How to do things with pictures in the museum

Photography, montage and political space

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CHAPTER FIVE

The Declarative: (M)oral History in Photo Narratives by Condé and Beveridge

In this study, I have proposed how beholders may be engaged as subjects by political speech acts in quite distinct ways: to enjoin in refusal (the combative); to admit a range of vantage points (the integrative); to bring into consciousness through productive looking (the contemplative); and to belong to a collective community (the interpellative). These discussions of performative images in the form of photo-based montage works have also noted the implications of the choice of performative venue: Dada cabaret, book jacket, magazine cover, activist pamphlet, museum display case, modern gallery, and outdoor “happening” event. I will now introduce another visual speech act mode: the declarative, as a mode of political performativity that asserts subjecthood and makes space for disenfranchised citizen segments. Related to this is a consideration of the potential for uses of space in the “everyday” world for declarative works, and an exploration of artists specifically associated with exploiting the potential for activating non-traditional spaces, such as the street, the labour hall, the archive.

1. The Declarative

It is useful to return to Austin’s *How to do Things with Words* as the starting point for defining classes of representation as performative speech: Austin distinguishes between utterances that describe the world in which we live (constative speech) from those which do something (illocutionary speech). Declaration is a class of performativity that Austin calls “exercitive”, a constitutive function such as an announcement or proclamation: “Exercitives commit us to the consequences of an act, for example, naming”.\(^1\) Searle, as one of Austin’s principal respondents, picks up from Austin’s preliminary distinction of speech acts, and refines the operations of the declarative as a type of formal speech that takes the form and gravitas of an official announcement.\(^2\) He later clarifies that declaration is a statement of collective intentionality (“we intend”), a social act based on a socio-juridical requirement to acknowledge and accord

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subjecthood, and to respect stipulated conventions. The declarative is also a hallmark rhetorical device throughout history of art, signifying religious and political power, for instance, through auratic presence (“I am”) in portraiture and history painting.

Ariella Azoulay, in her essay “The Human Snapshot”, positions Edward Steichen’s 1955 Family of Man exhibition in the context of the United Nations’ 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights: she reads the images featured in the exhibition not as descriptive statements with universal claims, but prescriptive statements pointing to the what-could-be, the claim to universal human rights. The emancipatory power is not located in what is in the photographs, but in the collective contents of the exhibition as a whole as a new genre: an act of declaration:

“A declaration is a decree, an order, an edict, or a ruling … it is a verdict made public, a pronouncement, a promulgation … an assertion, an insistence, a claim, an affirmation, an assurance, a protestation, an objection, a complaint, a disapproval, a challenge, a dissent, an outcry, a remonstration. The declarative has a particular role in constituting the self, derived from the Cartesian claim to consciousness as a way of invoking the individual being to calling into existence a collective. I would argue that declaration does not invite itself so decorously into discourse, seeking to draw its audience into acceptance of convention. Rather, it proclaims and insists on space being accorded to it. The announcement of “We are” commands inclusivity and lays claim to the discursive space where previously there was negation or neglect of the addressor’s right to occupancy. “The politics of identity,” states Henry Louis Gates Jr., “starts with the assertion of a collective allegiance. It says: This is who we are, make room for us, accommodate our special needs, confer recognition upon what is distinctive.” Judith Butler identifies declaration as a radicalizing speech act that asserts the social existence of a being; it is within the possible circuit

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6Azoulay, “‘The Family of Man’”, 37.

of recognition. The declarative is the creation of a legitimizing platform, an invocation of the subject’s identity in the public sphere, at once enlarging its own sphere of being and, possibly, concomitantly diminishing the competitive or negating forces already occupying the discursive space. In this way, I see a link between acts of declaration and Butler’s notion of precarity as communities claim a portion of social space. Groups may organize to assert recognition in the political process (creating a platform for advocacy) or to form a new political entity (state-making). For this reason, I recognize the declarative as a recurrent strategy of constitution and recognition chosen by contemporary image-makers in the public assertion of marginalized identities: examples that come readily to mind using photo-based images/montages include Guerrilla Girls’ activism protesting inequality of women in the arts; the ACT UP campaign seeking engagement to combat AIDS; and more recently, EqualHumanity’s iconic portrait of a woman wearing an American flag as a hijab to protest the anti-Muslim and anti-immigration stance of the Trump administration.

2. The Oshawa Project

The examples cited above share a certain mutability in the total speech environment, morphing in the public realms between billboard, poster, postcard, magazine graphic and social media meme. This fluidity of communication modality creates both a discursive and physical condition of making space for, and is a little-explored aspect of Canada’s most prolific artists working in the declarative mode, Toronto-based Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge. Oshawa. A History of Local 222 United Autoworkers of America, CLC11 is a complex work created in

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11 “CLC” refers to the Canadian Labour Congress.
collaboration with the union local over a period of three years (1982–1984); I will examine images from the final form of the project, a four-part series of 16” x 20” Cibachrome prints\textsuperscript{12}, synthesizing interwoven components: recorded oral history interviews conducted with unionized autoworkers; photographs of staged scenes with actors representing moments in the history of Local 222; within the scenes, embedded “frames” in the form of props with textual references or iconic historical images to create a composite made by combining transparencies, masking, and re-photographing the collages. I will then trace the migration of this body of work between the union meeting hall, the street, the museum and the archive, which invites exploration of the declarative as political insistence across a sequence of culturally encoded environments.

Condé and Beveridge lived in New York from 1966 to the late 1970s, and through their participation in politically oriented discussion groups which raised questions about the artists’ role in society, they began to consider ways to produce works that reflected this discussion.\textsuperscript{13} They returned to Canada after exhibiting their Mao-inspired call to arms, *It’s Still Privileged Art*, a series of socialist-realist style frames shown at the Art Gallery of Ontario in February 1976\textsuperscript{14} and later, in Toronto, participated in emergent artist-run spaces such as the Centre for Experimental Art and Communication (CEAC).\textsuperscript{15} They maintained their commitment to explore the collaboration process by anchoring their practice to sites of economic production, specifically

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\textsuperscript{12} As discussed in the discussion of Wodiczko’s printed documentation, Cibachrome is the brand name of a photographic support that enables positive colour film-to-positive colour print. The substrate is made of a stable polyester base rather than a traditional (and permeable) paper base, resulting in superior image clarity, colour accuracy and long-term preservation.

\textsuperscript{13} In the late 1960s, Condé and Beveridge were colleagues of Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula in the exchange between Toronto and New York art circles, and also with British colleagues working with staged and montaged scenes, Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn. See Martha Fleming, “The Production of Meaning. An Interview with Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge,” *Afterimage* 10/4 (November 1982):10-15; and Dot Tuer, “Is it Still Privileged Art? The Politics of Class and Collaboration in the Art Practice of Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge,” *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, edited by Nina Felshin (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1995),195-220. For commentary on the role of Condé and Beveridge fostering political discussion, see 3-part video documenting a one-day workshop about the legacy of their work, *Public Exposures. The Art Activism of Condé and Beveridge (1976-2016)* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXlJ8ov2328.


\textsuperscript{15} Dot Tuer, “The CEAC was Banned in Canada,” 73.
forming links between workers in the manufacturing sector, and the idea of artists as cultural workers.\textsuperscript{16}

In creating the \textit{Oshawa} project, to be explored in close detail below, the artists worked with former and current union members to create a historical narrative about the struggle to form and maintain Canadian Auto Workers Local 222, Canada’s largest private sector local union, known for integrating progressive politics into policy and community. Oshawa, a small city east of Toronto along Lake Ontario, is the home of the Canadian division of the U.S. auto manufacturer General Motors and the anchor of the local economy. The project constitutes a contestatory “micronarrative”, constituting an illustrated narrative of the union local arranged as several series representing specific periods of time. Within each series, specific issues are foregrounded, such as the impact of time-motion studies to improve industrial efficiency in the 1930s or the acceptance of women in non-traditional occupations in the 1970s. Each series is composed of a sequence of individual photographs of staged tableaux, which in themselves are constructed as an interplay of theatrical sets, props, posed actors, appropriated images and first-person quotations transcribed from interviews conducted with union members by the artists. In order to understand the workings of the declarative in the \textit{Oshawa} project, I will consider the workings of narrative and performance in selected staged episodes or photomontages that challenge the dominant (corporate) discourses about the labour movement by \textit{making space for} the workers’ voices.

As Condé and Beveridge state about activating the picture: “The job of producing images of our recent history has been left, for the most part, to the executives of mass media. The effect of this monopolization has been to anaesthetize social memory and to make the active subjects of history into passive consumers of human nature. Real subjects (working people, women, races, minorities, etc.) are replaced by the self-image of media entrepreneurs and the corporation they represent.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} Condé and Beveridge’s subsequent projects constitute critical responses to healthcare, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Occupy movement and planetary water ecology. They have also been active fostering artists’ collective bargaining rights, artists’ rights, such as the standardized consultation, exhibition and reproduction fees to compensate artists in recognize of providing professional services. See Greig de Peuter and Nicole Cohen, “The Art of Collective Bargaining: An Interview with Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge,” \textit{Canadian Journal of Communication} 40/1 (April 2015): 333-346.

\textsuperscript{17} Condé and Beveridge, “Some Notes about Work in Progress,” \textit{Mannersm [sic] A Theory of Culture} (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1982), 32.
The project’s narrative is executed through critical narratival elements: a narrator who speaks (source of the utterance), a focalizer (the perspective through which the narrative is presented) and actors acting out the key moments or events contained in the history (fabula).\(^\text{18}\) In the *Oshawa* project, I identify the narrator as the voice of the individual members quoted from the oral history recordings and presented as textual statements within the image panels; the focalizer is the Union as a collective, who presents the workers’ perspective in the story of their interaction with both GM management, and the powerful umbrella United Auto Workers (UAW) union; and the fabula is the sequence of key events (struggle, strike, collective bargaining) that are presented as texts and as *mise-en-scène*.

In their polysemic layering of texts and dramatic photomontage technique adapted from Heartfield’s oppositional practice, Condé and Beveridge’s photo narratives invite comparison formally and thematically with critical projects by Martha Rosler in *Bringing the War Home (House Beautiful)* (1967–1972) discussed in Chapter 2, as well as *The Docklands Project* (1980–1988) by British collaborators and community activists Lorraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, a similarly multidimensional project that I will address below.\(^\text{19}\)

The scenes are also supported by textual elements. Condé and Beveridge wrote a synoptic introduction to each series, in order to provide historical details prior to the sequence of photo narrative tableaux: for the first series, entitled 1937, the text reads as follows:

On April 23, 1937, the United Auto Workers won its first contract from General Motors in Oshawa, which marked the entry of the CIO\(^\text{20}\) into Canada. General Motors itself had come to Canada in 1918, when it bought out the McLaughlin Motor Co.

The first serious attempt to organize the plant came in 1928. After a week out on strike, the workers returned with the promise that GM would negotiate. While GM did grant some concessions, it also succeeded in buying off or firing the leadership and the financial secretary disappeared with the Union funds. To complicate matters further, the Trades and Labour


\(^{20}\) “CIO” refers to the Congress of Industrial Organizations.
Congress, an affiliate of the AFL\textsuperscript{21}, insisted the Union be split into separate craft unions. The net result of all this was no union.

It’s important to remember that during the 1920’s and 1930’s, the auto industry only hired from late December to late May of each year. This became particularly severe in the thirties when little or no work was available during the lay-off period.

This introductory text marks the liminal point where the declarative voice begins: it establishes the moment and place where the story will begin, and, in a sense, introduces the \textit{dramatis personae}, the focalizers who will represent the oral history voices in the narrative. This text, like the Greek chorus in theatre productions, provides an “external” narratorial voice to establish a specific framework prior to shifting to the “internal” storytelling of the workers. The sequence of images is uniform, showing a domestic interior “stage set” which is consistent from frame to frame except for changes in the gesture of the actors, the placement of props, and the insertion of texts. The work relates strongly to both the history of agitprop theatre and also to amateur theater, both marked by low budget production values and populated with references to the “everyday” world.

There is also a cinematic dimension to staged scene approach. Each image is referred to as a numbered frame, as if a still from a film. The coherence of a moving film is arrested, requiring a concentrated gaze at each “frame” in order to behold the polysemic elements from which it is composed. These moments become, in effect, stills excerpted from a putative filmed production. The staged gestures of each actor, and the deliberate presentation of props and containers for the recombination of images, such as calendar images, newspaper headlines and window, contribute to a denial of real space in favour of a constructed pictorial and narrative space. In addition, the first print in the \textit{Oshawa} project portfolio provides the “screen credits”, listing all participants in the artists’ production, and further pointing to the artifice of the production.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} “AFL” is the acronym for the American Federation of Labor.


In Frame 17 [fig. 5-1], a particular narrative moment is enacted: the first attempt to form a union at the Oshawa GM plant. The narrative printed at the bottom edge of the image was extracted from recorded interviews with real workers who had participated in the 1937 action and reads: *The women did a lot of the sandwiches and paperwork during the strike. We knew what we were fighting for. This Eve came over from the States and she was the one that said we should have a Ladies Auxiliary.*

In the scene, several people in 1930s-era clothing are clustered at the left of the domestic interior, demonstrating solidarity as well as expressing numerous union activities—bullhorn exhortations, telephoning members, carrying signs, sharing a meal (sandwiches, thermos) and keeping financial records. The image also features a panoply of graphics and props. For instance, the newspaper headline reads *Oshawa Situation “Grave” – Woodsworth,* a reference to J.S. Woodsworth, the founding leader of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and one of
Canada’s most vocal union advocates of the 1930s. A framed picture in the background is a montaged group portrait, possibly a union portrait from the period; another archival photograph occupies the space within the window frame featuring a smiling woman serving sandwiches; a picket sign that reads “There can be no power anywhere greater beneath the Sun”; a man calls out with a bullhorn; and a Plymouth Binder Twine advertising calendar features the image of a wholesome looking blonde woman in the foreground and a man haying in the background.

I read these as *extra-narratival* elements in the sense that I consider them to represent the artists’ participation in the development of a metanarrative. Condé and Beveridge, working five decades after the events they portray, are interpreters creating a symbolic visual language that augments the originating oral history record. The placement of these referencing expressions and the stage blocking of the actors reinforce and extend the literal statement extracted from the first-person testimony.

This narrative transitions from the experience of a single individual to a declarative “We are” utterance of the collective portraying the first crucial moment in the fabula, the birth of the first UAW local in Canada: the portrayal of the success of the organizing action and its dependence on the active role of women; the organized and purposeful manner of conduct during the strike; and the assistance of the American section of the union to bolster the efforts of the striking Canadian workers. As visual symbols these elements are embedded within the composition of each individual image. In the declarative operations of Condé and Beveridge, these visual symbols can also be linked to elements of speech act theory as utterances performed according to “referencing expressions”, which serve to identify or point to any thing, process, event, action or any other kind of particular.\(^\text{23}\)

Although the composition seems cluttered and chaotic with overlapping fragments that recall Höch, there is a discernible structure in the triangular positioning of three figures whose gaze addresses ours as viewers. The first is the woman at left wearing a coat with a fur collar and holding the Power/Sun sign, which can be read as the personification of *This Eve who came over from the States*, the instigator of the formation of the Ladies Auxiliary. The second is the smiling woman with sandwiches, at a much larger scale than that of the actors’ figures in the domestic setting. In the right half of the pictorial space, we can discern the third figure who addresses our

gaze, the ghostlike double-exposure figure of a man, wearing suit and tie and carrying a briefcase. This omnipresent apparition of Management assumes an authoritative, frontal stance with clenched fist, apparently keeping surveillance over the activities of the union organizers.

Beyond the iconography of the narrative there is also the critical component of the approach to the staged mise-en-scène. The complex synthesis of actors, props and “dialogue” in Frame 17 makes evident reference to theatrical tableaux and cinematic constructions of narrative. From the outset of each story in the overall narrative, then, we as viewers are aware of the denaturalized aspects of its telling.

At first glance, Frame 17 purports to represent “real space”, a domestic interior of the 1930s, with period props such as gas cooking range, patterned linoleum flooring and an upright piano. However, the camera frame displays “slippage”, allowing the viewer to see the limits of the stage set and how it is, in fact, constructed within the larger space of the artists’ studio. At the upper edge, we can see where the domestic walls of the set end and how the curtains are clamped into place. The denial of naturalized space and the use of actors to stand for the originating oral history interviewees is also a strategy to avoid the standard tropes of social documentary photography. The actual persons involved in the narrative never appear in the project: actors are cast in the tableaux to prevent our evaluating gaze on individual union members and carefully choreographed to present various personae in the narrative.

This approach brings to mind the acclaimed project undertaken by Jean-Luc Moulène entitled 24 Objets de Grève.24 First exhibited in 1999, Moulène’s project was to create a photographic archive depicting a variety of products made by striking French workers. [figs. 5-2, 5-3] As occupiers of the factories during the strike, they construct a physical intervention within manufacturing space, disrupting the usual management/worker hierarchy: they take control of means of production in order to produce alternative objects. The workers also displace manufacturers as author of the object depicted in each image: they are the designers and sole master of its manufacture. Moulène

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24 The number of objects/images in this series changes over time. The original number was 24 for the premiere of the series at La Galerie, the art center located in Noisy-Le-Sec, in 1999. For installations at the Centre Pompidou (2003) and the Musée national d’art moderne (2014), the total number was 40, composed of the original 24 images plus an additional 16. In 2000, the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) showed 39 images from the series. As Sophie Berrebi has explained, the number of objects is not fixed, as some objects disappear over time, and others appear, whether found by the artist, new sources suggested to the artist, or donated items. Sophie Berrebi, personal correspondence with the author, November 22, 2018. “Jean-Luc Moulène: Photography as a Training Manual,” Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry 28 (Autumn/Winter 2011):34-41.
documents what the workers have made (appropriated commodities), and also creates a meta-object through the arrangement of these in aesthetic spaces.25

Like the staged tableaux of Condé and Beveridge, Moulène’s photographs of worker-objects constitute a practice of “photographic action” (staged for the benefit of the camera) rather than “photo-documents” (documentation of performance).26 Moulène also shares with Condé and

[fig. 5-2] Example of objects collected and photographed by Jean-Luc Moulène for the Objets de grève project: a Parfum de solidarité, made by workers at Bourgogne Applications Plastiques (France); b Chomageopoly, made by workers at Lip (France); c Les souliers de la lutte

25 Forty objects from the series are now preserved by the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail.

Beveridge the practice of distributing work across multiple performance sites: labour hall or trade union journal, art gallery, museum and archives. In this way, the works perform in a variety of total speech environments, each with its constituent forum and audience. There is also a temporal dimension of the address as Moulène, like Condé and Beveridge, presents the works across a number of years: this temporal dimension creates the possibility of new contexts, as well as power of accrual in deploying the message.

Paolo Magagnoli has linked Moulène’s approach to addressing and representing unionized labour to Jacques Rancière’s notion of the emancipatory value of a work of art. For Rancière, it is not in the radical content of work of art itself (in the context of this discussion, the symbolic

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representation of unionized workers) per se but is achieved through its conditions of production. Following this connection, I would argue that the worker-collaboration projects undertaken by Condé and Beveridge and Moulène, as well as two previously mentioned projects by Martha Rosler—The Bowery in Two Inadequate Systems (1974-1975) and If You Lived Here (1989)—innovate strategies for the visual representation through the introduction of a new vocabulary of signifiers, empowering marginalized constituencies as speaking subjects through the collaboration of artist and worker (or resident). As speech acts, the works cited above create a new, unfamiliar universe of conventions through the introduction of an alternative and unexpected language that bypasses the tropes of realism and documentary photography. They also express the emancipatory declaration I am/I exist in the public sphere that Rancière lauds. I would add to this that Condé and Beveridge’s staged scenes, accompanied by first-person statements, are arguably more accessible as recognizable utterances to audiences composed of their originating constituents (workers) than the less-familiar language offered by 24 Objets de Grève and If you lived here. In this sense, the emancipatory value is as much in the production as in its reception.

The second reading from the Oshawa series is based on an image selected from Part III of the Oshawa project, 1949—1964. In this series, the overall compositional structure is maintained, and the series as a whole is introduced by the “external” narratorial voice:

After World War II, a new generation of workers—many of them veterans of that war—began to express a new militancy. In a wave of bitter strikes, the late 1940’s witnessed the consolidation of industrial unionism. It was also a period of fierce political struggles within the labour movement itself. Although the United Auto Workers had been established in Oshawa prior to the war, the new militancy surfaced in the 1949 wildcat strike.

In 1950, the UAW International negotiated a five-year agreement with General Motors, which included, for the first time, pensions and the 40-hour work week. But as production expanded, so did the cost of living and the 3¢ an hour increase won in that contract meant that real wages were actually falling behind. In Oshawa, the new militants (dubbed the “Young Turks”, but officially named the Democratic Right Wing), already dissatisfied with an entrenched administration, took over power in the Local.

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29 Discussed in Martha Rosler and Brian Wallis, If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1991).
In 1953, the UAW re-negotiated the five-year agreement and won an additional 5¢ an hour. The Oshawa Local, under its new leadership, refused the new offer and began what was to be a long fight for local autonomy within the International Union.

With the exception of the war and a few isolated cases, GM had a policy of not allowing married women to work in the plant. In 1954 a married woman took GM to arbitration and won that right.

In 1955, Oshawa stayed out on strike for five months to make up what they had lost in the previous contract. Although the Oshawa Local was separated from the other Locals during negotiations, the UAW established the master agreement which meant all the Locals received the same basic wage and benefit package. It was this strike that set the basis for the major economic gains of the next two decades.

Tension and oppositionality are present in the discursive space of this scenario, portrayed by multiple conflicts and focalized by one of the “young Turks” referred to in the synoptic text: 1) between the Oshawa local and the powerful UAW umbrella management based in the United States; 2) between the old leadership and the young members; 3) between the union local and local corporate management; and (4) between the choice for women to remain single and working versus married and illegible for work.

This prefatory narrative establishes the fabula that will be enacted in the scenarios of individual photographic images. As in the earlier series, the tableau for Frame 5 [fig. 5-4] is arranged as a domestic interior, this time, a typical 1950s living room with period props: sofa, coffee table, lamps, knickknacks, a banjo and a new container device for situating symbolic images—a television set. The foreground is dominated by the apparent courtship of a man and woman. The background is populated with various representations of union activities. Unlike Frame 17 from the 1937 series, the viewer is not shown the “slippage”, the seams where the constructed scene ends and the “real” studio space begins. However, the naturalism of the domestic interior is interrupted by the apparent construction of a factory setting in the background spaces, represented in this series in Constructivist-style by oversize silhouettes of manufacturing machinery and gears.

I read the principal fabula in this section of the narrative as the environment of tension between conflicting forces established through the confluence of the introductory text, the oral history excerpt at the lower edge of the composition, and the interplay of elements represented within the scene:
We mobilized enough young people in the plant to control the caucus. The old leadership walked out and I’m the only one on the platform. I said, ‘Well, if they think that’s the backbone of the Union, they’re wrong. It’s right here.’

Tension between the American and Canadian management of union operations is referenced by the figure at the extreme left of the frame (Canadian branch of the union) who appears to be in discussion with an unseen entity positioned “off stage” (American branch of the union). Conflict between veteran and younger members of the union caucus is portrayed by the two figures at left wearing shop coveralls and discussing a pamphlet that reads “PROGRESS”. As cast by Condé and Beveridge, it is difficult to read any significant age difference between these two figures, who may represent a younger and older union member differing over union policy, pointed to by the text, or a younger union member convincing his peer to join in a new direction. The third conflict is
represented by the presence of a figure wearing a suit standing in the door frame. Like the evanescent figure in Frame 17, this figure also serves as an allegorical figure of Management: in this composition, he is fully materialized and positioned in a liminal space surveilling the union discourse. The fourth tension is presented in the foreground as the apparent harmony of courtship. The couple at the centre of the scene represents the construction of heterosexuality and divided gender roles. Depicting the rituals of dating, the suitor, dressed up formally in a suit, conceals the gift box of chocolates behind his back while greeting his date with a decorous kiss on the cheek. The woman reciprocates the protocol, receiving the kiss with a smile, while chastely ensuring physical distance by placing her hands on his chest as a barrier for closer contact. In the construction of this narrative in Frame 5, we recall the introductory text’s description of the struggle for married women to keep their jobs; the sofa is not only the site of the courtship ritual but is also a place where various work-related papers are on view. In this scenario, then, the depiction of the happy courtship portends the eventual socio-economic conflict that awaits the woman, to marry or to keep her job at the car manufacturing plant.

The insertion of signifying elements by the artists to extend the narrative has been updated to display references of the 1950s, namely the production and distribution of mass media, consumer products and advertising. The stage management of Frame 5 affords an opportunity to look at these phenomenon as texts: the complex arrangement of message containers, in this example, through the positioning of magazines, the presence of decorative objects, the graphic design evident on the box of chocolates, and the television broadcast, will appear familiar to viewers in a visually saturated consumer culture. Condé and Beveridge have expressed their particular interest in analyzing advertising and modes of mass communication, and their conscious appropriation of advertising conventions includes stylized full-colour compositions featuring actors to represent “everyday” people and the inclusion of “testimonial” first-person texts.30

conflation of the iterative “I am” with the “I should be” (prescriptive) drawn from the rhetoric of persuasion. In terms of speech act theory, the opposition is between an iterative *illocutionary* statement juxtaposed with an affective perlocutionary utterance. The date of the scene in which the photo narrative’s events take place is announced at the top centre of the composition as “1953”, but the date of the magazine positioned on the coffee table, Canada’s national news magazine *Maclean’s*, reads “1959”. The discrepancy is not merely in the factual difference of date, but in the symbolic difference in “filter”. While “real” events in the history of the union are taking place enacted through the gestures of the actors, another mass-distributed history appears to be being written through the portrayal of union/management relations in the media. Both the magazine and the television broadcast are powerful media “containers” dependent on advertising revenue from corporate sponsors. In this way, both are predisposed to be, and proved to be in actual practice, biased in favour of the corporate perspective, or at the very least, toward the maintenance of social stability through promulgation of the status quo. The oral history interviews make numerous references to ways in which the press attempted to smear initiatives by trying to stage violent fights to counter picket line conduct: “There was a reporter came in from the (Toronto) *Telegram* and he offered 5 bucks a piece if they’s (sic) put on a scuffle so he could get some pictures.”\(^{31}\) Other incidents included red-baiting during the McCarthy hysteria of the 1950s to make communism synonymous with the labour movement in the public mind.

Another troubling reference to the corporate bias of media is constructed by the artists in their selection of the image that appears on the television screen. The image depicts reporter Foster Hewitt with hockey player Ted Lindsay wearing his Chicago Blackhawks uniform. Lindsay was traded to that team from his home team, the Detroit Redwings, in the mid-1950s as punishment for his attempts to unionize the Detroit team.\(^{32}\) (The point is not lost in the composition that Detroit was (and is) the head office of the international UAW union.) Finally, iconic messages throughout the *Oshawa* project make reference to corporate interests that have seeped into the home through consumer activity, such as the Plymouth calendar, T. Eaton’s catalogue, and numerous advertisements for cars. The latter case is ironic as the oral history interviews make reference to

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31 Condé and Beveridge quoted in “So what’s so important about culture?” *Our Times* (March 1984): 12-13.

32 I am indebted to my former colleague in the Photography Collection at the National Archives of Canada, Peter Robertson, older and wider with first-hand experience of the 1950s.
the fact that most of the UAW workers in the car assembly plant could not in fact afford to own a car. Close examination of the chocolate box suggests it is produced by Ganong’s, then Canada’s leading commercial chocolatier, a famous non-unionized enterprise which prided itself on its paternal care for its workers.

Herein lies an important component of the photo narratives of Condé and Beveridge: by presenting a chronicle of Local 222’s history they are in fact producing an anti-history, an oppositional narrative to counter the mass-diffused and unsympathetic versions that portrayed the bitter strikes of earlier time periods. In their ongoing practice with the labour movement, they encourage union members, who are well aware of being surveilled by management and the press, to photograph and document back events on the picket line and other sites of union/management conflict as a refutation of corporate-driven media portrayals.

The third reading from the Oshawa series is based on Frames 4 and 5 from the fourth series 1970s. This series is presented through the narratorial voice of women who struggle to break out of gender-specific jobs and take higher paying non-traditional jobs in the plant, which create conflict not only with management but also their union brothers.

The 1960’s and 1970’s were decades of growth for the auto industry and of relative stability for union members. The workforce at General Motors in Oshawa grew from 8,000 in the late 1950’s to 16,000 by the late ‘70’s. There were a series of tightly run, well-organized strikes in 1964, ‘67, and ‘70, through which the Union achieved major wage gains and benefit packages.

The political divisions which had characterized the local’s politics during the early years disappeared, and while there were still antagonisms, these centered on specific bargaining issues. A new caucus, the Autoworkers, was formed in 1964, but the Democratic Right Wing remained in power under a single president until 1977. The local, however, became increasingly involved in social service projects – senior citizen housing, co-ops, drug and alcohol programs – and put its full weight behind the New Democratic Party politically.

In 1964 a Women’s Committee was formed. Through the ‘60s, they fought for the right of women to plant-wide seniority, which would allow them into non-traditional areas of work. It wasn’t until 1970, however, when the Canadian Government passed equal opportunity legislation that, with the exception of World War II, women began to take jobs throughout the plant for the first time.

An important development during this time period was the formation by General Motors of a labour relations department. This saw both the approach at a more ‘personalized’ approach by management to the workers, and the introductions of production incentives – the use of a ‘pride’ car, small prizes, etc. – for ‘zero’ defects in the finished product.

The images in this series are presented through one of two possible frames: through the frame of a bureau mirror (home) or through the lateral view of a car door (plant). These contrasted environments, as we have seen in earlier examples, are replete with iconic references. The allegorical figure of the Woman Worker is positioned in her home environment. [fig. 5-5] The bedside alarm clock reads 1:08 a.m., and the woman is positioned with her hands on the collar of her Local 222 bowling league jacket as she checks her reflection in the fictional mirror: it is unclear if she is returning from a union function or about to leave for a shift. Her partner lies in bed and avoids her gaze, watching television which in this frame broadcasts a commercial pitching

cars for women (the slogan reads “To Each her Own”) and reading a newspaper with the headline “Two Incomes Needed to Support Average Family.” In the immediate foreground positioned on the bureau’s top is the blurred motion of a hand, one of several gestures in this series, such as balled up fists, connoting frustration. The text positions the conundrum:

You walk into the plant and there would be a hundred guys just gaping. You feel like if you pick up something, you’re going to drop it. Somebody’s always watching you. You can’t get over it, no matter how long you’re there.

This is one of the most developed insertions of the artists as extra-narratorial interpreters who “envision” the total speech environment of the quote cited above. They stage the female worker “caught” between the apathy of her husband at home (behind her), and her apparent reflection in a mirror, according to the logic of the space. However, according to the logic of the image, it is we who are the beholders, and in this way it is we who are now identified with the “hundred guys just gaping”. In a bound volume,” Sekula writes in Class Works, “every recto has its verso.” The pictorial and semantic implications of this conflation of actual and reflective space can be related back to Manet’s late work A Bar at the Folies-Bergère (1881–1882), also portraying a sexualized work environment. The barmaid, Suzon, stands at the counter and seems to address our gaze, but in following the logic of the reflective space of the mirror behind the counter, we (the beholders) seem to occupy the space/body of the male patron who ostensibly orders a drink, and beyond that, is the dominant figure who controls a possible sexual liaison.34 In actuality, the barmaid faces

34 There has been much discussion about “artificial space”, the “spectral domain of the mirror”, the “discontinuities between actual and reflective realms”, and so on. See “The Spatial Ambiguity of Manet’s A Bar at the Folies-Bergère,” adapted from Malcolm Park’s doctoral dissertation Ambiguity, and the Engagement of Spatial Illusion Within the Surface of Manet’s Paintings (University of New South Wales, 2001).

The conflation of real space/artificial space is also, of course, a key strategy practiced by many artists, from Velasquez’ Las Meninas (1656) to Jeff Wall’s Picture for Women (1979). The interpretive exhibition label for the latter ties the work back to Folies-Bergère:

In Manet’s painting, a barmaid gazes out of frame, observed by a shadowy male figure. The whole scene appears to be reflected in the mirror behind the bar, creating a complex web of viewpoints. Wall borrows the internal structure of the painting, and motifs such as the light bulbs that give it spatial depth. The figures are similarly reflected in a mirror, and the woman has the absorbed gaze and posture of Manet’s barmaid, while the man is the artist himself. Though issues of the male gaze, particularly the power relationship between male artist and female model, and the viewer’s role as onlooker, are implicit in Manet’s painting, Wall updates the theme by positioning the camera at the centre of the work, so that it captures the act of making the image (the scene reflected in the mirror) and, at the same time, looks straight out at us.

directly across the bar, but seen in the mirror’s reflection appears to be facing and interacting in some way with the gentleman. As T.J. Clark has claimed, “we must be where he is. But we cannot be.” \[35\]

The real threats presented in this image, visually and textually (Somebody’s always watching you) are the woman’s male peers: her partner who ignores her, and her coworkers who harass her and undermine her confidence: “You feel like you’re going to drop it.” The interplay between literal and semantic space is again activated in a series of six images entitled “Linda”, from the project Standing Up (1980—1981). [figs. 5-6 and 5-7] The introductory first-person narrative text presents Linda as a stock-handler in a warehouse (her first full-time job) who has participated as a union member in a nearly year-long strike. \[36\]

In her statement, she references: escaping the eye of management during her shift by smoking in the bathroom during breaks; friction with her husband pertaining to her membership in the union; her newfound political voice; and recollections of violent incidents during the strike, as well as her evaluation of the media’s biased portrayal. As a constructed representation by Condé and Beveridge, the scenes are set in the warehouse washroom where an actor in the role of Linda is taking a smoke break; in “her” space we see a discarded business magazine presumably with a manager in a suit on the cover; behind her head a message from management “THIS IS YOUR BUILDING KEEP IT CLEAN”; and to her left, between the sinks, a workers’ graffiti scrawled on the wall that reads “TAKE THIS JOB AND SHOVE IT”. \[37\] In this illusionistic portion of the pictorial space (rendered in colour), then, the figure of the actor/Linda is positioned between management and union positions.

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Linda Hutcheon discusses Picture for Women as an ironic reconstruction of Manet’s work, noting that the irony can only work if the beholder knows the historical antecedent in As Canada As … possible… under the circumstances (Toronto: ECW Press and York University Press, 1990), 26.


\[36\] The Standing Up series was published as First Contract: Women and the Fight to Unionize, a book created with the help of the United Steelworkers.

\[37\] It is worth noting that this use of all caps to indicate emphasis pre-dates its later use as shouting in social media.
Another scene takes place in the “artificial” (black-and-white) space of the mirror, which actually serves as a window into a scene from Linda’s personal life. In this space, the bathroom of her own home, a subdued Linda brings in freshly laundered towels while her husband studies his face in the mirror during a shave. Like the Manet work discussed above, in the logic of the mirror’s spatial relations, we are positioned to the right edge of the composition, with “our right hand” in a portion of the “real” space of this second view, holding a razor. The juxtaposition of the
two spatial realms operates to superimpose the figure of Linda over her husband’s implied figure (and our presumed identity) at the right. As the introductory text narrative states, there is strife in Linda’s marriage, as her husband considers her “changed” as a result of her union activism, and becoming “mouthy”. The image presents both Lindas as pensive and worried, and silent. I read the image as also presenting the potential for violence on both sides of the looking glass: corporate harassment on one side; domestic violence on the other. Other images in the project are of street scenes and picket lines; through car windows and rear-view mirrors are glimpsed scenes of fright and action. However, over the six-image sequence of Linda, the graffiti text on the wall is slowly altered to become TAKE THIS JOB COMPANY AND SHOVE UNIONIZE IT, with a second hand affirmatively writing “right on!” beneath the text.

Returning to the *Oshawa* series, one of the other images reverses the position of home and factory. [fig. 5-8] Now the scene represented in the mirror space is the assembly line:

The Company uses psychology; give us little prizes if you haven’t had a defect. But they don’t really give a damn who the hell you are. If you missed a screw-nail, they’re right down you. It’s just like you’re still a kid.

In this scene, the woman responds to conflict on two fronts. First, a supervisor points out mistakes in her work, reinforced by the text “If you missed a screw-nail, they’re right down on you.” The second attack comes from the woman’s coworkers: one retreats in the background behind a car door; the other smirks in smug satisfaction. Behind the woman is yet another site of conflict, which the recorded oral history interviews reveal as image warfare in which women contest the display of pin-up photographs of women on the assembly line with corresponding images of nude men. The woman’s other domain (home) is referenced by objects on the bureau surface: dried flowers, interrupted embroidery, cosmetics, a shopping list. (In other frames in this series, the shopping list is exchanged for a printed announcement for the election of the women’s committee. Here the home is not a refuge but a source of conflict as the woman endeavours to maintain competence in the arena of homemaking and sexual relations.)

3. Constructing the Intertextual Voice

Through a close reading of specific frames, I have explored in the discussion above how the union and artists collaborated to construct a narrative and series of images for the *Oshawa* project. The scenes present various fabula (past and present moments) and environments (home, factory, picket line). There are a number of voices in play and it is useful to identify these specifically and showed how they are linked. This section then explores how an *intertextual* voice is constructed, a network of narratival voices: individual union member, collective union voice, the utterance of inserted props and mass-media images, and the artists as co-authors. Each voice is knitted into the resulting visual frame, and sequence of frames, and this intersection in itself alludes to montage practice as a collage of fragments. As Graham Allen notes, the act of reading plunges us into a network of encoded relations such that the text *becomes* the intertext.38

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The *Oshawa* series, arranged as four chronological sections, deploys its declarative utterance dialectically between the *individual* testimonials and the *collective* force of their statements. The first set of voices is derived from individual oral history interviews with union members conducted by Condé and Beveridge: individual voices, although unnamed, appear as the first-person utterances of workers focalized through typeset texts at the lower margin of each frame. Christine McLaughlin observes that oral history contains an inherent criticality as method to collect, preserve and analyze challenges to the “official” narrative: “Resistance is a paramount theme in working-class history in Oshawa; many oral narratives stress events where working people empowered themselves by direct action, and through challenges to corporate, government and legal authority.”

By studying the transcripts of recorded interviews upon which the narrative is based, it is clear that Condé and Beveridge have taken liberties as editors in how they “quote” from their interviews with union members. As Condé has noted: “If you work with a union, you have a structure. Through that, in our practice, we can go in and meet with working people. We can get their stories, come back, show them our work, get their critique, make changes. It’s a back and forth – that’s the important part.”

First, while specific statements from the photo project are located in the interviews, they are rarely contiguous or even derived from the same informant. Secondly, the statements are edited to produce a generic narrative voice: each individual’s grammatical mistakes (most informants had not had the opportunity to undertake or complete high school education) and particular dialectic are minimized in favour of producing a consistent narratorial voice. The originating performative acts—the recorded utterances of the originating speakers, including the cadences, hesitations, accents, expressions of anguish or pride—is thus excised and replaced with a translation that visually presents representative moments. The same strategy is produced by the visual substitution of the actual informant with an enactor, allowing a single persona or allegorical figure to embody

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39 Christine McLaughlin, “Producing Memory: Public History and Resistance in a Canadian Auto Town,” *Oral History Forum d’histoire orale* 33 (2013), 1. McLaughlin mentions the Oshawa series by Condé and Beveridge as a project of “staged photographs [combined with] workers’ oral histories” in a footnote, but interestingly, does not explore the potential of this form of oral history within her main discussion about worker resistance.

the statements of various union informants without invoking confusion on the part of the viewer as to the source of the statement.

The collective voice of the union is formed as a summary by the artists in the textual panel that introduces each section. In this way, the Oshawa project is evidentiary as a narrative, expanding the arena of public discourse, amplifying the strike/bargaining activity between union and management, to speak to society at large about the union perspective about these things. In this way, the oral history recordings along with the folio of images attract interest as permanent memory-keeping exercises and thus are historically significant and of interest to archival collections. Condé and Beveridge create a matrix, which one reads along a horizontal axis consisting of a conflation of texts that compose each single image/statement across a narrative, and along a vertical axis, telescoping the narrative of each of the chronological series to link them as a metanarrative of four decades of union history.

Additional, non-union voices (for instance, public opinion, media reporting and management perspectives) are inserted into the visual composition as signs, newspaper and magazine covers, and graffiti. In this way, Condé and Beveridge conflate at once a historical narrative viewed in the spectators’ present time, and a contemporary narrative linked to the recollections of union narrators as they recalled them. By doing so, historical actuality is “performed” through flagrant artifice visual/verbal ironic juxtapositions, staged tableaux, collage, and citation of iconic historical images such as the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike (one of the most widespread and influential union actions in Canada’s history). In her discussion of Condé and Beveridge’s images, Linda Hutcheon notes that by mixing “high” art, and popular and commercial visual codes in their complex tableaux, they construct a clearly theatrical artifice invoking Brechtian distanciation to subvert a mis/reading of a naturalized historical actuality. Graham Allen

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41 As will be discussed in depth below, the complete archive of the project was acquired in 1986 and 1987 by the National Archives of Canada (now Library and Archives Canada), and includes recorded interviews with past and present workers at General Motors of Canada in Oshawa, Ontario who are associated with Local 222, United Automobile Workers. The collection [LAC R9079-0-3-E] takes the form of 71 photographic prints comprising the series Oshawa, a history of Local 222 and an illustrated guide with the background of the project and the sequence of the images, as well as 40 audio recordings with transcripts.

Although not discussed here, the collection also includes two photo sequences relating to women and labour, one sequence entitled A Work in Progress pertaining to the changing material and ideological roles of women in the twentieth century (produced in 1980), the other sequence entitled Making Up the Difference pertaining to females members of Local 222, United Autoworkers, Oshawa, Ontario (produced in 1983).

Condé and Beveridge themselves act as narrators of the stories of others. In this way, they reference narratorial modes familiar to Walter Benjamin (the role of storyteller as truth teller), Bertolt Brecht (as constructor) and Erwin Piscator (reworking micronarratives).\footnote{See Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov,” \textit{Illuminations}, edited by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969, 83-110. Brecht also advocated the construction of narrative in his oft-cited quote “a photograph of the Krupp works or AEG yields almost nothing about these institutions ... therefore, something has actively to be constructed, something artificial set up.” (Quoted by Benjamin, “Little History of Photography,” \textit{Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934}, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 526.} Allan Sekula directly links Condé and Beveridge with Piscator not only in the theatre-based use of actors and sets as the basis for their photomontage works, but in the very construction of the narrative itself, as Piscator also interrogated the whole notion of a single imaginative creator by basing theatrical presentations on the recorded speech and documentation of originating narrators, and putting the author/artist in the position of an organizer of given material.\footnote{Allan Sekula, “…the Red Guards come and go, Talking of Michelangelo,” \textit{Condé and Beveridge: Class Works}, edited by Bruce Barber (Halifax, NS: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2008), 45-50.} Through the \textit{Standing Up} series, in the hands of the artists the operations of the declarative “I am” of the workers are portrayed in a way that is constructed through the recombination of staged images. The pictorial logic of the series shows the context and implications of labour relations at home and at the warehouse; the performative staging offers realizes the “obvious construct” encouraged by Brecht, a work that is at once fictional and evidentiary. In this way, Condé and Beveridge are overtly working in a Marxian mode, as in their earlier drawing work \textit{It’s Still Privileged Art} (1975); their work is not only a translation of the voices of workers, but also working in the Brechtian mode as a didactic intervention, as Adorno describes, “to translate the true hideousness of society in theatrical appearance by dragging it straight out of its camouflage.”\footnote{Adorno, “Commitment,” in \textit{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]), 183.} For Adorno, criticism of Brecht cannot overlook the fact that he does not fulfill the norm he set himself, as if it were a means to salvation:
“The process of aesthetic reduction that he pursues for the sake of political truth, in fact gets in its way. For this truth involves innumerable mediations, which Brecht disdains.”

This returns us again to Rancière, who shares Adorno’s view of so-called “committed art”: it is not the office of act to spotlight alternatives, but to resist by its form alone the course of the world.

This exploration of the declarative voice in the Oshawa project as a kind of internodal rhizome now turns from an analysis of the construction of this body of work to a consideration of its cross-modal performativity, in the fluidity of stages through which the work is encountered. As Searle contends, in his support of Austin’s concept of the total speech environment, a theory of language is a theory of action, and the site of the declaration performs the utterance before an audience as the final level of text. The performative modalities chosen by Condé and Beveridge comprise the labour hall, the national art collection, the national archival collection, and the collective forms a metaframe for reading the work. This aggregate metaframe where photomontage acts of declaration are performed in itself invites comparison with strategies explored by British artists Lorraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, and American artist Barbara Kruger, in contemporaneous projects.

4. Metaframes: Sites of the Declarative

Condé and Beveridge have staged their performative works in both traditional and non-traditional venues. Their approach to producing work is not only collaborative in the sense of working together as co-artists, but also collaborative as a lengthy interaction with the people who become the subjects of their project, such as unionized workers. In fact, the point of departure is often an organized labour chapter as the sponsor of the project commissioning not only a visual speech act outcome, but also document an oral history comprising individual and collective narratives as a permanent record. The status of the creators as artists entitles the work to circulate also as cultural commodity and accrue value to the status of the artists in the canon of contemporary art.

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46 Ibid.
The presentation of the resulting body of work as directed by the artists is activated over time across several sites, each with its own encoded operations. This cross-modality, or variable *emplacement* (reception in another context), carries with it a number of implications pertaining to conditions of staging, expectations and behaviour of audience, physical and intellectual ownership of the work, and the decisions about its ultimate permanent disposition. As Su Braden aptly demands, who controls the photograph?

Is it the Photographer, or the subject, or the manufacturer of the camera or film? Or is it the publisher and distributor […] It makes more sense if we ask, “Who *could* control the photograph?”

The Community

The labour centre or union hall is usually the first point of reception for the photo narratives of Condé and Beveridge. Here, the declarative utterance performed by the source voices of the declaration, namely the workers interviewed by Condé and Beveridge, performs as a complex orchestration of the original oral history statements. The display of the photo narratives provides a first opportunity for members of the union to see how their participation in the collaborative process has been transformed into an allegorical narrative. The labour union hall as site of display also meets the objectives of the artists to break away from the insularity and elitism of the art world establishments in favour of building a bridge between communities, that of industrial workers and cultural workers.

Condé and Beveridge seek to blur the traditional social division between manual workers and artists by removing the museum atmosphere of privilege and intellectualism in viewing the works. In this sense, their aims are most closely Marxist in attempting to make an art by and for the people. In an exhibition catalogue produced for a showing of Condé and Beveridge’s work by the Art Gallery of Ontario, curator Barbara Fischer praises their choice of sites:

Instead of showing their works only in the context of the gallery or museum, the artists have developed a forum for their work in the context of community spaces and union meeting halls, in collaboration with those whom they represent.

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Fischer’s words connote an unresolved tension, pointed to in the words “instead” and “only”, which clearly privileges the more traditional museum site. The statement also makes clear that while the artists may forge a bridge between communities in the making of the work, they do not necessarily do so in the subsequent showing of the work. It is unlikely that the artists succeeded in convincing Toronto’s cultured gallerygoers to trek out to the union meeting hall in Oshawa, or that union members attended the sophisticated opening party hosted by the upscale downtown Toronto art institution. It is perhaps most useful to view that the transparent aggregation of multiple display contexts can be viewed in itself as a performative utterance by the artists, declaring the mutable status of the image object as a commodity. Likewise, as in the cases of many works discussed in preceding chapters, the multiple forms of visual communication referenced in each frame themselves point to and announce modes of image (re)production.

In the context of the union meeting hall, the force of the declarative utterance is powerful. The “I am” statement is transformed from a discourse among peers, or the debate between union and management, to a comprehensive and dramatic presentation. The physical presentation of the installation and its accessibility to all members offers a new move in the language game, for the union members to see/hear their own voice presented in a legitimized, even prestigious, format. Working with “real” artists also validates workers and provides a certain cachet that results in a production that is legitimately authored by the union itself.51

Like their counterparts and close colleagues Condé and Beveridge, British community-based photomontagists Lorraine Leeson and Peter Dunn work in several East London activist projects in a collaborative structure and synthesize the narratives that are collected. They discuss rough drafts and approaches with their collective members.

Passing the Buck [Games for Multinational Drug Companies] is one of a series of photomontage posters produced by Leeson and Dunn in collaboration with the East London Health Group between 1978—1980. [fig. 5-9] These were widely distributed within the health sector, which was politicized in the wake of severe national funding cuts that affected in hospital closures, mental health programs and health services to women in particular. Like the work of Hans Haacke,

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51 Beyond launch events in union settings, the projects of Condé and Beveridge have become permanent installations and resources. The CAW Family Education Centre in Port Elgin, Ontario is one of the finest union education centres in the world.
the work consists of a central image (in this case, a complex photomontage) with a didactic text below the image. The textual component is organized as three columns of bullet lists under the headings: *The Transfer Price Game, The Third World Game* and *The Control Game*. A besuited line-up of “capitalists” passes banknotes beside a castle constructed of brightly coloured pills, while the detailed text explains and expands the problematic between multinational “Big Pharma” capital and the pressure on doctors to prescribe drugs to patients.

[fig. 5-9] Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, *Passing the Buck*, 1978—1980
The work of Lesson and Dunn, and for that matter that of Condé and Beveridge, is overtly referential to the photomontage practice of historical avant-garde through both the approach to pictorial composition and the reference to Marxian content. As example is readily found in one of Heartfield’s most reproduced images, the October 16, 1932 AIZ cover with the text Der Sinn des Hitlergrusses: Kleiner Mann bittet un grosse Gaben. Motto: Millionen Stehen Hinter Mir! [The Meaning of the Hitler Salute: Little Man asks for big Gifts. Motto: Millions Stand Behind Me!] [fig. 5-11] Heartfield combines this verbal reference ostensibly to the millions of citizen supporters to the ubiquitous gesture of Hitler before his audiences, transforming the motto from an amorphous figure of speech to a literalized picture of big business. Hitler is recognizable by

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physiognomy, costume and gesture; unlike the anonymous backer, the body of Hitler is the “face” and “voice” of corporate interests. As Hitler’s arm raises and his hand is poised toward his characteristic salute, a stage gesture intended to thrill and terrify his followers, Heartfield pauses this moment with the open hand above his head, and transforms the performance of spectacle into a performance of a deceit, converting Hitler’s authoritative declaration to hidden corporate interests.\footnote{For an extended structural analysis of the pictorial space and symbolism of this work, see Eckhard Siepmann’s essay “Heartfield’s Millions Montage: (attempt at) a Structural Analysis,” \textit{Photography/ Politics: Two}, edited by Patricia Holland, Jo Spence and Simon Watney and translated by Sylvia Gohl (London: Comedia/Photography Workshop, 1986), 38-50.} The financial backer is represented in disproportionately larger scale in comparison to the diminutive Hitler and this discrepancy of size is reinforced by the subtitle “Little man asks for big Gifts”. In addition to the scale of a fairy tale giant, the financial backer, although faceless, is represented as the source of wealth through evident girth and a double chin, the prominent display of a diamond ring and suit and, last but not least, in his gesture of proffering the banknotes to Hitler’s backward reaching salute.

Like the contemporaneous collaborative photomontage projects of Condé and Beveridge, Leeson and Dunn’s work endeavours to bring the declarative “I am” of a marginalized voice into public discourse to contest the corporate voice, and to make space for visual communication that is not linked to advertising and consumption.

We began working with trade unions and activist groups in 1977 in the belief that cultural production has a strategic role in social change. But the question of how it may act as a progressive or reactionary force is not simple or clear-cut; ‘good intentions’ may be misdirected, and contradictions are endemic.\footnote{Leeson and Dunn, “The Changing Picture of Docklands,” \textit{Cultures in Contention}, edited by Douglas Kahn & Diane Neumaier (Seattle, WA: Real Comet Press, 1986), 16.}

This is distinct from worker-camera initiatives of the 1930s, as Leeson and Dunn do not facilitate the creation of images by members of the community but use their design skills to shape a visual image for the narrative voice. As they later recalled: “The role of each member was to share their specialist knowledge – the health representatives did not attempt to make aesthetic judgements, and we, as artist did not assume expertise in the issues [...] it completely contradicted the ‘design by committee’ criticism often directed at collectively produced artwork of the time.”\footnote{Introductory text for the exhibition of Leeson and Dunn’s work on health issues in the 1970s, \textit{The Things that Make You Sick}, eSpace (formerly the Art of Change) exhibition (London: ICA 2017).}
The construction of the declarative “I am” is extensively developed in Leeson and Dunn’s project *The Changing Picture of Docklands*—which unfolded over a seven-year period (1981—1988) and presented, among other tangibles, city billboards on six sites around London’s Docklands district as building development and gentrification threatened the affordable housing for local residents—from the inception of the gentrification project *What’s Going on Behind our Backs?* and *The Big Money is Moving In*, and then to community resistance as *Shattering Developer’s Illusions* and *Our Future in Docklands*. As the artists state: “The area has a history of social deprivation and militant struggle, not only by the dockworkers but also by the communities surrounding the docks; the local women have their own tradition of activism, and it was here that the early suffragette movement enlisted most of its working-class support.” The process began with workshops around these and other issues through close collaboration with local tenants and action groups, sympathetic planners, and economists. The resulting representation, in works such as *The Big Money Is Moving In*, features photomontage technique paired with first-person text. [fig. 5-12]

Recalling Heartfield’s *Millions* image, the use of disjunctive scale signals the inequity between the interests of the developers and the vulnerability of the working-class community. Large towers made from stacked coins dwarf the public housing building below; gigantic stacks of bills “flow” onto the site like heavy construction equipment; new structures of tower blocks, members of the community try to hold back a stack of coins falling onto them, some pushed over the edge into a landfill (Docklands is not about land, it is about people). The large red subtitle exhorts: DON’T LET IT PUSH OUT LOCAL PEOPLE. As I have shown in discussing Condé and Beveridge, as well as work of Hans Haacke and Allan Sekula, the proposition created by the assembly of image fragments is supplemented by evidentiary text. Here, the fine print text reads:

*Massive luxury riverside development – public housing cut to nil/ Large enterprises moving in (bringing their own workforce/ get incentives while small local firms are squeezed out – few new jobs will be created.*

http://cspace.org.uk/category/archive/east-london-health-project/


[fig. 5-12] Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, *The Big Money is Moving In*, from *The Changing Picture of Docklands* project, 1981—1988

[fig. 5-13] Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, billboard from *The Changing Picture of Docklands* project, 1981—1988
The diffusion of images across multiple distribution streams was intended to foster “Community Fightback” resistance and cohesion: pamphlets, postcards, posters, billboards and demonstrations were strategically deployed across the duration of the campaign, in addition to the creation of a documentary archive of oral history recordings and photographs of demonstrations and changes to the environment.  

The choice of billboard spaces as the site for the “I am” declaration is interesting as a privately controlled space in the public sphere. The everydayness and accessibility of billboards had immediate advantages: As Leeson and Dunn have stated, “our billboards are located where people are likely to congregate regularly; near where they live, where they will be on foot and are able to spend more time looking at images.”  

Presented in a neighbourhood about to undergo gentrification, and at a massive scale of 3.6 high by 5.5m wide, the performative utterance of these images was designed to encourage emotional affect of collective resistance and foster empowerment for generally powerless residents.

The choice of billboard as performative stage was also identified as an effective site for resistance because it is associated with dominant capitalist representation. Condé and Beveridge also note the potential for co-opting commercial space, in public view, but privately controlled: “Using public space has always been one of our concerns, because if you leave the space empty someone else will fill it, probably with something less critical.”

The potential for uses of space in our “everyday” world by artists for visual acts is attractive, and a number of artists are specifically associated with the interruption of media in public spaces using diverse strategies, and with exploiting the relationship between what Michael Auping calls “the graphic and the grammatical.” For instance, Jenny Holzer’s signature medium is the LED (light emitting diode) sign, like those used in supermarkets, airports.

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58 This archival material is now housed in the Docklands Museum, with photomural artwork. See Leeson and Dunn website for their Art of Change initiative. http://www.arte-ofchange.com/content/docklands-community-poster-project-1981-8


carousels] and banks for information or advertisements. [fig. 5-14] Her caustic aphorisms as first appear to be words of wisdom or the wise words of a proverb, but actually undermine the authority of the speaking voice, and provoke dissonance and anxiety. Her messages do not exhort us to buy, but to think, and have appeared on posters, T-shirts, tractor hats, stickers, metal plaques, monumental electronic signs, magazines, park benches, sarcophagi, billboards, television.63

Martha Rosler, whose photomontage-based work was discussed earlier in Chapter 2, used letter dot text on a Jumbotron screen for her installation in her 1989 project Housing is a Human Right (1989). [fig. 5-15] The screen was installed on New York’s Flatiron Building, originally called the Fuller Building, a triangular 22-storey steel-framed landmarked skyscraper deeply associated with iconic photographs by Alfred Stieglitz and Paul Strand. A third example is the outdoor installation of montages by Barbara Kruger. [fig. 5-16] She has displayed her montaged exhortations in multiple “public sphere” spaces such as parks, train stations, bus stops, newspapers and magazines (and like Jenny Holzer, has licenced her work for reproduction on merchandise).64 Her rhetorical strategy is the inverse of the “I am” declarations of Condé and Beveridge, and of Leeson and Dunn: her frequent use of the imperative (Don’t Be A Jerk; Why Are You Here?) and use of pronouns (Your Gaze Hits The Side Of My Face; Your Comfort Is My Silence) constitutes a linguistic destabilization of the (gendered) voice and violence of authority, calling attention to acts of exclusion, rather than inclusion.

The advent of billboards for commercial advertisement is itself concomitant with the rise of highways and congested urban freeways, directed toward motorists rather than street-level pedestrians.65 However, in the three examples of public address modalities cited above, the work forms a “street talk” relationship with the audience, and the presence of language acts as a kind of

63 And also merchandize to support cultural institutions, such as a coveted pencil set I acquired from MOMA years ago.


intrusion into coded spaces in the guise of text as a machine-generated lettering for mass audience dissemination. (The use of graffiti as a handmade, gestural insertion of language into the street will be discussed in the chapter ahead.)

The collaborative nature of the projects undertaken by Leeson and Dunn, and Condé and Beveridge, as they have recounted, involves an interplay of skills between artists and expert informants. In the union and community space examples discussed above, the emphasis of “I am” declaration is the voice of this expert information, namely the collaborating union workers or Docklands residents, as the speaking voice. What are the implications of the situatedness of these projects in designated art spaces, where the emphasis is on the creative role of the maker, rather than the declarative voice of the speaking subject?

Art Spaces

As artists, Condé and Beveridge also consider art spaces as performative stages, such as artist-run spaces, museums and special exhibitions. Once shown before the union audience, Condé and Beveridge’s works are usually presented by a number of institutions in the bona fide art community, and as projects are typically funded by art councils, rather than labour organizations per se, this seems logical.66 Condé and Beveridge have stated that they do not participate in

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66 Tuer, “Is it Still Privileged Art?” 204.
showings with private galleries, which are spaces designed to present works of art “at the point of sale” in marketing parlance. They do show their works in non-commercial spaces, such as artist-run galleries like Gallery 44 in Toronto and Dazibao in Montreal, and have participated in photography festivals and international exhibitions, for instance, representing Canada in the 1990 Rotterdam Biennale, and showings in several *Mois de la Photo* festivals in Montreal. They also permit sale of their works as complete portfolios for permanent preservation (the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the (former) Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography\(^67\), are two examples) and, in this way, recall the practice of collaborative artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude, who initiate projects within a community construct and post-installation and realize revenue from the subsequent sale of documentation. Condé and Beveridge are also founding members of the Labour, Arts and Media Working Group (LAMWG), sponsor of the Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts, held annually in Toronto since 1986.\(^68\) Finally, it should be mentioned that after more than five decades of production, Condé and Beveridge are considered senior figures in Canada’s visual art community, and as such have been featured in many surveys of contemporary Canadian photography and the focus of retrospective exhibitions and documentary film.\(^69\)

The condensed résumé given above is significant because it is important to note that there is a fluidity of the role of the artists as they traverse across performative venues. They move from their originating roles as *facilitators* within a larger multisectoral collaboration facilitating the construction of the declarative voice of their union worker partners, to that of artists, a category of sacralized creators working within the operations of a very different, and arguably, more exclusive, language game. Hutcheon reverses the sequence of actual venues as a way of underscoring the political value in addition to the aesthetic value of Condé and Beveridge’s work:

\(^67\) The CMCP closed its doors in 2009, when its program was integrated into the photography program of the National Gallery of Canada.

\(^68\) Tuer, “Is it Still Privileged Art?” 207.

“What is also important is that this series has been shown not only in museums (it has been purchased by the Art Gallery of Ontario), but also in union halls, community centres, libraries – in other words, in public sites that signal its social and political intent.”

Condé and Beveridge maintain that although one is limited to working within dominant institutions, they hope to “display” the contradictions the institutions embody. They state:

It does not mean that those institutions are unchangeable. In fact, we would argue that there is not real choice about working within or outside a given institution. The choice is working for or against it and it is this that determines the nature of one’s work.

As part of their work with art institutions, Condé and Beveridge make installation decisions that are designed to subvert the sacralization of the work, such as hanging the frames at staggered, non-uniform heights on the wall, or avoiding the use of protective and privileging picture frames. Encountered in museum, with the artists as the designated authors, the declarative “I am” statement of the Oshawa project can succeed by using highly artificial means to convey historical actuality, the technique of denaturalization advocated by Brecht and others in theatrical performance, and as I have argued in my discussion of the contemplative and Hans Haacke’s Voici Alcan. I would add here that twin roles of Condé and Beveridge’s authorship, first as facilitator/partner staging the work for worker/community audiences, then as artist/author staging the work for cultural audiences, do not carry the same the perlocutionary effect. There is an implied ennobling effect in foregrounding the work as art qua Art, which brings to mind Allan Sekula’s essay “The Body and the Archive”, where he writes of three distinct judgement positions or “gazes” performed by audience in response to visual works: the familiar gaze, as in the emotional gaze in looking at a photograph of a beloved friend or family member; the “look up” when we view portraits of heroes and other members of society we perceive to be superior to ourselves; and the “look down” which we reserve for the pitying or repugnant gaze accorded to portraits of criminals, the poor, the starving, the insane, etc. So although the body of work may

70 Hutcheon, 119.

71 Condé and Beveridge, quoted in Fleming, 14.

72 Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” reprinted in the anthology The Contest of Meaning. Critical Histories of Photography, edited by Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989), 343-389. The most extreme example of this disjunction that I have personally witnessed is the installation of mammoth scale portraits of labourers in Richard Avedon’s Arbusian series In the American West at the Boston Institute of
be fixed across its multiple instances of display, the meaning of the encoded spaces exude in framing its reception is flexible.

The Archive

During an earlier time in my own academic work, I investigated ways in which multiple perspectives were—and more significantly, were not—preserved through institutional archival acquisition decisions and unacknowledged biases of individual archivists as gatekeepers. Alice Walker’s resonant statement about the plurality of truths seemed particularly to both art and archival records:

I believe that the truth about my subject only comes when all the sides of the story are put together, and all their different meanings mean one new one. Each writer writes the missing parts to the other writer’s story. And the whole story is what I am after.73

What is the “story” referred to by Alice Walker, and what is the responsibility of the archivist in locating it, in gathering it, in preserving it? Historically, archives have collected the “official” story through the acquisition of public records and specific fragments of the “unofficial” story in private collections. The resulting tendency has often been an inadvertently monolithic representation of complex concerns, a preservation of a “uni-verse” or a “mono-verse” rather than the preservation of a “multi-verse”.74 Archivists are, by definition, experts in the precise labelling, arranging and filing of documentation. Their daily endeavours revolve around putting order to chaos, and language to order. But the continuous multiplication of social identities and the representations of them require accommodation to existing acquisition policies to meet an array of emergent perspectives and avenues of research, and to welcome new constituencies as clients.

The perspective of “mainstream” records creators, that is, government departments, big business and publishers of newsmedia, is well enshrined within archival institutions and will continue to be. The records created by individuals and organizations that reflect so-called


“alternative” or “minority” positions, particularly cultural minorities, are less prominently within view: too often, archivists have actively neglected making contact with such records creators, and the resource pressures which bear on these generally underfunded sources make their records scant and sometimes vulnerable. The viewpoints of such records creators, often critical perspectives, are hardly “minor” or “marginal” at all, but form an integral part of the whole story, or in this case, history. Acquired by the National Archives of Canada in 1987, the Oshawa project was purchased directly from the artists, in addition to the original cassettes and transcripts of the oral history interviews. The series was collected for its evidentiary value because it was considered to hold national significance, and to tell a story that would otherwise not be located in the archival documentation of either the management or union side of the equation.75

Archival operations generally go on behind the scenes at the “back of house” and are not visible or accessibly to the researchers who consult records in the reference room. Usually, the Oshawa series is not on display but is maintained in storage until requested by a researcher. At the National Archives of Canada, the researcher has multiple options in determining how s/he will explore the Oshawa series: s/he may consult the printed photographs only, or in conjunction with recorded oral history interviews recorded by Condé and Beveridge, or with the typed transcripts of the interviews, or either oral history element alone without viewing the photomontage series. However, the preservation of the oral history archives for access by researchers is not only a selective repository of memory, the very act of acquisition also represents a declarative pronouncement. For Jacques Derrida, the archive still shelters within it the memory of its root, arkhe, which comprises two concepts: the commencement and the commandment. It is the place where official documents are filed and official interpretations are given – the intersection of both place and law, both a sheltering and a concealing.76 Historically, the inverse of preserving the “I

75 This was a key piece of my own work in the 1990s at the National Archives’ collection of historical and contemporary photographs, considering the spectrum of potential records creators/perspectives, and to proactively seek to secure permanent records from more vulnerable (i.e., non-corporate) sources. My team, located at the national level, also advocated a rethink of collection policies across all archival institutions, to break the Darwinian passive collecting attitude of archives generally and the subjective stance of individual archivists specifically: the archivist responsible for war records should also seek to safeguard records of peace activist groups, etc.; the records of nuclear power should include protest groups in addition to records from national research councils and manufacturers.

am” declaration has been to assert the historical “truth” of dominant entities within culture, such as government, police, corporations. The “fever” referred to by Derrida is the sickness, the delirium that assails a culture that depends on archives. In her essay “The Human Snapshot”, Ariella Azoulay reads the value of archives in a very different way. She positions Edward Steichen’s 1955 Family of Man exhibition in the context of the United Nations’ 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights: she reads the images featured in the exhibition not as descriptive statements with universal claims, but prescriptive statements pointing to the what-could-be, the claim to universal human rights.77 The emancipatory power is not located in what is in the photographs, but in the collective contents of the exhibition as a whole as a new genre: an act of declaration: “A declaration is a decree, an order, an edict, or a ruling [….] a verdict made public, a pronouncement, a promulgation [….] an assertion, an insistence, a claim, an affirmation, an assurance, a protestation, an objection, a complaint, a disapproval, a challenge, a dissent, an outcry, a remonstration.78 In this important way, the location of the both the recorded oral history and the constructed photographic series at Library and Archives Canada points not only to the past moments of the Oshawa union, but also looks forward to its role in the future protection of workers. This was a key piece of my own work in the 1990s at the National Archives’ collection of historical and contemporary photographs, considering the spectrum of potential records creators/perspectives, and to proactively seek to secure permanent records from more vulnerable (i.e., non-corporate) sources. My team, located at the national level, also advocated a rethink of collection policies across all archival institutions, to break the Darwinian passive collecting attitude of archives generally and the subjective stance of individual archivists specifically: the archivist responsible for war records should also seek to safeguard records of peace activist groups, etc.; the records of nuclear power should include protest groups in addition to records from national research councils and manufacturers.

I see three important distinctions in the archival encounter of the Oshawa project from its location in union space or art space settings. First, in the archive, the performance “stage” is not


78 Azoulay, “‘The Family of Man’” 37.
fixed and curator directed, as it would be in a museum or union hall environment, but is flexible and user directed. Archival materials are generally not displayed but requested for occasional inspection in a special collections reading room. With this “unstable” performance environment, the operations of the declarative are fluid: the presence of originating voice (workers) or interpretive focalizers of the story (Condé and Beveridge) are not firmly established; the order of consulting the constituent elements is determined by the researcher; the differentiation between the “true” or “authentic” (the voices of workers on tape or on printed page) and the “constructed” (posed images with text overlays created by the artists) is blurred. This change of both the environment of performance stage, and its fixity, affects our possible readings of the visual speech act. Instead of “reading” images arranged along a wall, the sequence and choice of “text” in our beholding of the total archival record is entirely dependent on our own selections.

Secondly, there is a significant shift from encoded cues associated with aesthetic display: as we are not in an art gallery or museum, we may not frame the works as fictitious and poetical, but as documentary in nature and, in being preserved archivally, significant as evidence documenting the history of a nation. Finally, it is important to note that there is the risk of an incomplete performance of declaration, in the Austinian sense of potential speech act failures: researchers who choose to consult only the recordings or transcripts of interviews with workers, and not the photo narrative series, will experience the narrative of the history and struggles of the union as “unfiltered”, prior to an interpretive intervention staged by the collaborative artists. Finally, it should be pointed out that as archival documents in permanent storage, the exploration of these photo narratives is entirely dependent on an active request made by an interested viewer, such as an academic researching the history of labour in Canada; there is no chance the works would be encountered “accidentally” or passively as one visits a labour hall or museum in the course of other business, or is exposed to the series “by force” in passing frames from the series reproduced on a giant billboard. The audience of this storytelling is extremely specific and, most likely, one already well aware of the political nature of this discourse. In the archival environment, the “I am” declaration is no less potent, but is significantly altered. While the “I am” is “legitimized” as an integral voice through the process of acquisition and preservation as part of the national narrative, I would argue its power of performance is less visible as the documents lie in a dormant stage awaiting active beholding in the reference rooms, and more fluid as specific kinds of readers make individual selections in the sequence and media of the total narrative.
This discussion has explored the strategy of the declarative through an examination of the manifold meanings and experiences associated with the pluralism (and instability) of narratorial voices and performative stages through the examination of one single body of work. I would argue that the declarative, as expressed in the installations and events discussed above works, operates in two ways. First, it works as an artist-mediated exhortation to the community directly addressing the affected residents of Docklands, an interpellative mode of address discussed in the previous chapter concerning work by Krzysztof Wodiczko. Secondly, the presence of citizen representation against systemic forces through an artist-mediated “I am” declaration makes visible and tangible vulnerable citizens who refuse to be silenced. Jo Spence, a contemporary colleague of Leeson and Dunn, is best known for her autobiographical photographic practice in reconstructing the self, a term she referred to as “putting myself in the picture”. Her lifetime body of work interrogates photographic conventions and her role as author/subject, and explores the potential of photo-based narrative as a kind of radical therapy:

Though the project offers a starting point from within photography, it allows us to move beyond the eternal textual analysis to ask questions about what is not being shown or said; what cannot be said (what is visually unsayable); and what is being displaced or rendered structurally absent. [...] that which in terms of class/power relations is rendered invisible, not named/discussed/shown and often actively suppressed.79

Once the artist is no longer the primary agent responsible for the artwork but must engage with others, the artwork becomes less a “work” than a process of meaning-making interactions. The innovator of 1960s “happenings”, Allan Kaprow asks, in his haunting recollection of a utopian and practical project called Project Other Ways, which brought arts tools to underserved school kids in strife-laden Berkeley (California): “Was the experiment a success? It depends on our criteria. Conventionally, in our culture, something is either art or it’s something else; either a poem or a telephone call to a relative.”80 He then discusses the inevitability of collaborative community projects eventually seeking to be, or reluctantly being, “recoded” to admit them to the framework of art discourse (as objects).81

The *declarative*, I have argued, asserts subjecthood and *makes space for* disenfranchised citizen segments. In the close reading of work by Condé and Beveridge, I have explored the mutability of display spaces in the “everyday” world, such as the street, the labour hall, and the archive, and how non-museal performative stages play a role in audience reception. In the next chapter, I will reverse this vector and look at the implications of bringing “the street” into the art space, and how the use of the imperative challenges museumgoers in their peregrinations through a cultural institution.