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### How to do things with pictures in the museum

*Photography, montage and political space*

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Doing Things with Pictures

...God spoke and said ‘Let there be light.’ In this way he created both Heaven and Earth; for, with the utterance of the Divine Word, ‘there was light’ (Genesis 1:3,4). Thus Creation itself arose through an act of speech.<sup>1</sup>

In this quote from Umberto Eco’s essay “Languages in Paradise”, Eco links a creation myth of the world itself with the agency of speech. This citation is significant to my study in three respects. First, it points to the power of an utterance—in this example, a reflexive command—to act (or rather, create) in the world, rather than to describe it. Secondly, this particular command from the *Book of Genesis* proposes a dynamic relationship between uttering, illuminating and seeing the visual, between creating light by command and enabling the power of vision to behold the world. Thirdly, the biblical passage entwines a narrator, who recounts this foundational history, the recounting of a story, and participating readers/listeners, in other words, the action of something being uttered that addresses and engages the audience.

I am a curator: although I have also been a caretaker of collections at times throughout my career, my principal role has been as an activator through selecting specific bodies of work, choreographing how these works are situated in spaces, providing ways for lay audiences to enter into the arena of the work’s discursivity, and to foster visitors’ agency in creating their own encounters. I specialize in photo-based works, installations and interventions. I like to build real things that activate spatial and political encounters. In my projects, I experiment with ways to activate the connection between the discursivity of works of art and engaged audiences. I am outside the academy, although I draw from it to inform my work and hope that my creative moves may at times resonate back into the academy.

The title of my dissertation makes reference to J.L. Austin’s collection of lectures about the performative power of language published as *How to do Things with Words* (1962). In Austin’s proposal, ordinary uses of language, such as *promising, threatening,*

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<sup>1</sup> Umberto Eco, “Languages in Paradise,” in *Serendipities. Language and Lunacy* (New York: Orion, 1999), 29-30.

*commanding* and *questioning*, are examples of performative language, actions achieved by saying something. Austin's conception of language as use-oriented and context dependent is a dynamic way of considering communication, and his concept of speech—as a *transactional* operation of language *between* people according to conventions in everyday contexts—recognizes the agency of both the speaker and the addressee. In this dissertation, I consider how Austin's way of thinking can be helpful in examining the processes of making art, staging it, and beholding it.

My approach in this project is derived from cultural analysis: the consideration of projects and practices in view of theoretical articulations. This study is also informed by, but not limited to, more recent theorists (and artists) considering questions of how art “works”, including strategies of artists working in the political realm, the museum as a stage for performance, the curator as presenter and the experience of audience.

Terms used in art writing to describe the intersection between aesthetic and political practices are by no means synonymous, including *committed*, *critical*, *radical*, *disruptive*, *socially engaged*, *against the grain*, *activist*, *interventionist*, *oppositional*, *relational aesthetics*, *practical aesthetics*. In this study, I use the term “political art” as an umbrella term that implies three characteristics: 1) the work addresses real-world systems and the implications on human connectivity and emancipation; 2) the work can be framed as a *transgressive* performance, but each work does so in its own way, or in a variety of ways, dependent on the variables of production, staging and audience; and 3) the work presents itself as the locus for critical thinking.

Working with an interdisciplinary framework in this project has been essential. The Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) had only been recently founded by Mieke Bal when I became one of the first international non-resident students. It has been a fertile home for my research conducted on a part-time basis alongside my practice as a curator. In its core mission, ASCA fosters the “borrowing of a question, a methodological perspective, an object or a particular field of study, from another discipline, and the integrating of this into your own work or subject area.”<sup>2</sup> In the prospectus for the inaugural Theory Seminar for 2000-2001 led by Bal, she introduced her concept of

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<sup>2</sup> *Guidelines for Writing a PhD Thesis within ASCA*, by Mieke Bal (and updated by Esther Pereen), 2017, 13.

“cultural analysis” as a way of expanding and evolving methodologies by which to study cultural objects, and has contributed to both theory and art scholarship through her analyses of works of art through the lens of narratology.<sup>3</sup> For Bal, concepts are not established so much as univocal terms but are dynamic in themselves. They may “travel” between disciplines and intersect in interesting ways:

After returning from your travels, the object constructed turns out to no longer be the ‘thing’ that so fascinated you when you chose it. It has become a living creature, embedded in all the questions and considerations that the mud of your travel spattered onto it, and that surround it like a ‘field’.<sup>4</sup>

Bal’s own work as curator and artist, in addition to her formidable contributions as a scholar, has continued to guide my intellectual path in this study.<sup>5</sup> Succeeding her in my supervision, Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes and Sophie Berrebi have continued to enrich my thinking about border-crossing endeavours in considering photo-based works through an interdisciplinary lens, as well as the travel between academic writing and curatorial practice.<sup>6</sup> Lerm Hayes’ advocacy for dismantling disciplinary boundaries to encourage more fluidity between artmaking, scholarship by artists, creative art writing and curatorial practices promises a deepening fulfilment of a useful art, *arte útil*:

We can understand ourselves as making active interventions in constructing meaning, practices and our fields. We are working in partnership and often solidarity with artists – in the same eco system, while they are attending to ours, intervening in it and through it in the social field [...] Beuys would have said: we are all artists. Our work lives inside and outside of the inter-mingled realities of art spaces, research institutions and public space, in production, distribution and reception.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Bal, Handbook Theory Seminar 2000-2001, unpaginated.

<sup>4</sup> Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>5</sup> In particular, her analysis of works of art in the museum: *Double Exposures. The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes and Sophie Berrebi have been particularly effective interlocutors due to their own strong backgrounds in curating exhibitions. Lerm Hayes curated the extremely original and comprehensive major exhibition *Joyce in Art: Visual Art Inspired by James Joyce* (Royal Hibernian Academy, Ely Place, Dublin, 2004), as well as her more recent project, Institutional Work, Institutional Critique: Brian O’Doherty / Patrick Ireland (Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2019). Berrebi curated *Documentary Evidence* (Galerie Chez Valentin, Paris, 2004) and the acclaimed *Jean Dubuffet and the City: People, Place and Urban Space* (Hauser & Wirth, Zürich, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Lerm Hayes, “Writing Art and Creating Back: What Can We Do with Art (History)?” Inaugural Lecture 537, University of Amsterdam (June 5, 2015), 18. Accessed January 8, 2016,

This interdisciplinary study carried out within the framework of ASCA's research community has been a point of departure for me to explore dynamic discourse in other fields of study to build on art historical and museological scholarship pertaining to the now canonical 20<sup>th</sup> century artists in this transhistorical study. I have chosen specific artists associated with political critique, and well-established in art historiography, to develop fresh readings that consider concepts from communication theory and the philosophy of language to analyze the operations of political speech in the museum. I propose how Austin's concept of the transformative nature of speech can be expanded as a "toolbox" for thinking about political art generally, and the uses of montage as a rhetorical strategy in particular, and as curators, how we meet actual art works in real space. The progression of my investigation has been intuitive and heuristic: I am proposing and testing new tools by which to advance another perspective for close reading, and my "case studies" collectively argue for broadening our field of vision to "see" new aspects of canonical works. In this study, I will position the role of beholders as critical partners in the formation of meaning, and of framing the museum as a site for political engagement with critical (and transdisciplinary) scholarship in this field.

My project is not to create a "how-to" book with "proven" ways of staging critical practices. Nor is it a methodology to draw a causal connection between event and impact, or to prove how art does things in the world. What I do in my research is to unsettle "settled" works and bring them to life again with a new lens. I explore how beholders are engaged as subjects by speech acts in quite distinct ways: to enjoin in refusal; to consider another vantage point; to bring into consciousness through productive looking; to participate as a collective community; to make space *for*; and to force recognition through citation.

In this introduction, I will lay out a blueprint, so to speak, for the discussion to follow, divided into three sections:

1. I will begin with a general introduction to J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, from which I have derived the title for my thesis, and outline the

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[http://www.oratiereeks.nl/upload/pdf/PDF-6174DEF\\_Oratie\\_Lerm\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.oratiereeks.nl/upload/pdf/PDF-6174DEF_Oratie_Lerm_WEB.pdf).

influence of his concept of performativity on several disciplines, including aesthetic theory;

2. I will then outline specific positions which writers have taken to address the performativity of pictures. (I use “pictures” in a general sense here, as my examples include image-making as a whole, as well the production of works of art *per se.*) as well as key aspects of museum work as both display space and social space; and

3. I will propose a new way of considering Austinian (and post-Austinian) concepts of the performativity of political art and introduce the selected case studies to be discussed in the six chapters that follow.

## 2. Austin’s Theory of Language as Action

The point of departure for my thesis is a concept of performativity. As will be discussed in detail in the pages that follow, this theory of action is of interest to and applied by contemporary researchers across several fields of study. I have chosen to return to the origination of the concept by British philosopher J.L. Austin’s in his germinal work, *How to Do Things with Words*, based on a series of lectures on the philosophy of language, delivered by Austin at Harvard University in 1955. In Austin’s proposal, ordinary uses of language, such as *promising*, *threatening*, *commanding* and *questioning*, are examples of performative language, where the uttering itself is, or is part of, the *doing* of action (performative), distinct from the use of language which states something or *describes* the world (constative). Austin endeavours to clarify this distinction: he is concerned with the “performance of an act *in* saying something as opposed to performance of an act *of* saying something.”<sup>8</sup>

Austin died in 1960, and his lectures and notes were posthumously published in several collections. It is apparent that Austin’s contribution constituted at the time a very small (British) voice amongst two then-dominant upheavals in the conceptualization of the political outcomes of linguistics: one, at the level of language formation through

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<sup>8</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, edited by J.O. Urmson (Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2018 [1962]), 99.

systems of symbols (theorists of language such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Ernst Cassirer, Charles Peirce, Roland Barthes); and the other, as the conceptualization of language as a force in the deployment of societal systems (Marxist philosophers such as Louis Althusser, Theodor W. Adorno).<sup>9</sup>

Austin approached the study of language and the use of codes in its everyday use between individuals: he emphasized speech as the *transactional* operation of language *between* people, a concept that recognized the agency of both the speaker and the addressee. In spoken language, then, communication between people is as much about *experience* as it is the transmission of content through signs, and in this way, I see a connection between Austin's *total speech situation* to his near-exact contemporary, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose concept of phenomenology encompassed both the content and the performance of speech: *what* is said is communicated, and to what effect on the hearer—what Austin called the *perlocutionary*—, are communicated through accent, intonation, gesture and facial expression of the speaker, their intersubjectivity performed through expressive gestures, through bodies.<sup>10</sup>

As my project is to take a new look at canonical works through Austinian (and post-Austinian) lenses, I will take the time here to establish key aspects of his thinking. In Austin's proposal, he takes as examples drawn from conventional social transactions such as "I christen thee Mary Jane", "With this ring I thee wed", or "I promise to repay this debt". While his initial examples are drawn from the formal conventions of ritual (ship christening, marriage ceremony), he turns to more everyday uses of language in attempt to identify and group together types of performative actions: "verdictives" pertains to the giving of verdicts; "exercitives" to the exercise of power; "commissives" to what we promise or undertake; "behabitives" pertaining to expressions of feeling; and "expositives" asserting opinions in the force of our words in spoken or written discourse.<sup>11</sup> Taking a closer look at Austin's discussion of these, it is possible to see that

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<sup>9</sup> The implications of semiotic theory for art historians was introduced by Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson in "Semiotics and Art History," *Art Bulletin* 73/2 (June 1991):174-208.

<sup>10</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (New York and London: Routledge, 1994 [1962]), 150.

<sup>11</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 147-163.

exercitives encompass speech acts such as countermanding and interposing points of view<sup>12</sup>; commissives commit the speaker to a course of action, such as promising, vowing, and guaranteeing<sup>13</sup>; behabitives include the notion of reaction to other people's behaviour and fortunes, and of attitudes and expressions of attitudes to someone else's past conduct or imminent conduct, such as apologizing, condoling, congratulating, commending, deprecating, etc.<sup>14</sup>; and expositives pertain to imparting points of views or the conducting of arguments, such as informing, apprising, conjecturing and conceding.<sup>15</sup>

In the course of Austin's 1955 lectures, later published as *How to Do Things with Words*, he revisited his starting proposition to distinguish between constative language (statements which may be evaluated as true or false) and performative language (actions performed *in* language). He eventually argued the view that all utterances may be considered performative, even descriptive statements that may also function as implicit speech acts: "the cat is on the mat", for instance, may be construed as "I hereby affirm that the cat is on the mat", and thereby constituting an act of affirming. He also conceded that his proposal of prescribed classes of verb types could also be expressed through indirect speech ("this room is cold" as an implicit imperative to shut the window). As Austin astutely observed, "whenever I 'say' anything (except perhaps a mere exclamation like 'damn' or 'ouch') I shall be performing both locutionary and illocutionary actions."<sup>16</sup>

Austin is careful to develop his concept with regard not only to the construction of language but also to the total speech act environment (mood, voice, cadence, physical gestures, intensity, circumstances). For Austin, then, speech acts are not judged as "true" or "false", following the method of logical positivism, but as "felicitous" or "infelicitous", meaning their success as performatives is dependent on the degree to which they are intended sincerely by the speaker and executed in circumstances that align

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<sup>12</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 154-156.

<sup>13</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 156-158.

<sup>14</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 159-160.

<sup>15</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 160-163.

<sup>16</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 132.



with established convention. Bal, in her own introduction to Austin's work, elegantly sets this stage:

Performativity, at least in Austin's conception of it, is allegedly the unique occurrence of an act in the here-and-now. In speech act theory, it is the moment when known words detach themselves from both their sleep in dictionaries and people's linguistic competence, to be launched as weapons or seductions, exercising their weight, striking force, and charm in the present only, between singular subjects.<sup>17</sup>

In his concept of performativity, Austin concentrated on the delivery and impact of first-person present-tense utterances in the context of everyday life, of events directly involving the speaker and respondent in real time, a model that was taken up and challenged by Derrida, and which I will discuss in detail momentarily. For Austin, the conditions of a successful (felicitous) speech act are dependent on the total speech context, the set of variables that serve to deliver the intentionality of the speaker anchored in the specificity, and fragility, of the total speech environment.

Austin's pragmatic conception of language as use-oriented and context-dependent is a dynamic way of considering communication, beyond the Continental structuralist model of establishing linguistic sign/referent systems, or the Anglo-American school of logical positivism seeking objective clarity in language through the analysis of true/false statements. Austin did not view his own work as either definitive or exhaustive of the ways to consider ordinary language, rather it was developed as an innovative way by which to approach the richness and flexibility of the uses of language, or the phenomenology of language. Although Austin did not explore these avenues explicitly, the performativity of visual communication generally, and the experience of art specifically, as live speech act events governed by conventions, holds much promise to understand speech acts as *visual* speech acts, museums spaces as discursive environments, and beholders as sensate constructors of meaning. In this way, Austin's original model, which has been subsequently extended, debated, refuted, and applied by two subsequent generations of academics, is of interest to me as a curator.

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<sup>17</sup> Bal, "Performance and Performativity" in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*, 176.

## Pathways from Austin's Work

Like ripples expanding outward from the toss of a small pebble into a still pond, Austin's foundational thinking has migrated to influence several disciplines and to flow with the currents of thinking in other arenas of his time. The iterability of Austin's series of lectures, then, has found manifold channels to permeate and produce discussion that is both exciting and problematic, such as the impact on considering the impact of literary speech acts outlined above. The migration of Austin's innovative consideration of speech acts as performative is an excellent example of a "travelling concept" as Bal has coined it<sup>18</sup>, crossing boundaries with differentiated valences in a number of areas of study, including ethics, philosophy of law, philosophy of language and feminist philosophy.

## Communication Theory

Austin's contribution is relevant to communication studies as the dynamic interaction between sender, message and receiver, and the degree to which each of these is a conductor of meaning. Argumentation theory, for example, is an interdisciplinary study that offers methods to resolve differences. As a dialectical discourse, it engages the uttering of statements (descriptive or prescriptive) serving to justify or refute an opinion, and directed towards arenas of common interests, at the level of interpersonal common interests or policy development in the political arena.<sup>19</sup> Austin's theory of language use as communication between speaker and hearer, meets the rise of theories of reception and reader/response in the opening new pathways to understanding the effect of works on audience rise of reception theory, moving the addressivity of the work from the limits of its own pictorial space to activation by the audience as a transactional space.<sup>20</sup> Moving

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<sup>18</sup> Bal, "Performance and Performativity," 174-212.

<sup>19</sup> The leading scholar is Frans van Eemeren, Professor in the Department of Speech Communication, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric at the University of Amsterdam: see van Eemeren, Rob Grootendoorst, and Tjark Kruiger, *Handbook of Argumentation Theory. A Critical Survey of Classical Backgrounds and Modern Studies* (Dordrecht, Holland and Providence, RI: Foris Publications, 1987) and van Eemeren, Rob Grootendoorst, Sally Jackson and Scott Jacobs, *Reconstructing Argumentative Discourse* (Tuscaloosa, AL and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> The role of audience was earlier explored in 1898 by Leo Tolstoy, in his collection of essays published as *What is Art? and Essays on Art*, translated by Aylmer Maude (Oxford and London: Oxford University

from object-centered theory to viewer-centered theory, the notion of the work as a dynamic entity activated by the viewer posits meaning as an interaction between work, stage and beholder as an effect that is experienced.<sup>21</sup>

### Social Science Theory

Austin presents his concept of language as a theory of action within a sphere of social conventions, and as such, can be linked to contemporaneous developments in the social sciences. The artists discussed in this study overtly seek to engage in problems of the life world, and their political speech acts are founded on the notion that the world is alterable. The expanding sphere of Austin's influence intersects with emerging concepts of the individual in society. Jonathan Culler cites two works of the period that relate strongly to Austin's foundational work.<sup>22</sup> Gregory Bateson considers the operations of verbal and nonverbal communication (between humans, between animals) as rule-governed and context-dependent exchanges of messages.<sup>23</sup> His observation of the relationship of

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Press, 1938). Tolstoy places emphasis on art as an accessible communication *activated* by the general public, not restricted only to an educated or elitist class trained to appreciate aesthetics. Of significance to this study, Tolstoy likens visual utterances to rhetorical propositions: "Speech, transmitting the thoughts and experiences of men, serves as a means of union among them, and art acts in a similar manner.... By words a man transmits his thoughts to another, by means of art he transmits his feelings." (121) The communication is considered to be successful if the spectators or auditors are *infected* by the feelings with the author has felt, presuming a one-to-one transmittal as a telegram might be sent, which is different from the act of the audience's own collective and individual meaning-making. Ultimately, Tolstoy lauds the infectiousness of art as a positive project to produce harmonious union among people and does not posit a role for this transmission to create oppositional or subversive actions. (Interestingly, Tolstoy's operation of infectious art depends on the *sincerity* of artist, comparable to Austin's requirement for the *sincerity* of the utterance as a performative transaction.)

<sup>21</sup> Several readings have been useful: Wolfgang Iser on the phenomenal approach to reception, *The act of reading: a theory of aesthetic response* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1978); Roland Barthes on personal subjective responses to photographs in *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981); Jonathan Culler on the subjective construction of knowledge in *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1975); and Jill Bennett on affect and participatory spectatorship in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Culler, "Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative," *Poetics Today. International Journal for Theory and Analysis of Literature and Communication* 21/3 (Fall 2000):503-519.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," in *Steps Toward an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972 [1954]), 67-73.

language to the objects it denotes as comparable to the distinction between a map and a territory is one of the concepts later taken up by Deleuze and Guattari in their exploration of the use of language against itself as a normalizing mechanism, and operation of deterritorialization.<sup>24</sup> In his focus on the relationship between speakers, his work is parallel to Austin's linguistic theory approach to speech acts. Erving Goffman, in his pioneering sociological study *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) examines "the ways in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others."<sup>25</sup> Like Austin, Goffman creates a distinction between the "real life" interplay of individuals from characteristics of theatrical (make-believe) performance. He also invokes dimensions that are comparable to Austin's conception of language as action through the model of the total performance situation, such as the self-awareness of the speaker as a performer, extra-linguistic dimensions of the speech performance, the perlocutionary intentions of the speaking subject, and the effects on the interlocutor as both addressee and audience. Another influential figure of interest in Austin's conception of interaction is social psychologist Kenneth Gergen, who began his prolific and influential career beginning in the 1970s, explores the performative self as a relational, rather than fixed or essential, able to construct specific personas for specific circumstances. For Gergen, like Austin, there is no objective "true" or "false" following the paradigm of positivism, rather contingent interactions with pragmatic outcomes.<sup>26</sup>

## Law and Social Justice

The force of language as encoded with societal norms makes Austin of interest to juridical studies, where the "doing" of hate speech has the force of violence against the constituted subject, and Judith Butler has explored this dimension extensively, particular in reference to race and gender.<sup>27</sup> Connected to the use of language as an instrument of

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<sup>24</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated and forward by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN and London, UK: University of Minnesota Press, 2014 [1987]).

<sup>25</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), Preface.

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Gergen, *The Saturated Self. Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

<sup>27</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

violence is the relevance of language use in social justice contexts: the authority of the state can be deployed through language to constitute the subject citizen through interpellation, but also the role of language in the ethical relation of self to Other. The work of Emmanuel Levinas is germane here, through his articulation of the distinction between “is” (descriptive) as including numerous subjectivities, in contrast to “ought” (prescriptive) as the oppressive directive to adopt specific norms.<sup>28</sup>

## Language Theory

With respect to the philosophy of language, Austin’s exploration of the performativity of language is not a grand theory but a heuristic, looking closely at the ways in which we do connect to each other. Austin explores the performative uses of language as ways in which we “do” something, *by saying* (illocutionary). His many respondents have clarified and extended Austin’s exploratory set of grammatical classes described above. Jerrold Sadler describes the impact of Austin as responsible for “a small but flourishing industry devoted to the taxonomization of the conventional acts that people do in saying things.”<sup>29</sup>

I will now turn the discussion toward contributions of *post*-Austinian theorists and identify how his supporters and respondents also contribute to my project. American scholar John Searle emerged as one of Austin’s most prolific defenders, supporting his finding of the performative capacity of all language: in his 1969 book *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Searle agreed with Austin’s point of departure, asking how words relate to the world.<sup>30</sup> Searle regards Austin’s contribution as a point of

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<sup>28</sup> Emmanuel Levinas and R. Kearney, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, edited by R. Cohen (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1986), 13–40.

<sup>29</sup> Jerrold M. Sadock, “Toward a grammatically realistic typology of speech acts,” in *Foundations of Speech Act Theory. Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives*, edited by Savas L. Tsohatzidis (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 393.

<sup>30</sup> See notably John Searle, *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1969]), 1. Searle’s particular perspective also drew on the work of Paul Grice, P.F. Strawson, John Rawls, and William Alston.

intersection between a theory of language and a theory of action, and extends beyond Austin to also consider the speech act utterance expressed through non-textual means:

What is the difference between regarding an object as an instance of linguistic communication and not regarding it? One crucial difference is this. When I take a noise or a mark on a piece of paper to be instance of linguistic communication, as a message, one of the things that I must assume is that the noise or mark was produced by a being or beings more or less like myself and produced with certain kinds of intentions.<sup>31</sup>

While Searle found validity in Austin's overall approach to examine different kinds of speech acts, and the primacy of the intentionality of the speakers, he also found too much overlap between Austin's categories and attempted to develop more precision building on Austin's original categorization of grammatical classes. These, in turn, have themselves been the subject of considerable academic debate, extension and negation.<sup>32</sup>

### Derrida-Searle Exchange

Arguably, Searle's most notable contribution was his defense of Austin's emphasis on the intentionality of the speech act utterer in response to a paper given in 1970 by Jacques Derrida and published as the essay rebuttal to "Signature Event Context".<sup>33</sup> Derrida began his remarks by commenting on the polysemic nature of the term "communication" and continued on to consider specific aspects of the nature of writing and telecommunication. Derrida lauded Austin's original contribution of a theory of action that departs from a logistical positivist position but argued against Austin's concept of performativity as the delivery of first-person present-tense utterances in the

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<sup>31</sup> Searle, *Speech Acts*, 16-17.

<sup>32</sup> These expositions are good overviews of this landscape: Andrea Kern, "Concept of the Performative: Between Pragmatism and Deconstruction," in *ASCA Brief 1999* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, 1999), 83-95. [Kern's remarks are synthesized from a June 1999 week-long seminar held at ASCA on the topic of Austin and performativity, which I also participated]; Jonathan Culler, "Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative," *Poetics Today. International Journal for Theory and Analysis of Literature and Communication* 21/3 (Fall 2000):503-519; Alice Crary, "The Happy Truth: J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*," *Inquiry. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 45/1 (2002):59-80.

<sup>33</sup> John Searle, "Reiterating Difference: A Reply to Derrida," in *Glyph I*, edited by H. Sussman and S. Webster, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1977), 198-208; Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited, Inc.*, edited by Gerald Graff and translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988 [1972]), 1-23.

context of everyday life, positioned as events directly involving the speaker and respondent in real time. Derrida, as one of Austin's principal interlocutors, disputed Austin's exclusion of literature as non-serious, "parasitic" from of speech, and therefore exempt from "felicitous" status accorded to speech acts in real world circumstances. He argued that performative speech must also be iterable (transmittable, readable), it must be repeatable and it must presuppose receivers in a *distant* future: the originating meaning of the author is not static and fixed, but is continuous and inexhaustible as each encounter with a work (artwork or literary text) constitutes a new event. Accordingly, Derrida argued, the determinants of the total speech situation could not be fixed for each occurrence, or protected from the several ways in which Austin articulated "unhappy" performances.

Derrida's rebuttal of this particular point is one that has import for my own inquiry of works of art as speech acts, in that literature and visual art are world-creating, and illocutionary utterances that occur within the logic of their own realms. Derrida's analysis of the operations of literature, moving from orality to writing, accommodates a future reader-to-be, and in so doing, breaks away the force of the utterance from the intentionality of the speaker/author, to the meaning-making agency of the audience/reader.

My communication must be repeatable—iterable—in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers. Such iterability [...] structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is involved (whether pictographical, hieroglyphic, ideographic, phonetic, alphabetic, to cite the old categories.) A writing that is not structurally readable – iterable – beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing."<sup>34</sup>

For Derrida, the written sign is offered to an absent reader, or more precisely one with a distance presence, which he characterizes as a divergence or delay (*différance*).<sup>35</sup> Each act of encounter on the part of the reader, then, would be inaugural, distinct from any other occurring performance of the text.

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<sup>34</sup> Derrida, "Signature," 7.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Derrida's emphasis on the changing context of the performance has also engendered further inquiry into the distinction and intersection between performativity and performance as concepts.<sup>36</sup> Each encounter, or *énoncé*, between a work and its eventual beholder is likewise inaugural, and the intentionality of the utterance (*vouloir-dire*, or desire-to-say-what-one-means) intersects with the meaning-making of the interpretant.

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written, in a small or large unit, can be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity in a manner which is absolutely illimitable.<sup>37</sup>

It is this rupture between utterance-origin, and reader meaning-making, that it is possible to form a discursive relationship with the text:

For example, writing, as a classical concept, entails predicates that have been subordinated, excluded, or held in abeyance by forces and according to the necessities to be analyzed. It is those predicates [...] whose force of generality, generalization, and generativity is liberated, grafted onto a "new" concept of writing that corresponds as well to what has always resisted the prior organization of forces [...] It is to give to everything at stake in the operations of deconstruction the chance and the force, the power of communication.<sup>38</sup>

Searle, in his brief rebuttal, to Derrida, was principally concerned with maintaining an insistence on the intentionality of the author as the locus of meaning, whether in verbal or written form.<sup>39</sup> For Searle, the radical detachment of the intention of the speech act sender removed the possibility of the communication of the sender's meaning to the receiver.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See for instance, Bal, "Performance and Performativity," in *Travelling Concepts*; Eve Sedgwick and Andrew Parker (editors), *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>37</sup> Derrida, "Signature," 12.

<sup>38</sup> Derrida, "Signature," 21.

<sup>39</sup> Searle, "Reiterating Difference," 198. Searle does concede that he does not find Derrida's arguments very clear: "it is possible that I may have misinterpreted him as profoundly as he has misunderstood Austin."

<sup>40</sup> Readers interested in the implications of Derrida's examination of Austin in the context of linguistic theory are directed to Stanley Cavell, "What did Derrida Want from Austin?" in *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 42-65; and Stanley E. Fish, "With Compliments of the Author: Reflections on Austin and Derrida," in *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Summer 1982): 693-721. In addition to discussing specific points of difference, Cavell interprets the Derrida-Seale



Does the fact that writing can continue to function in the absence of the writer, the intended receiver, or the context of production show that writing is not a vehicle of intentionality? It seems to me quite plain that the argument that the author and intended receiver may be dead and the context unknown or forgotten does not in the least show that intentionality is absent from written communication.<sup>41</sup>

For the purposes of my own examination of visual speech acts, Derrida's response to Austin contributes an important dimension to my consideration of the performativity of works of art, as I will develop throughout the case studies in this project. To begin with, I would argue that the preferred communication modality of each philosopher played a significant if unacknowledged role in their perspectives on language as a theory of action. Austin's preferred modality for the expression of his ideas was in the live delivery of lectures in a university setting. His oft-cited published works that form the basis of historical and current engagement with his ideas are in fact transmissions of speech concretized in textual form. His body of argumentation has been crystallized through the compilation of his lecture notes, aggregated, sub-divided, edited and published by others after his death. *How to Do Things with Words*, for example, was initially compiled by philosopher and Oxford colleague James O. Urmson (and in later editions, in collaboration with philosopher Marina Sbisa). The preface traces this methodology:

The lectures here printed were delivered by Austin as the William James lectures at Harvard University in 1955. In a short note, Austin says of the views which underlie these lectures that they were "formed in 1939. I made use of them in an article on "Other Minds" published in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume XX (1946) pages 173 ff., and I surfaced rather more of this iceberg shortly afterwards....<sup>42</sup>

Urmson additionally interpreted and supplemented Austin's lecture notes through comparison with notes taken both in America and in England by those who attended the lectures, as well as an extant audio recording of lectures Austin gave on October 2, 1959

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exchange as evidence of a gulf between French-German (Continental) and Anglo-American philosophical traditions.

<sup>41</sup> Searle, "Reiterating the Differences," 201.

<sup>42</sup> James O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, Preface to the First Edition, *How to Do Things with Words*, J.L. Austin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982 [1962]), vi. The full citation for Austin's essay referenced in this quote is "Other Minds," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes 20 (1946), 148-187. Reprinted in James O. Urmson and Geoffrey J. Warnock (eds.), *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 76-116.

in Gothenberg, Sweden.<sup>43</sup> The volume entitled *Sense and Sensibilia* was reconstructed from Austin's manuscript notes by another Oxford colleague, G.J. Warnock. In the Foreword, Warnock outlines his editing method as consulting Austin's apparently additive and continuous set of lectures, which contained a number of separate sheets of various dates for each of the principal topics.<sup>44</sup> As these editors note, some elements in the published versions are conjectural, therefore text does not reproduce word for word what Austin actually said in his lectures.

Austin's preferred modality was sharing ideas in a collective discursive space, in real time, face-to-face. He was able to lecture with fluidity and precision and his speaking style strikes me as engaging and lively, with many eccentric turns of phrase, some of which have been preserved in the published versions.<sup>45</sup> He also held regular Saturday morning sessions at Oxford in order to share and debate ideas in a roundtable setting.<sup>46</sup> It should also be noted that the culture at Oxford discouraged publication.<sup>47</sup>

I see therefore his emphasis on *verbal speech* in everyday contexts— in contrast to Derrida's focus on the iterative nature of *written texts*— as reflective of his own preference for oral transmission. His personal preference for oral engagement is also

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<sup>43</sup> J.L. Austin, Lecture [Part 1], Gothenberg, Sweden (October 1959). [1 hr 1 min] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXo0YNZ3WsE&t=82s>; Lecture [Part 2], Gothenberg, Sweden (October 1959). [49 min] <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnRjVDRdQOTmQA99kCzOwA>

<sup>44</sup> Austin's lecture notes are preserved by the Bodleian Library at Oxford University (MSS. Eng. misc. c. 394-395).

<sup>45</sup> For example, "I cannot baptize penguins" [Gothenberg lecture, Part 1], 11:30; "here I must let some of my cats on the table" [*How to Do Things with Words* (1982), 20].

<sup>46</sup> Federica Berdini, "John Langshaw Austin (1911-1960)", *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <https://www.iep.utm.edu/austin/>: "For Austin, philosophy is not an endeavor to be pursued privately, but a collective labor. This was in fact the gist of Austin's "Saturday mornings," weekly meetings held during term at Oxford and attended by philosophers of language, moral philosophers and jurists."

<sup>47</sup> John Searle reminisced about the culture at Oxford in Austin's time: "Oxford had a long tradition of not publishing during one's lifetime, indeed it was regarded as slightly vulgar to publish." John Searle "J. L. Austin (1911-1960)" in Aloysius P. Martinich and David Sosa (eds.), *A Companion to Analytic Philosophy* (pp. 218-230). (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 227. Isaiah Berlin's reminiscences of Austin and the Oxford philosophy community based on lively face-to-face debate are vividly recounted in dialogue with Stuart Hampshire, "I'm Going to Tamper with Your Beliefs a Little," *Logic Lane* Episode 2, directed by Michael Chanan, 1972. [55 min] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYWKrACrMvo>. [The transcript of this interview is available at The Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library <http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/nachlass/imgoing.pdf>]

present in his work theoretically in its stress on sense factors as part of the total performance, such as tone of voice, visual sensing, and physical gestures. Derrida's position, by contrast, calls for the removal of this sensate collateral of intentionality in favour of the performance of the sign (the text) as the catalyst for new meaning-making by imagined future addressees. The preservation of his ideas through audio recordings and compilations of his lecture notes then constitute an oral history. Although Austin's work has received deep consideration and opposition, I have not seen this specific point emphasized, and it is a critical distinction to make in going forward to discuss the presentation of works of art in discursive political and museal spaces, with live audience interaction as well as their subsequent performances in later installations, which I will also consider. There is a requirement for the presence of a body in the context of a collective interaction in Austin's model that I wish to examine more closely in the exploration of the selected case studies ahead.

The substantive differences in their respective argumentation lies in the following key areas. Derrida's perspective lays the groundwork for each future encounter with the work of art to open inaugural, possibly unintended, meanings. Secondly, Austin's focus on the operations of language as dependent on context and governing rules becomes subject to Derrida's broader interrogation of systems: as the leading proponent of deconstruction as a methodology, Derrida placed particular emphasis on the ethical and political dimensions of speech acts, along with Giorgio Agamben, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-François Lyotard, and in this way, the work of Austin and of Derrida bear on my consideration of the political nature of works of art. In the context of my own research, Derrida's argument that the mark (the written text) is a sign that becomes divested of its originating source and can be grafted into other contexts is an important theoretical link to the medium of photomontage that I will examine. Beyond the collision of signifying fragments to produce pictorial and political disturbances, montage also enables a fusion that introduces a new, provocative narrative.

## Critical Art Theory

The social and political performativity of both art production and curatorial practice has been a central concern to the artists implicated in my study. Their awareness of and participation in critical art theory, especially post-structuralist theory and concepts of the spectacle in visual culture, forms a foundational basis for their work, and in turn, the presentation of their work in museal and non-museal spaces. In terms of the application of speech act theory to the consideration of visual art, Roland Barthes, Hubert Damisch and Mieke Bal have been leading proponents of the close reading of both historical and contemporary artworks as *theoretical objects*, the discursivity of works of art.<sup>48</sup> As Barthes cogently notes: “there are those who think that the image is an extremely rudimentary system in comparison with language and those who think signification cannot exhaust the image’s ineffable richness.”<sup>49</sup> The consideration of Austin and his approach to *doing* things through language opens a toolbox to examine how pictures can be said to *do* things in each performative encounter, and complements the important work of art history anchoring artistic production in the specificity of time and place.

In this way, works are not only fixed material objects, but also performative utterances by speaking agents (artists) presented as live event encounters that implicate also the everyday: visits to the museum, encountering public art.<sup>50</sup> In this context, Austin’s concept of the perlocutionary is also germane in evolution of art-specific theoretical considerations in the form of reception theory and affect theory. While artists work within established conventions (art market, genres, sites of display), they are also

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<sup>48</sup> Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” in *Image-Music-Text*, selected and translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 32-51 (I cite here just one example of Barthes’ meditations on the performativity of images, in this case, advertising; his essays also consider other forms of photographic imagery such as photojournalism and the portrait snapshot); Hubert Damisch, *La Théorie du nuage : pour une histoire de la peinture* (Paris: Les Éditions Seuil, 1992 [1972]); Bal, *Double Exposures. The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>49</sup> Barthes, “Rhetoric,” 32.

<sup>50</sup> The foundational work of Damisch and Bal has also been explored by others exploring the performative “doing” of art, and here I am indebted to W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Cambridge, MA and New York: Zone Books, 2008); Horst Bredekamp, *Theorie des Bildakts* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2010).

vectors for the creation of new moves, and in the case of my study of political art, new moves that seek to disrupt normative codes.

I have so far introduced how Austin's theory of performativity has migrated to other areas of study that consider experiences of being human: how we form language and our concept of self in the world, as well as relationships between each other, between individuals and agents of authority, between communities, and our experiences of art and literature. All of these theoretical streams outlined above that have radiated out from Austin's contribution are relevant in my examination of modes of performativity in the staging of political art, and indeed, forms the foundation of my thesis to view works from the canon through an Austinian lens. In the chapters that follow, these aspects of human experience will be examined in the course of the close readings of works connecting artists as speaking agents addressing real world concerns with audiences engaging in these propositions.

#### 4. Key Literature on Performativities of Art

In the discussion above, I have presented the essentials of Austin's innovative philosophy of action, as well as a précis of its problematical dimensions. My project is not a critical interrogation of Austin, however: it actively interprets and puts to work fundamentals of his ideas to consider how images may be regarded as speech acts. I propose pathways extending outward directly from both Austin's and Derrida's concept of speech acts, shifting from theoretical concepts of performativity to an empirical study of specific works.

Since launching my research into the agency of the selected photomontage works discussed in this study, there has been an increase in discourse about the agency of images generally, and how the experience of art may be political specifically.<sup>51</sup> To begin with, the very vocabulary of how to call this work has proliferated, that is to say, the

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<sup>51</sup> For an excellent overview of this terrain, see James Elkins, "Introduction," in *Beyond the Aesthetic and the Anti-Aesthetic*, edited by James Elkins and Harper Montgomery (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 1-16. I note also the recent contributions of T.J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature. Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016) and Gregory Sholette, *Delirium and Resistance. Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

nomenclature of art writing employs a myriad of terms by no means exhaustive or synonymous. At the start of this introduction, I began to list some of these (*committed, critical, contested, radical, disruptive, socially engaged, against the grain, activist, interventionist, oppositional, arte útil, relational aesthetics, practical aesthetics*). In this study, I use the term “political art” for works of art that address real-world systems and their implications for human connectivity and emancipation, are framed as transgressive or interventions, and form a locus for critical thinking, or as Kaja Silverman suggests, “productive looking”, a dialogical encounter with the “theoretical object”, as proposed by Hubert Damisch, that obliges you to theorize and provides you with the means of doing so.<sup>52</sup> In proposing and debating ideas about the agency of images, and the constitution of the role of the spectator/participant, I have found particularly helpful the lively contributions of the many writers who have created a theoretical terrain that is intriguing and complex. My study is distinct from, and related to, a widening interest in the performativity of visual, rather than linguistic, utterances, and more specifically, as modalities of political utterance.<sup>53</sup> Gabriel Rockhill, writing in *Radical History and the Politics of Art*, asks, “how do diverse dimensions of the practice socially labeled as ‘aesthetic’ and ‘political’ cross, intertwine, interlace, and at time become coextensive?”<sup>54</sup> What is the politicity of art? This key question is a nucleus around which my research enfolds itself and propels my inquiries from the perspective of curatorial practice. I will

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<sup>52</sup> Silverman’s concept of productive looking is a process which is fluid with respect to scope of associations and time frame: “To look is to embed an image within a constant shifting matrix of unconscious memories, which can render a culturally insignificant object libidinally resonant, or a culturally significant object worthless.” Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 3-4. For Damisch, the object is still a material entity but *the contemplation of it* is a dynamic event, referencing Claude Levi-Strauss’ *Way of Masks*: “What counts in a mask is not what it represents but what it transforms.” Yve-Alain Bois, et al, “A Conversation with Hubert Damisch,” *October* 85 (Summer 1998):15.

<sup>53</sup> The most recent volume relevant to my research is *The Constituent Museum: Constellations of Knowledge, Politics and Mediation* edited with text by John Byrne, Elinor Morgan, November Paynter, Aida Sánchez de Serdio, and Adela Železnik (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018), which reached me as I concluded my research.

<sup>54</sup> Gabriel Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 6. Two short essays are particularly succinct in unpacking the term “political art”: see Bal “Response: Ariel Dorfman’s Quest for Responsibility,” *Art Bulletin* (March 2009):44-50; and Irit Rogoff, “Representations of Politics: Critics, Pessimists, Radicals,” in *German Art of the Twentieth-Century. Painting and Sculpture, 1905-1985*, exhibition catalogue edited by Christos M. Joachimides, Norman Rosenthal, and Wieland Schmied (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1985), 125-136.

now delineate a map of approaches through which to consider the political discursivity of artistic and curatorial practices.

### Art in the Public Sphere

In *The Human Condition*, a consideration of the political and technological perils of the twentieth century, Hannah Arendt returns to the origins of the operations of speech in the political sphere in classical Greek and medieval thought.<sup>55</sup> To be political, to live in the *polis*, means that political action is transacted in *words*, and not in acts of violence.<sup>56</sup> Political speech occurs in the realm of active citizenship (*vita activa*), where the project of being together—“the human condition of plurality”—creates something new that may produce positive social benefits and hazardous unintended consequences. For Jean-Paul Sartre, the world is alterable by the resistance efforts of individuals and, ultimately, in the dialectic discourse of rhetorical positions in the public sphere.<sup>57</sup> This resistance is inextricably linked to the free choice of the subject and, for Sartre, it is the moral duty of the artist, as a specialized interpretant, to exploit the communicative potential of the arts to denounce injustice.

This position of resistance and the role of artist in social reform as a whole is, in fact, the position of many of the artists I will discuss in the chapters that follow.<sup>58</sup> For Theodor Adorno, art serves as a critique for the “what is” (the world as we know it) and

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<sup>55</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), 25-26.

<sup>56</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 10-28. Arendt’s analysis of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* will be discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>57</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, “The Artist and his Conscience,” in *Situations*, translated by Benita Eisler (New York, George Braziller, 1965), 205-224. I note here that Sartre’s essay, originally the preface for *L’Artiste et sa Conscience* by René Leibowitz (Paris: Éditions de l’Arche, 1950) observes that avant-garde art (his specific example is contemporary polyphonic music) is supported by the elite, and not necessarily accessible to the general public.

<sup>58</sup> See also examples in anthologies such *Cultures in Contention*, edited by Douglas Kahn and Diane Neumaier (Seattle, WA: Real Comet Press, 1986); *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, edited by Nina Felshin (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1995); Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another. Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2002); *Cultural Activism. Practices, Dilemmas, Possibilities*, edited Begüm Özden Firat and Aylin Kuryel (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2011); *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* by Grant Kester (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011).

this critique supposes the possibility of the expression of “what could be” (the bringing forth of another world.)<sup>59</sup> Adorno cautions against propagandistic expressions in the service of ameliorative measures but encourages change at the level of fundamental attitudes, and this brings to mind one of Walter Benjamin’s central challenges to the addressivity of material work: “Rather than ask, ‘What is the *attitude* of a work to the relations of productions of its time?’ I should like to ask, ‘What is its *position* in them?’”<sup>60</sup>

The journal *October* was founded in 1976 by Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson under the aegis of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press. From its inception as a vehicle to foster critical thinking in the interconnections of art, theory, criticism, and politics<sup>61</sup>, it has been the foremost channel for the role of art as a critical vehicle in the context of increasing commodification of art by the commercial market. *October*—as the locus for the examination of tensions “between radical artistic practice and dominant ideology”<sup>62</sup> — has been a particularly significant repository for the examination of political framing by or about artists discussed in this study (Hans Haacke, John Heartfield, Hannah Höch, Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula, and Krysztof Wodiczko), as well as theorists and historians (Claire Bishop, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Susan Buck-Morss, Martha Buskirk, Jonathan Crary, Douglas Crimp, Hubert Damisch, Rosalyn Deutsche, Leah Dickerman, Brigid Doherty, Hal Foster, and Rosalind Krauss).

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<sup>59</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Commitment,” in *Aesthetics and Politics: Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch and Bertolt Brecht*, with afterword by Fredric Jameson and translated by Francis McDonagh (London: Verso, 1980 [1977], 177-195.

<sup>60</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” in *Art After Modernism. Rethinking Representation*, edited by Brian Wallis (New York and Boston: The New Museum of Contemporary Art/David R. Godine, 1984 [1934]), 298. Ultimately, Adorno points to the impossibility of critical address escaping the encoding systems of its own production, in my case, the market, the museum, and the academy.

<sup>61</sup> The name of the journal references the 1928 silent historical film *October* directed by by Sergei Eisenstein and Grigori Aleksandrov in honour of the tenth anniversary of the Soviet Revolution. and “About *October*,” *October* 1 (Spring 1976): 3. Noortje de Leij has examined *October* as an influential intellectual narrative imbricating art with larger socio-political structures. Her essay “Art Criticism in the Society of Spectacle: The Case of *October*,” is published in *The Spell of Capital: Reification and Spectacle*, edited by Samir Gandesha and Johan F. Hartle (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 111-132. The publication of her doctoral dissertation “The Foundations of Criticism: The Case for *October*,” (Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, 2020) is forthcoming.

<sup>62</sup> “About *October*,” 4.



The writing of political scientist Chantal Mouffe, extending out from Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci, bears particular relevance to study. Mouffe holds that it is dissensus, rather consensus, that activates a viable public sphere in which antagonistic parties recognize each other's legitimacy while simultaneously acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict. This agonistic model generates continuous challenge to hegemony, and Mouffe positions cultural production as part of the hegemonic infrastructure. As Austin's model of a theory of action is predicated on a mutual understanding of conventions, more than this it demands a hegemony of linguistic interaction so that speaker and hearer are aligned in the conventions of speech, which is of course culturally determined and diverse; when these are not contained, the speech act risks going awry, or misfiring. I will return to her ideas in specific chapters ahead, and also in the context of the role of art both facilitating hegemony, and becoming an irritant to it.<sup>63</sup>

### The Power of the Object

Horst Bredekamp's analysis of *Bildakt* (image act) departs from Austin's concept of the speech act by considering images themselves as actors possessed of sovereign agency separable from their handling or their perception by people.<sup>64</sup> Bredekamp identifies specific strategies of addressivity that constitute illocutionary speech: enlivenment, substitution, destruction, and transmission.

The "I" becomes stronger when it relativizes itself against the activity of the image. Images can be placed neither before nor behind reality, because they work to constitute reality. They are not reality's consequences, but rather a form of its determination.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> See Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2005) and *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London and New York: Verso, 2013). Mouffe's work has been of particular importance to the theoretical construction of Krzysztof Wodiczko's projects (Chapter 4) and as I will argue, to the consideration of montage grids by Gilbert and George (Chapter 6).

<sup>64</sup> Bredekamp, 51. Bredekamp's writing is important to current discourses about contemporary art and exhibitions as sites of performance, but has been limited largely to the German-reading world: I am indebted to Beatrice Kitzinger for her insightful exposition assisting English readers in accessing Bredekamp's theoretical position: [review of Horst Bredekamp's *Theorie des Bildakts*], *CAA Review* (September 10, 2014) DOI: [10.3202.caa.reviews.2014.103](https://doi.org/10.3202.caa.reviews.2014.103).

<sup>65</sup> Bredekamp. 328.

In *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Alfred Gell discusses the *kinds* of agency the work itself may exert, distinguishing this from the locus of agency in the aesthetic actions of the artist, or else in the semiotic decoding of beholders.<sup>66</sup> Like Austin's theory of performativity, Gell positions the agency of art as context-dependent, and more specifically, culturally specific and independent of Western art frameworks. Gell discusses how art performs as an "index of agency" through a range of examples. In his discussion of captivation, a primordial kind of artistic agency, he cites examples such as the worship of cult objects as deities themselves, through which access to other person can be attained (Nepalese Hinduism); the production of African figurines as inextricably tied to a magical, supernatural occurrence in their origination; and Vermeer's *Lacemaker* as a lenticular conflation of worlds: one in which the beholder, like the artist, engages in the sensate experience of the real world, while at the same time, is unable to share in the technical and imaginative production of the work itself. For Gell, the range of "types" of agency is unlimited: "It may be supposed that whatever action a person may perform vis-à-vis another person, may be performed also by a work of art, in the realms of the imagination if not in reality."<sup>67</sup> Guy Debord and Pierre Bourdieu have examined the entrapment of art making and art viewing within a cultural commodity system<sup>68</sup>, while W.J.T. Mitchell and Marie-José Mondzain have questioned the putative power of the work of art to "do" things<sup>69</sup>. On the agency of photographic images in particular, particularly central to my discussion of photomontage, I have benefitted from the provocative thinking of Ariella Azoulay on constituting the subject via the image, as well

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<sup>66</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

<sup>67</sup> Gell, *Art and Agency*, 66.

<sup>68</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, MI: Black and Red, 1977 [1967]); Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) and *Free Exchange*, with Hans Haacke (Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>69</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Marie-Josée Mondzain, "Can Images Kill?" translated by Sally Shafto, *Critical Inquiry* 36 (Autumn 2009):20-51.

as Hilde van Gelder and Helen Westgeest, and Sophie Berrebi, on the work of photographs as indexical, symbolic and performative utterances.<sup>70</sup>

### Political Themes

The practice of creating “political” works of art has long been established in the modern history of art, most especially as presenting a utopian future in the service of reform and the manufacture of visual testimony to trauma. From the horrors of the Napoleonic wars seared into graphic form by Goya to contemporary Chilean *arpilleras*, the textiles portraying scenes of state-sponsored murder and torture handcrafted by mourning Chilean women as a collective national memory, from Picasso’s explosive indictment of the slaughter of civilians in *Guernica*, to works created in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks. The turn to the aesthetic, to the production of images, is manifested in physical form, *I saw this*, in psychic form, *I survived this*.

The artist as actual or metaphorical witness who generates visual testimony plays the role of archivist, preserving a grisly and otherwise possibly eradicated record of events, which are themselves in many ways, beyond language. This work is inevitably *ex post facto*, that is created after the event to which it refers, and is therefore historical, even if it is from the very immediate past: it preserves cultural and emotional, if not legal, evidence and in this way demonstrates its capacity to describe, to reveal, and to express, in a sense, a collective grief.

T.J. Demos, writing in *The Migrant Image*, undertakes a series of case studies, focusing on artists responding to the crisis of globalization and displacement of migrants and refugees, sharing Azoulay’s focus on problems of the representability of people, particularly those who are politically disenfranchised and victimized by violence. Demos does not take his point of departure from Austin but proposes specific visual strategies for the political in art, such as the opacity of the image, the withdrawal of visibility, the construction of fictional truths, and the indeterminacy between art and activism.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Cambridge, MA and New York: Zone Books, 2008); Hilde van Gelder and Helen Westgeest, editors, *Photography between Poetry and Politics. The Critical Position of the Photography Medium in Contemporary Art* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2008); Sophie Berrebi, *The Shape of Evidence* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2014).

<sup>71</sup> T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image, The Art and Politics of Documentary during the Global*

## Activist Modalities

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, a number of theorists (and artists) have come forward to posit alternative models that recognize both the potentiality and limitations of the political in art. In her study *How to Do Things with Art*<sup>72</sup>, Dorothea von Hantelmann makes Austin her starting point, as I also do, and draws in Judith Butler's concept of performativity to constitute social realities. She is aligned with Rancière's perspective: there is no *performative* artwork, because there is no *non-performative* artwork: every artwork has a reality-producing dimension. Von Hantelmann examines work by artists James Coleman (as did Bal before her in *Travelling Concepts*)<sup>73</sup>, Daniel Buren, Tino Sehgal and Jeff Koons as performative gambits within the framework of the conventions of production, and of museum practice.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Nicolas Bourriaud, and Gregory Sholette propose art as a state of encounter, a politics of action that is polyvocal, collaborative and inclusive<sup>74</sup>; Gerald Raunig advocates *transversality*, a mechanism designed to create entirely new terrains of co-operation and interaction between different activist, artistic, social and political practices; and Gabriel Rockhill advocates for an approach that reveals the *social politicity* of art as event.<sup>75</sup>

The anthology *Cultural Activism. Practices, Dilemmas, Possibilities*, edited by Begüm Özden Firat and Aylin Kuryel, considers diverse activist practices, such as culture

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*Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>72</sup> Dorothea von Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art: What Performativity Means in Art* (Zürich: JRP/Ringier & Les Presses du Réel, 2010). "Doing things" also appears in the title of Leah Price's *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), a fascinating study of the activity of reading novel, although Austin's work is not directly referenced in it.

<sup>73</sup> Bal, *Travelling Concepts*.

<sup>74</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Toward a Minor Literature*, translated by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1975) and *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated and forward by Brian Massumi (London, UK and Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014 [1987]); Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Paris: Les Presses du réel, 2002).

<sup>75</sup> Jill Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics. Events, Affects and Art After 9/11* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012); Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*, translated by Aileen Derieg (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007); Gabriel Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

jamming, surveillance, media hoaxing, adbusting, subvertising, flash mobs, street art, hacktivism, billboard liberation.<sup>76</sup> Collectively, the focus of the case studies is on creative forms of activism as the antidote to conventional struggles of protest, and nearly all of the discussions involve creators/collectives who have rejected the gallery/museum nexus as a neoliberal dead-end. Anja Kanngeser's essay in this same volume productively links performative encounters devised by Berlin Dadaists (1918–1923) with those by the Situationist International (1957–1972) and some of the German *Umsonst* (for free) campaigns (2003–)<sup>77</sup>: her approach and mine share an interest in identifying transhistorical links across practices as a way of analyzing strategies.

Grant Kester, writing in *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, considers collaborative interactions among artists and communities that are based on dialogic or relational aesthetics. Kester considers Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of relational aesthetics (defined by meetings, encounters, events and various types of people<sup>78</sup>) and Bourriaud's relegation of collaborative activist art (for instance, artists working with environmentalists, AIDS activists, trade unions, anti-globalization protestors, etc.) to the framework of 1930s socialist realism. For Kester, collaborative art practice frames artist/community exchanges beyond art world systems, that is, it is *extra-museal*:

... (spatially, institutionally, procedurally) set apart from quotidian social interaction to encourage a degree of self-reflection, and calling attention to the exchange itself as creative praxis. The distancing from the protocols and assumptions of normative social exchange created by aesthetic framing reduces our dependence on default behaviours, expectations, and modes of being, encouraging a more performative and experimental attitude toward the work of identity.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Cultural Activism. Practices, Dilemmas, Possibilities*, edited by Begüm Özden Firat and Aylin Kuryel (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2011).

<sup>77</sup> Anja Kanngeser, "Breaking out of the Specialist 'Ghetto': Performative Encounters as Participatory Praxis in Radical Politics," in *Cultural Activism. Practices, Dilemmas, Possibilities*, edited by Begüm Özden Firat and Aylin Kuryel (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2011), 115-136.

<sup>78</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland (Paris: Les Presses du réel, 2002).

<sup>79</sup> Kester, *The One and the Many*, 28.

Kester's animated debate with Claire Bishop brings out several considerations in projects predicated on relational aesthetics. Bishop rejects the direct correlation between an artistic form and political meaning, as well as the transformation of the object to social relationship. Claire Bishop questions the emergence of practices involving collectivity, collaboration, and direct engagement with specific social constituencies, citing a number of problems, including erosion of artistic authorship, sublimation into non-art examples of social interaction (meetings, events, festivals), and the weakening of critical discursivity and the displacement of aesthetic criteria for ethical criteria.<sup>80</sup> By contrast, Kester argues for an affirmative model of dialogic art: art as a state of encounter and a politics of action. He is critical of Bishop's position as policing the boundaries of artistic practice and dividing camps into an "*aesthetes versus activists*" paradox.<sup>81</sup> Kester also critiques Bishop's distinction, which he finds (over)rigid and dismissive, between "aesthetic" projects ("provocative", "uncomfortable", "multilayered") and activist works ("predictable", "benevolent", "ineffectual").<sup>82</sup>

### The Distribution of the Sensible

Into this polarization, Jacques Rancière argues aesthetics and politics overlap in their concern for the distribution and sharing out of ideas, abilities, and experiences. For Rancière, the politicity of art is not in the subject matter of its address, its overt political utterance, but the viewer's experience of new modes of perception induces a newfound political subjectivity.<sup>83</sup> The distribution of the sensible (*le partage du sensible*) then is a specific mode of experience that opens the subject's consciousness of perception and

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<sup>80</sup>Claire Bishop has established her position in a number of publications: "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004):51-79 and "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents," *Artforum* (February 2006):178-83. See also Bishop's collection of essays *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York and London: Verso Books, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> Kester, *The One and the Many*. See also Gregory Sholette, *Delirium and Resistance. Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

<sup>82</sup> Kester, *The One and the Many*. See also Grant Kester and Mick Wilson, "Autonomy, Agonism, and Activist Art: An Interview with Grant Kester," *Art Journal* 66:3 (2007): 106-118.

<sup>83</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, translated by Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2009) and *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*, edited and translated by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

reorients their consciousness of the world. Rancière's focus on the sensate subjective experience has gained wide influence in the discussion of works of art through the decade of the 2010s.

In her own consideration of the agency of art, Bal contends that it is the *event* of sensory perception, *rather than the object of contemplation*, that awakens the awareness of the subject as a political being: "Presenting a space that is inhabited rather than empty, open for entering but not for occupying, for co-inhabiting but not for appropriating – a space within which the viewing subject is welcomed while simultaneously being transformed by it – is perhaps the most central aspect of the political force of [...] art."<sup>84</sup> As Micaela Deiana observes, Rancière's perspective positions emancipation as an *individual* experience, first of all, within the personal perception and enjoyment of artmaking, able to create an interrogative moment that pierces habitual experience.<sup>85</sup> This is the interesting point where Austin's theory of language use as communication between speaker and hearer, meets the rise of theories of reception and reader/response in the opening new pathways to understanding the effect of works on audience rise of reception theory, moving the addressivity of the work from the limits of its own pictorial space to activation by the audience as a transactional space. Moving from object-centered theory to viewer-centered theory, the notion of the work as a dynamic entity activated by the viewer posits meaning as an interaction between work, stage and beholder as an effect that is experienced.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Bal, *Endless Andness: The Politics of Abstraction According to Ann Veronica Janssens* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 69.

<sup>85</sup> Micaela Deiana, "Handle with Care: The Influence of New Institutionalism on collection displays in Italian contemporary art museums," *Stedelijk Studies* 5 (Fall 2017):1-17. Accessed June 3, 2018 <https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/handle-care-influence-new-institutionalism-collection-displays-italian-contemporary-art-museums/>

<sup>86</sup> Several readings have been useful: Wolfgang Iser on the phenomenal approach to reception, *The act of reading: a theory of aesthetic response* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978); Roland Barthes on personal subjective responses to photographs in *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981); Jonathan Culler on the subjective construction of knowledge in *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1975); and Jill Bennett on affect and participatory spectatorship in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

Jill Bennett presents the aesthetic experience in slightly different terms, arguing that affect is produced through the relation between an image and its viewers, the sensate experience, which she describes as “seeing feeling” and is not merely something an artist expresses through a work.<sup>87</sup> Carrol Clarkson, writing on the political valence of the aesthetic act and its connection to political and social reform, links Austin’s notion of performativity to bring about a shift in perception or understanding on the part of those who encounter the artwork, or the speech, or the literary event.<sup>88</sup>

At the subjective level of individual experience, Irit Rogoff proposes *looking away* as an alternative to *looking at* works of art.<sup>89</sup> *Looking away* empowers the viewer’s emancipation as a performing subject resisting the work’s conscious, contrived connections, even those of contestatory ideological *détournement*. It may well be in the act of looking away from objects of our supposed study, Rogoff contends, in the shifting modalities of the attention we pay them, that we have a potential for a re-articulation of the relations between makers, objects and audiences.<sup>90</sup> For Rogoff, this experience approaches Giorgio Agamben’s concept of an undefined “whatever”, that is, in individual and innovative avenues of unrestricted significance.<sup>91</sup>

The examples I have outlined above bear testimony to the tremendous interest in what artworks *do*. I have chosen to work with these perspectives in mind to move from questions of *whether* art is performative, and how efficacy is determined, to questions of *how* it could be said to work, and to read closely several examples by advancing a framework that links directly to Austin. A key objective in my study is to revisit specific

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<sup>87</sup> Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), and *Practical Aesthetics. Events, Affects and Art After 9/11* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

<sup>88</sup> Carrol Clarkson, *Drawing the Line: Toward an Aesthetics of Transitional Justice* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 47.

<sup>89</sup> Irit Rogoff, “Looking Away: Participations in Visual Culture,” in *After Criticism. New Responses to Art and Performance*, edited by Gavin Butt (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 117-134, and “Turning,” in *Curating and the Educational Turn*, edited by Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson (London and Amsterdam: Open Editions/de Appel, 2010), 32-46.

<sup>90</sup> Irit Rogoff, “Looking Away,” 119.

<sup>91</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).



works in a new light in view of these recent contributions to aesthetic theory, and to take a fresh look at their production, staging and reception.

Austin posits a still promising and useful “toolbox” that can, I will argue, be used for thinking about works of visual art. What may we say is the political in art? What is the “doing” that art does in order to be considered as political art? What kind of weapons can we say are produced by artists? What happens when their work—constructed as an intervention within the wider social arena—is itself staged and absorbed by its very institutions? And what roles do political artists envision for the spectator as the eventual receiver/constructor of the visual utterance? It is intriguing for me to consider these contemporary perspectives of the agency of art as open-ended and personally constructed in the context of Austin’s 1950s concept of language as transformational and based on the unlimited particulars of the performative environment. I regard the value of Austin’s quite original path as especially germane to the recent re-considerations of the ways in which artists, works and spectators interact; here, performativity is a communication model that fosters the being-together in public space.

#### 4. Display Space and Social Space

As a curator, I am principally interested in the operations of works of art in terms of production, display and reception, and in my consideration of specific works of art as political speech, I will return to Austinian (and post-Austinian) perspectives in considerations of the intentionality of the artist, the iterability of a work to an absent addressee, the fluidity (and ephemerality) of the total speech environment, and the affectivity of reception. What parts of linguistic operations may we say apply to visuality? What is the relationship between how words perform in social arenas and how images perform? Can we really say that images act in themselves, that is, they perform, or do they refer mimetically or symbolically describe, as given in theories of perspective and significant form?

In Austin’s view, speech acts are part of the everyday operation of language, and as such depend on linguistic conventions and situational context. In this consideration of political art as image acts there are also established customs and environment, most notable the fine art context. Museums are particularly pertinent to this exploration: they

are at once practical sites for collective beholding, potent stages for narrative, and authoritative sites privileging a particular selection of works. As stages for display, art museums themselves perform as sites of national identity, cultural identity, aesthetic judgement and market commodity, beyond their ostensible primary role to safeguard works of art. Museological judgements and divisions further the modernist project by creating stages for the illusionistic performance “naturalized” narratives or arrangements by chronology, schools, geographies, culture, etc. I discuss how the process of critical discourse is set into motion between production, site, and reception. What role does the museum (and its public audience seeking contemplation, cultivation and pleasure) play as a stage for confrontational political utterances? What are the ways that artists use this stage and develop specific performance strategies to make their images “speak”, such as recombinant images, framing devices, and staging environments?

The museum is designated as a *place for looking*, in a sense apart from the zone within the object frames, *a pictorial space*. But the place for looking also has other constructions of space that are not necessarily distinct from one another. The museum is an ideological space borne of historical circumstance and present-day institutional practice, as well as a constructed space of social practices. The presentation of art, therefore, does not occur in an empty or neutral space, but into a heavily coded discursive environment, sacralized, David Gopnik suggests, as a sanctuary for plunder or a national mausoleum, and more recently, as a utopian “machine” for public education or consumer mall featuring art and non-art attractions.<sup>92</sup> It is a political space.

The sitedness of the utterance, that is, its *extra-pictorial* space or in Austin’s model, the *total speech situation*, is crucial in both constructing the outgoing rhetorical statement and also in shaping the beholder’s construction of meaning with the encoded meanings of the stage itself.<sup>93</sup> Mieke Bal, writing in *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, closely examines the various ways in which the museum is constituted as a total speech environment, where works are selected, ordered, presented and explained. These activities of exposition create discursive acts exhorting beholders

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<sup>92</sup> See David Gopnik, “The Mindful Museum,” *The Walrus* (June 2007).

<sup>93</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 52.

(*Look!*) to participate in narrative constructions of power, civilization, the body, progress, as notable examples, that are offered through epistemological authority (the curator). Bal's analysis of the discursive dynamics of specific exhibitions provides a way to think about the ideological premises underpinning museal space generally, and the techniques of display specifically, such as contrast, juxtaposition, scale, sequence, interpretive information, etc. It is critical to closely examine these "gestures of staging"<sup>94</sup> and interrogate the gap between the work that is presented before our eyes, and the narrative that the work supports.

The sacramental nature of the museum, observes Brian O'Doherty, has been transformed from a spiritual experience to one that isolates the work from "everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself, namely installation within the "white cube" gallery:

Some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the mystique of the experimental laboratory joins chic design to produce a unique chamber of aesthetics. So powerful are the perceptual fields of force within this chamber that, once outside it, art can lapse into secular status.<sup>95</sup>

O'Doherty's critique of the aridity of the museum environment has been answered in the literature of the past two decades in the form of greater scrutiny of the forces at play within art occupied with institutional critique, and the dynamic, or dialogical, encounter of the work of art by the spectator, in terms of Austin's total speech environment, the deixis of the encounter as a transitive act of interpretation.

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<sup>94</sup> Bal, *Double Exposures. The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). Bal also takes care to distinguish between *performativity* and *performance*, distinct but related terms with a common root in the verb *to perform*. Bal characterizes *performance* as the unique execution of a work (playing a role, dancing, playing a piece of music), an activity that implies a temporal duration connecting past and present through rehearsing, memorizing, etc. *Performativity*, on the other hand, according to Bal, is a unique occurrence in the here-and-now; it is transformative and cannot be an object. The two may be present in the same event, connecting that which is presented to us from its effect upon us. See Bal's chapter "Performance and Performativity". An abridged discussion is given in her more recent work *Endless Andness: The Politics of Abstraction According to Ann Veronica Janssens*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 10-11.

<sup>95</sup> Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, with introduction by Thomas McEvelley (Santa Monica and San Francisco, CA: The Lapis Press, 1986 [1976]), 14. It is important to note here the connection to Paul Valéry's prescient lament of the dislocation of art's sites of origin to the museum white cube: "The Problem of Museums," *Art Issues* (March/April 1997):24-25,

This study is concerned with the discursive relationship between production of the work, and its subsequent staging and reception. Douglas Crimp has noted the shift since the advent of 1960s minimalist sculpture, from the meaning of the work *in and of itself*, to its interpretation as a *situated object*, and the reception of the work transferring the act of meaning-making from the artist/subject to the spectator/subject. The implications of the role of spectators in political speech acts will be discussed extensively in the chapters that follow. I would argue that the museum, in its display of visual discourses ranging from identity politics to ecological activism, transforms the “image act” to the cult object, and in so doing re-inscribes these potentially performative images as separate from (real) life, a place to go when we need to be “cleansed”, as the container of ideas that we cherish, but do not embody. Such contemporary works are vulnerable to recuperation and re-presentation within the museum. Here the dangerous tendency on the part of museum operations is to engulf and display the “weapon”, which is still not the same thing as encountering it, and, in so doing, graft the social relevance of the visual utterance onto a renewed societal relevance for the museum. A second danger surfaces in the critical discourse about the intriguing works that we will meet: because of its extra-museal nature, most of the work falls outside the notice of art discourse; because of its visuality, it tends to fall outside the notice of political discourse.

I have discussed space in relation to the performative potential of images and the real space of the museum where the encounter of the work takes place. The final major concept that I will introduce here as critical to my exploration is the notion of social space, and entwined through this, the idea of the *physical space* of the everyday in public life. At a very basic level, political art, or the political *in art*, functions to connect the artist, the audience and the world as a collective address, rather than creating a self-reflexive, autonomous and private work that attempts escape from the parameters of social space.

As will be demonstrated through my case studies, the idea of the everyday is not only the addressivity of the works’ utterance, but is also presented through the “ordinariness” of the sites where the works are staged or displayed: the union hall, the

public square, the art gallery.<sup>96</sup> Michel de Certeau reflects on the relationship between “place” and “space” and creates a parallel to *langue* and *parole*: place, like *langue*, is an ordering system in accordance which elements are in fixed relationships of co-existence—planned, regulated, order, stability. Space, like *parole*, is realized through dynamic, transitive practices, the act of interacting, the unpredictable, characterized as strolling through the city.<sup>97</sup> The beholder, like de Certeau’s walker, and like Vertov’s *kino-eye*, is in perpetual motion, whose pictorial experience consists then of what is noticed, the fragmentary. I would reframe this concept of space in its context of human circulation through the museum. In her writing on the political performative in contemporary art, Bal considers the constitution of the gallery/space as particular aspect of performance via the concept *deixis*, a linguistic term to refer to the relationship between viewer and space. Bal contends that it is the *event* of sensory perception, *rather than the object of contemplation*, that awakens the awareness of the subject as a political being: “Presenting a space that is inhabited rather than empty, open for entering but not for occupying, for co-inhabiting but not for appropriating – a space within which the viewing subject is welcomed while simultaneously being transformed by it – is perhaps the most central aspect of the political force of [...] art.”<sup>98</sup> In the context of my discussions here, I would widen the concept and propose that *deixis* is an intersection between both the bodily experience of sensate, autonomous motion (dynamic, unpredictable strolling) and action (stopping, beholding, constructing meaning).

The artists discussed in this study have chosen to turn *toward* the injustices and inequities of daily life, of life lived, along with the temporal immediacy of problems in their time (the rise of National Socialism in Germany, the carnage created and suffered

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<sup>96</sup> For an excellent consideration of discursive approaches to the display of works, see *Exhibition*, edited by Lucy Steeds, in the *Whitechapel: Documents of Art* series (London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2014).

<sup>97</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 117. For considerations of de Certeau’s theoretical concepts of space, see Nick Kaye, *Site Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), and Kanishka Goonewardena, “Marxism and Everyday Life. On Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord, and some others,” in *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, edited by Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom, and Christian Schmid (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 117-133.

<sup>98</sup> Bal, *Endless Andness*, 69.

by American troops fighting communism in Vietnam, the operations of apartheid in the global economy, etc.).<sup>99</sup> The works neither look backward into the past as allegory for the present (and here we can readily think of the French painter Jacques Louis David employing antiquity as contemporary metaphor) nor forward to an utopian/dystopian eventuality, but to *this* day, the everyday, of the original viewers. I consider the displayed work of art as a performative event activating an intersection of three critical “moments”: the point of production, the point of staging and the point of beholding.

Supporting this “in-real-life” thematic approach is the pictorial space of photomontage, assembled from everyday sources such as advertising, illustrated magazines, portrait photography and printed ephemera, as well as the iconographic references to daily life contained within the fragments. The everyday nature of the world around us is featured, such as kitchens and living rooms, slums and grand buildings, factories and picket lines, singers and circuses, banknotes and modern machines, and most especially, the faces of familiar public figures and private persons. These mass-produced and mass-consumed pictorial instances of the familiar are selected, extracted from their usual contexts and recombined. In recalling the potential to see photomontage as a form of minor photography, I see this deliberate construction as creating pictures “that do things”: in the fissures and the joins of composite images, they aim to disturb the normalizing codes through which our worlds are created, and in which our worlds are immersed.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *Turning away* by the artist is also a strategy, although not one of the strategies discussed in this study, for instance, in Alfredo Jaar’s body of work which intercepts the connection between trauma and its representation.

<sup>100</sup> An interesting example of this is *Leaves of Grass* (2015) by Canadian artist Geoffrey Farmer. The large-scale sculptural work features roughly 16,000 images cut out from the pages of LIFE magazine and mounted on dried-grass sticks. The sticks form a dense “forest” arranged in chronological order along a narrow 38-metre-long table, which is viewable from both sides. The images depict a veritable visual encyclopedia of 20<sup>th</sup> century Western culture featuring, to cite just a few examples, celebrities, events and consumer products. but it was premiered at the *DOCUMENTA* 13 in Kassel in 2012: See a short video of the installation narrated by Hannelore Starke <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEeGy-MGsRc>.

I visited the installation several times in 2015 while it was on view at National Gallery of Canada. In watching visitors move across the space, I see this work as eliciting enchantment, although the work is also readable as an extreme Debordian mirror of the spectacle of consumption.

## 5. Unsettling Radical Action

This thesis takes as its central project the development of a new proposal, a fresh perspective in curatorial practice: my study has been developed over a period of nearly two decades, both informing and being informed by my own experiences as a curator. On the potentialities of curatorial and museological practice as radical action, I have been inspired by Martin Krenn’s intertwining of art and political praxis using various media such as photography, video, and web-based tools to develop projects realized in exhibitions, public space and on the internet<sup>101</sup>; Emilie Sitzia on the production of knowledge in the museum and approaches to emancipating the visitor; and Ruth Phillips in her cogent narrative and analysis from a Canadian perspective of the problems and possibilities of curatorial practice to foster discursive spaces positioning Indigeneity in the museum past and present.<sup>102</sup>

The selection and presentation of specific works of art in the chapters that follow is not unlike my everyday work developing arts exhibitions: works are selected for an affinity to a common theme or thread; and the pathways connecting these works with museum visitors are suggested but not exhausted by the organizing curator who stages them. For each visitor to the gallery or museum, there is an inaugural, novel encounter with the creator of the work, the material work itself, and the stage upon which it is displayed. This encounter, or event, places beholders in a dynamic role as the subject of their own experience.

In each chapter, I consider how Austin’s careful classification of performative acts by type could serve as a point of departure to propose specific kinds of strategies by artists in producing *visual* speech acts. Although Austin’s own typological labels do not transfer well to the artists I have selected, they do inspire me to propose a new taxonomy of performativity. The study, then, proposes a morphology of image acts, applying Austin as a point of departure to explore each “case study”. It is hoped that this thesis, as a

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<sup>101</sup> Martin Krenn, “The Political Sphere in Art Practices”, <http://martinkrenn.net>; Krenn’s work as artist/intervenor is discussed ahead in Chapter 1.

<sup>102</sup> Emilie Sitzia, “The ignorant art museum: beyond meaning-making,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 37/1 (2018):73-87; Ruth B. Phillips, *Museum Pieces. The Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011).

whole, will advance discourse among my curatorial and art administrator colleagues by serving as a point of departure to consider the impact of works of art via exhibition projects.

## Introduction to the Chapters

### Chapter 1

In Chapter One, I launch my study by discussing John Heartfield's use of photography as a weapon to introduce (and untangle) concepts regarding politically confrontational art. I introduce the formal, narrational and political strategies deployed in recombinant images, and discuss the violent operations of dismemberment, force and suture in the production of photomontages and propose the term the *combative* as a strategy of negation. Close readings of Heartfield's work are amplified by a discussion of how their reception connects to Austin's concept of "unhappy" performances or misfires, and how the citation of a work by Heartfield in an 2016 installation by Martin Krenn links to Derrida's concept of iterability.

### Chapter 2

In Chapter Two, I shift from Heartfield's use of scissors as a weapon of violence to his Dada contemporary Hannah Höch and her practice of cutting with "the kitchen knife", a reference to her most celebrated work. *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (1919) presents a Boschean kaleidoscope of contemporary life, and her work, like that of Frida Kahlo and others, has become of particular interest in recent decades by art historians to study under researched artists previously omitted from the canon. In this sense, the visual speech act is an insertion point into the public sphere where there is no viable feminist speech. Höch's practice extended into the late 1960s and continued to explore powerful montaged female figures. In her photomontage series, *Bringing the War Home (House Beautiful)* (1967—1972), Brooklyn-based Martha Rosler integrates commercial photography of sumptuous domestic interiors with fragments from traumatic journalistic photography portraying soldiers and civilians caught up in the violence of the Vietnam War. Rosler's critical perspective, like Höch's, combines images of the public and private world: *Bringing the*



*War Home* forces the collision of ludic simultaneity of the tranquility and unimpeded consumerism of upper-class American homes (staged for display) with the savage reality of strife, wounding and death (that which should not be seen).<sup>103</sup> Rosler's work takes to task the official discourse of America's involvement as an imperial force in Southeast Asia and the human cost of both soldiers (many forced into service through the draft and most from lower- or middle-class families) and Vietnamese civilians onto a single visual field.

As a *kind* of visual speech act, extending beyond Austin's morphology of utterances, I position this performative strategy as the *integrative*, pictorially and semantically forcing inclusion. "Integrative" here has not only the standard sense of combining or completing components to produce a larger whole, but also includes its character of creating a holistic 360° picture from disparate fragments. This term has the advantage of yet another connotation which is more overtly political: "integrate" has also come to mean a synonym of "desegregate", as in the removal of restrictions against subordinated or subaltern groups and bringing into equal membership.<sup>104</sup>

### Chapter 3

In Chapter Three, I propose a strategy I name the *contemplative* as a class of pictorial speech. The contemplative can be characterized as both a strategy by the artist to invite the spectator to *reflect upon*, that is, as a cognitive action, as well as one by the museum to create an encoded space for looking, that is, as a sensate action. An extended analysis of Hans Haacke's installation, *Voici Alcan* (1983), at the National Gallery of Canada considers the intersection of these operations. The work forms a suspended triptych that creates a narrative in image and text to suggest the hidden agency of the corporate operations of Alcan (a company name formed by the contraction of the word "aluminum" and "Canada") in concurrent activities: in mining aluminum, in sponsoring the performing arts and in enabling racial oppression in South Africa. Art writers have

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<sup>103</sup> The latter should not be confused with *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* by Jeremy Peter Varon (Oakland: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>104</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 1065.

seldom discussed *Voici Alcan* among Haacke's frontal attacks on the systemic circulation of art as cultural capital. With this in mind, I investigate at length the internal operations of *Voici Alcan* and the external operations beyond the frames of the work as a performance on a stage, linking this reading to a model of political action proposed by Hannah Arendt.

For Arendt, civic life is the arena of the imagination and of meaning: it is through our engaged connection to citizenship, to urban experience in particular, that we fully realize liberation. In this conception of contemplation, reception activates the citizen to full realization of consciousness and agency. Working from Arendt's view, I locate the performance of pictures, specifically on the "stage" of the museum, as the nexus where aesthetic and social contemplation intersect and where the individual engages with the collective community. For photography theorist Ariella Azoulay, the public sphere is the space of relations between citizens (invested by the state with protections and privileges) and noncitizens (those governed without commensurate status).<sup>105</sup> This is the space where private reflection and ethical consideration become connected to the responsibilities of citizenship. Azoulay extends Arendt's concept of citizen engagement by considering the moral responsibility implied in this meeting ground of the (privileged) spectator and the dispossessed through the work. I also consider the complex and powerful operations of the museum as a stage for both spectacle, and increasingly, one that fosters engagement.

#### Chapter 4

I introduce the strategy I call the *interpellative* as the next class of the performative applicable to image acts where the "speaker" does more than "make an announcement"; s/he uses rhetorical strategies to persuade audiences to belong to the proposition. In Chapter Four, I locate the image strategy of interpellation, or hailing to a civil community in the public sphere, in Krzysztof Wodiczko's 1985 *Bundeshaus Projection* in Bern, Switzerland. As in Heartfield's practice, the tools used by Wodiczko for this strategy involve the discordant and thus expository conflation of one image/sign onto others. In Wodiczko's case, the intersection of photographs projected onto

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<sup>105</sup> Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*.

architectural destinations, such as office buildings, war memorials and heroic statuary, activates the image act. Wodiczko's projections invite meanings that are located in the actual temporal duration of the projection itself, by the specificity of place marked by its own accretion of historicity, and by the associations brought to the work by audience participation in the process of interpellation. Alongside the many provocative effects of the projections are the problematic issues that they raise for activist art practice: do Wodiczko's narratives become a diverting spectacle or do they function as ephemeral moral civil disobedience?

## Chapter 5

In Chapter Five, I propose the *declarative* as an even more insistent pictorial speech act in the *Oshawa* series photonarratives (1982–1984) of Canadian collaborative artists Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge. The declarative as an image utterance mode does not invite itself into discourse politely, with decorum, seeking to draw its audience into dialogic communication, but enters from the margins, insistent on insertion and inclusion. Such declarative acts are constitutive, invoking the “I am” subjecthood of its author/constituents into the public sphere. The specific practices of Condé and Beveridge invite assessment of shifting performances stages (the labour hall, the museum, the archive, the street) in shaping reception by audiences as well as the construction of the persona of the artist.

## Chapter 6

In Chapter Six, I introduce the *imperative* as deployed by Gilbert and George in Thatcher's Britain. I consider the linguistic operations of the imperative as an imposing means of intervention in and response to social discourses through visual expression. Huge multi-panel photographic installations provide tangible examples for analysis. Gilbert and George produced these works in opposition to the social, economic, and political policies of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government during the deepening economic recession of the 1970s and 1980s. I look closely at two series of works, *Dirty Words* (1977), and a related group of images with monarchic and nationalist themes created between 1978 and 1980. The large-scale grids in both groups combine disparate

image groupings, immense scale, pungent texts, and heraldic iconography, operating as aggressive confrontations in the public sphere. Their images open intertextual linkages to the critical voices in the films of Stephen Frears and Hanif Kureishi (*My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*); to the disturbing phenomenon of mass violence in football and National Front rioting; and to the emergence of punk rock music as a form of attack on the rhetoric of tradition. In comparison with the previously discussed modes of speech, which may be considered as relatively decorous and “co-operative” in argumentation models (integrative, contemplative, interpellative), the imperative mode is inherently impolite and coercive, belonging to a class of *exercitives* or commanding expressions (accusatives, hortatives, admonitives) that express desire through force.

In the writing of these case studies, it has been my intention to consider how Austin’s way of thinking can be helpful in the consideration of making, distributing, and beholding specific practices by artists working in “the political”. My focus extends out from the domain of traditional art history to suggest in what ways we can consider *how* art works may be speaking subjects. Departing from Austin’s original classes of speech acts, I consider the roles of critical artists/collaborators in 20<sup>th</sup> century examples to shock, defamiliarize, make space for, call into community, declare one’s existence and compel engagement, in the context of sites of performance, and audiences, usually museumgoers.

## Interconnections

I think it is also important to make transhistorical connections between practices and I take opportunities to do so throughout my discussions. As Anja Kanneiser notes, it is through the mutations and re-evaluations of the performative encounter that it becomes possible to uncover the viability of tactics for political insurrection.<sup>106</sup> The works of art that will be closely read are specifically sited, not only in the sequence of chapters as I have arranged them, but also in their places of display and eventual preservation in collections. This constructed fixity does not reveal the dynamic and fascinating real

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<sup>106</sup> Anja Kanneiser, “Breaking out of the Specialist ‘Ghetto’: Performative Encounters as Participatory Praxis in Radical Politics,” in *Cultural Activism. Practices, Dilemmas, Possibilities*, edited by Firat, Begüm Özden and Aylin Kuryel (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2011), 115-136.

world interconnections between the artists themselves, or their place in a discursive community that also includes leading cultural figures of their respective milieus.

John Heartfield and George Grosz were closely associated with the playwright Bertolt Brecht; they created stage set designs for Brecht's productions. Heartfield became closely allied with the Soviet OCTOBER group—Gustav Klucis, El Lissitzky, Alexander Rodchenko—in part as co-exhibitors in the 1931 Fotomontage Exhibition and through his friendship with Constructivist writer and playwright Sergei Tretiakov, who hosted Heartfield on an extended visit to the Soviet Union in 1931–1932.<sup>107</sup> The Soviet artists were using collage and photomontage techniques to support disseminating the positive messages of the revolutionary communist government, with an emphasis on factography (the delivery of factual information through visual communication) in order to be as accessible to the general populace as possible.<sup>108</sup> The emphasis on cuts, edits and splices also directly related to the montage techniques explored in the experimental cinematic works of Vertov and Eisenstein.

Hannah Höch was also a member of the Berlin Dada group (albeit ever wary of its often-disparaging disregard for female artists), and participated in exhibitions and events with her partner, Raoul Hausmann. Portraits of Heartfield, Grosz and Hausmann all appear as “cameos” in *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*. These Berlin artists had varying degrees of acquaintance and collaboration with the leading intellectual and cultural figures of the Weimar period, most especially critical theorist Walter Benjamin, who praised Heartfield's *AIZ* covers—produced initially in Berlin, and from Hitler's rise to power in 1933 until 1938, from exile in Prague—in his writing, philosopher Hannah Arendt, and theatre director Erwin Piscator.<sup>109</sup> All three play a role in the discussions ahead.

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<sup>107</sup> Evans, 11. See also Margarita Tupitsyn, “From the Politics of Montage to the Montage of Politics: Soviet Practice 1919 through 1937,” in *Montage and Modern Life, 1919-1942*, exhibition catalogue edited by Matthew Teitelbaum (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 83-127.

<sup>108</sup> For extended discussions of Soviet factography practice, see Benjamin Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography,” *October* 30 (Fall 1984):82-118 and Leah Dickerman, “The Fact and the Photograph,” *October* 118 (Fall 2006):132-152.

<sup>109</sup> Benjamin addressed Heartfield's *AIZ* covers in his 1936 essay “Das Kunstwerk in Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” in terms of their circulation as a deliberate political intervention circulated through mass reproduction. See “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in

The work of Heartfield and Piscator most especially radiated influence in the left-leaning artists emerging in North America in the 1960s. Like earlier rejection of the emotional excesses of Expressionism by the Dada artists in the wake of the First World War, artists working with a more conceptual vision of art production likewise turned away from the hot emotional field of then-ascendant Abstract Expressionism. In 1967, radical art advocate Lucy Lippard encouraged two Toronto-based artists, Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, to join to the politicized artistic foment of New York.<sup>110</sup> During their residence in New York from 1969 to 1975, they met Martha Rosler, and all became members of the (NY) Society for Theoretical Art and Analysis (founded by Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden)<sup>111</sup>, which later became Art & Language, generally contesting the philosophical conservatism of minimalist and conceptual art practice.<sup>112</sup> By the late 1970s they were experimenting with the use of photomontage in theatrical stage set scenes portraying union narratives. At the same time, Hans Haacke was serving as an active member of the Art Workers Coalition (AWC), which formed in 1969 with the goal of revolutionizing and reforming museums.<sup>113</sup>

Meanwhile, in Halifax, the Nova Scotia School for Art and Design (NSCAD), one of the premier art schools in Canada, was emerging as a hotbed for experimental artists from Europe, the United States and Canada.<sup>114</sup> These artists were largely focused on

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*Illuminations, Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), 217-252.

<sup>110</sup> See biographical timeline in *Condé and Beveridge: Class Works*, edited by Bruce Barber, (Halifax, NS: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design), 58.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* Carole Condé also joined the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee.

<sup>112</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, "A Conversation with Martha Rosler," in *Martha Rosler. Positions in the Life World*, (Birmingham, England: Ikon Gallery, 1998), 23-55.

<sup>113</sup> John A. Tyson, "The Context as Host: Hans Haacke's Art of Textual Exhibition," *Word & Image* 31/3 (2015):214.

<sup>114</sup> A short list of visiting artists who gave workshops and/or participated in NSCAD exhibitions constitutes a veritable roster of the most acclaimed artists of their generation: Laurie Anderson, Vito Acconci, John Baldessari, Iain Baxter, Joseph Beuys, Dana Birbaum, Jan Dibbets, Daniel Buren, Eric Fischl, Robert Frank, Dan Graham, Jenny Holzer, Claes Oldenburg, Dennis Oppenheim, Yvonne Rainer, Gerhard Richter, Robert Smithson, Michael Snow, and Joyce Wieland. See Garry Neill Kennedy's beautiful and comprehensive documentation of the activities under his tenure in *The Last Art College. Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1968-1978*. (Halifax, NS, Cambridge, MA and London: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and the MIT Press, 2012).

challenging the autonomy of art by making the social context of art practice the subject matter of their work. Under the leadership of director/artist Garry Neill Kennedy, NSCAD hosted workshops and exhibitions by Karl Beveridge (1972), Martha Rosler (1977), Hans Haacke (1975) and Krzysztof Wodiczko (1976).<sup>115</sup> The NSCAD Press, under the direction of art historian Benjamin Buchloh from 1978 to 1987, published monographs dedicated to politically engaged artists, notably for the purposes of this study: Hans Haacke's *Framing and Being Framed: 7 works 1970–1975* (1975), *Photography Against the Grain: Essay and Photo Works 1973–1983* by Allan Sekula (1984) and a retrospective of Rosler's work entitled *3 Works* (1978, reissued in 2006). The artists in this study have augmented their performative art practices by contributing essays to the discussion about the importance of institutional and discursive framing. In turn, they are linked to the network of art writers associated with the journal *October* at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, including founders Annette Michelson and Rosalind E. Krauss, and Benjamin Buchloh, Rosalyn Deutsche, Hal Foster, Douglas Crimp, Yve-Alain Bois, etc.

Working from their studio in the East End of London, Gilbert and George were also connected in these circles within circles: indirectly through the artists' frequent attendance at exhibitions of their work held in New York's Sonnabend Gallery throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and more directly through their connection with acclaimed curator Kasper König. With his brother Walther, König operated the Cologne-based Verlag der Buchhandlung König. The König Brothers published several artist books: *Side by Side* was the first book created by Gilbert & George in 1971 by the König Brothers just four years into their lifelong artistic partnership, as well as several books by their former classmate at St. Martin's School of Art, Dutch Conceptual artist Jan Dibbets. König was proposed by Dan Graham as first director of the NSCAD Press in the 1970s<sup>116</sup>, where he oversaw the production of exhibition catalogues by several of the artists, cited above, connected to the school.

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<sup>115</sup> Kennedy, xx.

<sup>116</sup> Kennedy, xx.

## Conclusion

In this introduction to the study, I have introduced J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, from which I have derived the title for my thesis and outlined the **impact** of his concept of performativity on several disciplines, including aesthetic theory. I have outlined ways in which the image act can be said to have agency, and the agency of photomontage as a specific technique relevant to my study of the politicized art. I have mapped out a selection of works to study closely I have also delineated how the North American and European "currents" of artistic practice flowed and interconnected through and across time during the twentieth century and also across geographical boundaries. The photomontages (photo-based prints, collages, assemblages and projections) examined in this study are linked by a confrontational genre of pictorial production in which the political arguably is (or is not) present as the subject matter of the work but, significantly, is its activating strategy of address. This speaking role provides a mechanism for the work of art to enter directly into the arena of argumentation as an active and affective manifestation of language.

In attempting to map the grammatical analysis of language developed by Austin onto visual speech acts, I will propose a morphology of discursive *image acts* to delineate the kinds of rhetorical conventions produced in the works of art under discussion and to examine the kinds of intervention they constitute. I will consider how Austin's way of thinking can indeed be helpful in the consideration of making, distributing, and beholding specific practices by artists working in "the political". I argue that we can locate promising avenues for the applicability of Austin's ideas to the consideration of political or activist art as image "utterances" at work within social relations as propositions that describe but also perform in the world.

The blossoming of new ways to think about the intersection of theory, art and society also coincides with important concepts fracturing/decentering the norm and empowering polyvocality/marginalized positions: postcolonialism, postmodernism, identity politics, globalization, im/migration, community advocacy, digital technologies and media saturation, as ready examples. The provocative entanglement of performativity and political art in itself shines powerful lumens into the tight corners of discipline-ordered practices such as art and art historical instruction, museum acquisition and



presentation, curatorial and academic scholarship. The works discussed in this research project exceed the origination of their making and staging and become departure points for dynamic theoretical inquiry in the present moment. In examining provocative and productive ways of *how we can do things with pictures*, my research puts “some of my cats on the table”, to cite one of Austin’s strange yet endearing turns of phrase.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things*, 20.