, but in fact consists of numerous independent modules. Just like the artist is the invisible hand that shifts the gears in the car with manual transmission – here, the artist’s conceptual framework is the transparent force that organizes the material. The artist is the third perspective – not the POW in the chronology, not the viewer in the exhibition space – but the perspective that observes his own chronology from above as it shapes and grows into a new body in the public space.
the chronology does not destabilize it—nor does it distort the outcome of the piece presented.

An example would be the nail that the painting hangs on. No one that sees a painting hanging would think that the canvas is levitating. In other words: leaving the nail out of the construction presented to the viewer is a successful example of formal editing in the chronology.

Knowing this, we are able to apply a more modular quality to the editorial mechanism of pulling specific points from the chronology into the piece.

By combining the memory’s nonlinear way of navigating with conventions of formality - we are able to detach particular points from the chronology and bring these into the piece - without it affecting the surround cells.

The result is the artist in a new hybrid form. The surface of the art piece has been replaced with a portal; a transit area to the artist’s chronology where every stage of the process is equally represented. This allows the artist to shift in and out of different mediated forms – depending on which one is most suitable for the discourse he wants to enter. If needed, the artist can dissolve himself completely into theory – At other occasions the artist might transform into a piece in the gallery – or if required he can choose to represent himself in person.8

Whatever form he chooses – the mechanism that animated this transformation is revealed and logical to the viewer thanks to deconstruction.

Instead of the viewer spending all his interpretive energy on how the message was delivered – he can now fully focus on its content.

8 The imagery illustrating this paragraph is from Spiderman 3 – from a scene called The Birth of the Sandman. Sand’s porous texture makes an ideal example of a system that tends to be conceived as a whole, but in fact consists of numerous independent modules. Just like the artist is the invisible hand that shifts the gears in the car with manual transmission – here, the artist’s conceptual framework is the transparent force that organizes the material. The artist is the third perspective – not the POW in the chronology, not the viewer in the exhibition space – but the perspective that observes his own chronology from above as it shapes and grows into a new body in the public space.

In that sense Robert Smithson is the Sandman. In the historicized body of work that one finds after his death, he manifests himself in various formats. Sometimes the concept “Robert Smithson” is represented as a sand pile-piece, sometimes as a text, and on other occasions he figures in person next to the execution of a piece in the landscape. The artist is the editor of the transmission from his own chronology. His presence (whatever form it might take) is never monumental – but merely serves a temporary gesture to emphasize and optimize the relationship between the chronology and the piece.
Roni Horn, a compilation

Julie Ault

Her mother was often awake in the wee hours of the night reading the newspaper and drinking a chocolate egg cream in the kitchen.

Arthur and Anne Horn named their kids economically and symmetrically: Ona, Ian, Roni, Matt.

Both of her grandmothers were named Rose.

Her ancestors changed from Hornichyk to Horn when they emigrated.

Her father: smart and sharp, harsh and opinionated, honorable and compassionate. She inherited him in some measure. He instilled her with profound love and respect for nature. Through objects, she learned from him about the past.

She spent a lot of time walking around Rockland County alone while she was growing up.

They thought their father’s name was Arthur but she encountered a document that said otherwise after he died.

*My mother taught me to say the opposite of what I meant and people would understand better. I think she was right . . . because then you get a laugh—or people just think you’re out of it.*

*My father was a pawnbroker—my cousin Eddie was a writer—my father gave him his first typewriter—and Eddie wrote a book called *The Pawnbroker* that was partly based on my father’s life except that my father was never in a concentration camp. Then they made a film out of Eddie’s book. And the house in the movie was just like ours and Rod Steiger was a lot like my father—especially the emotional repression.*

She remembers her mother reading *Myra Breckinridge* when she was about thirteen. *The cover of the book had an androgynous figure on it.* They discussed its subject matter, which she found intriguing.

As a teenager, she worked at an apple orchard store stocking shelves and making apple cider donuts.

*It always seemed like magic to me . . . when he priced things in the pawnshop.*

*My mother had a blue convertible. I went food shopping with her. When I got lost in the supermarket I walked home. My mother wasn’t there either.*
She used to climb a tree to a private spot on the black tar roof of a storage building where her father ran a nursery in Peekskill. There, she could read to her heart’s content in the sun, hiding in the light. Once over several days she read lots of Camus—The Stranger, The Fall, The Plague, Exile and the Kingdom, The Myth of Sisyphus.

*When I was young I found a copy of Psychopathia Sexualis in my parents library. It appeared as a reference work, and as such, reading it seemed to have no taboos attached . . . Until I actually did read it and was awed at the descriptions—which set quite a standard for my imagination in regard to what people do to each other.*

Favorite trees inscribe the family homes in her memories. Meadow Street: the maple tree, birth to age nine. The elementary school was surrounded by woods. Red Hill Road: magnolias, tall grasses, dogwood, age nine to thirteen. She liked to watch the fireflies at night. Andover Road: beech tree, age thirteen until sixteen. She couldn’t wait to leave home any longer. At sixteen she went to Providence to study.

Conflicts surfaced between father and daughter around when she was fifteen.

Her best friend Arnold was killed at age sixteen when a car hit his motorcycle.

*Harold Pinter was important when I was leaving home. I had seen some of the movies he wrote screenplays for and then got to reading his plays.*

Although not a fan of Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* was essential for her as it provided insight into melancholy, which had previously seemed mysterious.

*Jean Genet made a strong impression on me when I was in undergraduate school—sort of when I was fitting into who I was. My first real girlfriend gave me The Thief’s Journal with a beautiful picture of Genet by Brassai on the cover.*

*The library—that’s my home.*

*When I was eighteen and nineteen I was heavy into Beckett, Joyce, Kafka and Yeats. I read Ulysses for the second time while I was traveling with Ditto in Ireland. I loved that. Watching the liffey and thinking of Leo Bloom.*

While at Yale she read the entire fifteen volumes of Paul Valéry’s work.

*I wonder how I see, differently, in solitude. Wonder what I see, differently, in solitude.*

She kept journals between 1975 and 1990.

*I have a house to which I come back and go from to other places. I have little attachment for this place, or any place I’ve ever inhabited. Sometimes I derive a great deal of gratification from associating intimately with spaces and places which are comfortable (spiritually) to remain in.*
Her father wanted her to be a scientist.

Her journals are chronological. As repositories for introspection they are also atemporal. Presentness, retrospection, and prospection commingle. The early ones are a free flow of personal reflection and declaration, romantic longing and savoring, desire and doubt about her work, meditation on relations between objects, space, and contexts, and focused observation of her immediate natural surroundings—especially in Iceland. After a few years the notebooks changed tone. Perhaps it was too painful to be so close to language and self-consciousnesses at once. Perhaps her relationship to time changed. Perhaps the depth, which had found voice in her journals, was relocated in her art as her practice gathered form.

*There is no physical manifestation of home in my life. But there is a home. It is a very portable one. Home is for me a state of mind. I feel my home composing itself ever more concretely as I attain a greater sense of self. Its composition resides also in my friendships; the mutual acknowledgements of the profoundest order.*

She fashioned a philosophy of home at twenty-three.

*The ideal house is a place whose only distinctions between outside and in is the space it divides off. It necessarily isolates on a physical level. But there can be no spiritual distinction between outside and in. There can be no shelter that isolates spiritually. If things are going badly outside it is necessary to take this badness inside. There to deal with it the more directly and fully.*

A picture of a woman and a sailor (her parents), dated 1945, is pasted to the inside cover of one of her journals.

*I graduated from college and a few months later I left for Iceland. I took a motorcycle and spent six months on crummy roads. I was living in a tent the whole time. It was a very frugal period—perpetually uncomfortable, wet, cold, windy and exhausting.*

*When I am alone everything about me is a mirror. This is new. This reflection, beckoned from the wholeness of my solitude.*

*I thought a great deal about art today and especially the nature of a work which has no sensational aspect. No mystery to create magnetism. Just the direct and simple presence of a thing which can be seen physically in its entirety in an instant and harbors no illusions.*

Her self-imposed isolation is means and destination.

*She has an insatiable need for quietude and privacy.*

*Living with myself is no easy matter: as Valéry said: “One must go into himself armed to the teeth…”*
10 pm I decide to leave directly for Reykjavik. A long, long drive home. But I was really up to it—though the frame cracked 40 miles out of Varahlit, I kept going—70 miles out of R. the rain came—5:30, into town sopping wet. Standing outside Jenny’s wondering how to get in—a brief walk and then a dog barking brings an old woman downstairs—ushers me upstairs with warm open gestures—into a beautiful old kitchen out of the 40s with b&w checkered tile floor—enamel white fixtures and a high ceiling, painting and glossy light blue. It is full of light—and the gesture of the two old women, sisters out of a Fellini type sensibility—I keep thinking I must be dreaming—First, I am wrapped in heavy blankets and served fruit with the utmost care and attention and then as I sat there, wrapped up —like Dad used to tuck me in as a child—eating my red apple—she serves me a most delicious egg and tomato sandwich and then another—

I sure do like that motorcycle. How it just keeps going.

Her private records: diaries, intimate letters—received and written, ruminations on specific works, letters expressing the philosophy of her art, unpublished writings and conversations. She lets me read it all.

Nostalgia longing arises in me at the sight of the early pre-drawn lights in the farmers’ houses.

Her itinerancy moved her beyond associative relays between her original landscape and formative losses.

When I get back to Reykjavik or my trip to the west fiords I will rewrite this journal using only my memory to describe the circumstances—in this way I shall discover the moments of deepest intensity I have of experiences here in Island.

Every time you use a memory you change it.

Find a lighthouse to stay at in Iceland. Alone. Utterly. And from each window a vantage to see the same view in space, each day . . . but each day feeling its difference . . . the difference created through duration. I want to feel that passage.

She realized her authorship early in life. Stillness, reading, remote landscapes, conviction, risk taking.

When she finished college she gave a close reading to everything she could put her hands on by Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Rilke. Together they formed an important space.

One day this week I will go up to the Museum of Natural History. Really strong urge to see the different birds even though all stuffed.

Up to the Museum of Natural History to see the birds. You really have to look hard to see them. Looking at the nests, the different collections, arrangements and densities of each.
Remarkable constructions. This museum has got to be one of my favorite places in the city.

I am seeing so much these days.

Living situation tenuous. No place in Manhattan to move to. Everything exorbitantly priced. Not much available. Too much instability for any kind of peace of mind. I wish that I could somehow glide above all the mundane change. The plague of urban living seems to be that it demands a rate of change which is inhuman and ultimately depressing. It seems a deliberate propagation of despair. It takes all my energy just to ignore it. Anne and Arthur have a way being encouraging. It’s just their style.

For years she copied lengthy quotations by hand. She keeps these documents in binders. Quoted authors include Artaud, Bachelard, Borges, Camus, Capra, Cézanne, Cioran, Coomaraswamy, Dante, Dickinson, Dupin, Eliot, Faulkner, Flaubert, Gide, Gourmont, Heidegger, Hölderlin, Joyce, Kafka, Kierkegaard, Kubler, Mallarmé, Merton, Ortega Y Gasset, Rilke, Rodin, Roethke, Rossellini, Stevens, Siren, Suzuki, Thoreau, Valéry, Weil, Williams, Yeats.

Felt so good today, I went out and bought 5 lbs of soap.

I wonder what Faulkner would make of the midnight sun. Composed a little lyric for him—“That evening sun—it won’t go down.”

Homesick for Iceland.

Unable to read. Anxious to get forthcoming trip over with. R. Reagan elected president. My body responded with nausea, disgust. An aborted day, entirely. Unable to think. Wander about too much.

People say they want to get out and “see the world”—as if they weren’t living in the world and what they saw daily before them wasn’t a part of it. Getting out to see the world is no reason to travel. I’m sitting here wondering why the walnut is so well sheltered. So well housed. European Radio talks too much.

In Iceland I was moved from within. I felt first. Beyond the reach of my intellect, beyond the application of my words. I felt the presence of my being as real. It is as forceful as the sky, the earth and the waters.

I move in tides when I am alone, high and low and constant.

Have been working intermittently throughout day and evening. It seems that I get much to close to what I am doing and lose the structure of sight. Reading Thoreau whose attitudes and interest in nature is very appealing to me. I like the basis for his writings as well as the form. With the exception that his poetry which occurs frequently throughout the text is
very poor. I have taken to skipping over it entirely. I greatly admire his lifestyle and the sense that his work, writing, and observing the natural world comes from a real center.

In solitude, her subtle mind is in dialogue with a multiplicity of authors.

What do you do when someone moves you? You cultivate that motion.

Snowshoeing in Vermont. That is my next move.

Spectacles bore her.

I remember when I was a child, perhaps 12 years old; my father and I stopped in an antique shop. There I found an extraordinary ivory cue ball. I couldn’t take my eyes off it. It captured my imagination and inspired an immense desire to hold it. He preferred not to give it to me.

Artifacts of faith: she was attracted to things made solely as the result of faith in something, which have no other meaning.

A long walk to see the sun rise. A majestic view of the hanghukill glacier and the valley north of it. I am truly inspired tonight and the new work is really beginning to come to clarity in my mind. I am also so full of Yeats and believe tonight has brought me a more full appreciation and understanding of his work.

In me late last night and early this evening, I carried in me the most quiet and true happiness. It was indeed a state of inspiration in which I felt at one with myself and the nature about me. I felt a communion with Yeats I never before felt except in rare moments with Rilke—that I really knew / felt the meaning of their words. Thru the internal state of my being. I had lived their meaning and their meaning was part of me.

A mundane ordinary day. But basically relaxing. Yeats is really in me now. And I am bigger for it.

On long journeys in Iceland she reads particular authors in depth. She took Thomas Bernhard to the Arctic Circle while working on “Pi” and “Arctic Circles.” His energy suited the view perfectly—empty, flat—end of the world landscape—Gathering Evidence, Woodcutters, The Loser, Concrete, Gargoyles, The Lime Works. It was like the landscape catalyzed an understanding and created a kind of stamina in me for reading him.

Emily Dickinson accompanied her when she toured the country’s hot tubs and pools. Another time it was Flannery O’Conner’s short stories. She first read O’Conner on the recommendation of her high school English teacher.

The weather has got me thinking again: living life as the moment-to-moment result of myriad circumstantial exchanges . . . . I’m haunted by the critical questions I have about
my work. Trying to keep it at a slight distance—believing I can resolve them in time with less direct address—

There exists no outside force that is capable of affirming my being in the manner that I do through my work.

Her seclusion is interposed with a heavily populated fantasy life.

One winter in Iceland she read Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks* entirely in the dark. *It was wonderful. When I was a kid “Tonio Kröger” was important to me. I took that story very personally.*

*I grew up with the Arctic Circle on the map and there was no question in my mind that I was going to go look at it one day and I did so. Of course it is a dead ringer for any other horizon but it is the Arctic Circle.*

By the early-eighties her journals principally provide occasions for deep examination of her art works. She stops keeping notebooks by 1991. Thereafter she keeps notes on disparate sheets of paper, often undated.

*A gold field…as it lays on the floor…lays among the dust and accumulating newspapers, I wonder and wonder and wonder at it: and so here I have a disembodied substance brought back to corporal existence—an epic object—it would make the coldest place burn with its fire, is splendor—a brilliance capable of reflecting the purest of natures, the purest of solitudes—A presence so palpable—I close my eyes to the object and it becomes—and becomes.*

*Gold is rarely experienced in its pure state. It is rarely used for its intrinsic properties (if it were it would not be alloyed so frequently): it is used most frequently for its image quality.*

When she first began reading, Edgar Allan Poe was a fixation. She especially liked all the stories on premature burial and obsessional behavior. She recollects experiencing a weird sexual energy from reading him.

*To use color as a material substance: manipulated as much for its phenomenal offering as for its less seen but highly present qualities: chemical and physical properties. Adhesion, solubility, texture, density.*

The first lines of Dickinson’s recorded in her journal are: “To shut our eyes is travel.” “We went to sleep as if it were a country.” “I work to drive the awe away yet awe impels the work.”

*Pair = One thing plus another
Double: One thing plus itself
Duplicate: One thing plus itself again exactly*
Twin: One thing plus one thing that are alike (likenesses)

. . . in the late eighties I had a kind of epiphany with Dickinson and just dropped everything—stayed home and read everything in print in one go. That meant a couple of weeks as I recall. Her writings are not exactly light reading and I remember wanting to reread many times before moving to the next poem. I then went on to her letters.

Lispector came to me in the late eighties and early nineties. I have a very strong connection to her work.

I’ve always thought of my library as the center of the world.

Lyrics of Abba songs and of “Send in the Clowns” sit in a pink plastic folder in her files.

She doesn’t often find herself somewhere she doesn’t intend to be. Place is purpose. A Place: condensation of acts.

I think that all the visual work comes through language. I believe I think with words, I can’t verify that, but my understanding of how I put ideas together or how I put work together, forms together, is definitely involved with language in some way.

She makes lists:
Recurrence
Repeat
Pair
Double
Duplicate
Twin
Franchise
Reflection

and

I have been taken as
My sister’s husband
My niece’s father
My girlfriend’s boyfriend
My best friend’s boyfriend
My girlfriend’s girlfriend

and

My father was a pawnbroker in Harlem
My first real girlfriend’s name was Ditto
My first trip to Iceland was in 1975
My hair used to be red
My hair was so thick I had no peripheral vision
My cousin Seth put his hand in dogshit on a dare when I was a teenager
My best friend was Arnold—we used to swim naked in the top of a silo
My mom bought me a chocolate colored plastic wallet with sky king embossed in blue and black on the cover
I first masturbated over Monica Vitti in L’Avventura—on T.V.
I used to have a recurring dream—me on a ladder as high as the sky—next to a stack of books as high as the sky too. I was reading the top book working my way down to an unseen bottom
I had a pink bathroom when I was young
I was kicked out of the Brownies when I was a kid. The troop leader didn’t want any Jews.
My father had a cuckoo clock in this pawnshop. I liked to pull the solid metal cones that hung from the clock and watch the cuckoo come out. The cuckoo got stuck outside the clock and my father smacked me.
I used to have a pair of mittens made as golf club covers. They had been hocked at the pawnshop. They were mink w/ brown velvet lining.

She is self-possessed. She is full of herself.

I have this almost pathological desire for privacy.

Maybe I’m just imitating the sense of memory.

I started thinking how who I’m talking to affects who I am—because who I’m talking to affects how I am—and how affects how I’m seen—that is, how you see me. So this circle of perception affects the outcome of me at any given moment. And the question then became what moment do I take to be me? So then a confusion of selves arose, even though over the years I noticed that I do bear a likeness to myself in some ways. But what about all the times when I hardly recognize myself?

She habitually listens to Shirley Bassey singing Goldfinger. Sometimes she makes it a duet.

I have a sister. And I figure that it’s her presence that allows me so much solitude.

She considered having impersonations of herself made by Tommy Lee Jones, Renée Zellweger, and others.

I spent a few nights in a hotel. The halls were lined with glass cases crowded with stuffed birds. Near the door to my room a large snowy owl was sitting on a chest. I hustled the owl into my room. The owl’s presence was so strong. Even a dead owl...And I couldn’t sleep. So late in the night I schlepped it back out to the hall.

She is demoralized by mundanity, the aggressive subjugation of nature worldwide, and America’s widespread ignorance of history.
I am sitting in a room that is also my home—and it overlooks a not-quite-setting-sun, across the ocean horizon, in what has become a kind of recurring criminal act—absorbing all of my attention for hours at a time. Also in the view out there is the entrance to the center of the earth—Snaefellsjökull. In the foreground of the view are a traffic rotary and recycling center and a sewage treatment plant too. Together they do an ok job of countering the sublime.

Her library contains many books by Theodor S. Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss.

. . . Jerry, Margret, Ditto, Lin, Matthew, Douglas, Sandy, Dale, Eliza, Jeanny, Jeff, Rachel, James, Quentin, Ona, Robert, Don, Felix, Tala, Melissa, Vicente, Arnold, Frida, Ulfur, Matt, Georgia . . .

It is necessary for me to be received by those who move me. In this reception resides my home.

A quintessential lifelong New Yorker. She oscillates between chumminess and detachment, bombast and sensitivity, directness and evasion. Sometimes she calls people ‘babe’ or ‘honey bunch.’ When she’s fired up she swears like a sailor.

Iceland’s landscape is being nibbled from every direction: a dam here, a road there, patches of gridded forest here. With each of these new alterations, Iceland moves one step further—away from its unique self. Seeing all of this combat with beauty, I begin to understand that Iceland’s infamous bad weather was in fact a blessing in disguise—protecting Iceland all these years from the Icelanders.

The bad news of the world is always in her. Reading the news really winds her up. Invectives abound.

I feel so alienated because I can’t hold the world together in a way that makes sense to me—in terms of all this horrific shit going on.

My mother died yesterday. That’s how I found myself at the Museum of Natural History. The Hall of African Mammals was just as it was when my mother first brought me here. I remember the things I remembered then. The dioramas hold time and memory constant.

When I was a child I came into this room, fresh from a bright blue sky that lingered in my vision. I took that blue and the color of the sun right into the darkness with me. The memory of them illuminated and scaled the vast darkness. I held my mother’s hand as I stood in front of these other places, stringing the views, one after another—places like pearls, together.

In the Hall of African Mammals that day my mother wore a kerchief pulled tightly over her hair and knotted behind her neck. When I looked at her, I saw a muted light reflecting off her forehead, accentuating the line of the kerchief and the shape of her head. She wore a powder blue sweater trimmed in brown scallops around the neck and sleeves. The powder blue fuzz caught the light and made the sweater glow in the
darkness. The fuzzy aura of kinked wool teased me as I looked up at her. And around her neck she wore a strand of grooved gold balls.

Many things encircle her, radiating out from her—gold balls, links of illuminated windows, sequences of inhabited reflections, a necklace of faraway places—and the memories borne in me. I encompass myself with them—a spiral opening out, expanding: always in the present tense.

She laments the transformation of her original landscape from farming community to suburban expansion.

Memory is a pairing of you.

My brother and I would play outside together. He let me wipe my nose on his shirt so I didn’t have to go home.

**BEING FULL OF RELATION**

My weather began back in grade school. In class the teacher announced a hurricane was on its way. With that she dismissed us and emphatically instructed: “Run home!” I guess it gave me such a thrill I’ve been running to Iceland ever since.

You know the room in a lighthouse that revolves? When you stand in that room you feel like the light.

Weather is the one thing she holds in common with every person.

While working on Library of Water she read Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*, *The Road*, and *No Country for Old Men*. The former contained episodes of violence that were more powerful than I have seen in any film—i.e. Peckinpah, Tarantino, etc.

“We’ll be up shit’s creek” as my mother used to say.

In a letter to Dr. Ruediger Hentschel at Schott Galswerke she wrote: *I want to produce a work of optically clear, utterly transparent glass. This would be an object which from afar would have a container-like aspect that the frosted sides would present, but when the viewer approaches the object and looks into it from the top—will have the experience of seeing into the interior of a solid form. Basically an object which is a window into itself. The object is in another sense, the experience of transparence itself. Transparence in the paradoxical form of a solid mass. Something not looked through, but into. I thought that a body of still and clear water would be an analogy for the work, but water is almost always contained by something not water. Here would be an object that distinguishes itself in its extreme state of clarity.*

. . . I have come to Iceland dozens of times since . . . almost every year sometimes twice a year . . . it has a migratory frequency and sense of necessity . . . I’ve tried to imagine not
going to Iceland . . . it’s not an option . . . I go because I have to . . . the way geese
migrate . . . a chemical necessity . . .

Her aim is to make objects that are clear about themselves.

. . . I want to talk about this experience I had ‘x’ time ago and I have to wonder why I’ve
picked just that one—or even why I remember that one thing. And so I’m thinking about
all the missed memories that are me too but totally forgotten. And now I’m thinking why
can’t I remember the things I’ve forgotten and isn’t the missing me, me too?

Reading Roni Horn

I am sitting in her studio reading her journals and private papers from the past thirty
years. She works nearby customizing letterforms for a vocabulary of weather. They look
liquid and whimsical and remind me of Dr. Seuss.

Usually she works in this room alone. For the time being, I am in her daily milieu reading
and absorbing. The open-plan arrangement along with the newness of our proximity
encourages access: out-of-the-blue we ask each other questions and offer spontaneous
commentary. After a couple days of this, she starts playing loud music, most frequently a
playlist that includes Knocking on Heaven’s Door, Sympathy for the Devil, Goldfinger,
Play With Fire, Desperado, and Sinnerman. It depletes my reading concentration, but I’m
getting the full-on Roni-in-her-studio experience, so I don’t protest.

I presume the notebooks provide direct admittance to her former present tense—taking
me where I get to know Roni long before I knew her.

Every once in a while I look up and exclaim, “this is so juicy,” to which she smiles, looks
intrigued, and immediately returns to what she was doing. I feel like a snoop despite
permission. She has not read her early journals in decades and might well be stunned by
the intimate yearnings formerly lodged in her mind that found voice in diaristic privacy.
Situations, sensations, and emotions are rendered with raw sensitivity: hard evidence of
feelings written in their time. I am flushed from what she felt, and have difficulty
reconciling with Roni who sits in front of me. In and out of time.

She springs from one room to the other and from one work station to another—reviewing
images, talking to Suzanne and Ann in the office, making calls, editing texts, checking
email. Sometimes I’m jolted by her physical presence as she rushes to the printer or
suddenly belts out “. . . the man with the Midas touch . . . ”

My abrupt questions must seem bizarre: ‘who was David? What happened between you?’
She looks blank at first—unaware of what I’m talking about—yet she devoted pages and
pages to him thirty years ago as she savored their deepening friendship and subsequently anguished over the unexplained rupture that occurred. She was tremendously disappointed to learn that their bond was neither definite nor mutually precious. He disappeared from her journal.

Every afternoon, around three o’clock, one of us goes out to get us each a pack of Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups.

I wonder if I am the only person who has read these, or if a former intimate ever intruded, perhaps under duress—distressed by the sense of fading connection—seeking verification of their unarticulated ending on the horizon.

Every once in a while she says, I can’t believe I’m letting you read all that. Frankly, I can’t either.

Her accounts of solitary travel speak of the paradox of isolation. Her longing for social communion is so insistent and intense that I mirror it. When I come to descriptions of meetings that evolved into the warm exchange of contact I feel as reassured and renewed as if they were my own experiences.

The diary-writing protagonist of Sartre’s Nausea reasoned: “I think that is the big danger in keeping a diary: you exaggerate everything. You continually force the truth because you’re always looking for something.”

I’ve never maintained a journal for long, but when I was around five years old, did so for a few weeks. Apparently my days were simple: it was exclusively composed of entries that read “macaroni and cheese today” and “no macaroni and cheese today.”

She may not realize that some love letters are tucked into notebooks, but I can’t bring myself to tell her.

I’ve only been reading a few days but I conclude, perhaps erroneously, that she has always made good choices for herself.

I marvel over the deep thinking and fine writing she demonstrated at only twenty years old. Shit, this chick has always been self-conscious, articulate, and sharp as a tack. Recollections of myself at that age are disturbing. I wonder what would explain the gulf.

She has long centered her life on freedom and responsibility. Youthful contact with Sartre’s philosophy of existentialism cannot account for this (“. . . man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being . . . ”); such tenets must be in her core.

My appetite for biography is driven by an unappeasable desire for self-understanding—which I suspect is a somewhat unhealthy cultural symptom—and by the wish to cultivate possibilities for my future through the lens of another.
Evenings, I read some of the books by Genet, Sartre, Camus, and Poe that impressed her when she was coming of age.

When asked in 1993 to provide a curriculum vitae for the first monograph on his work, Felix Gonzalez-Torres composed a chronology of his life that intertwined private and public events, which he related informally (1964 Dad bought me a set of watercolors and gave me my first cat . . . 1993 Sam Nunn is such a sissy, peace might be possible in the Middle East). Twelve years later I made a duet with his timeline: further inscribing personal milestones and social memories and histories, including some that occurred before his birth as well as after his death (1945 First atomic bomb, named “Little Boy,” is dropped on Hiroshima by the United States . . . 1994 “Untitled” (America) is the last of twenty-four light string pieces made over two years, which Gonzalez-Torres calls “my own history of light.”). That piece inspired Roni’s invitation for me to consider her personal history. I regard this as an undertaking of friendship, but not only. Investigating relationships between clock time, history, lived experience, narrative, and memory has occupied me since Felix died, although I hope it won’t always.

I felt on firmer ground with the Felix chronology, with his biographic armature to derive from, and because he could not take issue with my choices.

Every artist colludes in the shaping of his or her public persona. If I push this piece freely, I may activate her boundaries and learn the extent of her inclination to control portrayals of herself. Mirroring is intrusive business, even when invited.

She seems like a minefield. She is sensitive, and I recognize the double-edged nature of sensitivity with regard to my own psyche. I doubt she has thought much about the potential consequences of this collaboration—how it could affect our friendship, our connection. I might write something that offends or disappoints her. My idea of accurate information may not flush with her self-perception. I may not know her as well as I believe I do, which would be unsettling. How best to balance privacy with exposure? What will be exposed? The enterprise feels treacherous. Still, I like the idea of testing our limits. Projecting discord, I remind myself (and mentally remind her) to lighten up.

Last night, I reread an email I received from Jim Benning a few years ago: “Life is finite with a beginning and end. It can be traced along a line. Someone thirty-five has a line this long. Someone eighty-two twice that plus some. However, the number of points in each line is exactly the same. Proof: Form an angle with any two lines of finite length. Draw a line through the end points of each line and then a set of lines parallel to that line. The points of the two lines are shown to obey a one-to-one correspondence. Perhaps an ordering of the points is more important than length . . . . But time is infinite with no beginning and no end. It can be represented on a line that is infinitely long in both directions. Life placed on this line exists as a point somewhere in the middle. Tomorrow is just as far away from no beginning (negative infinity) and no end (positive infinity) as are today and yesterday. Therefore all of life exists at the same point in time.”
Where to begin? I’ve heard that people in therapy either recount and reexperience the past, or focus on current circumstances and relationships. I talked exclusively about the present. But as Roy Schafer has observed, “Once the analysis is under way, the autobiographical present is found to be no clear point in time at all.”

Language is blunt. We could use a new tense that refers to past, present, and future as synchronous.

In 1991, Felix asked me for a list of formative dates and events which a word, name, place, or phrase would denote, from which he would make my portrait. I enthusiastically called on memory, letting people, places, and events surface. I obsessed over the responsibility of memorializing key relationships and myself. I thought about what formed me and about what I would want to be reminded of on a daily basis since the piece would be installed in my bedroom. Finally, Felix selected from my pool and sequenced the entries non-chronologically.

“In the theatre of the past that is constituted by memory . . . we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being’s stability—a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, wants time to ‘suspend’ its flight.” (Bachelard)

Felix’s portraits are not static; they can be modified by whoever owns them. (The owner may or may not be the subject of the portrait.) Typically the owner preserves the artist’s original selection, and some expand on it. My portrait has had two subsequent permutations: one time I self-consciously modified it for a public exhibition. And for another exhibition I restructured it with all new entries except for one. Collectively the three versions diagram the absolute mutability of self and life as flux.

Subject and object: alternating between authoring, witnessing, and narrating our selves.

A few years ago I painted over the original portrait and have no plans to recreate it. I don’t really want to live with it now, although I’ve contemplated making the fourth version a random group of memories, an impersonal accounting of public events, a collection of lies, or a set of predictions.

Sometimes when I hear myself proliferating my personal facts and fictions I wish I could just stop talking. Stories repeated and repeated in order to sustain some semblance of consistency about who I think I am. Mythologizing is tedious. Of course demythologizing gets tiresome too.

Self-representation always involves the dilemma of “the secrets kept from oneself and from others.” (Bersani and Phillips) The impact of a secret cannot be fathomed until it is exposed.

Recently, after swearing to tell the truth, I was interviewed by a judge for jury duty, and responded to his questions automatically. Upon leaving the courtroom I was stunned to
realize how much misinformation I had unintentionally served up in a five-minute exchange, beginning with my birthplace. (I instinctively say I’m from Maine but actually I was born in Boston.)

Every so often when she tells me something about her past, I suspect she’s told it countless times and I feel a bit uncomfortable.

My attraction to her diaries is that they are from her past, not about it, and are perhaps more reliable than history filtered through memory and myth.

Carolyn Steedman has written, “And here is a problem: history and biography came into being together, make constant reference to each other, make us see the one in the other, make us think in the same way; but one is about the end, and the other can only ever be about endings.”

Occupied by concepts of biography, I wonder what the alternatives are.

The desire for new means of constructing experience is active. It is the unforeseeable that I am most interested in.

We seem to spend decades apprehending our life stories, and then begins the incessant process of loosening their grip on us, detaching from our case histories.

There is a danger that Roni Horn, a compilation may be misinterpreted to suggest that personal history is retrievable and archivable.
LOAN AGREEMENT

LOANED BY:  Julie Ault  
88 Bleecker Street #4G  
New York, NY  10012

LOANED TO:  Malmö Art Academy  
Box 17083  
200 10 Malmö SWEDEN  
(hereinafter, the “Borrower”)


LENGTH OF LOAN:  September 1 – November 30, 2010

WORK:  FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES  
“Untitled” (Portrait of Julie Ault), 1991  
Paint on wall  
Dimensions vary with installation  
ARG# GF1991-033

INSURANCE VALUE  
FOR THE BORROWER:  Cost of installation of the work

The loan must be credited in the exhibition as follows:  
Collection of Julie Ault, New York

Julie Ault (hereinafter “the Owner”) is assigning their rights and responsibilities to create a  
manifestation of the work in accordance with the open-ended yet specific parameters of the work.

The borrower accepts the Owner’s rights and responsibilities with respect to the work within the  
parameters. The loan of the Owner’s rights and responsibilities as granted to the borrower is  
enduring only for the specified length and specific purposes of the loan. Each manifestation of the  
work is the work and should be referred to only as the work.

There are many steps necessary for the borrower to fully take on the responsibility of  
manifesting this work and this loan is made only if all of these steps are taken on fully. The  
borrower must read this entire document and fulfill all requirements within it. This loan is  
contingent on the fulfillment of these requirements. If these requirements are not fulfilled,  
this loan document is null and void.
SPECIFICS OF THE WORK

It was the intention of Felix Gonzalez-Torres that the work be able to be manifested and may physically differ according to the location and interpretation of flexible parameters.

**Description**

One artwork consisting of text comprised of events and their corresponding dates. The font of the text is Trump Medieval Bold italicized. The color for the text is dark grey.

**Regarding the Text of the Portrait**

The Owner has the right and responsibility to add and/or subtract events and their corresponding dates to/from the work at any time. The Owner has the ability to decide on a case-by-case basis, whether to assign this right (or any part thereof) to add/or subtract events and their corresponding dates, to an authorized borrower. In this case, as curator of the exhibition, The Owner has decided it is not necessary to extend these rights.

**Text of the Portrait**

The borrower should manifest the following version of the portrait.


**Installation**

In the ideal manifestation of the work the text is hand-painted by a professional sign painter in a horizontal line or lines directly on the wall or walls just below where the wall meets the ceiling, creating a continuous unbroken frieze, formatted according to the space and length of text in a modest but readable scale. Because the work can expand or contract in length due to the potential to add and/or subtract events and their corresponding dates and in consideration of the flexible parameters of the work and the varying conditions of each chosen site for installation, each manifestation can physically differ. While the work may encircle the site in more than one horizontal line if there is enough text to warrant it, it is not intended to appear in paragraph format. It may be broken by the architectural details of a space.

Please note: while the medium is paint on wall, within the artist’s lifetime in situations where this was not possible, he did allow portrait works to be applied to the wall in alternate mediums. If such a situation arises, where a sign painter is not possible, the borrower may approach the Owner to determine the appropriateness of an alternative medium. The Foundation welcomes the opportunity to provide advice in such situations or the Foundation may act on behalf of the Owner.

It is important that the borrower understand the breadth of their decision making responsibilities in regard to the installation of the work so that they are prepared to predetermine and make as
many decisions ahead of time as possible, while leaving room for the understanding that some of the decisions may unfold during the process of physically installing the work. Once the text has been chosen, the borrower must determine the site for installation, taking into consideration if the site is appropriate in relation to the parameters set out (as described above) and, if so, the borrower must consider how the features or conditions of the site might alter or influence the installation. The borrower must also understand their responsibility for formatting the text within the open-ended yet specific parameters of the work (as described above).

Whenever consistent with its charitable and educational mission, The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation is available without charge to provide information on previous installations, and the borrower is encouraged to contact The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation with any specific questions about the work.

ADDITIONAL TERMS OF LOAN

Costs
The Borrower is responsible for all costs associated with installing and maintaining the work while it is on loan.

Deinstallation
Upon completion of the exhibition, all materials out of which the work was manifested must be destroyed or obliterated.

Copyright, Rights and Reproductions
All copyright in and to images of Felix Gonzalez-Torres works is reserved. Loan of this work confers no right to make images or authorize third parties to use images of it. The Foundation must be contacted to obtain image usage rights. It is the responsibility of the borrower to refer anyone seeking the right of reproduction to the Foundation.

Regarding Portrait Works: Maintaining an Unbroken History
As stated in the Certificate of Authenticity and Ownership, Felix Gonzalez-Torres considered a recording of the variations from manifestation to manifestation of each installation of the work to be conceptually important. Therefore, each time the work is installed (by the Owner or by an authorized borrower) the installation should be recorded both through written documentation of the events and their corresponding dates included and the specific order in which they appear as well as installation photographs of each manifestation.

Archival Responsibilities
An inherent part of the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres is that it may physically differ according to location and the configuration of the work. To this end, the Foundation works to obtain and retain a complete history of all exhibition information, installation details, production material, as well as all exhibition catalogs and information about each installation of the work. Therefore, the Foundation requests that borrowers work with the Foundation to maintain accurate and complete archives of the work by sharing the following archival information and material with the Owner and the Foundation. The following information and materials should be provided by the Borrower and sent to The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation and the Owner free of charge. Please note: as specific technologies change or become obsolete, images of the work should be provided to the
Foundation in a format of comparable quality to what is described below. Up-to-date preferred specifications may be obtained from the Foundation.

**Details regarding each specific installation:**
- The events and their corresponding dates used and the specific order in which they appear. This should be recorded through both installation photographs and written documentation.
- Type of installation method used and contact information for the individual or company executing the installation.
- Floor plan indicating the location of the work in the space.
- An elevation view of the space (which includes measurements of the work and the wall(s) on which it is installed).

**Details regarding each exhibition in which the work was included:**
- Information about the exhibition, including title, curator, and exhibition dates
- Two copies of the exhibition catalogue
- One copy of all exhibition materials, including a press release and checklist
- Five copies of the invitation or announcement card

**Details regarding documentation of the work:**
- High-quality photocopies or digital scans of all reviews of exhibitions in which the work is included, including title of article, author, title and date of publication and page number
- High-quality photo documentation of each manifestation of the work installed in context, including name and credit line of the photographer. All copyright in and to images of Felix Gonzalez-Torres works is reserved and this should be indicated to the photographer of the work. Images must be provided as high resolution digital images, which must fulfill the following conditions:
  - Each image must be in TIFF format
  - Each image must be a minimum of 60 MB at 8 Bit (ideally 80 MB or larger) in RGB format, when opened. Please note this must be the original out-of-camera file size. Resolution must not be interpolated or manipulated in any way. At a resolution of 300 dpi, the largest dimension should be approximately 20 inches or more. Please also provide RAW and 16 Bit files, if they are available.
  - Images may not be compressed, or a lossless compression should be used, such as LZW.
  - All images must be provided on a CD/DVD labeled with exhibition title, dates, institution, photographers’ name and any courtesy information; alternately, the images may be sent via a file sharing application like YouSendIt. Images sent this way should be accompanied by a PDF or DOC listing the same information.

**Regarding Titles and Media**
Felix Gonzalez-Torres intended that the wording, punctuation, placement of punctuation and parentheses, and formatting of titles and media were specific and had conceptual meaning. It is requested that the work be listed as follows in catalogues, wall labels and other texts: “Untitled” (Portrait of Julie Ault). If it is the protocol of the borrower to italicize or underline titles, it is requested that the quotation marks and parentheses remain in place. If it is standard practice to include medium and dimensions in catalogues, on wall labels or other texts, it is requested that
the following text be used: Paint on wall; Dimensions vary with installation. It is not appropriate to indicate any additional details specific to a particular installation of the work.

This loan document is executed by the Borrower and the Owner, who has full legal title to the work. The Borrower agrees and acknowledges that the terms set forth in this loan document are binding upon the Borrower as a condition of the Borrower’s loan of the work, and each individual executing this loan document, whether on behalf of the Owner or the Borrower, represents and warrants that he or she, as the case may be, has the legal authority to cause the Owner or the Borrower, as the case may be, to enter into it.

By:______________________________ Date:____________

Julie Ault

By:______________________________ Date:____________

Silvana Hed, Malmö Art Academy
Appendix B

Digital version:

Material of Group
A Chronicle
Show and Tell:
Edited by Julie Ault
September, 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, Yoandela Hawkins, and Tim share an apartment; they all met in art classes at the University of Maine at Augusta in 2006. Julie occasionally makes collages using images drawn from popular magazines, and is interested in collaboration. Yoandela 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 ad hoc activities in New York City’s nonprofit art sector are all formative contexts for the group.
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.

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.
June

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 Liliana 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

The group finds and rents an affordable storefront at 24 East 3rd 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. Yoandica Hawkins is made woman 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.”

Following spreads:

Fiery communiqué to GM from Tim Rollins

MEMBERS:
Hannah Alderfer, Julie Ault, Patrick Brennan, Liliana Dones, Yoandica Hawkins, Beth Jaker, Marybeth Nelson, Marek Pakulski, Tim Rollins, Peter Szypula, Michael Udvardy
DISCLAIMER

All information is presented "as is" and "in good faith". The provider of the information does not warrant the accuracy, completeness, or timeliness of the information. The information is provided "as is" and for general information purposes only. The information should not be used for any purpose or relied upon for any reason. The information is not intended to be a substitute for professional advice. The provider of the information shall not be liable for any errors or inaccuracies in the information or for any actions taken or omitted to be taken by anyone in reliance on the information. The provider of the information disclaims all liability for any claim, damage, or other loss arising from or in connection with the use of any information presented on or through this service. All readers are advised to verify the information with appropriate professionals before taking any action or relying upon the information presented here.

SALVATION

On this page, a section titled "COMMENTS" is visible, followed by several paragraphs of text that discuss various topics and provide information. The text appears to be formatted in a formal manner, possibly intended for a legal or professional context. However, the specific content of the text is not legible due to the image quality.

A PROPOSAL TO AMEND OR PROVIDE A CERTIFICATE

This section appears to be another part of the document, containing more paragraphs of text. The exact nature of the proposal or the certificate being discussed is not discernible due to the image quality.
August.

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 $5 membership fee for a full vote in Group Material, or $2 for half a vote.

September.

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 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 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.

316
Notes on first show plans (excerpt), Meeting Minutes (excerpt),

Other commemorative piece of paper. (Dones)

Information on guest artists and GM artists we hope to accomplish. B. Background

Group Material—who is involved and what do art director, etc. to ensure a successful and smooth operation.

Contain the following info: A. What is the artwork involved. B. Why include other artists? Why do you want GM to be represented as a group of individuals?

"Collective" as a satisfactory personal space will contextualize the space and that space red or Julie's "combination proposal."

Meeting that they are delivered. Each group votes on three options: all gray. Option one passes unanimously.

Color chips that Tim researched are chosen. All gray. Option one passes unanimously.

Group debates the colors of the wall. Julie proposes one wall red, the other gray. Pat proposes one wall red, the other gray. Pat is responsible for getting the paint. Tim is responsible for getting the paint. . . .

Group votes on three options: all gray. Option one passes unanimously.

Discussion for show proposals should be presented to Group Material in seconds before you are ready to fall asleep. Time proposals:

A. What is the artwork (we must keep in mind that a collection of individuals?)

B. Why include other artists? Why do you want GM to be represented as a group of individuals?

"Collective" as a satisfactory personal space will contextualize the space and that space red or Julie's "combination proposal."

The artwork should reflect our understanding of how we function, why we decided to originate, what made under collective name. . . . The purpose to show work. That other art groups engaged to show clearly demonstrates our belief in what goes on in the room. Beth suggests that what goes on in the room. . . . Address community by having all outreach, make clear who we see as our audience, and to what kind of a public we are participating in some way—either individual or group works or statements, some people will do both. That we make art—statements for shows tend to come from the ideas generated in one individual's head: the conversation, and so on. Rarely are ideas impeding decision on adoption of show, then a majority vote must be taken. That other art groups engaged to show clearly demonstrates our belief in what goes on in the room. Beth suggests that what goes on in the room. . . . Address community by having all outreach, make clear who we see as our audience, and to what kind of a public we are participating in some way—either individual or group works or statements, some people will do both. That we make art—statements for shows tend to come from the ideas generated in one individual's head: the conversation, and so on. Rarely are ideas impeding decision on adoption of show, then a majority vote must be taken.

"Collective" as a satisfactory personal space will contextualize the space and that space red or Julie's "combination proposal."

In my opinion the interest we need can be in ultra related to each other. Each group votes whether to develop their criticisms. Group votes whether to develop their criticisms.

Group makes questions for each of us to think. . . . (Szypula)

Theme—socio-political information.

Communication is central to the articulation of social relations between people. (Szypula) A struggle practical enough to satisfy one another, as coming out of a certain class ways as students, as neighbors, as coming out, as Diana Ross. . . . (Nelson)

Exhibitional form should reflect the function, why we decided to originate, what determined by intellectualism, careful organizing to work together in their own interests as the basis of political action—and forming of alliances that other art groups engaged to show clearly demonstrates our belief in what goes on in the room. Beth suggests that what goes on in the room. . . . Address community by having all outreach, make clear who we see as our audience, and to what kind of a public we are participating in some way—either individual or group works or statements, some people will do both. That we make art—statements for shows tend to come from the ideas generated in one individual's head: the conversation, and so on. Rarely are ideas impeding decision on adoption of show, then a majority vote must be taken. That other art groups engaged to show clearly demonstrates our belief in what goes on in the room. Beth suggests that what goes on in the room. . . . 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should be seen as a catalyst. "

This month in a storefront at East

On talents and resources outside the group,

Among the events on Group Material's

The inaugural exhibition includes a window

To a bulletin board. Although they are not

They reflect the budgets

From the facts of their lives. Fresh from art

As we want or

And musicians who make up this burgeoning

But now, in neighborhoods where galleries

The street, and all that it gathers, got

Around the time he opened the door to his

Now everybody's more compla-

In moving along, Oldenburg was also

It is unclear if the paint will

"Dancing In The Street, " also a part of his work, is

This wave's (loftless), and make art that reflects the new

By Conrad Atkinson, works by Michael Lebron,

Among the events on Group Material's

Of presidential election-based art to take

A document, a multimedia project, and a dance party

A show (a show

The inaugural exhibition includes a window

Marybeth, Hannah, and Beth, an installation

An Inaugural Exhibition by the Group Material

The group is distributed. The night before the

A calendar of

The words of the inaugural statement, "the

We're here because we live here, and our

White kids slumming, " argues

This is not an art-as-commodity idea. We're not.

For art that embroils itself with the every-

Of politically conscious artists that has

He explained several hours before the opening of

Not long after, of course, Oldenburg aban-

For the American heartland and the monu-

Politically-minded works, most of them by

Not the lowly grit of the city block (and that

But now, in neighborhoods where galleries

In neighborhoods where galleries

The street, and all that it gathers, got

We're not just white kids slumming, " argues

We're not just going to be a gallery devoted

There's fresh pounding on the

"I am for art that is political-erotic-mystical

To real social relationships with the people here,

As Artful Dodger, " the words of the inaugural statement, "the

Budgets

The inaugural exhibition includes a window

It included stenciling text in red paint on the floor,

America's Hispanic social club, an eight-month-old

Almost as soon as the words were out of Oldenburg's

In the words of the inaugural statement, "the

"I am for art that is political-erotic-mystical

In the words of the inaugural statement, "the
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 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 5–8/9–10.

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, 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*
AVAILABILITY

WHEN

WHERE

WHAT

WHO

INSTRUCTIONS:

The Museum is open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm and on Sundays from 1pm to 5pm. The Museum is closed on public holidays.

CALANDAR

1980 - 1981

TAKEN FOR GRANTED.

WHO

NOW

WHAT

WHERE

WHEN

TAKEN FOR GRANTED.

WE INTEND TO CONTINUE TO PRESS THE ENTIRE CULTURE WE HAVE

OUR PROJECT IS CLEAR.

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WE INTEND TO CONTINUE TO PRESS THE ENTIRE CULTURE WE HAVE
Budgets by Liliana Dones

GM and friends on East /one.LP/three.LP th Street /two.LP/five.LP /two.LP/four.LP /four.LP EAST /one.LP/three.LP TH STREET 321
differences spoil our effectiveness. The group is not going to work out. The group is not going to cooperate. Their open hostility makes it impossible to work with Tim and Patrick but they are the only ones who hang the shows. The group agrees on the night of performances, that in the show there would be only glaring fluorescents. The show, consisting of a wide array of works and no creativity, was only a small aspect of the problem. People are jealous of an idea—people are jealous of an idea that is the only thing that the group is successful at, which is different from the definition of success. People are jealous of an idea that is the only thing that the group is successful at, which is different from the definition of success. People are jealous of an idea that is the only thing that the group is successful at, which is different from the definition of success. People are jealous of an idea that is the only thing that the group is successful at, which is different from the definition of success.

The Deer Hunter, Michael Cimino's film, and Three Women, Bob Hazen's film, were relevant to topical political situations and the effects of the Vietnam war on a group of members from a small town in Pennsylvania. The Deer Hunter, Michael Cimino's film, and Three Women, Bob Hazen's film, were relevant to topical political situations and the effects of the Vietnam war on a group of members from a small town in Pennsylvania. The Deer Hunter, Michael Cimino's film, and Three Women, Bob Hazen's film, were relevant to topical political situations and the effects of the Vietnam war on a group of members from a small town in Pennsylvania. The Deer Hunter, Michael Cimino's film, and Three Women, Bob Hazen's film, were relevant to topical political situations and the effects of the Vietnam war on a group of members from a small town in Pennsylvania.

Marybeth: Agrees with Julie's comments. Will consider quitting. It is suggested that the group participate as a collective project, or through an evening of screenings of home movies being considered. There is general discussion about the need to analyze and critique the exhibitions and events, and no booze. The group decides to serve coffee in styrofoam cups with ugly plastic stirrers for the opening of a Christmas party that is scheduled for the block. There is also discussion on shows. There is general discussion about the need to analyze and critique the exhibitions and events, and no booze. The group decides to serve coffee in styrofoam cups with ugly plastic stirrers for the opening of a Christmas party that is scheduled for the block. There is also discussion on shows. There is general discussion about the need to analyze and critique the exhibitions and events, and no booze. The group decides to serve coffee in styrofoam cups with ugly plastic stirrers for the opening of a Christmas party that is scheduled for the block. There is also discussion on shows.
ALIENATION

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

ALIENATION, 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, the performers were the models of the presentation. Using a projected image, Hudson River waterfront locations instead of a presentation, the group divided into two entirely independent bodies that share only the responsibility of maintaining the space.

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, a work informed by Marxist theory, is described in part by the following statement: “A presentation that describes and explains the modern break-up of reality — our separations from society, production and nature.”

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The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)

January 10 – February 1, 1981

Group Material, New York

9 PEZ candy dispenser collection exhibited in The People's Choice

MEMBERS:

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

January

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 often express interest in participating, especially if they have an object they wish to share. Friendly rivalry prevails and soon the walls are full. Lili, who is Cuban, suggests "Arroz con Mango" 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

George Ault leaves the group due to his studies at NYU.
to a general audience. Most artwork that strives to mean something sentimental, a quality that is absent from most political or esthetic action. Until then, Group Material will probably present some of the political or esthetic action. Until then, Group Material's real work is their use of the community's own icons and supported by the community's artist, working with the residents on the block to exhibit things he serves. The group invited Rodriguez to attempt from the self-enclosed systems of recent art. Not only was the image itself a domestic one, but it soon became clear that Rodriguez's role on the block was a special one. He is the people he serves.

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Rodriguez was a mural done by the kids on the block as part of a weekly project. There were a few amateurish paintings of family, favorite landscapes and pleasing abstract shapes. Another category was that of the souvenir or gifts. The photographs were of babies, first communions, weddings, pictures of a covered bridge and a strange-shaped steel construction, a shiny-surfaced dressing table with a crazed, Cubist-inspired costume. It was presented here with the brand PEZ.

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Photograph lent for The People’s Choice by Junior, the superintendent of two LP/four LP four East/three and one th Street Press release (excerpt), Group Material, January one nine eight one The People’s Choice—an exhibition of favorite art possessions on loan from the people and households of one/three th Street between two and three 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.
Letter to Group Material (excerpt), Joy Episalla, Carrie Yamaoka, Michelle Araujo, Bill Allen, Bobby Bordo, February

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 upon 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...

It's a Gender Show!
Group Material, New York, February - March, 1988

It's a Gender Show!
is organized by Group Material members Beth Jaker, Marybeth Nelson, Hannah Alderfer, and Peter Szypula 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.)
MEMBERS: Hannah Alderfer, Julie Ault, Patrick Brennan, Liliana Dones, Yolanda Hawkins, Beth Jaker, Mundy McLaughlin, Marybeth Nelson, Tim Rollins, Peter Szypula, Michael Udvardy

Mundy, Julie, and Tim select songs, bring records, and take turns DJ-ing the event. Movies borrowed from the midtown Donnell Library are projected including: Workers Conditions, Martin Luther King Speeches, Anti-War Demonstrations, Black Music in the Sixties, Women in Defense, and Kids and War Toys. March 1/LP/nine.LP/eight.LP/one.LP. Anne Drillick leaves the group.

Revolting Music Machinists' Union Hall, New York, March 7, 1981. 7:30 pm. The event: a Revolutionary Hits of the Past 50 Years. A subset of music that is a fifth of the whole. Two groups material: the first 10 songs, the second 10 songs. The event is a celebration of music that is a fifth of the whole. 328
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. This is the first exhibition for which the space is painted entirely red. A Tupperware party is held on April 1/5. 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 1/9. Suggestions for next year's exhibitions include: a show about the family; open invitational 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 Staeck; Sports; Television; Apocalypse; the Whitney Biennial; Celebrity Show; Fun Show; and Love and Sex.
Detail of work by Tim Rollins in Consumption/four.LP/five.LP/two.LP/four.LP/four.LP/EAST/one.LP/three.LP
Facere / Fascis A Dress / Dance / Dazzle event is held at Club five/seven/two/four/seven 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.

A Dress/Dance/Dazzle event is held at Club five/seven/two/four/seven 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..."
May.

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.

Yoandia 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.

The Future of Group Material, Julie Ault.

For GM to improve itself we should look to some of our original ambitions. "Part of GM'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 works sustenance and meaning."

"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."

"Broaden our base, communicate with artist groups, etc. outside the U.S., and set up an international network."

"To represent GM as a group in exhibition and projects outside of East Sixth Street."

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 what 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.
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. This has caused great devastation among Atlanta’s black communities. The tragedy which has received a great deal of media attention has been documented in a presentation of the exhibition “Atlanta: An Emergency Exhibition.”

Atlanta: Emergency Exhibition

Group Material, New York

June 14-30, 1981

From Sun. June 14 to June 30, 1981, Group Material (a young artists’ collective and gallery based at 244 E. 13th St., off 2nd Ave in N.Y.C.) will present an emergency exhibition in which 10 artists and collaborators address the ramifications of the tragic child murders in Atlanta. The Opening and Reception for this important exhibition is June 14th from 4 to 7 p.m. Gallery hours are 6-9 p.m. weekdays, 12-9 on weekends.

Beyond the shock,
Beyond the sensationalism,
Beyond the anger, the guilt and the ribbons,
There is a history, a sense and an omnipresence
To the terror that is now called "ATLANTA ."
...
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.

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.

Group Material is awarded its first NEA grant in the amount of $50,000 (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.

Group Material, New York, July 1, 1981.

Eat This Show

MEMBERS:
Julie Ault, Mundy McLaughlin, Tim Rollins

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 47-7-59-9 (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."

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 eight 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 1—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.
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 130-7803 West Street as a headquarters for meetings and occasional exhibitions, and discusses getting new members.

Jock Reynolds conducts a site visit to 130-7803 West 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 ad hoc character of the setup is apparent to Reynolds, who proposes a candid conversation over a couple of six-packs. He is supportive and offers good advice.

Externally, Group Material's first public year was an encouraging success. 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. New installations, gallery sitting, haphazardly 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. Just like the alternative spaces we had set out to criticize, here we were sitting on 13th Street, waiting for everyone to wash down and simply choosing not to 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 it makes political sense as well. Working out of our new headquarters on E. 25th and Lexington Ave. in N.Y.C., Group Material has planned not only special gallery shows (we haven't totally disposed of 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 reproductions 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 BARES ARTISTS AND THEIR WORK FROM THE CRUCIAL SOCIAL CONCERNS OF THE AMERICAN WORKING CLASS.
Enthusiasm!

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

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 29th Street, and use the motif for the exhibition flyer.

November 1981 is the summer Tim met Doug. In the summer Tim met Doug. In the summer Tim met Doug. In the summer Tim met Doug.

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The收集 of artworks speaks to:

- 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.

As part of the group's objective to integrate art into everyday spaces, Group Material contracts to fill advertising spaces inside buses on the Fifth Avenue lines—M/3, M/4, M/5, M/2—that travel the spine of Manhattan, from Harlem to Soho. The total rental cost is $60. 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 1989. GM presents Works on Newspaper, a group show of artists working on and with newspapers, in its 2nd Street headquarters.
Dazibaos (big character posters) are a popular Chinese debate medium, which Tim learned about when he visited China in 1987. 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 Union Square, New York, DA ZI BAOS. 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 $0. 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.
UNEMPLOYED

KIND OF ACTIVITY, YOU KNOW?

THEY SHOULD HAVE SOME OTHER

WORRIES ARE STILL THERE. BACK INTO IT BECAUSE YOUR

AWAY YOUR WORRIES AND YOU GO

TAKE THE DRUG TODAY TO TAKE

BEYOND DRUGS. BECAUSE YOU

SOME OTHER KICKS, OTHER THINGS

PEOPLE SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIND

 remain toward attention. No pain, even though

these are

new york state division of substance abuse

Call toll free 1-800-522-5353

Help Prevent Drug Abuse

Open Your Eyes
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.

Primer (for Raymond Williams)

Press Release (excerpt), Group Material, May 1995
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) 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 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.

"There are new audiences and new artworks."
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 346 West 2nd 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. A few months after Luchar! the group rents a small office space for $2,000 a month on the second floor of 346 West 2nd 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.
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.

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.

In conjunction with announcing GM's new headquarters on two/threeement 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 ad hoc basis, and never have salaried positions in order to avoid any conflict of interest.
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 Aric Obrosey's piece, McMerger, which envisions the corporate fusion of McDonald's and Merger.

Subculture

is the natural extension of our successful M.I.T. project. . . . Subculture will be an exhibition of art in the place of advertising on New York City subway trains. Group Material has rented four advertising spaces to show the work of 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."

Invitation to Participate (excerpt), Group Material, November

"This exhibition made possible by Group Material's Invitation to Participate."

"This exhibition made possible by Group Material's Invitation to Participate."

Subculture

by Dennis Adams

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and Burger King. Obrosey’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 Obrosey’s pieces are simply not installed.

November 1986

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 $20,500 income. The 11 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.

January 1987

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.

S U B C U L T U R E
Timeline:
A Chronicle of U.S. Intervention in Central and Latin America
P.S. New York, January 25–March 12, 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

Since one.LP/nine.LP/zero.LP/zero.LP, 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 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. . . .

T I M E L I N E
The group is invited to make a new project for the Whitney Biennial. America 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 Buttertop 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."

LeRoy Neiman, *Harry's Bar*

Martin Wong, *Chinese Laundry*

Following spread:

Two pages from the proposal for *Americana*.
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.

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 critics, or students, or tourists, or investors, or the Whitney curators with their tidy little shows.
Tseung Kwong Chi, Townsend, Vermont

Artist and soundtrack list for Americana (in progress)

(Room with paintings and sculptures)
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 five 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

Letter from National Cleansing Campaign, including statement for Democracy Wall
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. An exploration by Jeffs.
MASS
various locations, May/one/LP/nine/LP/eight/LP/five/LP through December/one/LP/nine/LP/eight/LP/six/LP

MASS installed at The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, -

Following spread: Hanging instructions for MASS, Doug Ashford, -

What you need:
Approx. three/zero/zero feet of string
Nails
One/one/yard of sticky backed velcro (fuzzy side only)

What you do:
Measure out at the floor the placement of letters that fit the space. Ideally there is two/feet between each letter. This would bring the total amount of wall space needed to three/eight feet. Also, try to leave three/feet space at each end as well. Mark bottom of wall accordingly.

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 eight/feet high but needs higher wall with space at top and bottom (see diagram).

Meanwhile, cut velcro into one/two " by one/two " or three/four " 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.

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 one/four " space is maintained between each square panel. (Panels are slightly smaller than one/foot by one/foot).

Remove string and nails. Panels can be adjusted slightly or easily removed and replaced, because of the velcro.

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.

William Olander, Exhibition Brochure (excerpt), (New York: The New Museum,)

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 one/two inches by one/two 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. . . .

MASS 362
Tell Your Government What You Think

By Marc Wolf

For Immediate Release

For the chapter from a country in conflict, a place where the people have been divided, where the lines have been drawn. Where the issues are complex, where the stakes are high. Where the future of this great nation is at stake. This is where we come to speak. This is where we come to listen. This is where we come to understand. This is where we come to act.

For Immediate Release

Messages To Washington

Washington Project for the Arts
Washington, DC
September 1–October 12, 1998

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.
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.


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

The classical conception of democracy mandates that each individual act in 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...
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/LP/nine/LP/eight/LP/six/LP

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 NYSCA support for special projects. For the most part, hosting institutions finance the respective exhibition and project costs.

Arts and Leisure

The Kitchen, New York, May/two/LP/four/LP–June/one/LP/four/LP, nine/LP/eight/LP/six/LP

Press Release (excerpt), Group Material, May/one/LP/nine/LP/eight/LP/six/LP

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

MEMBERS: Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Tim Rollins

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."
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.
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—attributes that make the object slow, flesh and blood in a new way. The Castle is a King, a Book, a Landlord. The artist is a Death, an Emperor. The Castle makes the artist a monster. The artist makes the Castle a living thing.

Here is our offering to The Castle—an arrangement of paintings, drawings, photographs, prints, sculptures, prints, photographs, paintings, prints, sculptures, photos—things we buy in supermarkets, decorative household objects, things we buy in supermarkets. These 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 artist rejects the role of the artist, perhaps in a struggle with The Castle. Then, we will either fall or rise, depending on whether or not we fill the role of the artist, perhaps in a struggle with The Castle. Then, we will either fall or rise, depending on whether or not we fill the role of the artist.
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 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

Julie visits Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ MFA exhibition at NYU, which includes 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 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.
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 $50,000, the majority of which goes for the space and distribution into 85,000 copies of the May 30 Sunday edition. Grants from NYSCA, the Public Art Fund Inc., and Art Matters, Inc. fund the project.

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.
WHAT YOU MIGHT DO.
I WILL KILL YOU FOR.
DO WHAT THEY SHOULD.
BODIES WHOSE HANDS
LIKE A CIRCLE OF.
MY HOUSES LIKE DREAMS.
I EMPLOY PEOPLE TO MAKE
AND I THINK THEY ARE FUNNY.
I HAVE A LOT OF ACCIDENTS.
HALF OF EVERYONE DIES.
WHEN I IMPLEMENT IT.
I NEED PERMISSION BUT.
I CAN DO IT MORE THAN ONCE.
I LIKE DRINK AND I AM SURE
NOT YOUR BUSINESS.
WHY I RIGHT IS
MAKES ME SICK.
GETTING WHAT I WANT.
WHEN IT DOES WRONG.
IN STOPPING MY FLESH
THERE IS PLEASURE.
THAT I LOVE MY BOX.
BUT I AM NOT CERTAIN
I PROTECT WHAT MULTIPLES.
THAT MAKES BLOOD.
FOR SIGHTS OF SEX
I SLEEP ON MY BACK.
AROUND THE HOUSE.
I CHASE PEOPLE.
IT EMPTIES ME.
I ENTER SPACE BECAUSE
I AM A MAN.
When I lay down
It was on fine
SMOKE IN BED.

Drink: I wasn't

To smoke in bed.

You drank too.

"You drunk fool!

I'm running Red.

Drunk out of a
Fireman Pulling
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 /seven.LP/seven.LP 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.

Democracy
Four installations and Town Meetings, Dia Art Foundation, /seven.LP/seven.LP Wooster Street, New York, September/eight-nine–January/nine-four, 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* 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.
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

Democracy: Education
Dia Art Foundation, New York, September 1/one.LP/five.LP – October nine.LP/eight.LP/eight.LP
Town Meeting,
September two.LP/seven.LP,

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 Cockroft, Judge Bruce Wright, Julie Ault, Felix Gonzalez-Torres

AGENDA
Dia Art Foundation • 155 Mercer St.
Tuesday, September 27, 8 PM
Town Meeting

Meeting Chairperson: The Rollins, Director, Art and Knowledge Workshop, Bronx
Our objective is to focus on the different options and issues that surround the process of learning. The installation is designed as a classroom, where many voices enter into a dialogue. Democracy is in a state of crisis. It must be a process of collaboration and inclusion which needs to be constantly reinvented.

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. The opening atmosphere is of a perversely patriotic party gone wrong.
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...
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 a 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. Bon Ton “Fiesta Mix,” Bachman “Pastapazazz,” 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 “2/0 lb. self-basting turkey.” Tickets are sold for $1 by Dia guards who approach visitors asking them if they want to enter a raffle.
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? . . .

AGENDA
Dia Art Foundation 155 Mercer St.
Tuesday, November 22, 8 pm
Organized by Group Material
Cultural Participation Town Meeting
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.

Democracy: AIDS and Democracy: A Case Study


Safe Combat in the Troganons Zone

Art


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Karen Ramspacher, 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.


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

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/one, 1990]: 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/zero, 1990]. 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.
Group Material curates a tape of disco hits of the late '70s 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.

During the Congressional controversy over NEA funding of exhibitions of Robert Mapplethorpe's and Andres Serrano's works, The Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., 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 9 of the Home Lobbyist mail-order kit, symptomatic of the extended "culture war" over art funding that began in the mid-1980s.
GM is commissioned to make a publically sited, community-engaged project for D&S Ausstellung. 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


. . . 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.
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 Timeline University Art Museum, University of California at Berkeley, November/one.LP/one.LP, /one.LP/nine.LP/eight.LP/nine.LP – January/two.LP/eight.LP, /one.LP/nine.LP/nine.LP/zero.LP, 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 /one.LP/nine.LP/eight.LP/zero.LP, 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/two.LP/two.LP/six.LP–two.LP/five.LP/five.LP for AIDS Timeline Case Study]
Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago, February/two.LP/three.LP - March/two.LP/zero.LP, /one.LP/nine.LP/nine.LP/zero.LP 390
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 Art Center, 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, schools, artists, social activists and others who are participating in the struggle for social and economic justice.”

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.

This project is being organized in part because many people are undergoing a new struggle to protect their own neighborhoods against the movement of gentrification and the displacement of artists. Performing arts and activist groups are also encouraged. The participation of individuals and groups of diverse cultural backgrounds is essential to the project.
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, the power of suggestion—the ability to define social agendas and to form the background within which we imagine ourselves and in turn, live our lives.

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 replacing as many of the usual ads that we could with what people wanted to see on billboards on their streets and in their neighborhoods...in the face of hundreds upon hundreds of billboard images in the city, YOUR MESSAGE...might seem modest in scale. But neither the process that produced the project, or the potential effects of such activity, nor the power of suggestion inherent in advertising the power of suggestion—the ability to define social agendas & formed within which we imagine ourselves and in turn, live our lives...In the face of hundreds upon hundreds of billboard images in the city, YOUR MESSAGE...might seem modest in scale. But neither the process that produced the project, or the potential effects of such activity, nor the power of suggestion inherent in advertising the power of suggestion—the ability to define social agendas & formed within which we imagine ourselves and in turn, live our lives...
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 / Aligator, Jeanne Dunning, Mark Blottner.

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

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

Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (NGBK), Berlin, June/two.LP/six.LP – July/five.LP/one.LP/nine.LP/nine.LP/zero.LP

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.
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

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 your 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.
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

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, (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, 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...”

9900 Democracy: A Project by Group Material

AIDS Timeline

September 30—November 1, 1990

Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford

AIDS Timeline
Collaboration

The Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, October/two.LP/six.LP, one.LP/nine.LP/nine.LP/zero.LP – January/one.LP/three.LP, one.LP/nine.LP/nine.LP/one.LP

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-mâché 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.

Exhibition Statement (excerpt), Group Material, October/nine.LP/nine.LP/zero.LP

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/six.LP 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/seven.LP. 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...
AIDS Timeline is reconfigured for the 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 Whitney 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 AIDS Timeline (New York, April–June), many institutions, appears to be more inclusive than in the past.

June. 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 1988. NEA grant recipients are required to certify in writing their compliance with a “decency clause.” GM’s applications to the NEA and NYSCA are denied funding. GM does not apply again.

November. 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.”
The group is invited to make a site-specific work as part of a public art project called *In Public: Seattle*.

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.”

**Project Statement (excerpt), Group Material, December**

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.

**Project Proposal (excerpt), Group Material, May**

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.
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 prime time soap opera *Dynasty*. The ABC series depicted the ostentatiously wealthy Carrington family, and starred Joan Collins, John Forsythe, and Linda Evans; the poster was the pop culture 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.
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 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.

Tomorrow
San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego,
October/eight.LP–December/three.LP/one.LP/nine.LP/nine.LP/three.LP

Project Statement (excerpt), Group Material, October/eight.LP/two.LP

In 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.
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.
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.

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.

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 1-by-7-foot installation. The piece includes observations by museum visitors, non-visitors, staff, curators, and a quote from the MFA’s official mission statement. “We wanted 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.”
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.

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.
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 giveaway 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.

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Left to right: Thomas Eggerer, Jochen Klein in supermarket, Munich

Following page: Video stills, Cops: Caught in the Act, How to Organize Your Home, screened in Market
Advertising slogans for Market

You've never been this secure.

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.

You're 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.
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.

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.
Fall

Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ death, from AIDS-related causes (on January nine, nine, six), 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, Liliana Dones, Thomas Eggerer, Mundy McLaughlin, Marybeth Nelson, and Tim Rollins.
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

Assembling the archive

In the summer of 2006, 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 1996, 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...
The transfer necessitates imagining future use. Exemplary scenarios need to be filled, such as fleshing out the collective's archive with individual members' material. 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 activate its bodies of information. Institutionalization also entails a reassignment of directly and tangentially interconnected individuals, collectives, communities, and intrinsically conservative forms of archive and book?

Institutionalizing the archive implies closing down, or "closing the casket," but it simultaneously involves opening up and multiplication through use and interpretation. "institutionalization," particularly as Taylor, clearly an activist archiver himself, was impressed with his focus on documenting New York downtown culture as an arena of fragmentary access 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 seemed more pressing than an abstract notion of history.

Doug Ashford was likewise enthusiastic. We recognized the Downtown Collection and complementary collections. He stresses archives are living entities, and has been excited by the notion of Group Material's collection being cohered and structured by the camaraderie, closeness, and fun that colored the initial collaboration was thrilling, but the process is ongoing: meeting with Marybeth Nelson, Hannah Alderfer, and Peter Friedl. 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. There was a certain appeal in preserving the ephemeral aspect of the entire project: ephemerality, resisting becoming history, and opposed to leaving the responsibility of directly and tangentially interconnected individuals, collectives, communities, and forms of directly and tangentially interconnected individuals, collectives, communities, and forms. The inception of Group Material's archive can be regarded as a kind of reunion—fleshing out the collective's archive with individual members' material. This book was planned to emerge on a parallel track with organizing the archive. We sought to disrupt the logic of simply depositing a relevant collection with its arbitrariness and gaps intact and let people make what they will with it.

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In the process of organizing, we met with previous participants to discuss their input and the project's inception. It was vital to inform previous participants about the project and seek their advice, as well as their contributions to the archive. We sought to disrupt the logic of simply depositing a relevant collection with its arbitrariness and gaps intact and let people make what they will with it. Institutionalization, particularly as Taylor, clearly an activist archiver himself, was impressed with his focus on documenting New York downtown culture as an arena of fragmentary access 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 seemed more pressing than an abstract notion of history. We recognized the Downtown Collection and complementary collections. He stresses archives are living entities, and has been excited by the notion of Group Material's collection being cohered and structured by activating the archive. Institutionalization also entails a reassignment of directly and tangentially interconnected individuals, collectives, communities, and forms of directly and tangentially interconnected individuals, collectives, communities, and forms.
essentially end up "turning over the iceberg."

Rasmus Røhling used this term to describe the rich and varied collection of documents that Group Material assembled over its 17-year existence. These included soundtracks, research and source material, publications and books, and artworks and installation photography, snapshots, working notes and notebooks, exhibition records, and more. The group sought out and integrated into its archive anything that might provide insight into the group's activity, internal communiqués, original proposals, announcements, press releases, and facsimiles from individuals and institutions Group Material worked with. They aimed to include anything that could help in understanding Group Material's work and the context in which it was created.

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 beyond, research notes, internal communications, and proposals. The Wire

The Wire

³

AIDS Timeline

Sabrina Locks initially brought to light how AIDS had influenced the group's work, and how the group had dealt with the loss of friends and colleagues. The Wire

The Wire

³

AIDS Timeline

In the 1990s, a temporary workspace was set up at the Downtown Collection in New York City. Here, Group Material worked on a project that focused on the role of archives in the study of contemporary art. The group realized that archives are not just repositories of historical information, but active places where information is created and interpreted. They decided to use their own archive to help them understand their work and its relationship to the broader context of art history.

The Wire

³

AIDS Timeline

The group decided to create a "living" archive, where new materials could be added and existing ones could be rearranged and interpreted in different ways. They believed that this would help them understand the group's work in a more nuanced way, and that it would also help others understand their work in a more meaningful way.

The Wire

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AIDS Timeline

The Wire

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AIDS Timeline

The Wire

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AIDS Timeline

In 2002, a comprehensive and thorough study of Group Material's archive was conducted. The study included an analysis of the group's archives, as well as an examination of the group's history and its relationship to the broader context of art history. The study highlighted the group's innovative approach to art-making and their commitment to creating a living archive.
Revisionist and interpretive tendencies have been restrained in this initial look at throwing contradictions into relief and potentially rendering resolution absurd. Memories and histories intertwine and actively condition and contextualize any event, journalists, project participants, and audience members. The extracts range in subjective and objective are not secure categories; they are hybrid and permeable. Archives, spoken, or written representations are unbiased or comprehensive. Typographic design treatment. These excerpts are diverse in nature; many are written various authorial modes embody specific expressions of authority, and neither silences is capable of.

Which had consequences in practice. The collaborative was modified by 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's actions are presented here as reference points in a larger cultural context. The group's shifting rhetorical strategies, as well as the cultural vocabulary of GM's composition, and how Group Material structured itself and financed its work. Private workings, conflicts and contradictions endemic to the discrepancy. It was clear some qualifying narration was essential to portray Group Material's motivations—what we perceived we were doing at the time, and demonstrate what collective subjectivity, distinct from a retrospective review of events, as well as suggest collective subjectivity, distinct from a retrospective.

Witnessing, and subsequent discussion of their understandings, interpretations, confusions, distortions, assumptions, and questions illuminated and delimited the results. It was clear some qualifying narration was essential to portray Group Material's documentation trail communicates. Rasmus Røhling, an art student at Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, respectively. At Jutland Art Academy in Århus, Denmark, and Sabrina Locks, a graduate student finishing her studies at Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, respectively. He could get involved in as he planned a lengthy stay in New York, which we extended to a summer internship with me at Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, recommended Sabrina at Bard Center for Curatorial Studies who developed during that visit. Rhea Sabrina Locks, a graduate student finishing her studies at Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, respectively. It was clear some qualifying narration was essential to portray Group Material's actions are presented here as reference points in a larger cultural context. The group's shifting rhetorical strategies, as well as the cultural vocabulary of GM's composition, and how Group Material structured itself and financed its work. Private workings, conflicts and contradictions endemic to the discrepancy. It was clear some qualifying narration was essential to portray Group Material's motivations—what we perceived we were doing at the time, and demonstrate what collective subjectivity, distinct from a retrospective review of events, as well as suggest collective subjectivity, distinct from a retrospective.

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What Was to be Done?

WHAT WAS TO BE DONE?

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W H A T  W A S  T O  B E  D O N E ?

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witnessed and experienced as a young kid. It has fueled up a culture of impossibility, so unlike the spirit of the civil rights movement that I was a part of, it was negative and combative. The old New Left were conjuring up a putative revolution where there was none. We were the youngest generation after the Beats and the counter-culture of the 60’s. The most exciting thing was the idea of making art. The most abject, funky, raggedy-looking feel of so many of the artist-run galleries at the time was seductive and put us on the edge. 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 with the street and the 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 generation after the Beats and the counter-culture of the 60’s. The most exciting thing was the idea of making art. The most abject, funky, raggedy-looking feel of so many of the artist-run galleries at the time was seductive and put us on the edge. 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 with the street and the neighborhood just outside the doors.

While the experience of those meetings was a unique opportunity to share ideas, the atmosphere was sometimes tense and provocative. The discussions often veered towards ideological debates, which could be both exhilarating and exhausting. It was a time when many of us were searching for a sense of purpose and meaning in our lives, and we found that in the collective conversations around the table. Even now, when I think back on those days, I can still feel the energy and the passion that filled those studios. It was a time of intense learning and growth, and I carry those experiences with me to this day.

We could operate outside the commercial and increasingly not-alternative spaces of the mainstream art scene in order to make our own art. But we also 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 expensive-looking Soho white cube paradigm. We wanted to build a damn barn. We needed a barn, not a space but a place, a laboratory of our own.

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. You don't go through a feasibility study and then it starts. 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 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 serious problems in our society?"

Anyway, we had all just graduated from SVA without the prospects of anything. Jedd Garet, 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 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 the mainstream art scene and the whole riotous community-building neighborhood club scene we visited almost every night (Max’s Kansas City, Club 88, The Pyramid, Mudd Club, Danceteria, Tier Three, etc.).

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

It was during this time that the idea of creating a collective community space gained traction. We wanted something that was not just a physical space but a laboratory, a place where we could test out our ideas and theories, and a place where we could truly be independent and self-reliant. This was a time of intense learning and growth, and I carry those experiences with me to this day. The group that I was a part of became known as the Group Material, and we were determined to create “the Beloved Community.” 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 the mainstream art scene and the whole riotous community-building neighborhood club scene we visited almost every night (Max’s Kansas City, Club 88, The Pyramid, Mudd Club, Danceteria, Tier Three, etc.).

The Real Estate Show generated excitement in the art world: the feminist Heresies Collective, The Times Square Show, The Pyramid, Mudd Club, Danceteria, Tier Three, etc. Jenny Holzer’s first Truism posters plastered all over downtown, Mike Glier’s Estate Show... The Pyramid, Mudd Club, Danceteria, Tier Three, etc. The UFO club, CBGB, Crisco Disco) that induced fresh possibilities for the making and experiencing of new modes and new social practices. This was a time of intense learning and growth, and I carry those experiences with me to this day. The group that I was a part of became known as the Group Material, and we were determined to create “the Beloved Community.” 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 the mainstream art scene and the whole riotous community-building neighborhood club scene we visited almost every night (Max’s Kansas City, Club 88, The Pyramid, Mudd Club, Danceteria, Tier Three, etc.).
and feelings were tacitly imbedded in our practice. Group Material understood massive demonstration mandated: from peaceful protest to direct confrontation and even if we were too young to directly witness the physical mobilizations that rejected rights, women's liberation, free love, gay power, and anti-war movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s.  

"We are also part of the audience," Group Material.

Most of the members of Group Material were children during the rise of the civil rights movement, the war in Vietnam, and the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s, and early 1970s. T oday's ascendant activism is a continuation of a larger socio-economic and cultural transformation of the late 1960s and early 1970s. This book comes at a time of concentrated reflection on the complex political contours and possibilities of our present moment. We are witnessing the dismantling of the progressive economic and cultural changes of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and Group Material's overall project was imagined in and during that era. This book is a publication of this book in 1972, ten years after the world-changing disturbances of Berkeley, Newark, Prague, Nanterre, Watts, Alabama, and Stonewall. T oday's ascendant activist politics present a moment of collective refusal, but made familiar, even loved, in the battle with gigantic repressive authority. The constraints on an artistic offering, the resistance of the anonymous becomes empathically known. This "new face" of the impossible demand to start the revolution everywhere at once is an experience of precariously and in deprivation suggests that the darkest fantasies of governmental capitulations, and betrayals complete an almost unbearable chronicle. But the fresh affinity found under the duress and risk of social unrest, is an experience of the subjective effects of non-governmental organization, a reflection that is encircled in the work of aesthetics. An oppositional movement makes groupings where the desires of others overtake our sense of singular and individual autonomy, a process amplified by the impossible demand to start the revolution everywhere at once. This book is a call for political change produces conjecture on a number of fronts, and conjecture that connected to the liberation movements against colonialism, patriarchy, and
figure real techniques of social liberation. To defend the notion of artwork as an manifestation of a perceived world, and proposed that art’s abstract matrix can the practices that ways proportion, absence, suggestion, and substitution. In many Group Material developed were un-theorized, suggested by the exigencies of the manifestations of a perceived world, and proposed that art's abstract matrix can to be a complex dialogue: with others through affiliation and love, and through others disaster of contemporary life be constructed? As artists we knew that the street political process happens in public. A process, for Group Material, that was designed of democratic process. How else could an authentic response to the imposed Group Material our displaced groupings of visual culture were concrete figurations of the juxtaposition of artworks with everyday market commodities and publicity revelation in the undoing of what already exists. A multitude of artworks as a form of divergent, even oppositional presentations of...
A representation of art as a person is an assertion of the work as a self-conscious 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 a visual system—images that make possible the recognition or misrecognition of identity. The definitions of gender, race, and power were, and still are, dependent on writing of William Olander, who first broached the idea of an inhabiting my thoughts during the writing period, and to the attention of Alyse Yang. I am also asking, “How is culture made and who is it for?” we were asking for something greater than information is transferred, but rather at the place we recognize ourselves; 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 of an art that can concurrently untangle, remake, and re-tangle 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 the privatizing influence of corporate culture by re-organizing the actual experience of blanketing agreement, a blind consensus. If it is true that capitalism is the most spectacularized consistency that this generation of artworks and collective action has ever known, its reservoir of manufactured groups, like the collectively designed exhibition, shows. A repression no longer exclusive to the barrel of a gun—a repression designed to defend the economic and political regression and they still weigh upon us, attempting to re-form us into an anti-culture of mutual repression. Manifest conflict. As part of the audience it is only logical our disagreement with the strengths, its true protest, the working together of ideas and desires that are in a moment of social unrest of the modern inception. For Group Material the market-dominated context for culture in general through the market, enforces a complex system of limiting notions of another, in frame or in detail can be presented as neutral. So when Group Material met that art directly builds who we are—it engenders us. This was an insistence that the group material, dissensus can finally be proffered as the basis for imagining social and aesthetic action—it is an emotional invention of the self expands by rupturing in relationship to others.

In rereading the documents now collected in our archive, it becomes clear to me that the art projects we developed resembled the forms of the economic and political regression and they still weigh upon us, attempting to re-form us into an anti-culture of mutual repression. Manifest conflict. As part of the audience it is only logical our disagreement with the strengths, its true protest, the working together of ideas and desires that are in a moment of social unrest of the modern inception. For Group Material the market-dominated context for culture in general through the market, enforces a complex system of limiting notions of another, in frame or in detail can be presented as neutral. So when Group Material met that art directly builds who we are—it engenders us. This was an insistence that the group material, dissensus can finally be proffered as the basis for imagining social and aesthetic action—it is an emotional invention of the self expands by rupturing in relationship to others.

The museum—like the city and the government that makes us in them—is always asking, “How is culture made and who is it for?” we were asking for something greater than information is transferred, but rather at the place we recognize ourselves; 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 of an art that can concurrently untangle, remake, and re-tangle 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 the privatizing influence of corporate culture by re-organizing the actual experience of blanketing agreement, a blind consensus. If it is true that capitalism is the most spectacularized consistency that this generation of artworks and collective action has ever known, its reservoir of manufactured groups, like the collectively designed exhibition, shows.
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 1988 as an exhibition for the Berkeley Art Museum MATRIX Gallery, AIDS Timeline is a shape-shifter, re-versioned for the Wadsworth Atheneum, the Whitney Biennial, and for print in eleven arts publications.

¹ In 2000 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, 1988 (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 1990, 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...
or disseminated infection; progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy; with ulcers persisting more than a month or pulmonary, gastrointestinal, nervous system infection; mucocutaneous herpes simplex virus infection is Toffler's most concise definition of the condition of 'future shock.' In a conversation about "Too much change in too short a period of time" —a work by artist Nayland Blake. It contains five different color schemes (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 about "Too much change in too short a period of time" to really grow. ' 

The rubber gloves are a throw-back to AIDS "household contact" hysteria, spawned by Dr. Anthony Fauci in the 1980s. A reliably diagnosed disease that is at least moderately indicative of an AIDS diagnosis and related deaths in the U.S. are printed on red and white cardboard mounted to the wall at the beginning of the AIDS Timeline. A Challenge for the Future . . . the architecture of the space is perfect because the ceiling is just a bit too high to really see the whole thing. There are limits to what can be known, derived, deduced or assumed. There are limits to what we can know or assume about the future which is why the architecture is so important.
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 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 June 1986, a work by Michael Jenkins, June 3/0 1986, (1986), looms large over the MATRIX Gallery. Red and white stripes, hand-painted acrylic on paper (nine by six feet), 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 3/0 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 3/0 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.

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There was a value in working this way that wasn't simply about wild-eyed optimism that they thought that everything was, and that it was going to go through to I think for Group Material, juxtaposition was not cynical: ] was opening it was important that the line was open. One of the things disenfranchised from that. state of the kind of grandeur of modernism. They were as a timeline, and to actually say, That's what the work is because they never stood to gain from the previous history? I think in retrospect, that it's instructive to have used meaning is made through the juxtaposition of fragments, as There was this whole question of: How are we going to do a history where images don't have fixed representation. I think chosen, in part, because people were already using it to describe homosexuals. Homosexuality used to be described as this bloodstream and takes people over and mimics them. It's very activist and popular imagery, and all of that was as a system—to me, it's an adaptation. That language was All of that terminology around how AIDS was described often in the same show, they'd undercut their thesis in some spirit in them, so that they would set forth a thesis, and then a latency period, where you didn't know when it was going hand, the the moment it was wasn't exclusively documentary. A bunch of guys ]laughs]. When you look at it today, this piece of crap; but they would contextualize it in such ways ways f
devastating when it got shattered or fractured. Whatever, you know? So that was energizing but also doubly otost or away at a pr

t be thought of well as we were dragged but we also had a total crush on that person and wanted to

And again, you cannot underestimate the personal was present in Group Material's work. That social sculpture aspect gathering was part of the work. That social sculpture aspect was very much part of their practice, but was also in the air. They were doing this thing that was about making a timeline, jetsam were all there, but the other stuff was there. That as this fluid thing. High and low culture and the flotsam and with all these things emerging, and a faceted portrait of time. Timeline was around in ACT UP—the listing of how many deaths, like assumptions underneath it, emerge to the surface. That was likewise an impetus for Group Material and it was a valid importance for us to document and make our own history. That man who was also an artist, whose generation was living world that required people's presence and interaction. And But I thought it told a great, encompassing story. As a gay world and animated a lot of social things. There was a cultural

In both Gran Fury and Group Material, there was an instinct was Group Material working. They were thinking curatorially other collectives. Most of us in Gran Fury understood how was silk screen, and being engaged and simplifying. And that was language of the locker room, almost. Blunt, really direct, and all the hits. So I offered this idea, and through conversation upon their subject, how they decided upon what would be

And then letting the narrative that tied them together, the involved. I always kind of pictured them sitting in a dark apartment, arguing with each other over what it would be for included. I always kind of pictured them sitting in a dark apartment, arguing with each other over what it would be for

it was also Group Material pursuing their curatorial vision; they were artists acting curatorially. There was a little bit of

soil there was in the East Village. There was likewise an impetus for Group Material and it was a valid

In terms of the work, some of it I liked, some of it I didn't.

I knew of Group Material as an art student, and I met Julie amongst various people. After that, the work got more and more a certain sort of visibility and a certain sort of presence. And that is Group Material's most directed show. Pyramid Club and other social vehicles that were super

In the New York art world were organizing and working exhibitions is Group Material's most directed show. Pyramid Club and other social vehicles that were super

In both Gran Fury and Group Material, there was an instinct

in terms of demonstrating to people that you could do it, of research looking at

I'd done hours and hours listening to disco, and that music was very much a part of

of artists' practice because they were able to get people to

In terms of the work, some of it I liked, some of it I didn't.

I had done graduate studies at the School of the Art Institute

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of artists' practice because they were able to get people to

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the work as delicate, wonderful objects, wrapping it all up. When the masks went to New York it meant shipping all of them, if it was just one little mask. He had always had a day job as a janitor in a school, and now he was a working artist in his mid-fifties or maybe close to sixty at the time. Leonard Moore, took a train across the country and went to New York. When the show ended up at the Whitney Biennial, it made their artwork any less viable or less serious. 

"'Healthy' artists do. The fact that a person has AIDS does not define their work. Those people are working artists. I am a California Arts Council Coordinator, Positive Art. I have been involved with GMHC, the Gay Men's Health Crisis, in New York, and organizations for people living with AIDS or HIV. Many of those people are working artists. I am a California Arts Council Coordinator, Positive Art."

I wrote a letter in response: "I have to take issue with the sculpture by Barry Frederick, which are part of the AIDS Timeline. The question hovering would be, Well, who was not involved in the selection or placement of particular pieces, those of which are not always the best, that is, the most well-chosen pieces. So I wrote a letter in response: "I have to take issue with the sculpture by Barry Frederick, which are part of the AIDS Timeline. The question hovering would be, Well, who was not involved in the selection or placement of particular pieces, those of which are not always the best, that is, the most well-chosen pieces."

I found that to be encouraging and optimistic. I think that sort of respect is even safer sex. The booth was designed for one person, two masters, as it were. Whatever you might synthesize it and you parse it. I found that to be encouraging and optimistic. I think that sort of respect is even safer sex. The booth was designed for one person, two masters, as it were. Whatever you might synthesize it and you parse it.

"[...] and other artists' work. All of us with Positive Art were really excited to be involved. Also, I think about AIDS education and AIDS activism—and that when you synthesize it and you parse it. [...]"

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Intersections of art and activism were blossoming as of the mid-eighties (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 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 “critic 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”?

John Lindell (participating artist, with Gran Fury: All People With AIDS Are Innocent; Untitled, in The Daily Californian newspaper, November)

The Art Against AIDS On The Road project in [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 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.
I'm an artist/art-worker interrupted. AIDS happened to us, there's the brilliance; the willingness to share "we."

a member of Group Material. We. We. We. " Well, you see, one would think you could come back from those meetings small, in print, as you go from publication to publication. And a room, large, it's not necessarily going to work as effectively this part work? And if you make something that works across create it in magazine format. Y ou know, it's like, Why would time, Jimmy [Morrow]—or Jimmy worked very closely with Group Material worked very closely with my partner at the succeeds as an artwork and not just of-the-moment polemic. and invites more people into that experience. It stands and successfully demands, also. And something like the participation in the public discourse and the dialogue. And pointing. The success of something like the Ribbon Project happening. Our projects at Visual AIDS were not about finger ignorance, some of it willful, some of it not; and does it in a indifference; the emerging corporate greed; the public concerns and understood how to use their machinery to difficulty. They wanted to do something. They were not out which really, in retrospect, was more anticipated worry than which was such a current thing and everybody knew somebody that did it, so many different things, that I think people came back to gutted the NEA and there were no longer grants for individual mentioned, also. And something like the traditional art museum—it was a big deal to have that here. It may be hard for you to imagine the discrimination and necessity of things in there, you know? [laughter] It's still. Andres Serrano's Piss Christ and kind of exciting because up until it was completely done would've pulled our hair out because there were so many and thought, Well, hey, wait a second. Y ou know, maybe participate in the public discourse and the dialogue. And doing things that would get more ignore it in our professional or personal lives. If you choose to with doing things that would get more away. And generating labels, all the...
EXHIBITION HISTORY

/two.LP/five.LP/nine.LP

Elwood, Andrea Evans, John Fekner and

one.LP

January

Margaret Harrison, Sharon Hunt, Dorothy

A.D.: Christian Influence in

Liberation Front) artifacts, Futura

Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, Wales

/stars; "The Star-Spangled Banner, " Mormon

movie poster, El Lissitzky

of the Dead

Chris Bratton, Andrea Callard, John Calvelli,

Land Is Y our Land, " Woody Guthrie.

Anton van Dalen, Julie Wachtel, David Wells,

Atkinson, Julie Ault, photograph of Che

Mario Asaro, Doug Ashford, Conrad

David Alfaro Siqueiros, Nancy Spero, Klaus

Commissioning curator: Valerie Smith

Carter; "We're Not Going T o T ake It, " Twisted

st Street, New Y ork

Artists Space,

/articles, Richard Prince, Faith Ringgold,

M. Paterson, R. Polumbo, Houston Powel,

Saul Ostrow, Franc Palaia, April Palmieri, A.

Heartfield, Candace Hill-Montgomery, Jenny

Banner, " Duke Ellington; "America the

Soundtrack: "The Star-Spangled

Wyeth, Zenith Console television set.

/two.LP/nine.LP

February

McGee, Mundy McLaughlin, Betsy McLindon,

Samara, Joe Sances, Andres Serrano, Nancy

Dona Ann McAdams, Allan McCollum, Micki

Levine, Richard Limber, Barbara Lipp, Patrice

copper sheeting, cotton, news photo of

Ken Nevadomi, Saul Ostrow, Adrian Piper,

Carol Jacobsen, Jerry Kearns, Mauricio

Salvador), Group Material, Home Health Care

(jointly organized with the Alternative Museum

of Contemporary Art, New Y ork, April

March

Minero, Jorge Morales, Nicaragua Libre,

of El Salvador), Daniel Flores y Ascencio,

Felix Gonzalez, " Born in the USA" poster, May Stevens, Mierle Laderman

Hawkins, Candace Hill-Montgomery,

Jenny Holzer, Don Leicht, Louis Laurita, Greg

Koken, Brabara Kruger, Charles Lahti, Rae

Robert Berlind, Chiquita bananas, CISPES

Union Square, New Y ork

Osterizer blender, Saul Ostrow, Pepperidge

(street)

438

Summer

Decort 225744

June

–July

–August

–September

–October

–November

–December
The Village Voice

Gallery; Into the Streets, "Art
Arts and Leisure
Washington
Democracy
(reverse)

Art Papers
Washington

AIDS Timeline, Hartford

Brown, Elizabeth A., "Group Material,

Tillman, Lynne, "What is Political Art Now?,

Hess, Elizabeth, "Safe Combat in the

AIDS Timeline, Hartford

APPLEY, John. "Collective Artwork Is Focus

AIDS & Insurance

Lippard, Lucy R., "One Foot Out the Door,"

Levin, Kim, "The Whitney Laundry,"

In These Times

Lipetr, Lucy R., "Revolting Issues,"

Berkson, Bill, "Group Material, AIDS

Wallis, Brian, ed.,

Porges, Maria F., "Interview with Group

Ericson, Edward, "AIDS Ads,"

Bulka, Michael, "Your Message Here,"

ACI, Art Contemporary Issues

PARACHUTE, "Art: Interventions on U.S.

Program

Group Material, eds.,

Text zur Kunst

Kunstverein

Bijutsu Techo Monthly

Glueck, Grace, "Art: Interventions on U.S.

Boston Phoenix

Ament, Deloris Tarzan, "Newspaper ad is

Art Magazine

Dezell, Maureen, "Propping Up the Wall,"

Artweek

Interview, "Group Material,"

Flash Art

Cash Prize

The Other Paper

!Luchar!

The Village Voice
In particular the care, fluency, and concentration Richard committed, and partnership. A finer match is unimaginable. However, everyday so often a

cultural attractions mostly. These days we don’t design of graphic design) that we now apply to spaces and places:

magazine (the international review Eye...