

Notes on the Exhibition

Passage Two

GIULIO PAOLINI

Mimesi

1975–76

[Figures 2.1 – 2.3]

The Italian artist, Giulio Paolini, has created a work with two life-sized plaster casts of the Medici Venus (readily available from a manufacturer in Torino), put them on plinths and placed them to face each other so they are each the reflection of the other.

The meaning of this juxtaposition, according to the artist, is not in the act of placing the two sculptures one in front of the other but in the “side effects” of this positioning. In response to Gerhard Richter accusing Paolini’s *Mimesi* of being a “decorative game,” the artist explained his actions:

When I place two identical copies of the same ancient statue one in front of the other, I do not aim to rediscover and recreate that statue, nor do I want to be delighted by the situation. My only aim is to focus on the distance, on the empty space between them. That is the true body of the work of art, bearing in itself, in the closed circuit of a cryptic answer, the question concerning its very existence. Hence, the decorative effect: an induced and unexpected decoration as ultimate truth, as something “unaware” of the work of art, a decorative game that is more real than the illusion of truth.¹

As Craig Owens has written:

Giulio Paolini’s art invariably stages a (double) disappearance—both of the art object itself, which has been reduced to the status of fragment or trace, as well as the subject who can claim the object

¹ Paolini 2003: 21.

as his, as one of the modes of his vision, his thought. What we encounter in Paolini's installation is never the thing itself, but a stand-in or replacement for it (the lost object, the object of desire); hence, the plaster casts of antique statuary out of which so many of his works are composed, or the wall drawings which often double either for the objects exhibited in the gallery space or the space itself. The disappearance of the subject, in Paolini, the "dematerialization of art," its removal from the circuits of appropriation and consumption, entails a dispossession—the death of the artist. (I am referring, of course, to Roland Barthes' famous post-mortem, 'The Death of the Author,' in which Barthes argues that the author cannot—or can no longer—claim to be the unique source of meaning and/or value of the work of art.) For Paolini... the work of art is an essentially narcissistic structure which returns neither the artist's nor the viewer's gaze. In *Mimesi*—which remains for me Paolini's most powerful work—he deploys, with his customary elegance and economy, two identical plaster casts of an antique Venus pudica as mirror images, exchanging gazes into infinity. An image of fulfilled desire—the narcissistic desire for our own image that motivates our looking at works of art—*Mimesi* radically excludes both artist and viewer in the name of its own internal completion.²

Mimesi initiates the centre passage of *Partners*. It continues the notion of reflection that was introduced by the self-portrait reflection of Arbus in the mirror. As well, there is a perpetuation of doubling, as occurred in the antique toy, *Minnie Mouse Carrying Felix in Cages*, along with the duality of the presence and absence of Felix. However, this sculpture is more than the start of a Noah's Ark of pairs; it furthers the concept of connections and their implications. The themes are the threads of the exhibition that make up the picture, but not the cloth. They provide links from one work to another, creating contexts in which viewers can then locate themselves.

For example, there is a connection between the object shown and the history of what was once shown in these spaces. In the days when Hitler chose the art for these halls, he picked huge, homoerotic bronze statues that were so tall and majestic that they dwarfed living human beings. *Mimesi* is also composed of nudes, but in this case, and in opposition to the types of works for which the Haus der Kunst was constructed, they are vulnerable plaster casts of women who are petite and in human scale. The philosophical differences are highlighted by this thematic link. The fact that they are both nudes is merely a conduit to that consideration.

The artist has requested it be clearly stated these are "exhibition copies" of his work. They are made of plaster and come from the same mold, and are, in every respect, the same as the original. The requirement for

² Cited in Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 261.

Paolini's permission is an indication of a partnership between the artist and collector and exhibitor—a theme and subject that pervade this exhibition. The notion of ownership and what it means, in terms of power and entitlement, has become a complex concept. The artist has the copyright on the work, the photographer on the photograph, the agency of the newspaper journalist and photojournalist owns the licences to display and publish images. The rights and limitations of ownership provide a parallel paradigm of practical partnership in the modern world of art exhibitions.

HANNE DARBOVEN

Ansichten >82<

1982

[Figures 2.4–2.8]

The title of this work by German artist Hanne Darboven means “points of view” and “vistas” as well as “postcards.” On the top part of fifty-three of the fifty-four panels is a reproduction of a vernacular found portrait photograph of an unknown sailor, not unlike the many found in *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)*. It is used here as a surrogate for a specific sailor Darboven has celebrated in this work. Below this reproduction on paper of a family-album photograph is a lithograph of a found oil painting of a ship from the Hamburg-AmerikaLinie (Hamburg-American Line), which is a stand-in reference for the head of the company, Albert Ballin. Below, and on all fifty-four panels that run along the four walls of this huge, 140-foot-long hall, is a third sheet of paper with the artist's characteristic notations for each day of each week for the year 1982. In addition to an introductory panel of ten pre-war postcards and twenty-four black-and-white souvenir photo cards of Hamburg (collaged with handwritten excerpts from the 1973 *Brockhaus Encyclopedia* and handwritten quotes), each of the remaining panels is inscribed with handwritten notations on a calendar delineating each day of each week. The framed works were all composed virtually the same, except for the specific dates.

In order that the panels themselves could create a horizon line around the gallery, the prominent picture rail which graphically connected the tops of the doorways was removed, as part of the exhibition design for *Partners*. This restoration to the original architecture allowed the fifty-four framed, repetitive images of *Ansichten >82<* to be spread over four walls of the centre gallery without a competing horizon line.

The panels are spaced evenly, giving the visual effect of pageantry. Fifty-three of them have a head on the top and together resemble a regiment of soldiers, available for the viewer to stand before and inspect. The artist, trained as a classical musician and the composer of a number of musical works, has presented a memorial as a visual series of musical cadences that might conclude a symphony.³

³ For an interpretation of Darboven's work through musical terms see: Pohlen 1983: 52-53.

The work was inspired by a story about a writer of folk tales, Johann Kinau, who lived in Finkenwerder, a town near Darboven's home in Harburg, near Hamburg. This fellow, who once worked for the Hamburg-AmerikaLinie (HAPAG), later became a German sailor. He died on May 31, 1916, on the battleship "Wiesbaden," during the Battle of the Skagerrak in World War I. *Ansichten* >82< links this humble everyman in perpetuity to the powerful head of the Hamburg-AmerikaLinie, Albert Ballin, who was the general director of HAPAG from 1899, and who, on November 8, 1918, three days before the end of the war, committed suicide. With her signature ritualistic scrolling style of handwriting, Darboven made an artwork that commemorates a metaphorical relationship between these two people that forever links them in her version of history.⁴

The introductory panel contains excerpts from the 1973 *Brockhaus Encyclopedia*, translated from the German as follows:

The German sailor, Johann Kinau, was born in Finkenwerder, near Hamburg, on August 22, 1880. He died on May 31, 1916, on the battleship "Wiesbaden" during the Battle of the Skagerrak. Before he left his job to serve in the German navy, Johann Kinau was a bookkeeper for the shipping company, Hamburg-AmerikaLinie.

He was also a humorous and warm-hearted writer who, under the pseudonym "Gorch Fock," wrote folk songs and poems, partially in Hamburger Platt [the local dialect of Hamburg]. His work was published in the folk anthology, *From the World of the Fish Trap Specialists*.

Albert Ballin, born in Hamburg on August 15, 1857, was the general director of the Hamburg-AmerikaLinie. On November 8, 1918 he committed suicide in Hamburg.

Albert Ballin succeeded in turning the Hamburg-AmerikaLinie (HAPAG) into one of the largest shipping companies in the world. He had great influence on international shipping and hoped for a peaceful equality between Germany and England. He recognized the dangers of Admiral Tirpitz's fleet politics and, as a confidant to Wilhelm II, tried to challenge these tactics. He fought for a negotiated peace agreement for the seas between Germany and England. The First World War threatened his life's work, and may have caused him to decide to put an end to his life.

The encyclopedia speculates, without any evidence, that Ballin's suicide might have been financially inspired. This perpetuates a cultural stereotype—in contrast to all that Ballin did in his life—that suggests his suicide may not have been like the suicides of many demoralized Germans at that time.

⁴ For a sociological interpretation of Darboven's version of history, in relation to her nationality, class and education see: Graw 1994: 247-254.

Additional quotes and translations of quotes on this introductory panel, handwritten by the artist:

“There is no collective guilt. There is, however, a collective shame.” Theodor Heuss, 1948

“Imagine,” by John Lennon (born in Liverpool on October 9, 1940,

gunned down in New York City on December 8, 1980)

“freundschaft” (friendship)

“heute” (today)

“gedankenstrich” (pause; dash; silence to reflect)

“und keine worte mehr” (and no words more)

“tagesrechnung” (daily total)

The quote by Theodor Heuss, German writer and the first president of the Federal Republic of Germany, makes a clear reference to World War II, even though this work is explicitly about a connection between two people in World War I. Also notable in the first panel is the mention of John Lennon’s popular song, “Imagine,” an expression of peace and in light of his own death from a gunshot wound a particularly poignant longing for a world without violence.

By recounting a story from World War I, Darboven alludes to World War II.⁵ In World War I, Ballin, known to be a Jew, identified with Germany so profoundly that he may have committed suicide rather than live with the consequences of defeat. He was, at this time in history, first a German and second a Jew. By implication, Darboven is noting subtly how a person’s national identity can be changed without his consent, such that in World War II, a German Jew was identified first as a Jew and then as a German.

The image of the sailor in this work tolls like a bell, never letting us forget the image of the lost unknown sailor, a synecdoche of loss that is presented by the artist as a stand-in for the very specific Kinau, imprinting it repeatedly into our brains. The ship portrayed, metonymic of Ballin, when repeated fifty-three times gives the impression of ships passing over the Atlantic in a perpetual filmic rerun, like a loop of a single voyage, reminiscent of the many boats of immigrants and shipments that have passed across the ocean back and forth, physically and metaphorically connecting the New World to the motherland. The repetition initiates for the viewer the idea of a chronicle, which is further confirmed by the daily handwritings of the artist, in which the word “Heute” (today) is crossed off the way a date would be stroked off on a monthly calendar, to mark the passing of time, not only as a commemoration of the past but as a reification of the time spent in making the memorial.

⁵ On the relation of Darboven’s work to time, see: Graw 1990: 68-71.

The doubling of the matching images of Felix, in *Minnie Mouse Carrying Felix in Cages*, links to the doubling of images in *Mimesi*. This repetition is expanded in *Ansichten >82<* into a multitude of the same images, but with a different impact and meaning.⁶

YDESSA HENDELES

Ships (The Zeppelin Project)

2002

[Figures 2.9–2.30]

Moving from the ships in the water that link Germany to America (which is also, importantly, a reification of the structure of the presentation in the exhibition, with icons from Europe on one side and recognizable images of the identity of America on the other), there is, in the subsequent gallery, a display of over one hundred and twenty photographs of ships floating in the sky, sometimes with their silhouettes shadowed on the ground below, which continues the interweaving of Germany and the rest of the world.

Small, silver-bromide photograph cigarette cards were made in 1932 and 1933 and eventually compiled into three books (now out of print) titled *Zeppelin-Weltfahrten*. These cards demonstrated, through professionally made documentary photographs, how far and wide were the journeys of the enormous ships in the sky, called zeppelins after their inventor, Count (Graf) von Zeppelin.⁷ A selection of these tiny pictures was enlarged into the 8 x 10 inch (20.32 x 25.4 cm) photographs displayed in this gallery along with other pictures taken of zeppelins that were not part of this series.

Bird's-eye views were taken from zeppelins over towns, rivers, mountains and oceans, and over cities such as Cairo, Jerusalem, Cologne, London, Rome and Munich. They provide picturesque photographs not only of landscapes but also of pre-war German cityscapes that are similar to 1930s documentation of American cities such as New York and Los Angeles. The zeppelins travelled close enough to the ground that buildings are identifiable. The shadow of the zeppelin is cast onto famous architectural landmarks such as the Sagrada Família (Holy Family Church) by architect Antonio Gaudí in Barcelona and the British Parliament buildings, as well as the walls of Jerusalem and the magnificent terrain of Switzerland, Antarctica and Rio di Janeiro. One can even see an extensive Nazi rally with a large swastika. Also included are some pictures taken from the ground, such as the one displayed of a British R-100 zeppelin flying by the Ontario Parliament buildings in Toronto.

⁶ The first extensive exhibition of Hanne Darboven's work outside Europe was at the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation in Toronto in 1991. For the opening, a concert was presented: the world premiere of the *First Symphony for Chamber Orchestra* by Darboven and Friedrich Stoppa, performed by Arraymusic. A subsequent group exhibition at the Foundation, which included Darboven's *Ansichten >82<*, was mounted in 1994.

⁷ For a historical account of the development of zeppelins see: De Syon 2002: 15-25.

But zeppelins were not completely benign in their role as scenic ships in the sky. They also functioned as carriers of bombs dropped by Germans on cities during World War I. The zeppelin image has the graphic shape of a phallus—potent with ambition and the exemplification of might and power. However, the pictures have now become poignant, since they record pre-war Germany before the destruction by Allied bombing in World War II.

This gallery also contains a display of sixteen vintage news photographs of the “Hindenburg” disaster, as recorded by a photojournalist for Associated Press [Figures 2.31 – 2.42]. The German commercial passenger airship “Hindenburg” (LZ-129) was 804 feet (245 m) in length and 135 feet (41 m) in diameter, and, at the time, was the largest aircraft that had ever flown.

The first photograph [Figure 2.32] shows a close-up from a small plane of the “Hindenburg” flying over the tip of lower Manhattan, during its approach to Lakehurst, New Jersey, a few hours before it exploded into flames at 7:25 p.m. on May 6, 1937. The photographs that document the event follow the airship over New York to the actual explosion of flames, which appeared suddenly, and, as it looks in the photographs, like an ejaculation. By morning, there is documented only the final skeleton of what once was a potent, powerful airship. Out of ninety-seven persons aboard, twenty-three passengers and thirty-nine crewmembers were saved, some injured to various degrees. Thirty-six people perished in the flames: thirteen passengers, twenty-two crewmen and one civilian member of the ground crew.⁸

Analogous to the story of the “Titanic,” this is the story of yet another loss of an enormous ship. In fact, it could be described as the “Titanic” of the sky. The original photo-documentation shows America’s embrace of this pride of the Third Reich. An airship with its tail displaying swastikas, flying over the tip of lower Manhattan in 1937, was celebrated by Americans for its glory. The isolationist policy of American politicians identifies America, at least at this point in time, in a complicit relationship with Germany.

But the partnership that continues is the bond among those who lost loved ones in the tragedy at Lakehurst. On May 6 each year, at 7:25 p.m., the Navy Lakehurst Historical Society holds a memorial service for those who lost their lives in the “Hindenburg.”

LUCIANO FABRO

Italia d’oro

1968–71 (conceived in 1968 and executed in 1971)

[Figures 2.43–2.45]

Across from the wall with the “Hindenburg” in flames is a golden, glowing sculpture by Luciano Fabro. The map of Italy, an inherent part of the country’s cultural identity, is suspended upside down by its “toe,” the

⁸ Chant 2000: 105-106.

Calabrian peninsula. Sicily and Sardinia are fixed to the back of the map of the mainland. The work uses an iconic form to question the very idea of Italy. While Fabro made many versions of this sculpture in a wide variety of materials, this one, cast in gilded bronze, has a clarity of image that sets it apart from the more abstract versions that marry form and material, such as one made of fur and another made of wire mesh.⁹ This one, with identifiable mountainous terrain on the surface, has the appearance of being viewed from very high up, as if from a spaceship.

What comes to the fore in this particular context is the reference to the famous image of the dead Benito Mussolini and his mistress, Clara Petacci, hanging upside down in Milan's Piazzale Loreto on April 29, 1945.

Hitler had assisted Mussolini in becoming the leader of an Italian socialist republic in German-held northern Italy, but Mussolini was eventually arrested. Hitler sent German paratroops to try to rescue him from the mountaintop resort where he was imprisoned. But when the Germans surrendered in northern Italy, Mussolini and his mistress were taken from the jail at Giulino di Messegra and executed by the military forces of the Italian Resistance. The next day, their corpses were hung in public view.

It would be unfortunate if the depth of meaning of Fabro's work, and its finely tuned relationship of form to content, were diminished to a mere political reference to Mussolini and the mercantile success of Italy, as the artist himself has made clear: "However much it may appear to the contrary, my *Italie* are linked by a very slender thread to iconography..."¹⁰

Nevertheless, in this display, the iconography and associations are highlighted. Mussolini, Il Duce, Fascist dictator of Italy, attempted to create an Italian empire in alliance with Hitler's Germany. He joined Hitler in supporting the Fascist Nationalist side in the 1936–1939 Spanish Civil War, gaining him an ally in Spain's General Franco, who was associated with many atrocities in that brutal war. In the context of this exhibition, Rogelio Sanchis, the creator of *Minnie Mouse Carrying Felix in Cages*, who went to war in support of Franco, is linked not only to Franco, but also, by association, to Mussolini, who was a partner of Hitler.

LAWRENCE WEINER

Cat. #471

1980

[Figure 2.46]

The form of art by Lawrence Weiner is words.¹¹ The meaning comes from the viewer's interpretation of the phrases the artist has composed, as they are graphically presented on the wall, and in the context of their

⁹ Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 103. See also: Bruce 1992.

¹⁰ Cited in: Christov-Bakargiev 1999: 246. See also: Cullinam 2008.

¹¹ See Pelzer 1999, and Weiner 1991.

placement. Weiner has made a dramatic contribution to the conceptual-art dialogue by dematerializing the art object while providing content without a material host, and in the process redefining what constitutes art.

In this work, the words on the wall of *Partners* are displayed as follows:

THE RESPONSE OF AN OBJECT TO
CONTACT SUFFICIENT TO LEAD TO
A CHANGE IN INHERENT QUALITY
(VIS INERTIAE)

LA RÉACTION D'UN OBJET AU
CONTACT SUFFISANT A ENTRAINER
UN CHANGEMENT DE QUALITÉ
INHÉRENTE (VIS INERTIAE)

Canada's official languages are French and English. The letters are in a moss green shade determined by Weiner, a colour that is, according to him, a reference to the myth of Sisyphus, who ritualistically and repeatedly rolled a boulder up to the top of a mountain, where it slid down and he began again. There is a play on the colour green, because if a rock is forever rolled, it cannot gather any moss and become green.¹²

This metaphorical work lends itself to many interpretations. Were it installed in another context, it might propose that art can have an almost alchemical effect on the viewer. However, in *Partners*, this interpretation modulates to include not only the impact of art on a viewer but also the impact of images on society. What was general, in this context, becomes specific.

The text is installed between two columns in the colonnade space, at the point in the show's structure where the exhibition bifurcates into two passages. As part of the exhibition design for *Partners*, this space was restored to recapture its original processional grandeur. The plaster walls were removed from the doors and windows to reveal the original Troost architecture. Natural light now enters, as it originally had, and draws viewers, as it did many years ago, to progress through the galleries towards the light [Figures 2.47, 2.58].

The work by Weiner is positioned to mediate between two performances captured in photographs and polarized at opposite ends of a long, narrow space. These recorded events—a suicide on one end and a murder on the other, staged for the camera and then transformed by the subsequent dissemination of selected

¹² The information on the symbolic nature of the colour green in the artist's work originates from a personal correspondence with the author.

images by the media — invite another interpretation of the word “contact” in Weiner’s work. A photographic print can be made by the direct contact of a negative on paper. The mass publication of the record of an event transmutes it by recontextualizing it, turning it into something else, resulting in “a change in inherent quality.”

This work by Weiner, in the place where it is presented, acts as a kind of mantra, a refrain, or even a caption to the news photographs, which, when read after seeing the displays that follow, provides another perspective on what the viewer has just experienced. In the process, it contributes to the show by corralling the area of cultural symbols in the news media.

The acquisition of a work by Weiner involves the transfer to the purchaser of the legal copyright to the text. The artist’s sole stipulation is that only one installation of a particular piece can exist at any one time. Conceptually, it is the words that are owned — to a point. VG Bildkunst is the official agent for copyright clearance in Germany. Artists such as Weiner and Nauman belong to this organization, which means they have requested that copyright for their works be cleared through VG Bildkunst. Publishers who do not comply have to pay a penalty fee. The collector or museum may own the actual work of art but not the “geistige Eigentum” (intellectual property). At the end of each year, all members receive a proportional share of the income from VG Bildkunst. Like all artworks, the artist ultimately owns the copyright to his art. And as with all artworks, there is a partnership not only with the viewer but between the artist and anyone who displays or publishes the art.

MALCOLM BROWNE

Sacrificial Protest of Thích Quảng Đức

June 11, 1963

[Figures 2.47–2.57]

The documentation of a performance can precipitate “a change in inherent quality” by disseminating it so it becomes widely known. Such is the case with the sequenced photographs depicting the sacrificial protest of Thích Quảng Đức in Vietnam in 1963, as photographed by Malcolm W. Browne, a foreign correspondent (and not a professional photographer) for Associated Press. This series of photographs consists of the nine vintage photographs that were the originals (ex-collection John Faber) published in Faber’s book, *Great News Photos and the Stories Behind Them*.

Browne had been invited to attend an early morning “memorial service” at the intersection of two streets in Saigon. Upon arrival, he found himself faced with a vast crowd of three hundred and fifty Buddhist monks and nuns, dressed in liturgical robes. After an hour of chanting and ritual observances, Thích Quảng Đức, seated in the lotus position, in the centre of the intersection and surrounded by an assembled circle of supporters, made a ceremonial protest for the Buddhists’ right to religious freedom in Saigon: he was doused with pink gasoline and diesel fuel, ignited himself and burned to death.

Rumours had abounded of some impending act, but after a number of false alarms, foreign newsmen had lost interest. Thích Đức Nghiệp phoned several dozen foreign correspondents the night before: only Browne responded to the invitation and showed up with his camera cocked. Once the immolation began, Browne's actions were determined by his job. He recorded the fiery, aggressively provocative protest performance by Thích Quảng Đức with the comparatively mundane, ritualistic clicks of his camera, completing the courageous act of the monk by bearing witness and capturing for the world the images of his self sacrifice.¹³

In his memoir, *Muddy Boots and Red Socks: A War Reporter's Life*, Browne wrote: "These images played an important role in President Kennedy's decision to end support of President Ngô Đình Diệm's regime in South Viet Nam—an action that led to the coup in which Diệm was overthrown and killed on November 1, 1963."¹⁴

The pictures are installed at the end of a colonnade. Upon entering this space, one cannot easily discern what the images are on either end wall, as they are far away. The viewer is encouraged to approach to get a better look. The result is that the viewer is pulled down the narrow corridor lined with monumental columns as if in a solemn processional. Viewers are invited to witness a suicide and martyrdom.

They are also encouraged to contemplate the relationship of the photographer to his subject and consider the power dynamics between the two. In this series of images, there is a duality of power. There is a partnership between the subject and the photographer. Each has critical control. Browne recorded an event over which he had no control. However, there were no other news people there, making his record all the more crucial for its later dissemination. His role and identity as a newsperson made it unlikely he would not document the immolation. And the position of the newsperson empowered Thích Quảng Đức. Had Browne not been there, camera in hand, the event might not have occurred as it did. Certainly the ceremony would not have had the visibility it ultimately had, once the World Press Photo Award-winning image of the burning monk was published in newspapers and journals all over the world. Browne's record of the martyrdom of Thích Quảng Đức, on the altar of a cushion on a street, found itself on the altar of every newspaper's front page. Each of the two principal people were linked to the other, in power and in perpetuity.

EDDIE ADAMS

Murder of a Vietcong Suspect by Saigon Police Chief (Vietnam)

February 1, 1968

[Figures 2.58–2.67]

On the opposite wall of this long arcade, precipitating yet another processional by the viewer, is a second

¹³ Goldberg 1991: 212-215.

¹⁴ Browne 1993: 17.

series of photojournalist images. What was once called *Execution of a Vietcong Suspect* is now called *The Murder of a Vietcong Suspect by Saigon Police Chief (Vietnam)*.

Eight vintage photographs by the photojournalist Eddie Adams show South Vietnamese National Police Chief, Brigadier General Nguyễn Ngọc Loan, summarily executing a non-uniformed Vietcong suspect with a point-blank shot to the head. The subsequent wire transmission of one of these images was published in every major newspaper and magazine. While there was also a film of the event, it was the impact of the photograph that changed the course of the Vietnam War.¹⁵ When the images of this event first appeared in print, it was a rude awakening for the American people. They woke up one morning to something they had never experienced before: a murder recorded on the front page of every newspaper. As well, it was intolerable to think that Loan, a South Vietnamese general and the highest-ranking police officer in the country, was casually and brutally killing an unarmed, non-uniformed man with his hands tied behind his back while presumably acting on behalf of Americans, who preferred to believe themselves to be righteous and humane in this war.

The event as recorded also became mythologized, totemic of a moment that altered history.¹⁶ Umberto Eco included the Pulitzer Prize-winning image from this series when he observed in his essay "A Photograph" that:

[the] vicissitudes of our century have been summed up in a few exemplary photographs that have proved epoch-making. Each of these images has become a myth and has condensed numerous speeches. It has surpassed the individual circumstance that produced it; it no longer speaks of that single character or of those characters, but expresses concepts. It is unique, but at the same time refers to other images that preceded it or that, in imitation, have followed it.¹⁷

However, Adams, in a 1983 interview in *Parade* magazine, expressed regret that he had taken the photograph: "In taking that picture, I had destroyed his life. For General Loan had become a man condemned both in his country and in America because he had killed an enemy in war. People do this all the time in war, but rarely is a photographer there to record the act." Adams said his picture "wasn't meant to do what it did."¹⁸ The photograph had spun out of the control of the photographer and had become reframed as a

¹⁵ According to Walter Benjamin's "Little History of Photography," photography can depict the *optical unconscious* due to its ability to penetrate movement in a way that the naked eye cannot. Photography can "reveal the secret" of movement by presenting isolated images of what is usually concealed because of the character of movement as changeable and continuous. This explanation might aid in the understanding of the popularity of the stills images over the film of the same event. The stills photographs allow the viewer to see more than he actually can (to see details that he could not recognize in real time, to see for a longer period of time than a fleeting moment etc.), while maintaining the "real effect" of photography. Benjamin 1999: 510-512.

¹⁶ See Sontag 2003: 59.

¹⁷ Cited in Fulton 1988: 214.

¹⁸ Cited in Goldberg 1991: 229.

symbol that developed a myth and meaning of its own, almost independent of the actual event.

In other words, the graphic image was misleading when taken out of the context of the actual event and what preceded it. The powerful visual image overrode the circumstance of the killing. The suspect wearing a sport shirt was in fact a soldier, a terrorist—a Vietcong lieutenant who was known to have murdered a South Vietnamese major, his wife and their children. As well, General Loan led the lieutenant, hands bound behind his back, to where there was a bevy of journalists and photojournalists, and provided a performance for them to record. Though appearing to be factual, and certainly authentic, the event was captured as if the execution were spontaneous.

The fact that it was staged is not easily apparent until one reads about the event. Its appearance now has a place in culture as a construct of reality. Its impact was the result of the fictions generated around it. A photograph does not become imbued with this kind of mythological power on its own, but, like the teddy-bear phenomenon, is fuelled by culture and commerce. Unlike the icon of the single shot, this group of eight images in sequence, as presented in *Partners*, is all the more gruesome because the murder is displayed as it unfolded in a narrative, a form that engages the viewer in the horrific scene. Showing the whole series interferes in the mythologization that took place when the single image of the actual moment of the shot was propagated all over the world. The eight photographs offer the possibility for engagement, one of the primary effects of narrative.¹⁹

These news images reveal the persuasive impact of the media's fictionalizing system of dealing with the inexorable rush of information, and also the voyeuristic position of viewers when confronted with images that pinpoint the moment between life and death. When juxtaposed to the systems used by artists that comment artistically on the information generated by the world outside their subjective realms, the role of the media becomes highlighted as society's selective system for presenting portraits of our time. We can also see, over time, the changing moral standards of what society tolerates as presentable to the public.

At one end of the corridor is the pictorial portrayal of a suicide. At the other, a murder. Returning from this gallery, back through *Ansichten* >82< by Darboven, viewers are reminded of two earlier stories about murder and suicide. However, after seeing the photojournalistic examples of violent deaths, the poetry in the

¹⁹ In his essay on how photography has an inherent paradox because it generates a new category of time and space—the “not any more” that is, at the same time, the “not yet”—Thierry de Duve refers to the traumatic effect on the viewer of Eddie Adams' iconic, Pulitzer Prize-winning photo from the series exhibited in *Chronicles* at the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation in 1994 and also in *Partners*: “I'll always be too late, in real life, to witness the death of this poor man, let alone to prevent it; but by the same token, I'll always be too early to witness the uncoiling of the tragedy, which at the surface of the photograph, will never occur. Rather than the tragic content of the photograph, even enhanced by the knowledge that it has really happened... it is the sudden vanishing of the present tense, splitting into the contradiction of being simultaneously too late and too early, that is properly unbearable” (Duve 1978: 121). The interpretation of this particular image's contradictory relation to time is magnified by being shown as part of a series. The presentation of an event as a duration (in Duve's term, “time exposure”) and the presentation of an event as a solitary image isolated from time (“snapshot”) are emphasized as contradictory but, in photography, also essentially linked.

presentation of the murdered unknown sailor is enhanced. The harsh, you-are-there photographic document of reality contrasts sharply with the comparatively romantic portrait of a sailor from years gone by and the benign, painted picture of a boat. The sailor portrait is similar to photographs many people have in their homes of relatives from long ago. It exudes a sense of memorial that is reassuring, of a loss that was not for naught, and it is without the messiness of death from aggression. This sailor is shown alive. His death is imagined and felt as a conceptual loss, but not described graphically in the work.

But after seeing photographs of an actual killing in war, as depicted by the two photojournalists, re-entering *Ansichten* >82< is a completely different experience—one that is injected with a dose of violence. The juxtaposition reformats the viewer’s initial reception of the images chosen by Darboven and changes somewhat the perception of this work upon the second viewing.

The murder and suicide in Darboven’s work become a counterpoint to the photojournalist narratives. The worlds of art and life intersect. One looks to art to elicit and release an intensity of feeling, which then results in transcendence. The juxtaposition of these series and the works that surround them creates a context where they transcend their original function as information and contribute to the escalating curve of emotion that viewers are encouraged to feel as they progress through the show. War as a romantic idea and war as a wrenching reality both have a role in our culture.

BRUCE NAUMAN

Thank you

1992

[Figure 2.68–2.71]

From the left limb of the tree-like composition of the exhibition, the viewer’s passage provides a branch leading to a gallery accessed by a glass-panelled, sound-retaining door.

Entering, viewers encounter a video monitor containing a man’s face shouting out verbal assaults. *Thank you*, a private gift to the curator/collector from the artist, is a confrontational performance mounted for attack at standing height. The provocative and relentless audio-visual message is made by the artist himself, his facial expression ruddy and angry as he spits out in varying cadences, “Thank you!” in a ten-minute loop.²⁰

The repetition replicates the structure of Darboven’s *Ansichten* >82<, continuing the theme of ritual that threads through the show. The video, in its aggression, identifies a latent “Fuck you” in the quotidian

²⁰ This work was later included in an exhibition in the Unilever Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern, London, as a part of a commissioned presentation of his effort to expand the definitions of art through the medium of sound (Dexter 2004: 18-23). See also Nauman 2004.

words “Thank you,” and vice versa. The phrase “Thank you,” uttered by the recipient of a gesture, acknowledges the inherently ambivalent relationship in the bond that exists between a giver and a receiver. When “Thank you” is discharged repetitively, in rapid-fire, loud shouts, as in this videotape, it becomes a verbal pistol. The words are “Thank you,” but the authoritative tone is like the Führer’s in his speeches to persuade Germans to support his Fascist position in World War II. Located adjacent to Thích Quảng Đức’s gift of his life, the silent aggression in the monk’s act is given voice.

The video by Nauman affirms that even the most benign of everyday, ritualized interactions—indeed all relationships—involve power positions that slide gelatinously along on a slippery gradient from attraction to revulsion. When reformatted, “Thank you,” a normally civilized social nicety, reveals the aggression in ambivalence, which exists in varying degrees in all relationships. The simple switch in tone lifts the shroud on existing aggressive human instincts, resting threateningly close to the surface in us all. In a flash, like the rolling up of a sleeve of a garment, latent hostility lies on the surface of the arm, waiting to be exposed.

The hostile sexual reference and the fully frontal body position taken by the artist in his performance, assuming at once the role of actor, director and purchased, exhibited artist, make manifest the power implications of both giving and receiving. The analogy to the sexual act diagnoses, with wit, the power relations of dominance and control as they exist in all human relations, with particular reference to the power dynamics between the artist and collector, between the artist and curator, and between the artist and viewer. The performance is a direct response to the power dynamic in a collector’s or curator’s relationship with the artist’s work. The video makes a playful, but decidedly provocative, statement of resistance. It repeatedly and ferociously copulates with the viewer again and again and again and again. Power—mirrored, squared and confounded into absurdity.

The interchange of artworks for money and for exhibition is not without complicated repercussions. There is both an increase and a sacrifice of power by both parties. “Thank you” may be the slap-on-the-back of approval, but not without the force felt. Saying “Thank you” in response to a perceived gesture of power is presumably meant to achieve balance. But whether anyone really wants social equilibrium is questionable. The natural urge is to try for the upper hand, which inevitably leads to tension, like the implied sexual tension proposed in this video gesture.

The sending of a video note was a functional social missive in a modern medium, like the ones sent in the form of picture postcards in *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)* and the snapshot by Arbus of herself, in a pregnant state, to her husband in Burma. None of these pieces was originally intended to be artworks. But when I proposed to Nauman the possibility of showing this work in the context of an exhibition that included *Sacrificial Protest of Thích Quảng Đức*, which was also not intended to be an artwork, Nauman arranged for his video technician to convert the videotape onto a laser disc and offered the specifications of a stand to

present it publicly. He suggested it be seen by the viewer at a standing height. A private gift became a public present.²¹

ON KAWARA
May 15, 1981
from the *TODAY* series
1966 ongoing
[Figures 2.72–2.75]

As a continuation of the right limb of the exhibition, adjacent to the images of *Murder of a Vietcong Suspect by Saigon Police Chief (Vietnam)*, is a branch of the exhibition that starts with a gallery accessed through a large arch made of two columns of the colonnade.

Upon entering the gallery, viewers are confronted with a small, penetratingly vibrant, cerulean blue painting, inscribed with the date “May 15, 1981,” meticulously hand-painted in white letters, made by the Japanese-American conceptual artist, On Kawara. From 1966 on, Kawara has been creating (among a range of other kinds of works) monochromatic paintings with dates painted on them, which he has titled the *TODAY* series.²² These paintings were made under the artist’s self-imposed terms for completion: each painting must be started and completed on the actual day depicted on the painting, in the language of the country in which the artist painted it, in one of eight sizes the artist predetermined for this series, ranging from 8 x 10 inches (20 x 25 cm) to 61 x 89 inches (41 x 226 cm). If the painting is not finished by the end of the day, it is destroyed. Decisions about whether a painting would be undertaken on a particular day, as well as its scale and background colour, typeface, and how many paintings might be attempted, are all intuitively made, depending on Kawara’s emotional state of mind upon rising from bed. There are many days when no paintings are made. But when one is, the work is very painstaking. Each canvas is covered with as many as four or five layers of paint for the background, which he refines to make it free of any appearance of brushstrokes, and an additional six or seven coats of paint are applied to make the white letters, which are not stencilled but are all masterfully drawn by hand.

Like many artists, such as Andy Warhol and Gerhard Richter, Kawara has appropriated published newspaper articles and pictures as part of his work.²³ Each painting is later fitted with a cardboard box,

²¹ The gift of this work to the curator recognized a special connection between the curator and the artist. In a later interview on the occasion of his exhibition *Raw Materials* at the Tate Modern, London, Nauman describes the inception of the work in the following words: “I thought of it as a piece. It was a thank you, but it was a piece” (Simon 2004: 131).

²² For an overview of Kawara’s practice see: Choon and Subotnick, eds. 2004; Glicksman, ed. 1978; Nancy 2004; Springfeldt 1980; Weidmann 1994.

²³ Although Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter and On Kawara have all appropriated photojournalistic images for their art (see Rorimer 1991: 224-225 and Wall 1996: 146-147, 154) there are essential differences between the appropriation of images by Warhol and Richter as compared to the direct use of actual newspaper clippings by Kawara. Warhol and Richter, for example, appropriate only journalistic photographic images into their work, whereas Kawara uses complete parts of the newspaper—the photographic image and the text that accompanies and contextualizes it. Also, Warhol and Richter insert the photojournalistic image into the picture plane itself by reprinting or copying it; Kawara uses the original newspaper as a material and dedicates a separate part of the work to it, the box in which the painting is placed when not exhibited, thus supplementing the painting and making the box part of the work’s content.

hand-fabricated by the artist and lined with a news clipping chosen by him that was published on the day of the painting's creation and in the city where it was painted. Sometimes the news stories are historically significant, and at other times, they are banal.²⁴

The date painting included in this particular work, *May 15, 1981*, happened to have been made on the day that *The New York Times* reported "The Shooting of the Pope: Millions Pray for Fast Recovery." The box, which houses the painting when not on view, is displayed here with its news-clipping lining.²⁵ The newspaper's art director has highlighted the gun used by the potential assassin by putting a white circle around it. The gunman and the intended victim were indelibly linked, by ink and by history.

Juxtaposing Kawara's work with straight photojournalism makes a connection between the works of this conceptual artist and documentary news photographs. Actual newspaper clippings are a material part of Kawara's work, but the artist did not first read the newspaper and then set out to commemorate an event. For the most part, the news articles were collected by Kawara's wife for him to eventually make the boxes, which were constructed after the date paintings had been made.

The *TODAY* series is not a form of "history painting," as Jeff Wall proposed in a lecture he gave at the Dia Center for the Arts ("Monochrome and Photojournalism in On Kawara's Today Paintings"). Wall responded to my plan to juxtapose the date paintings of Kawara with photojournalism by developing an argument in which he placed Kawara's work in the genre of history painting, wherein an artist decides to commemorate an event in history with a painting. As he put it, "In history painting, the floating and subjective character of the art of painting is disciplined by the ineradicable validity of the known occurrence, an occurrence that can be named just by the citation of a date—for example July 14, 1789, Bastille Day, a day that becomes a festival, a public holiday, and is singled out on calendars."²⁶

On this, I differ from Wall. Kawara rarely set out to make a painting to commemorate an occurrence, though he was conscious that on some of the days when he was psychologically inclined to make a date painting, an event of newsworthy consequence had happened. But each of those occasions is so unusual, he carefully noted them in what he calls his *JOURNALS* as exceptional.

Furthermore, the claim that this is history painting is undone by the fact that the newspaper iconization of an event is when the newspaper story comes out, which is the day *after* the event occurred. The date painting, which bears the same date of the news clipping, is therefore a record of the dissemination of the information about the event and not a commemoration of the event when it occurred. The dates recorded by

²⁴ For a further analysis of the interaction between the material qualities of Kawara's painting and those of his newspaper clippings see: Watkins 2002: 78.

²⁵ As Karl Schampers stated: "In spite of their obvious mutual connection, On Kawara deliberately keeps the painting and the box separate. The fact that they are never exhibited together confirms their (relative) independence and autonomy. They remain two separate entities" (Schampers 1991: 199).

²⁶ Wall 1996: 137-138.

Kawara are not of the incident happening but of the media mythologization of it.

In my view, Kawara's work is about locating *himself* in history. His subject is time—past, present, and future—and also places and situations.²⁷ His own biography is described in days and not years, calculated for exhibition catalogues as up to the beginning of each showing of his work. His *JOURNALS*, which record colours and the titles of newspaper articles (which he refers to as “subtitles”), also include a category Kawara calls “Places.” In this, there is extensive photo-documentation he has taken of the New York City transit system, with particular attention to scenes in the subway cars, which are reminiscent of the subway pictures Walker Evans took years earlier.

Kawara's archive makes clear that his priority is records, particularly his own system of keeping track of each item he makes. The people who are part of that record are entered as data. The moment that an event happened is of less importance than when the event was recorded. Each day is different, but, as a day, it is in the end the same as all the other days.

That said, what is seemingly dispassionate is not without its humanism. As is clear from the news articles, Kawara values everyday life and all people of all social strata. These paintings do not record world history as much as they portray a personal, internal, subjective history. They are a record of Kawara's relationship to history as an anchor to locate his own place in time, and are not his interpretation of world affairs. In the process, he has provided a record, through the colour and size of the paintings, of those days in which he felt an intuitive inclination to make a painting (or several) of a certain type in keeping with his strict repertoire. The labour-intensive, meditative act of crafting a painting with a single date over the period of a full day implicitly proposes a separation between whatever was happening in the outside world, which could not be controlled, and the artist's spiritual relationship to himself and to existence, on which he imposed strict controls.

Kawara's work, displayed alongside photojournalism in a fine-art context, makes a metaphorical analogy between a system of artistic practice and a commercial cultural system of mass media. It highlights the relationship Kawara had to such information in deference to his subjective inner life, while also raising the notion of consumption of information by the media and the impact of this on us all. Kawara copes by locating himself in the continuum of recorded time. The newspaper, in contrast, has a capitalist agenda.

Kawara's work is not a commemoration of a historical event outside of one single fact—that On Kawara was alive at the time. So, not only are the Pope and his would-be assassin connected as a fact forever, the artist connects himself to moments in history at various points, when he chooses to locate himself in time.

As with the representations of Felix the Cat carried by Minnie Mouse and Paolini's pair of classic Greek

²⁷ As Jonathan Watkins argues: “They [the *TODAY* series] make the same sense as the graffito ‘I was here’, written in the past tense as the writer projects him or herself immediately into the future, somewhere else, and this trace of a here/now-ness is left to be encountered by someone else” (Watkins 2002: 87).

sculptures locked in each other's gaze, the date paintings also suggest both presence and absence. Viewers are in the position of looking at the dates back in time, seeing something that has been consumed, like yesterday's news, and encouraged to situate themselves in the context of what they see.

ON KAWARA

I AM STILL ALIVE

1986, 1987

from the *I AM STILL ALIVE* series

1969 ongoing

07/10/1986

02/11/1986

10/11/1986

12/01/1987

[Figures 2.75–2.78]

Also exhibited in this gallery, in a wall-mounted vitrine, are four telegrams On Kawara sent to a friend, Harry Pollac, that are part of the ongoing *I AM STILL ALIVE* series. Over the years, Kawara has sent telegrams intermittently to people he knows.²⁸ The *I AM STILL ALIVE* series began with the following three telegrams:

6 DEC 1969—I AM NOT GOING TO COMMIT SUICIDE DON'T WORRY

8 DEC 1969—I AM NOT GOING TO COMMIT SUICIDE WORRY

11 DEC 1969—I AM GOING TO SLEEP FORGET IT²⁹

Until about fifty years ago, telegrams were the primary way in which important information was transmitted over long distances quickly. A telegram received was an object of significant import, announcing the death or birth of someone with whom the recipient was in a relationship. With the date-painting boxes lined with news clippings, Kawara has been interacting with systems of information transmission. But with the telegrams, he has been initiating his own connections to the outside world, rather than appropriating them, as he does with the clippings.

The four telegrams here each say “i am still alive.” These personal messages heighten one’s consciousness of life, as well as the fact that death is forever a threat, either by accident or by intention, by oneself or by others. The concern is not only personal, for those who die, but also social, for those affected by their deaths. The recipients’ anxiety after reading Kawara’s telegrams is only intensified when, after a series of four giving the same message, they stop arriving altogether.³⁰ Like the video thank-you note by Bruce Nauman, and

²⁸ Kawara 1978.

²⁹ Chiong 1999: 66.

³⁰ Jonathan Watkins acknowledged this tension and locates it in the telegram’s inherent pastness. When Kawara’s addressee reads “I am still alive,” he necessarily has to interpret this as “I was still alive.” About the telegrams, he writes, “Their intrinsic obsolescence now matches the instant obsolescence of their message” (Watkins 2002: 87).

the personal notes sent on family-album postcards, these private missives by Kawara expand in meaning when displayed in public.

Another issue is the dynamic of power and risk. Who ultimately controls these objects? The telegrams, by virtue of their presence in this display, were at one time sold by the recipient. The artist, though he issued the telegrams, was not paid financially for what he himself considers to be artworks. Like the paradigm of the monk's performance, Kawara's telegrams are both a gift and a sacrifice, as well as a risk, as the gift may not be worth anything if the act is not valued and preserved.

Because society recognizes Kawara as a professional artist, copyright fees for the publication of the telegrams must be paid, which the artist receives. However, unlike works by Weiner, Kawara's telegrams were never sold by him. They exist between art and ephemera, and as part of an open social contract. The fate of these items, like that of the photo-postcards and teddy bears, is in the hands of someone other than the sender, who can cherish them, discard them or potentially capitalize upon their value.

The theme of suicide implicit in Kawara's telegrams is linked in this exhibition to Darboven's *Ansichten* >82<, in which she commemorates the suicide of Albert Ballin. Murder is yet another connection between the works by Kawara and Darboven. The failed attempt on the life of the Pope, referenced in Kawara's *May 15, 1981*, stands in contrast to the successful shooting of John Lennon referenced in Darboven's *Ansichten* >82<. Their works are also united not only by their references to political history but also by virtue of their systemized, labour-intensive acts of art-making, in which they are both engaged. Darboven's characteristic writing is countered in this exhibition with the careful crafting by Kawara of the date painting and its box.

Systems provide a comforting semblance of control over our lives. Darboven utilizes idiosyncratic, ritualistic writing, tangibly tracking her progress through life. Kawara immerses himself in several systems of painting, appropriation and intervention, reaching out to friends through series of postcards he sends that state what hour he awoke each day, in a series he calls *I GOT UP*. Darboven wrote, and Kawara painted, and both counted. Their work is compared in this show to society's system of organizing information on a daily basis. Like the artists, the news media notes lives lived and lost, but with entirely different agendas than the artists'.

One of the notions raised by these works when brought together is how much control we really have over the course of history or even the story of our own lives. The exhibition makes the point, that in the end, we can each come up with a system to organize the information to which we are subjected, but the only thing we may actually choose to do that has any physical effect on the world is either to damage ourselves or damage someone else.

JAMES COLEMAN
Box (Ahhareturnabout)
1977
[Figures 2.79–2.80]

The gallery in which Kawara's work is installed is quiet, but in the gallery adjacent to it, the sound level is at the legal limit of an outdoor rock concert. To reach this gallery, viewers enter a glass-panelled, sound-sealed door, walk down a corridor and open a second sound-sealed door.

The moment the second door is opened, viewers are confronted with a dark space that suddenly assaults their retinas with flashes of light, causing after-images, and their ears with a relentlessly pounding bass sound so powerful it vibrates their bodies. They are starting to experience *Box (Ahhareturnabout)*, made in 1977 by Irish artist James Coleman.³¹ This piece is a black and white film loop made from documentary footage of the famous 1927 historic boxing rematch between the Irish boxer, Jack Dempsey, and the American boxer, Gene Tunney. These fighters are legendary figures in the folklore of boxing. An Irish artist has utilized documentary footage to tell a story about an Irish boxer in combat with an American boxer.

In 1926, Dempsey was the world's most famous heavyweight champion. He had successfully defended his championship six times over a period of seven years, winning himself the nickname of the Massana Mauler. Tunney, who had been invited to fight Dempsey, was a New Yorker, known for his high ideals and called the Dreamer. He was considered the underdog, and went into the fight with odds against him of 11 to 5. Even though Tunney won the fight, the fans resisted acknowledging his accomplishment as legitimate, convinced the win was a fluke. Dempsey's fans resolutely clung to their hero, refusing to acclaim a new one in Tunney. And so a rematch was scheduled a year later, on September 22, 1927, at Soldier's Field in Chicago. Dempsey was close to retiring from the ring. He needed to win this fight to end his career in glory. Tunney needed to win to authenticate his first win and prove himself to the skeptics.

The sportswriters declared the Dempsey/Tunney fight of 1927 as "The Second Battle of the Century."³² It turned out to be one of the most famous events in boxing history. Central to the story is that before the fight, both boxers agreed on a rule: should a knockout occur, the one still standing must go back to a neutral corner before the counting could start. It was the seventh round. Dempsey was fading and Tunney was bashing blows at him. Dempsey surprised Tunney with a strong right punch to his jaw, which flung him against the ropes. Then a forceful left punch downed Tunney to the floor.

Dempsey was so stunned by his accomplishment, he hung over his fallen prey for four full seconds, frozen with disbelief. By the time the referee finally cajoled him to go back to a corner of the ring, in

³¹ On the relationship between Coleman's work and its audience see Lageria 1999: 20-27.

³² Fleischer 1972 (1936): 272.

accordance with the rules, the official count to ten had to start again. By the count of nine, Tunney was up. By ten, the fight continued. Three rounds later, the match ended with Tunney triumphant, successfully retaining his title as champion over Dempsey.

However, once again the victory was controversial. The “Second Battle of the Century” had turned into the “Battle of the Long Count.” Dempsey’s fans dismissed Tunney’s victory as the result of a technicality. Tunney was never acknowledged for his victory. Dempsey’s knock-out of Tunney was applauded by his fans, who admired him as the true hero, the stuff of which mythology is made, and this became the final cultural reality.

What boxing folklore retained has parallels to the popular-culture reading of Adams’ documentary photographs. What was believed was what seemed to be true, in accordance with the appearance of what happened. Coleman explores that gap between perception and reality. He appropriated archival footage and turned it into a film loop, then added an unexpectedly loud sound track that accosts the viewer viscerally. He also interspersed clear film in the documentary footage, which allows the bright light of the projector to shine through at regular intervals. These white images (flashing in a darkened gallery) in the original footage are synchronized to each punch, overloading the retina — momentarily blinding it — and creating after-images to simulate the impact of each blow.³³ At the same time, the viewer is pounded audially with deep, bass thudding sounds belted out at an astonishing one hundred decibels, loud enough to vibrate in one’s chest cavity.

Throughout and between the punches, a poignant audio narrative gives a fictional account, written by the artist, of Tunney’s inner thoughts: priming himself, defending his title, at once trying to hold onto his life and his title. His physical existence was at stake, as was his identity as a winner. The room in which the work is installed is small and claustrophobic, replicating the small boxing ring and the mindscape of Tunney, whose interior monologue provides an intimate, voyeuristic experience for the viewer. The intimacy of the physical presentation is matched by the intimacy of the monologue. However, the actual sounds of the public spectacle — the screams of the audience, the horrible sounds of the painful punches against living flesh — are not included in deference to the interior psychological reality portrayed as if in the fighter’s mind.³⁴ The artist’s voice-over of Tunney’s struggle to survive and his fear of defeat plays between the punches. Tunney and

³³ Benjamin Buchloh interprets this effect as follows: “As Coleman’s film loop follows mimetically an exchange of punches in rapidly alternating sequences of blackout and image-sound flashes . . . BOX reiterates the experience of the perceptual pulse in the spectator, pushing it almost literally across the threshold of physical discomfort, this pulse alternates with an iconic sign of two fighters exchanging actual punches. Not only does this correspondence generate an effect of the doubling of the semiotic as the physical (bordering on a pun), but it also situates the image of bodily performance within a very specific historical event and within the confrontation of two historically identifiable protagonists” (Buchloh 2000: 161-2).

³⁴ As Anne Rorimer noted, the viewing experience combines an internal view of being inside his mind, hearing his thoughts, while at the same time offering an external view of watching the fight (Rorimer 2003: 9).

Dempsey appear doomed to stay locked in a perpetual limbo, an endless allegorical struggle for life and soul. Plato asked what does it mean to be, but the key question here is, “Who am I?”³⁵

The Tunney/Dempsey rematch of 1927 was the first to be broadcast live on radio across the world. The *New York Evening Telegram* hooked up to seventy-nine radio stations in Africa, Latin America, Europe, and Australia. These connections made the story into a mythological fight. Coleman, by using the documentary as an armature, made a work that expresses the life and death struggle for identity.

Triumph is not only about the continuance of life but also about the survival of the spirit. People have killed and will kill for their identity. Triumph and defeat each provide identities that persist in history.

³⁵ According to Jean Fisher, Coleman's interest in the fight results from “a consideration that the challenge to a return bout precipitated a crisis in Tunney's sense of identity—at that moment he was both ‘champ’ and ‘non-champ.’ As a consequence, it was his own sense of coherence that he was fighting to maintain in the second match” (Fisher 2003: 25).