"YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSTITUTING THE MEANING OF THINGS:" Examining Jenny Holzer's Progressively Complex Textual Constructs

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“YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSTITUTING THE MEANING OF THINGS:”
EXAMINING JENNY HOLZER’S PROGRESSIVELY
COMPLEX TEXTUAL CONSTRUCTS

By
Britt Miazgowicz

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“YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSTITUTING THE MEANING OF THINGS:”
EXAMINING JENNY HOLZER’S PROGRESSIVELY COMPLEX TEXTUAL CONSTRUCTS

Britt Miazgowicz

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Jenny Holzer has not always held her present post as a reigning figure in the world of contemporary art. When juxtaposed with the simplicity of her first text series, *Truisms* (1977), her recent work is increasingly more complex. Yet clearly there are qualities which have remained vital to the core aspects of Holzer’s concepts regarding art, particularly that it is intended to be seen by many, pondered over, and deciphered by the general public. She has proven herself capable of exhibiting work in a wide variety of mediums so as to address more acutely an extensive array of cultural issues.

In order to remain true to her ideals while adjusting to new spaces and an ever shifting social landscape, Holzer has retained, above all, a devotion to utilizing clear, direct language. Other details in Holzer’s imagery have changed: simple black and white texts printed on posters led to more complex textual displays which employed light, color, and other various mediums (such as marble, skin, and bone, to name a few). Audiences have been winnowed away to a more select group of “art” cognoscenti who seek out her texts, rather than the original street viewers who were caught abruptly off guard by the appearance
of Holzer’s texts in public places. Rather than authoring her own texts, Holzer now also culls writings from various poets or utilizes documents from government archives; installations have grown more intricate and complex as they have moved from outdoor to gallery and museum spaces.

Nonetheless, Holzer still elicits reactions to her work today that are as strong as the feelings borne towards her early works. In fact, some of these newer projects may even be more emotionally difficult to bear, as they continue to engender dialogues about issues most viewers would rather ignore because of their uncomfortable nature. This paper serves to explore the ways in which Holzer’s work has successfully matured, addresses the mechanisms by which her texts achieve their potency, and enumerates the similarities and differences between the various series Holzer has created through her career up to her *Redaction Paintings* (2005-2007).
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Chapter 1: Anonymous Editing

Jenny Holzer has carved out a name for herself by using text as a means for engaging her audience in ways that upend the way one typically encounters words. Historically, artists have employed text in works of art, pushing language in innovative directions for different purposes. From the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt to the paintings of Jasper Johns, images, symbols and language have interacted in ways that allow for unique or personal interpretations; Holzer is an artist who follows such pursuits.

Jenny Holzer (b. 1950) began her M.F.A. studies as an abstract painter at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1974. She was inspired by the sublime qualities of the work of color-field painters such as Mark Rothko and Morris Louis.1 This influence manifests itself in the ethereal qualities of Holzer’s LED and Xenon projection works later in her career. She left the medium of painting in 1977 for something she believed could convey her ideas more explicitly and directly. “I wanted to be able to speak about or to certain, specific subject matter. I couldn’t find a way to do it when I was a painter…language seemed to be direct.”2

In more recent work, Redaction Paintings (2006), Holzer has once more returned to painting. Though it may seem as though the artist has come full circle, her cyclical path was not without a number of subtle mutations. Her first series, Truisms, developed in the mid 1970s when Whitney Independent Study

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Program faculty member Ron Clark assigned Holzer, then a Whitney Fellow, a reading list that included books on Eastern and Western philosophy, including Marxism, and Structuralism. Holzer remembers feeling overwhelmed.

“I wanted to sort out what I was to do, or what anyone was to do, with that much dense and sometimes contradictory information. So I rewrote his library. I did it as a self-help maneuver, and pasted the results – the Truisms – in the streets.”

Holzer “re-wrote” Clark’s library by condensing these various theories and ideologies into single sentences meant to distill their essences in the most concise manner possible. Despite her desire to be explicit, the work is not didactic. Holzer describes her writing style:

“I try not to make it random or sloppy, but there has to be a wild part…that’s what I like, when things spin out of control but then are pulled back so they’re yours. I want them to be accessible, but not so easy that you throw them away after a second or two.”

Diane Waldman (art historian, author, and former curator and deputy director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York), who interviewed Holzer in 1989, asserts that Holzer is essentially “capturing what both life and art are about – randomness, order, being out of control, being in control.” Like her successive series, Holzer juxtaposes contradictory statements, e.g., “CHILDREN ARE THE MOST CRUEL OF ALL,” with “CHILDREN ARE THE HOPE OF THE FUTURE,” to blatantly challenge the viewer to choose what is right to them. As viewers ingest her phrases they are forced to agree or disagree, to make

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5 Ibid
judgment calls that are their own, to fish out what they believe, and to dismiss what they do not. In more recent work, such as her *Redaction Paintings*, Holzer appropriates declassified documents culled from the National Security Archives (which makes documents available via the Freedom of Information Act) and renders them as large, colorful silk-screens on canvas. These documents are often sterile, bureaucratic memos. Again, there is no voice from Holzer attempting to sway the viewer’s opinion of what the texts should communicate; instead, she simply puts texts on display in a larger than life format, letting the viewers decide for themselves why they should be looking, what the work means, and how they feel about what they are seeing.

Holzer stopped using her own texts for many reasons, but in a way, the texts she did author were seldom the voice of “Jenny Holzer.” They were the ideas of different philosophies, the fears of new mothers, and the victims and perpetrators of violence. Holzer is an editor. She sifts through information and retrieves that which she finds compelling. It is only after the material has been removed from its original context and placed into her unique medium of display, that these texts take on new meaning, are looked at differently, and establish new relationships with viewers. One notable example of this occurred early in Holzer’s career in the mid 1970s, before *Truisms*, when she began a series of drawings based on diagrams she copied out of books from a range of disciplines. She recalls “At the time I thought that diagrams were the most reduced, truest way of visual representation.”6 Here we see an interest in the structuring of information. Data, in its rawest form, is organized and presented in a way that

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implies truth through clarity and order. These diagrams are what eventually led Holzer to text. “I don’t know exactly what made me shift, but finally I wound up being more interested in the captions than the drawings. The captions told you everything in a clean, pure way.”

Diagrams [Figure 1] shows a caption beneath a drawn diagram stating “Two bodies run together, fuse, and then vanish.” Because it is below the diagram, we immediately make an association. However, viewed independently or when placed in a different context from the diagram, those words could mean any number of things to different people. This interest in decontextualization has remained continuous in Holzer’s work.

Another constant in Holzer’s work is tension. Mentally, her texts are never easy to read. They evoke a response or an emotion, whether agreement, disgust, opposition, or validation. According to Elizabeth Smith (art historian, former chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and former curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles), Holzer “has consistently emphasized the artwork as a carrier of ideas that stimulate a passive viewer to become an active questioner by inviting reflections on intentions, meaning, and authorship.”

Her work makes a statement and we are left to our own devices to digest what she has provided. Holzer employs a number of devices in order to elicit a reaction. For Truisms it is the vast number of often opposing ideas in close proximity to one another. In Lustmord (1994) Holzer creates tension through the subject matter, which addresses sexual violence. She presents three different points of view, allowing the viewer to experience

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7 Ibid p. 111
each identity (rapist, victim and observer). Inevitably, the viewer sympathizes with one position or another. It is text that would be difficult to read with indifference. Another approach which Holzer uses to educe tension is her use of color. In *Redaction Paintings* Holzer paints documents that detail abuse that has been inflicted upon Iraqi detainees in deep crimsons, evoking thoughts of blood and flesh. In an LED piece, *Thorax* [Fig. 2], she envelopes viewers in glowing, throbbing, pulsing light of the same colors, garishly referencing pain and death. In other work, such as *Final Autopsy Report DOD 003235 – DOD 003241 OCHRE* [FIG.3], she juxtaposes cheerful colors with morbid subject matter, using bright yellow as the background color of a document detailing a detainee autopsy report.

Holzer’s work often focuses on cruelties in the hope that people will recoil. Historically -- Francisco de Goya’s print series *Disasters of War*, the Dadaists’ anti-establishment responses to World War I, and the culture wars of the last three decades -- numerous artists have aimed, as has Holzer, to bring social or political issues to the forefront. Her pointed interest in eliciting a reaction from the public was evident early on. She explains her revelation as such:

“At the beach I would make paintings on long pieces of fabric and leave them so that people would come along and wonder what this thing was that had obviously been left by someone hoping to tickle their imaginations a little bit. Downtown I’d put bread out in abstract patterns so people could watch pigeons eat in squares and triangles…But the works weren’t beautiful enough or compelling enough or understandable enough to make people stop.”

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Another mainstay of Holzer’s artistic career is anonymity. Whether or not Holzer uses her own writings (as in *Truisms*), or uses the text of others, she silences her own claim of authorship. Ironically, by eliminating her authorial voice she lends power to the work because the viewer is not reading one voice with a clear ideology, they are reading many. She states “I always try to make my voice unidentifiable… because I’ve found that when things are categorized, they tend to be dismissed.” In choosing to render her public work anonymously, Holzer incorporates a conceptual element that not only dematerializes the object (her text), but also its author. In severing the connection between text and author, the viewer again must parse out what is being said, what should be given more or less weight, and, more critically, must dissect the structure of the work to determine its ideological function. Roland Barthes wrote, “To utter a discourse, is not, as is too often repeated, to communicate; it is to subjugate.” Inherently, the purpose of text is to propagate a message, and the study of this relationship between language and power has been a constant focus in Holzer’s work. Her placement of incompatible and contradictory ideological positions in direct proximity with each other (as in *Truisms*) exposes the means by which linguistics exert their power.11

Also significant is Holzer’s acute awareness of the spaces her texts inhabit. She enjoys the differences that result in displaying her work both outdoors (to a more general public), as well as indoors in a controlled space (to a more limited but attentive audience).

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11 ibid, p. 421
“What I gain outdoors is the surprise that a passerby has from seeing something unexpected, something with hard content. That’s lost indoors. It’s almost impossible to shock an art audience. With the outdoor work you might startle people so much that you have a prayer of changing their thinking a little bit, or even prompting them to take some kind of action...However, what you gain indoors is the chance to develop a complex presentation of a lot of ideas. The installation that you set up can be more intricate, the writing can be more complicated, the ideas can be elaborated, the emotional tone can be richer – you have more layers.”

Private thoughts and opinions are projected onto public buildings in enormous scale and bright lights for all to see. Hidden secrets and horrors are thrust into public view. Though displayed only in museum and gallery settings, *Lustmord* elicits a particularly visceral reaction, as rape victims’ stories are presented on human bones as if they had emerged from the grave, unable to rest peacefully [Fig. 4]. Government documents that were once classified have been exposed by Holzer in large, colorful silk screens on canvas, demanding to be scrutinized. Holzer’s conscious awareness of place in relation to her work is a powerful asset. Places also trigger certain questions. Who belongs here? Whose place is this? Why are these particular words *here*? Where Holzer places her texts creates almost a reverse caption. In the same way that a title would provide context for gaining insight into the artist’s meaning behind a particular work, Holzer’s choice of place provides a referential clue for the viewer to explore its relationship to that particular text. One such example is the text Holzer included in her lobby installation at 7 World Trade Center [Fig. 5]. For this particular installation a stream of poetry and prose moved along a screen made of acid-etched, diffused,

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translucent glass illuminated by whitish light.\textsuperscript{13} Scrolling across a glowing, 65-foot-wide, 14-foot-high wall in the lobby, the text evokes New York’s history.

“After much stewing, I came up with the idea of doing text in the wall—not memorial text, but text about the joy of being in New York City. I despaired of writing for the piece, as I often do, and I came to poems by a number of different authors—everyone from Walt Whitman to William Carlos Williams, Elizabeth Bishop, and many more.”\textsuperscript{14}

Here Holzer exalts in lifting the spirit of a place that experienced a profound sense of sorrow and loss. By choosing to use poetry that bursts forth in pride about the beauty of New York, Holzer focuses on the perseverance and endurance of a city. This is appropriate text particularly since 7 World Trade was the first building to be erected on ground zero.

Holzer has made other memorial structures as well (\textit{Erlauf, Black Garden}) and in each particular case has been particularly aware of the event and people she is memorializing, the space she has been given, and the way people will interact with her structure.

Holzer’s work has undoubtedly evolved. She began her early career with street art (posters full of authoritative statements, wheat-pasted onto various surfaces in New York City, from bus stops to buildings as with *Truisms*). At such a time, Holzer’s audience was at its broadest (and here I do not mean the sheer number of people familiar with her work, but rather the wide spectrum of types of people who viewed it). Any passerby could stop to absorb her one-liners, puzzle over their source and their purpose, and even edit them in some cases [Fig. 6]. These texts, which were often alongside other advertisements, were jolting in that they were not selling products, they were advertising ideas; ideas that seemed authoritative, yet disconnected or contradictory to one another. These original broadside posters were of the utmost simplicity, printed on a white background with black letters in all capitals, arranged in a list format, alphabetically.

As Holzer became recognized by the art establishment and received funding, these texts were also displayed on actual objects of consumption such as cars, T-shirts, condoms and post cards. In the early 1980s Holzer moved on to use LED (light emitting diodes) signs or displays for her work. The format of display was still basic font, list-like and alphabetical, and could be seen simultaneously by large numbers of people in public places. Knowing that pedestrians encountering these texts would allow only a brief moment to glance up and read what was vying for their attention amidst a sea of other voices and
advertisements, Holzer grasped that, “If you want a general audience, it’s not art issues that are going to compel them to stop…it has to be life issues.”

It was through her use of electronic mediums that Holzer gained recognition and prominence. She realized in 1982, after displaying her *Truisms* on an electronic billboard in Times Square [Fig. 7] that, “Large active displays [were] perfect for public address.” She was able to appropriate the medium of advertising, and instigate an interaction that activated thought, opinion, discourse and judgment. As Holzer’s stature in the art world rose, her work shifted away from the streets of New York City. Her Xenon works began to be projected upon the facades of internationally well known government buildings, museums, theaters and even rivers. These were public works available for anyone passing by to view. One needed not seek out these texts – they grabbed the viewer by their very presence in the most unassuming and unexpected of places. Coming out of nowhere and demanding attention as light in the form of words, her texts offered themselves up to be read, questioned and judged. Diane Waldman notes how her own familiarity with Holzer’s work has altered her perception of public texts altogether. “I have a hard time when I walk around New York, trying to figure out whether you’ve [Holzer] written certain signs or not. It reverses the way you think about something that is in the real world.”

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Today, Holzer’s work is more often found within a museum or gallery space than out in the public sphere. The increase in popularity of her work has led to its being viewed by academic and art circles more than by the general public. Holzer’s subject matter remains similar, if not the same (often museums show her earlier texts as well as newer ones), but Holzer does admit that within interior spaces, the door is open to more expansive writings. “The subject matter tends to be the same, but what I’ll do if I know it’s going to be in a gallery or museum where people are willing to invest more time, is write longer, more complicated texts.”

Not only did the texts become more complicated, so did installations. Simple broadsheets gave way to LED displays. These LED works were more malleable than simple paper prints. Color became a factor. Red or yellow electronic text on a black background implied warning or urgency. Viewing time also played a pivotal role with works that scrolled by. Various speeds were used within different spaces. LEDs scrolled by just long enough to be read. Museum-based LEDs are installed in a variety of formats, but often in ways that are meant to be overwhelming. Viewers may be immersed in various texts, all scrolling by in different directions and at different speeds to dizzying effect. Between the fonts and colors of text, the format and shapes of the LED panels in relation to the viewer, and the speed of the texts scrolling by, a force field is created. There is a more acute and intimate experience when encountering the works in an enclosed space, and yet there is also an aggressiveness or sense of claustrophobia [Fig. 8]. Words which are readable morph into light that simply

18 ibid, p. 19
surrounds the viewer once a sentence is lost, and so the room alternates between content and form, and the viewer cannot help but oscillate between viewing and reading.

The Solomon R. Guggenheim exhibition (1989), her first major museum retrospective, highlighted Holzer’s ability to mesmerize an audience by utilizing the space to theatrical effect. The Frank Lloyd Wright designed building features a spiraling rotunda upon which Holzer installed LED signs which scrolled through a selection of all of her texts to date (Truisms, Inflammatory Essays, the Living and Survival Series, Under a Rock, Laments, and part of her new work at the time, Mother and Child). The dizzying effect of the scrolling, circular path of the texts, in energetic green, red, and yellow (traffic light) colors, enlivened the space and executed a potently hypnotic effect [Fig. 9].

Moving into the 1990s, Holzer’s work mutated aesthetically, this time in the form of Xenon projections. These projections coincided with a decided shift in subject matter that addressed more emotionally charged topics such as war, sex, violence and motherhood. It is also at this point that Holzer uses the work of poets such as Henri Cole (American) and Wislawa Symborska (Polish). Xenon projections allow for a much larger rendering of texts, which cover entire buildings, rivers, and other surfaces in a larger-than-life scale. Although she retains her all-capitalized letter format and simple font, these large works scroll slowly, attached to nothing because they are merely projected light; they cling to surfaces and then vanish into thin air, fleeting and ephemeral, more wistful and calming aesthetically than the mechanical, frantically-paced diodes. Holzer often
uses light blue or white as the text color, furthering their capacity to appear softer and more contemplative [Fig. 10]. Such color choices are a far cry from the vivid reds and yellows employed in her LED works whose color associations invoked warning. Despite the ambiance of the Xenon projections, at times the work gains from the very dissonance between message and medium. Though subject matter may address loss, sorrow or violence (as in text from *Lustmord*), Xenon projections of such text unfurls itself in such a way that the viewer absorbs the work in a thoughtful, contemplative manner rather than by the abruptly flashing execution of the LED works. The work welcomes a sense of pathos, taking on monumental proportions and endowing itself with a different type of power.

In addition to shifting mediums and spaces over her career, Holzer has also changed the voices of the texts themselves. Beginning with her own writing (*Truisms, Inflammatory Essays*, and in her *Survival* series), Holzer aimed for anonymity. Her direct, emphatic statements were culled from a wide range of philosophies, and were sharply authoritative. The fact that so many of these statements theoretically opposed others on the same list, could be confusing, upsetting, even humorous to observers. Because there are numerous ways of interpreting a statement, engagement leads to an inescapable conclusion of our global society (and one that epitomizes one of Holzer’s *Truisms*): YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSTITUTING THE MEANING OF THINGS.19 Given Holzer’s penchant for remaining authorially absent, this is especially true.

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In the 1990s, Holzer ventured into more political territory, presenting texts that addressed AIDS, rape and war. By representing a multitude of viewpoints (*Laments* and *Lustmord*) Holzer avoids taking sides. These more emotional texts were a fitting segue for Holzer’s employment of the poetry of others for her Xenon projections. The fusion of poems (which one traditionally reads from a book in the intimacy of one’s home), with Holzer’s medium (large light projections in public spaces), results in an altogether different experience of the text. Henri Cole, with whom Holzer has collaborated, describes the works as having a stripped bare quality. “The poem becomes like one voice in a chorus. You have the voice of the words, the voice of the color, and the voice of the architecture. You have the voice of all these different things working together to make art.”20

Holzer states, “I am happiest dealing with the abstract part – the composition and making a complete environment. I can deal with subjects and have texts that I couldn’t produce. But I can present them in a way that I find suitable and compelling.”21 The desire to project the voices of others has led to her most recent work in which she no longer imagines or creates voices – she plucks them from reality. “I can do more art if I don’t try to write. I can try what I am better at, to make things look right. And I can have more and better content if I’m choosing rather than generating it.”22 The National Security Archive provided Holzer with a multitude of non-fictional voices that are all too real: FBI agents

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21 *ibid*

investigating Alice Neel for being a suspected communist, parents of detained Iraqis appealing the US Army for answers, CIA correspondence soliciting permission for harsher interrogation tactics [Fig. 11]. These are the voices that Holzer amplifies through her work. The government in a democracy is supposed to represent the people. In putting the government under the microscope to be scrutinized, Holzer’s work calls for self-reflection as well.

Another significant focus of Holzer’s work over the course of her career has been her audience. Originally reaching a multitude of people from all walks of life, her early work existed mainly in the public realm. Reaching a wider audience has always been important to Holzer. When asked about her earlier use of texts, she states:

“The model or inspiration for text was more about political posters, or people standing on soap boxes. That’s what I was thinking about, various forms of public address. I wasn’t thinking of the art world… I wanted to hang things out there for other people to consider: things I was puzzling over, or frightened by, or that I thought were thrilling.”

Ironically, Holzer did gain the attention of the art world. This recognition pushed Holzer to create new work, and her stature allowed her to produce texts that were laden with meaning and urgency, more so than her early works which span an array of ideological systems. In an interview in 2003, Holzer makes a poignant comment about the need of the artist to take a stand at some point, perhaps denoting her awareness that many people were listening intently to what she had to say.

“I presented the voices [of Truisms] more or less simultaneously, and weighted evenly, to suggest that the thoughts were true to

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somebody. It seemed like a comprehensive and clean way to present belief systems, since I wasn’t choosing. I wanted to avoid polarization. Then, a young artist pointed out that contemplation is fine when there’s no crisis, but when there is a crisis, you may have to come down on one side or another.”

Given her latest work, it seems that Holzer has shifted from a broad scope of ideas, to a more acute focus. Moving steadily into political territory, from her earlier texts about the atrocities of the Bosnian War (Lustmord) and on to presenting declassified documents in large-scale and saturated colors (Redaction Paintings), Holzer has tailored her work for a museum audience that has come to look because they want to be exposed to such work. It is as though Holzer has realized that she has our attention and is utilizing that power to address issues she finds worth investigating. Still, one cannot help but wonder what effect her Redaction Paintings would elicit were they wheat-pasted all over the streets of New York City, their glaring secrets exposed for all to see, rather than remaining in the confines of the art world.

Even so, Holzer’s work allows us to create our own hierarchy of values. She provides us with “blank pieces that we push forward as knights or pawns, kings or queens. With each move made, value is ascribed.” It is in this very process that the structure of the texts is dissected. With this investigation the voice of power shifts from the creator of the text to the viewer. Jenny Holzer prompts this shift by creating works that compel us to look, read and view more critically.

Chapter 3: Using Contradiction to Expose Linguistic Power Structures

Holzer’s first work as an artist which received recognition was her *Truisms* series. These cheaply produced pronouncements were based on her reading list from the Whitney Independent Study Program. Wheat-pasted on to the walls of New York City in 1977, these posters expressed her ideas about society and culture “as a parody; like the Great Ideas of the Western World in a nutshell.”

She aspired to “make the big issues in culture intelligible as public art.” Comprised of more than 250 individual sentences arranged alphabetically, there is no logical sequence of thoughts, and in fact, the juxtaposition of ideologies such as: AN ELITE IS INEVITABLE and EVERYONE’S WORK IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT, or ANY SURPLUS IS IMMORAL and MODERATION KILLS THE SPIRIT, renders it necessary for the viewer to accept or negate value. The fact that these statements emphatically pronounce their doctrines compels a process of reflection in regards to the principles that we the viewer choose to live by. These are beliefs and opinions, stated with conviction as facts, thereby exposing the malleability of truth.

Holzer remained unidentified as the author of these statements. “I thought my texts would be more effective if no one knew who was writing them and why. The anonymity made me braver.” This raises an important point. These snippets of thought are not attached to a person or an ideology. This places the

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burden of evaluation more heavily on the viewer. One is much more prone to agree or disagree with someone or some group, with which one is familiar, based on one’s own affiliation in relation to that group. For example, if a liberal or democrat listens to a speech given by Barack Obama, it is highly likely that that person would be much more open to accepting the ideas put forth. On the other hand, were the same speech given by Newt Gingrich or Dick Cheney, it would surely be received with a much higher level of scrutiny despite the identical content. Jenny Holzer does not give the sources for these Truisms; viewers must think for themselves without the familiarity or support of prior affiliations. One must draw one’s own inferences to determine meaning. “They [Truisms] are not, in and of themselves, inherently good or bad, true or false, left or right, right or wrong…AN ELITE IS INEVITABLE could be read as fascist, but it could just as easily be read as Marxist-Leninist, as new-right, as social Darwinist or as Nietzschean.”

This again emphasizes how language functions as a tool of authority and exemplifies how the same words can be manipulated in order to wield different meanings based on a given context. Barthes asserts that “The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.”

Holzer’s Truisms, by exposing this fact, ask viewers to be skeptical, and to not take for granted that the printed word is necessarily trustworthy, tying in to Barthes’ belief that it is the viewer who endows text with significance.

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Inflammatory Essays expands on Holzer’s Truisms. When asked about how the concept developed for Inflammatory Essays, Holzer states:

“I remember that I thought the tone of the Truisms was possibly too even, too bland, too balanced. I wanted less balance, and I wanted the next writing to flame…I wanted a passionate statement about the way the world could be if people did things right…I went to the library to find examples of lunatic manifestos and beautiful ones.”

This series is comprised of 24 essays, each presented on 17”x17” squares, on variously colored posters [Fig. 12]. Despite the fact that the texts are in paragraph form, they still seem free-floating and can have multiple interpretations, especially when parsed as individual phrases. However, once placed within the whole of the essay, the phrases carry a slightly less flexible meaning. Holzer was inspired to write these authoritative texts after her aforementioned library readings of works written by Vladimir Lenin, Adolf Hitler, Mao Tse-tung, Leon Trotsky, and other extremists. Again, Holzer exploits how structuring language results in propagating a specific point of view. For example, the sentences, YOU GET RESULTS FROM GUNS or IT IS YOUR LIFE SO TAKE CONTROL AND FEEL VITAL, may read much like Holzer’s Truisms, open to pondering what the statements mean. However, once placed in the midst of a paragraph, these sentences attain a much more exacting ideology.

YOU GET AMAZING SENSATIONS FROM GUNS. YOU GET RESULTS FROM GUNS. MAN IS AN AGGRESSIVE ANIMAL; YOU HAVE TO HAVE A GOOD OFFENSE AND A GOOD DEFENSE. TOO MANY CITIZENS THINK THEY ARE


31 ibid, p. 18.
HELPLESS. THEY LEAVE EVERYTHING TO THE AUTHORITIES AND THIS CAUSES CORRUPTION. RESPONSIBILITY SHOULD GO BACK TO WHERE IT BELONGS. IT IS YOUR LIFE SO TAKE CONTROL AND FEEL VITAL.

Seeing how these essays clearly dissect the relationship between sentence and paragraph allows one to witness the formulation of an ideology, and therefore see the way that linguistic power takes shape.32

As Holzer’s Truisms and Inflammatory Essays grew in popularity they began also to grow in the diversity of formats by which they were displayed. Simple posters gave way to t-shirts, LED signs, taxi cabs, and baseball caps. These manifestations on different media added new dimensions to Holzer’s texts. The same texts rendered on different objects resulted in different iterations of the same body of work. A Truism such as STUPID PEOPLE SHOULD NOT REPRODUCE, printed on a plastic condom wrapper, could in turn be humorous or offensive, depending on the person interpreting it, the situation, or any number of other factors. Similarly, an LED sign reading ARTIFICIAL DESIRES ARE DESPOILING THE EARTH, near other comparable advertisements, may work to “expose the cracks in the mass media context in which they are placed. Diversity is thus seen to activate the work’s context by contesting, and by exposing as contradictory, the diverse structure of public signs, advertising and popular media.”33

33 ibid, p.422-23
Like *Truisms*, *Inflammatory Essays* also succeeds in yanking us forcefully from sentence to sentence, from one abrupt thought to the next. Sometimes the connection between such statements is loose to the point that the viewer may question if there is one at all. Yet, because of the paragraph format, viewers are compelled to create bridges between discrete segments. Certainly, viewers surmise, these sentences have been connected for some logical reason. It is then up to the viewer to assemble the various parts of each essay to discern a cohesive thread of ideas, often so ambiguous that no two viewers will arrive at the same conclusion in regards to intended meaning.

Holzer further stimulates the viewer’s inclination to uncover the basis for the text’s cohesion, through the homogenous formal qualities of the essays. In addition to being printed on identically sized posters, each essay is unified through its composition of exactly twenty lines and one hundred words. The sentence structure is also short and succinct throughout, resulting in a similar rhetorical cadence when reading/viewing. These similarities are somewhat confounding when absorbed in conjunction with the ambiguous content of the essays themselves. One seeks a pattern or bridge in order to build something substantive and orderly, only to realize that the colors are arbitrarily assigned, the subject matters of each essay do not correlate to other essays, and meanings disperse as quickly as they emerge. These collapsed values result in a constant contestation of ideas – a power struggle based on language and its structure.

Whether it was to provide a respite for her audience or a respite for herself, Holzer’s *Living* series (1980-82) takes a decidedly mundane turn. Here,
subject matter is less provocative than in *Truisms* or *Inflammatory Essays*, and is more bemused in tone. Holzer herself has described the voice which emanates from these texts as “upper-class anonymous.”34 Although the pronouncements retain their factual assertiveness, they touch upon issues that are less divisive and more amusing, such as: FEW CAN IGNORE A BABY’S CRIES, EVEN IF THAT RESPONSE IS IRRITATION, or, WHEN YOU’RE TRYING SOMETHING NEW, YOU’RE TORN BETWEEN ANTICIPATING A DELIGHTFUL SURPRISE AND THINKING YOU’RE A FOOL TO IGNORE WHAT YOU KNOW YOU LIKE. Understandably, one viewing the *Living* series after having already seen Holzer’s previous work, would likely experience a sense of skepticism. Are we missing something? These sentences are connected in a way that is rational and comprehensive. Furthermore, the texts are wordier, less concise and more narrative in nature. Although the various clusters of texts may have no relation to each other, sentences are congruently grouped, and are presented in sections of text which are purposely organized. “For the *Living* series I [used] a moderate, average voice and language because I thought that would match the subject which was everyday events that just happened to have some kind of link to them.”35 Rather than inundating the audience with contradictory lists of absolutes, Holzer touches upon subjects such as illness, sex, sleeping, eating, even breathing, providing everyone with the opportunity to relate. However, because of their failure to elicit strong reactions, they lack the punch of *Truisms*

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and *Inflammatory Essays*. Because they do not seem threatening or “inflammatory,” texts from the *Living* series do not garner the same thorough examination, and therefore achieve decidedly weaker responses.

In 1983, Holzer began her *Survival* series because she felt that the *Living* series was getting “too bland… I wanted to support things that are helpful to people and maybe bash what I think is dangerous.”36 This work returns to her original format used for *Truisms*: single, free-floating statements proclaimed with a degree of authority. Some of these texts have become widely known, such as: MEN DON’T PROTECT YOU ANY MORE, WHAT URGE WILL SAVE US NOW THAT SEX WON’T, PROTECT ME FROM WHAT I WANT and THE FUTURE IS STUPID. Other statements, such as: THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR WILL BE SECRET or DIE FAST AND QUIET WHEN THEY INTERROGATE YOU or LIVE SO LONG THAT THEY ARE ASHAMED TO HURT YOU ANY MORE, seemed to have foreshadowed more recent atrocities (such as Abu Ghraib or harsh interrogation tactics used at Guantanamo Bay which are now considered torture), as well as Holzer’s recent work (*Redaction Paintings*).

Holzer’s use of pronouns gives these phrases their ambiguity and flexibility, making them extraordinarily well suited for a wide array of venues. A condom wrapper that states MEN DON’T PROTECT YOU ANY MORE provides a catalyst for multiple interpretations. Which “MEN”? Who is the “YOU” addressing? Given the time this series came out, the 1980s, perhaps the AIDS

epidemic was implicated. Similarly, PROTECT ME FROM WHAT I WANT also engenders questions. What is it that you want? Or what is it that I want? Why is it that what we want is threatening? Addiction, credit card debt, adultery, greed… Holzer allows us to choose our vice and fill in the blank for ourselves. Other statements like SILLY HOLES IN PEOPLE ARE FOR BREEDING OR FROM SHOOTING, or BODIES LIE IN THE BRIGHT GRASS AND SOME ARE MURDERED AND SOME ARE PICNICING, juxtapose disparate feelings such as love, lust, violence, joy and death. Holzer investigates these kinds of incongruent junctions throughout her career.
Chapter 4: A Turn Towards Pathos

A decided shift in Holzer’s work occurred in the late 1980s and through the 1990s. This metamorphosis was marked by the 1987 work *Under a Rock*, which explores issues of sex, violence, power, and death. This work is presented in a methodical, objective tone akin to that of a user manual or news report.

CRACK THE PELVIS SO SHE LIES RIGHT. THIS IS A MISTAKE. WHEN SHE DIES YOU CANNOT REPEAT THE ACT. The content, however, is subjective, and intended to promote an imagined narrative by the viewer as well as a deep sense of disturbance. This shift from declarative and analytical series (such as *Truisms* and *Survival*) to more pathos-driven works (including *Laments* and *Mother and Child*) not only changed in tone, but in their material forms as well. The language, however remained clear and direct. Emotional aspects were prodded as Holzer’s experimentation with various media compounded the one-two punch of content and context. Works floated across bodies of water as Xenon projections, were etched into sarcophagi, or were rendered in blood, lending visceral elements. Holzer describes her shift as stimulated by both her own personal experiences, but also the social environment.

“The late ‘80s were different. The national and the art economies were booming. People were heedless from sloppiness, happiness, or avoidance. That there was trouble around, from the AIDS epidemic to the country’s domestic policy, was obvious, and though I recall many exceptions, I think Americans became less willing to recognize trouble...In my writing, I was more explicit as I became aware of a general unwillingness to look at distress.” 37

Holzer’s awareness of the public’s unwillingness to take seriously or consider some of the major problems facing society, such as the AIDS crisis, or violence against women seems uncannily prescient given that, as a whole, viewers continue this avoidance to this day. Magazines that peddle celebrity gossip, such as *People*, report level or growing circulation rates in 2008, compared with news magazines like *Newsweek*, which reported a decrease of 12.9%. It is quite perceptive of Holzer that she recognized this phenomenon nearly 20 years ago, and altered her work as a response. Provocation has long been an important tool in getting the public’s attention, and Holzer’s visceral work of the late ’80s and ’90s does much to engender instinctive feelings and emotional responses, much different from the somewhat detached rhetoric of her earlier works.

Continuing her exploration of disturbing subject matter was Holzer’s 1989 exhibit at Dia Art Foundation, *Laments*. This body of work expresses her imagined final words of deceased people – one infant, two children, and ten adults. Comprised of 13 stone sarcophagi into which the text was chiseled, each was illuminated by a single spotlight and accompanied by a vertical LED sign which scrolled the text. These LED signs were timed to go on at once, simultaneously, and then off at sporadic intervals, culminating in total darkness.

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before starting all over again. The room was dead silent, evoking feelings of unease and discord whilst juxtaposing visual noise with silence, and new technologies with the ancient, ritualistic tombs [Fig. 13]. This eerie display evokes a sense of somber finality.

“It was as if the people had a last chance to say what they wish had been different in their lives, or to describe what had happened to them, or to talk about what hurt them. I wanted to give these people who had died unnecessarily a chance to say what they couldn’t say.”

And though the Laments give the viewer information, they still beg many questions. Though fictive voices, there are issues being raised that are very real: AIDS, murder, war. THE DISEASE CAME. I LEARNED THAT TIME DOES NOT HEAL. EVERYTHING GETS WORSE WITH DAYS. I HAVE SPOTS LIKE A DOG. As is typical in Holzer’s work, viewers are given a framework which raises more questions than answers. “The texts are open-ended; there should be a lot of room for the people reading them to enter and to wander and to interact personally with it.”

The 1990 Venice Biennale marks another achievement of Holzer’s in terms of her creation of an all encompassing environment in relation to her text. Furthermore, she became the first woman to win the Leone d’Oro for best pavilion. At the U.S. pavilion, she covered the floors of two different antechambers in a diamond pattern of tiles in red Magnaboschi marble, white Biancone marble and black Marquina marble. These materials were innately

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Venetian, and referenced the color scheme of the Doge’s Palace, which she had visited before the Biennale. In Gallery E of the U.S. pavilion, Holzer installed 21 horizontal LED signs displaying writing from all of her series in five different languages (German, French, Italian, Spanish and English). The floor of the room was covered in red Magnaboschi marble, giving it an oven-like quality [Fig.14].

Another gallery is described by Diane Waldman:

“The most effective room of the installation had a red, black, and white marble floor with twelve vertical LED signs that displayed the *Mother and Child* text. As the marble floor reflected the light emitted from the signs, the borders between sign and floor blurred, creating a space that seemed to be of another time and another dimension.”

Following Venice, Holzer began a new series of texts, collectively entitled *War*. These texts were Holzer’s response to the first Gulf War, which saturated the news at the time. Extremely violent and graphic in nature, Holzer eventually turned away from such writings. Statements such as: HIS DEATH IS FRESH AND THE SMELL IS PLEASANT. HE MUST BE PULLED AWAY SKIN SPLITTING, were, according to Holzer, “too over the top.” And yet, this compulsion to address the horrors of war is clearly a cause which Holzer deems important enough to highlight in her work (as seen in *Lustmord* and in her *Redaction Paintings*).

Moving into somewhat more autobiographical territory is Holzer’s 1990 work *Mother and Child*. Holzer describes the piece (shown in the Venice

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43 ibid, p. 16-19
Biennale) as “a more complete account of what a woman might feel as she tries
to protect her child from everything from environmental disaster to bad
government.” Holzer’s observations of viewers’ reactions to the work effectively
pinpoint part of the reason it is so powerful.

“People were crying. This was new to me...When I was writing the
text I felt sad. I had just had a child and I was worried. Somewhere
along the line I had separated myself from those feelings and when
I saw that emotion coming over the people reading, that was really
something. Damn! It made me sensitive again.”

Therein lays the power of these more emotive works during this period of
Holzer’s career. She is able to trigger individual memories of others through her
own texts. Even taken individually, lines of this text address certain universal
feelings. WHAT I FEEL AFTER LOVE IS FEAR is open enough to interpretation,
yet specific enough as to provoke a personal link to what one loves and how it
may be lost or hurt.

The final series to address from this particular period of Holzer’s career,
Lustmord, serves as a good transitional piece when tracking Holzer’s
increasingly politically overt work (though chronologically it is much earlier than
recent work). Lustmord (1993-95) was inspired by the violence perpetrated
against women during the Bosnian war. The title of the series, Lustmord,
compounds two German words: Lust, meaning desire, and Mord, meaning
murder. The combination of these two words can convey multiple similar

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45 ibid
significations, such as sex-murder, lust-killing, or rape-slaying.\textsuperscript{46}  Again, to avoid pushing a particular point of view and to promote a more in-depth “reading,” Holzer depicts three perspectives: victim, perpetrator, and observer. Originally the texts were written onto human skin then photographed [Fig. 15]. They were also printed onto cards with a mixture of ink and blood. However, Holzer’s most provocative iteration of Lustmord is found engraved onto metal bands which have been attached to assorted human bones [Fig. 16]. This direct connection to human remains packs a visceral punch unlike her solely textual works. It epitomizes violence and mortality in relation to women and war. The bones invoke feelings of consumption to a certain extent, like the carcass of some eaten creature. At the same time there is the alternative realization that the creature consumed in this particular case was a human being. Oscillating between the stances of power and vulnerability through both the content of the text and its medium gives this work its emotional power. When discussing why she chose such a different aesthetic format from her previous works, Holzer states: “I was thinking that rape was a crime of the body, but perhaps if I only used language it might be too far away from that, so I though I would write on the skin and that I would use blood to make the ink…I thought it appropriate, and unbearable.”\textsuperscript{47}

Since the early 1990s, Holzer has been commissioned to create several outdoor monuments in Europe, many of which deal with aspects of war and national histories that are linked to specific wars. In 1994 she produced \textit{Black}


Garden in Nordhorn, Germany. This consisted of Holzer planting a garden composed of flora that had dark foliage, from black apple trees, to Queen of the Night tulips, to Black Mondo grass [Figs. 17-18]. This garden surrounded a plaque honoring Germany's fallen soldiers. Five red, sandstone benches were also incorporated into the site. The benches bear engraved texts from the War series, such as: A BONE IS BROKEN SO IT CANNOT MOVE AWAY. This mournful landscape required the removal of much of the previous monument (which featured a bowl with an eternal flame commemorating fallen war heroes), and one of its most poignant aspects is that it depends upon the active participation of the community to tend to the space, thereby initiating a healing process that at once demands an acknowledgement of horrors past while hoping for a more tranquil future.

In 1995 Holzer continued her anti-heroic war monuments with Erlauf in Austria. The monument is meant to celebrate the historic meeting between Major General Stanley E. Reinhart, commanding General of the 65th U.S. Infantry Division, and Major General D.A. Drickhin, General of the 7th USSR Air and Land Division, at midnight on May 8, 1945 in Erlauf, which made the surrender of Nazi Germany official. The monument was a joint effort by two artists: Jenny Holzer from the U.S., and Oleg Komov from the former Soviet Union. Komov created a sculpture of a small girl (Austria) flanked by two giants (the U.S. and the USSR). Holzer composed a piece that was a white, vertical beam of light that projected

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49 ibid, p. 26
into the sky, referencing the air raids of World War II. The white column of light was encircled by an octagonally shaped, white marble base, as well as by a ring of white birch trees. Paths of white granite stone lead away from the monument in various directions, one of which connects to Komov’s sculpture. Incised into the stone paths were new texts by Holzer that addressed the brutality and chaos of war. The juxtaposition of the bright white light as a beacon of hope, and the clear, pale paths leading to it, against the disturbing texts, serves to both encourage vigilance and celebrate peace.

These works from the later 1990s, (including Arno, Blue, and OH) are similar in that they, too, reflect a shift from earlier analytical, declarative, and often energetically displayed texts towards more slowly-paced, floating, emotionally charged works. Despite their more raw, difficult to bear content, these works are still fictive. Although they address real events and tragedies, and even though viewers relate to these texts by inserting their own narrative, they are still authorless, and, as such, the viewers are still able to consciously distance themselves on an emotional level because the texts are not facts. It is not an easy task given Holzer’s talent for rendering gut-wrenching works, but it is still possible. Her late works offer no such solace.
Chapter 5: “Reading” Art: The Impact of Words

Undoubtedly, Holzer is an artist whose work prompts an inquiry, on the part of the viewer, to investigate the relationship between words and images, as well as the oscillating experience between looking at the visual aspects and reading the textual elements. Historically, starting from the time of ancient Egypt, artists have used text to supplement or explain visual works. Text being interjected into visual works is certainly not unprecedented. What makes Holzer’s work so significant is the fact that she has been the first artist to use text, divorced entirely from imagery, as the art itself. Artists such as Lawrence Weiner [Fig. 19] and John Baldessari [Fig. 20] (among others) share traits within their textual works, and these artists certainly paved the way for Holzer’s foray into new territory. However, Holzer is unique in that her works are placed in direct contact with the public. Furthermore, she remains unannounced as author/artist of such public works. Though those that encounter her work in a museum setting may in fact be familiar with Holzer due to her prominence in the world of contemporary art, those who stumble across her work by mere chance in the public sphere are completely unaware of who the artist/author is. This anonymity, on which I will later elaborate, plays a significant part in the power her work has in relation to the ways in which it is interpreted. Holzer’s work was initially criticized and derided as non-art by some\textsuperscript{50}, however, the effective flexibility of her texts and the sophisticated nature of their presentation have

\textsuperscript{50} J. Patrice Marandel (at the time curator of European paintings for the Detroit Institute of Arts) wrote an editorial to the New York Times July 22, 1990 stating: “May I suggest that Ms. Holzer limit her display of dime-store philosophy and poor orthography where it belongs: inside fortune cookies.”
since earned her validation in the art world. Never static, Holzer has consistently pushed her own exploration of presenting words in innovative ways prompting within the viewer a coalescence of emotion, personal experience, and, most importantly, inquiry.

Often, the examination of text in works of art leads to the theoretical study of language itself. Perhaps there is the notion that implementing the study of linguistics will somehow assist viewers in deciphering the words or phrases that Holzer has chosen to present to us. Even those texts that seem self-explanatory, because they have been selected by Holzer, engender further investigation and a higher level of scrutiny than, for example, the text within an advertisement. Viewers may find that theory can, in some cases, provide one with a map and key that can simply be referred to, in order to decode Holzer’s embedded meaning. In other words, because she has plucked these particular words from a sea of other possibilities, their selection implies that they are laden with a certain importance. It seems ironic that words, which are by nature definable and limited in established meaning, may provide such enigmatic combinations or evoke such various, inconsistent interpretations. Referring to semiotics, or linguistic theories, tends to result in more questions than answers, and perhaps that enigmatic quality is a boon to using text as art. Such theories often address the reason language is so complex, but are unable to establish how to unerringly interpret it. Definable yet pliable, words are ultimately a catch-22. A brief probe into some principles of semiotic theory may therefore shed some light on the appeal of text to viewers (though Holzer herself claims no influence of semiotic
theory within her work). Though Jenny Holzer asserts that her work is not inspired by the study of linguistics, she clearly employs language and text for its ambiguity as much as for its readability, which is precisely the relationship that the study of linguistics by Saussure and his followers is centered upon.

Being that words are arbitrary by nature (that is, letters which are combined to create a sign that represents an object bearing no correlation with the shapes and sounds assigned to it), it is no surprise that they carry the same openness of explication that a representational image would carry, and that their interpretation is dependent on the particular viewer.

Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure provided an important framework, to which others have since contributed. Saussure believed in the relationship of two parts of the linguistic sign: the 'signifier' and the 'signified'. The ‘signifier’ is the designated oral and written symbol for the word, the shape of the letters, and its specific sequence of those letters, for example D-O-G. The ‘signified’ is the meaning assigned to the word, or the idea or object that the ‘signifier’ represents, the concept; for example, the domesticated animal with fur, a tail, and four legs, that forms in our minds when we see or hear the word “dog.” The relationship between the two is arbitrary. There is no inherent connection between the letters and the concept. The connection is purely a result of convention. Speakers of a language have decided that a particular sequence of letters will refer to a specific thing or idea.

In 1868, American philosopher Charles Peirce explored similar theories stating that there are three basic semiotic elements, ‘signs’, ‘objects’, and ‘interpretants’, which can be understood by their relationship to each other.\textsuperscript{52} A ‘sign’, represents something, in its broadest sense, and is not necessarily symbolic, linguistic, or artificial. The \textit{Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy} concisely describes the triadic relationship as such:

“To simplify, we can think of the sign as the signifier, for example, a written word, an utterance, smoke as a sign for fire, etc. The ‘object’, on the other hand, is best thought of as whatever is signified, for example, the object to which the written or uttered word attaches, or the fire signified by the smoke. The ‘interpretant’, the most innovative and distinctive feature of Peirce’s account, is best thought of as the understanding that we have of the sign/object relation. The importance of the interpretant for Peirce is that signification is not a simple dyadic relationship between sign and object: a sign signifies only in being interpreted. This makes the interpretant central to the content of the sign, in that, the meaning of a sign is manifest in the interpretation that it generates in sign users.”\textsuperscript{53}

The ‘interpretant’, then, is that which is called to mind when the two aforementioned elements are combined. This injects the individual into the process of comprehension, so that the person reading the sign exerts a crucial role, and that in addition to the general sound and form of the word, as well as its definition or idea, there is the infusion of a personal element. For instance, when I think of “dog,” my particular dog comes to mind. Matters are further complicated when a sign refers to something more ambiguous. “Childhood” for

\textsuperscript{52} Peirce, \textit{Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences} 7 (1868), On a New List of Categories, p. 287-298.

example, though definable in a dictionary, would no doubt invoke a multiplicity of interpretations for different people. This is especially important because it suggests that the meaning or value of a ‘sign’ is determined by its relationship to other factors, which include personal experiences, but also, as in the case of a sentence, the other signs within the sentence which combine to create more complex meanings. This is particularly relevant concerning the role of the viewer as completing the triadic relationship as the missing link of the work Holzer creates.

It is this third relationship that is so relevant to Holzer’s textual works. Holzer became increasingly attentive to the visual effects of her words. Her choice of color, medium, speed with which they are presented, orientation, etc., all denote a connection between aesthetics and content. The viewer must draw out correlations between form and context, and such extracted correlations are bound to vary from one viewer to the next. Holzer’s *Truisms* series are a prime example of the relevance of Saussure’s linguistic theories when viewing textual art. “MEN DON’T PROTECT YOU ANYMORE” (*Survival* series) leaves plenty of room for dissecting parts of the sentence. MEN could mean various male figures to different viewers, as could the YOU.

French literary critic Roland Barthes expands on such ideas. Just as readers connect literature to its author in order to gain insight on the work’s meaning, inspiration, and origin, so too viewers connect artists to their works. Barthes, in his critical essay of 1967, “The Death of the Author,” argues that it is
the *reader*, not the author, who is the source of signification.\textsuperscript{54} That is to say that it is counterproductive to incorporate the intentions of the writer because it limits meaning by pushing the author’s (or in Holzer’s case, the artist’s) identity or ideologies – political, religious, etc. – onto the reader/viewer. Holzer has consistently avoided this tie between artist and work, which Barthes posits, liberating it from interpretive tyranny. Holzer, then, becomes what Barthes terms a “scriptor,” existing not to explain the work, but to produce it. By manipulating her chosen texts aesthetically, in order to convey meaning and importance, she simultaneously denies the viewer a simple interpretation and avoids didacticism. Holzer, in subverting conventional ways of seeing and reading engenders new modes of consciousness.

To understand the evolution of the relationship that exists between text and images, it is pertinent to look back on precedents that have been set by artists and civilizations past. The Egyptian hieroglyphics system is often the first that is referred to when considering past civilizations’ pictographic writing. The Egyptians created a system solidly based in representational imagery, which they then encoded; this allowed their system to be endowed with the ability to convey multiple meanings when the given signs were combined in different sequences. Pre-conquest Mesoamerican civilizations, such as the Mayans and the Aztecs, also developed similar standardized representational imagery to convey their cultural history in pictographic writing, originally believed to be independent of speech. New research now shows that there may actually have been ties to phonetics after all.\textsuperscript{55} There is continuous debate about whether or not such pictographic systems constitute “writing,” mainly because of the often non-linear format, or our inability to decipher such systems, and our strict understanding of “writing” as defined by the \textit{Oxford English Dictionary} as: ‘the penning or forming of letters or words; the using of written characters for purposes of record, transmission of ideas, etc.’ However, despite our uniform alphabet and linear writing format, our words are no less ambiguous, especially in the hands of artists seeking to manipulate the way we receive written information.

\textsuperscript{55} Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. (FAMSI) http://www.famsi.org/research/pohl/pohl_art_writing.html
Typically, before the 19th century, text was included in imagery strictly for supplemental purposes, and, even then, in most cases it was integrated sparingly. Gothic art, as well as Early Renaissance art, sometimes used text scrolls to visualize speech [Fig. 21]. Illuminated manuscripts combined beautiful calligraphic script with elements of illustration [Fig. 22]. With Johannes Gutenberg’s invention of movable type, in the 15th century, the evolution of text made a huge leap from being something scarce and often handwritten, to something being dispersed on a much wider level. Furthermore, it standardized language in a way that further removed it from its origins in bodily gesture, and drastically reduced the artistic flourishes that were a part of the handwritten tradition, as printing became economical. This gulf between text and art would remain relatively wide until the 19th century and the impact of the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution and its new printing technologies resulted in a dramatic shift insofar as where text appeared. Words jumped out of the confines of the book and into the public sphere in unprecedented ways. The Modern Era arrived with an explosion of text that barraged citizens of towns and cities in a way that was inescapable. Walls, billboards, newspapers, street signs and other media, all threw text at the viewer in ways that brought artistic creativity back to writing, as mass media vied for the public’s attention. “The narcotic effect of


57 ibid. p.13.
these transformations is vividly captured in a travel book about Paris written by Italian, Edmondo de Amicis, in 1878:  

‘Here is splendour at its height; this is the metropolis of metropolises, the open and lasting palace of Paris, to which all aspire and everything tends. Here the street becomes a square, the sidewalk a street, the shop a museum, the café a theatre, beauty, elegance, splendour dazzling magnificence, and life a fever. The horses pass in troops, and the crowds in torrents. Windows, signs, advertisements, doors, facades, all rise, widen and become silvered, gilded and illumined… Oh, Heavens! A gilded advertising carriage is passing with servants in livery, which offers you high hats at reduction. Look at the end of the street. What! Half a mile away there is an advertisement in titanic characters of the Petit Journal - ‘Six thousand copies daily – three million readers!’ You raise your eyes to Heaven, but, unfortunately, there is no freedom in Heaven. Above the highest roof of the quarter, is traced in delicate characters against the sky the mane of a cloudland artist who wishes to take your photograph…. So there is no other refuge from these persecutions except to look at your feet, but alas, there is no refuge here even, for you see stamped upon the asphalt by stencil plate an advertisement which begs you to dine on home-cooking in rue Chausée d’Antin. In walking for half an hour you read, without wishing to do so, half a volume. The whole city, in fact, is an inexhaustible, graphic, variegated and enormous decoration, aided by grotesque pictures of devils and puppets high as houses, which assail and oppress you, making you curse the alphabet.’ 

Today such saturation is not shocking. However, then, it was literally (pun intended) an assault. The notion that language was a man-made construction with no claim to truth or universality of meaning was unsettling to say the least. Here one begins to see how power structures emerged in terms of who could and could not read, connections between literacy and class, who controlled the

58 ibid. p.19.

language that is being disseminated and to what end. Artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec [Fig. 23] and Pierre Bonnard [Fig. 24] began to exploit the new market, creating combinations of graphics, art, and text for advertisements, again closing the gap that had existed with the advent of the printing press. Impressionists also began to include glimpses of words in their art, not only to render the pervasiveness of text in modern life accurately, but also punctuating the way information could be manipulated, as in Gustave Caillebotte’s *Interior* [Fig. 25] showing an incomplete and obstructed view of a sign through a window.

The distinct and outright use of text in art rapidly burgeoned in the 20th century. Artists began to re-examine the constructs of language, how it functioned, and how it could be molded, subverted and changed. There was an undercurrent running through the first part of the 20th century that sought to challenge the authority of conventional symbols and signs, including language. Looking first to the Cubists’ inclusion of words in their art, one sees the function of text become both aesthetic and informational. This aim was not an initial desire to include text as a reference to language, but rather began as something strictly formal, highlighting the graphic nature of letters, which often complemented other forms within the composition, creating visual harmony. One example of this is evident in Georges Braque’s *The Portuguese*, in the earlier analytical cubism phase of his work [Fig. 26]. The stenciled letters ‘B’, ‘A’, and ‘L’ all mimic the geometric shapes and angles seen throughout the work. They also serve to emphasize the flatness of the piece, being inherently two-dimensional in
nature. Furthermore, in French “bal “ also can mean a little, informal street dance, which again alludes to a play on words.

As the cubist movement progressed from analytical to synthetic, words took on a different role. The technique of collage exploded as World War I commenced, and artists began to tear down the authoritarian notions of “high art,” and the distinctions between art and life pushed elements of the everyday into new works. Commonplace, cheaply available sources, such as newspapers, advertisements, posters, brand-name logos and sheet music were inserted into cubist art as a rebellion against the elitist establishment. Often severed, obstructed, or flipped in orientation, these texts were meant to be disorienting, confusing, and often-times satirical, as artists commented on the chaotic social atmosphere of the times. Artists also experimented with visual puns and ironic wordplay. Picasso was particularly fond of the words ‘LE JOURNAL’, and he morphed them in various ways, including ‘LE JOUR’ (meaning the day), ‘LE JOU’ (suggesting the French word for play) [Fig. 27], and ‘URNAL’ (alluding to the purposefully crass word ‘urinal).60 In this particular choice of words, Picasso has taken an authoritative, factual, sterile tone associated with a newspaper, and appropriated it for a more engaging, playful purpose. Braque used text to reference other mediums, particularly music. Bach [Fig. 28], compels the viewer to respond to the visual piece on another level, engendering an aural connection through its allusion to the composer. Cubists opened up the possibilities for text to intrude into art in ways that undermined the formality of words and allowed for

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shifting relationships. The cubist movement asserted that text was not necessarily a counterpart to the visual, but rather an element of the broader context, in which meaning is gleaned from connecting various visual elements through active participation and discursive “reading” by the viewer.  

In the 1920s Dada embraced the use of text for its arbitrary, yet fixed nature. This ironic juxtaposition of authorized inauthenticity epitomized their aims of rendering the nonsensical ways of the modern world. Like the Cubists before them, Dadaists embraced a non-linear display of words, seeking to actively engage the viewer. Marcel Duchamp’s *La Boîte Verte* (The Green Box) [Fig. 29] produces the desired effect, forcing the viewer to question the conventions of looking and reading, visual versus verbal. The work is comprised of various notes and paraphernalia that relate to his work *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* of 1915-1923 (The bride stripped bare by her bachelors, even). The work is not bound, however, in the typical form of a book, and all of the sheets of typed paper, handwritten notes, photographs, and diagrams, are left loose, allowing them to be read in any order. The components of *La Boîte Verte* were not merely glimpses of the preparatory nature of the work it referenced, but rather were a part of “the total but indeterminate meaning of the finished ensemble, circulating in an open-ended fashion around the physical artwork to which they refer.”

In the later 1920s the Surrealists’ leader Andre Breton argued that the arts must unite in a campaign against rationale, asserting that they must instead be

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61 ibid. p.45.
62 ibid. p.64.
based upon “thought expressed in the absence of any control exerted by reason, and outside all moral and aesthetic considerations.” Breton suggested that words had become slaves, worn down from serving others, in need of being freed. Searching for the language of the unconscious, Surrealists sought authentic, primal connections. René Magritte, whose work was a favorite of Breton, attempted to expose the falsely constructed connection between the language of words and images. His *The Interpretation of Dreams* [Fig. 30] and *The Betrayal of Images* [Fig. 31] both suggest the inability of language to mirror objects, though they do it through different means. *The Betrayal of Images* is clever because it tells the truth and lies at the same time. Here, word and image misbehave, while enlightening the viewer with the truth. The writing states ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe’ (this is not a pipe). Yet, we are in fact looking at a pipe—not an actual pipe, however, just the representation of one. Here we are thrown off by the duality of truth and deceit in the juxtaposition of word and image. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and its arbitrary combination of mismatched words and images invites parallels with the contemporaneous philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein argued that, as a constructed code, the map of words “does not really tally with the territory of reality, and as a consequence...meaning cannot really be encompassed. Indeed, on the contrary, to seek to deal with them using words is more likely to result in

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confusion than clarity.”\textsuperscript{65} This notion expounds that, though one may believe because we have written something that our ideas are clear and stable, words are inevitably faulty. Given that one’s interpretation will always vary from that of others, no two people will “read” the same thing. The Surrealists’ unleashing of words and images from “reality” had both positive and negative consequences. Emancipating text from convention, to often treasonous effect, resulted in a certain degree of mistrust of language by both viewers and artists alike.

The late 1930s and early 1940s saw a definitive reaction against Dada, as power and authority tried to suppress “Degenerate Art” and wield the visual arts as ideological weapons of dissemination. Totalitarian regimes sought control and censorship, knowing that control of the media was vital in convincing the masses and winning support of the people. The Fascists and the Nazis quickly adopted the tactics of photomontage and graphic design. These power parties also were able to manipulate language quite effectively due to its recent severance by the avant-garde from real-life and historical ties. Words could be plucked at will and placed into new contexts for specific propagandistic purposes with no intrinsic relationship to truth. This obscenely polluted type of language is exemplified by the slogan above the entrance into Auschwitz, \textit{Arbeit Macht Frei} (Work Makes You Free). However, language had also served as opposition to such regimes, as seen in the work of John Heartfield from 1929 [Fig. 32].

The use of text in the post World War II period was, in some cases, a reaction against the horrors that resulted from the manipulative abuse of words and images that had been used to oppress people. Words now revealed themselves as dangerous tools, laden with the intentions of those in power. Artists began to scrutinize their own use of text in an effort to find authenticity. For many, the only viable vehicle of rebellion was silence, or near silence. The overarching goal seems to have focused on an assault on logical, conventional signs, and a rebellion against the “reason” that had resulted in Hiroshima and the Holocaust.

The Abstract Expressionists’ inward, self-searching nature clearly substantiates such motives. Artists such as Adolph Gottlieb looked towards primitive, ancient symbols [Fig. 33], and Franz Kline used bold, gestural, intuitive strokes to block out the banality of newsprint [Fig. 34]. Moving further into the 1960s, artists began to once again de-contextualize words within their work. Pop artists appropriated the language of advertising, resulting in biting commentary on the modern, consumer-driven world [Fig. 35]. As advertising grew more omnipresent, artists responded by creating work in which the juxtaposition of words and images reached new levels of complexity and sophistication. Jasper Johns’ use of familiar signs (maps, the alphabet, numbers) resulted in a jolt when the viewer was confronted with something so familiar in such an unfamiliar context [Fig. 36]. This type of mediated reality allowed Johns to subtly suggest to the viewer the ways that signs could be deconstructed and severed from their

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67 ibid, p. 128.
“true” meaning. Warhol celebrated the brand name as the modern equivalent of old religious icons.\textsuperscript{68} His image \textit{Green Coca-Cola Bottles} [Fig. 37] showed the cool detachment of mass production and mass consumption. The Coke logo, for example, is the most recognizable logo in the world\textsuperscript{69}, epitomizing the level to which the graphic arts are able to cross-culturally saturate by combining visual (the distinctive red and white color) and textual (calligraphic font) elements to potent effect.

From the 1960s and through the present, the Conceptual Art movement has taken firm hold. The art of ideas is fundamentally based in language, and often based entirely outside of aesthetic judgment, seeking an active engagement of the mind rather than the eyes. Artists Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Kruger, Lawrence Weiner, and John Baldessari, have taken language out of its context and used it in new and innovative ways, prompting the viewer to question meaning. As conceptual art gained momentum in the 1970s, new mediums were explored, pushing words into new aesthetic territory. Neon, cloth, chalkboards, and spray paint were among the materials newly utilized by artists to display their texts. Furthermore, the 1970s saw an altogether new inclusion of voices as women, blacks, gays, and other previously excluded groups, asserted their own narratives through text in unprecedented numbers. This emergence of “other” voices opened up entirely new dialogue opportunities for future artists. English artist Gillian Wearing photographed people on the streets of London who were given paper and a marker to write what was on their minds in a series called

\textsuperscript{68} ibid, p. 131.
\textsuperscript{69} http://thelogocompany.net/georgia-logo-design.htm
Signs that say what you want them to say and not signs that say what someone else wants you to say [Fig. 38]. In Unveiling [Fig. 39], Iranian exile Shirin Neshat wrote Arabic script all over the exposed face and chest of a woman partially covered by a traditional Islamic head scarf. This text insinuates the control of the Islamic culture over her body. However, the script is that of a feminist Iranian poet. This does two things – for someone able to read the text, this could be interpreted as an image that empowers women. For someone unable to translate the script, this image may be interpreted as signifying oppression, as if the subject were being silenced by this veil of text. These ambiguities result in multiple “readings” of the work.

Today, the saturation and over-stimulation of the senses have reached new levels due to the widespread use of the internet. This virtual realm is limitless and pervasive in ways artists are only beginning to utilize. Cyberspace provides a new kind of gallery space where users may interact with hypertext that allows them the freedom to navigate their own route, branch off into any direction, and literally get lost in a web of never-ending connections. Jenny Holzer herself is investigating the utilization of the information superhighway as a means of connecting with viewers in her web-based project Please Change Beliefs (1999). In association with äda’web, an experimental site sponsored by the Walker Art Center, Please Change Beliefs allows users to view her texts in a way that denies one the ability to navigate the content. Additionally, the initial link to the website allows users to alter Holzer’s original Truisms or add their own.

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This brief and annotated selection, regarding the progression of text as employed in works of art, gives a general overview of the roles that text has played historically, and touches upon the various ways artists have pushed language in innovative directions and for different purposes. It is within this framework that Jenny Holzer follows her own evolution in utilizing text in art.
In 2001 Holzer stopped writing her own texts altogether. “I found that I couldn’t say enough adequately, and so it was with great pleasure that I went to the texts of others.”71 This complete withdrawal from authorship punctuates what has always been important to Holzer and her belief about texts’ effectiveness.

“There’s a reason I’m anonymous in my work. I like to be absolutely out of view and out of earshot. I don’t sign my work because I think that would diminish its effectiveness…I want people to concentrate on the content of the work and not ‘whodunit’.”72

Holzer’s work, from 2003 to the present, deals with politics. Her exhibition TRUTH BEFORE POWER (Austria, 2003) presented Holzer’s first use of declassified U.S. government documents, and focused on the complex ties, both economically and politically, between the U.S. and the Middle East, particularly the consequences of September 11th and the “war on terror.” Interestingly, the phrase “truth before power” derives from a 1968 essay “Estimates and Influence” by Sherman Kent, a founder of the C.I.A. Kent believed that unbiased intellectual rigor should be the foundation of the agency.73

Holzer’s material for TRUTH BEFORE POWER was gleaned from once classified documents made accessible by organizations such as the National
Security Archive and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) via the Freedom of Information Act. Ironically, many of these “declassified” documents have been severely redacted by the government, prompting a debate in regards to the balance between transparency and censorship, expounding Holzer’s belief that truth holds a priority over authority. Also of importance is the fact that, though Holzer manipulates the color, size, and medium of these documents, she does not in any way alter their content.

Many of the documents Holzer has selected for her works (beginning with 2003-2004 TRUTH BEFORE POWER and continuing up to the present) have been rendered as paintings. Holzer explains that her return to painting after 30 years occurred “Because people study and preserve paintings and take them seriously, whereas information wasn’t always noticed or taken seriously.” That Holzer wants these documents to be viewed with scrutiny and thoughtfulness is clear. Furthermore, the careful selection of these documents indicates that they are of deep significance to Holzer’s overarching themes of violence and victimization, and power and vulnerability.

Critic Cathy Lebowitz states:

“By choosing to make paintings, Holzer inserts these works into a long tradition of political pictures, from those of Géricault and Goya to Picasso and George Grosz. Two notable contemporary

74 An independent non-governmental research institute and library located at The George Washington University, the Archive collects and publishes declassified documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.
75 Enacted in 1966, The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is a federal law that establishes the public's right to obtain information from federal government agencies.
examples are Andy Warhol’s “Death and Disaster” works of the early 1960s (particularly the *Race Riot* paintings) and Gerhard Richter’s “Baader-Meinhof” cycle (1988)...She purposely selects her subject matter as a calculated political act and, it could be said, as a means of facilitating historical memory.”

Holzer herself acknowledges these predecessors as influential. “I was looking at Warhol’s “Death and Disaster” works while I was collecting the declassified pages...I collected books on Goya’s “Black Paintings,” looked at the colors and layering, and then sampled portions of the skies and landscapes. Later, I took pastel skies from Renaissance works to indicate hope. I also screened many documents in black on white paint to emphasize that the documents are real.”

These influences demonstrate Holzer’s acute awareness of the power of her aesthetic choices and her ability to alter them where she feels necessary.

Just as her *Lustmord* series punctuated the violence inflicted on women in war-torn countries, here Holzer engenders a dialogue that responds to atrocities committed against prisoners of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. And yet, in *Redaction Paintings*, Holzer elevates her texts through their factual nature as authentic documents, burdening the viewer with an explicit reality rather than an imagined narrative, no matter how based in real events. Her veracity cuts deeply.

Holzer uses several types of documents found on the National Security Archive website, including maps, government memos, PowerPoint presentations

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detailing invasion strategies, sworn statements of soldiers as well as detainees, pleas from family members of detainees, and post-mortem autopsy files which include the handprints of dead captives. In addition to using several types of original documents (autopsy reports, maps, letters, etc.), Holzer presents these works in a variety of ways, from LED displays, to large silk-screened paintings, to projections. Holzer’s presentations induce a multiplicity of responses by juxtaposing opacity with transparency, emotional pleas with bureaucratic unaffectedness, cartoon-like maps and diagrams [Fig. 40] with the reality that this was implemented strategy, and disturbing memos disclosing evidence of torture rendered in deep, bruise-like or bloody colors. Critic David Joselit wrote,

“If information is supposed to be ‘public’ property, Jenny Holzer’s redaction paintings…offer a spectacle of foreclosure. These works reproduce documents related to the persecution of war in Iraq ranging from government memos to the sworn statements of soldiers that are just as shocking for their copious deletion of names, phrases, and passages as they are for recounting atrocities in the bland idiom of bureaucratic forms.”

The nature of these documents is severely disturbing, but also shocking in that the most damning evidence has often been blocked out with heavy black ink. The censors’ marks are clearly handmade, and appear broad and gestural, creating an expressive abstraction that is strangely at odds with the chilling content and formal layout of the original document. This has the effect of underpinning the fact that these horrible documents were actually created by human beings, and passed before a number of officials who sanctioned their content. These crude redactions also highlight the distance between the publicly

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released version, versus the original version, disproving claims of openness and oversight. Holzer recalls the work as being emotionally draining.

"It’s necessary to be emotionally engaged when writing about these topics. It’s exhausting... My researchers and I have had to stop various times reading the material for these redacted paintings. Sometimes it’s a relief to come to the pages that are wholly blacked out because then, at least for a page or so, you don’t have to read what was there."\(^{80}\)

Often, Holzer enlarges these redacted documents to sizes that fill an entire gallery space, engulfing the viewer. This overwhelming display serves to simultaneously emphasize the importance of seeking out information, while also questioning the point of releasing these documents which have been stripped of so much of their content. Holzer appropriates these documents in a unique way in that she changes none of the actual content. By altering the format of presentation she engenders an entirely different experience of the texts than the experience one gets by seeing them in black and white on a computer screen or on a sheet of paper. By recreating these documents in a larger-than-life scale, Holzer facilitates a physical confrontation with viewers that jolts the viewer because of the distortion in size. Holzer’s choice of color is also calculated, with the intended effect of snaring our attention and implying significance, leading viewers to puzzle over how the color is connected to the content. The more aesthetic choices that Holzer makes, the more layers of meaning she embeds, placing the burden of interpretation on viewers and requiring that they pay more

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attention. This correlates to Holzer’s overall themes of the *Redaction* works, which address awareness, transparency, and public vigilance.

LED displays offer a different effect, which Holzer has likened to being inside a toaster oven. Joan Simon describes one such piece, *Red Yellow Looming* (2004) [Fig. 41] as such:

"13 horizontal LED signs ascend from floor to ceiling, creating a plane that tips forward into the room and dwarfs the viewer under its topmost edge. Deploying red and amber electric diodes in concert with their perceived greenish after-images, Holzer shapes a space both ominously threatening and seductively inviting, one that broadcasts a selection of declassified U.S. documents and bathes the room in a red that is part ethereal Rothko, part holy fires of purgatory."

Nick Obourn of *Art in America* describes *Thorax and Purple* (2008) similarly: "The artist astutely pairs furnace-like reds and hypnotic, deep-ocean blues with deeply disturbing content, skewing the harrowing reading experience toward a kind of trance."

In addition to typed, bureaucratic memos, Holzer also renders touching, handwritten documentation, from various sources, including: parents of a U.S. soldier accused of having committed war crimes, detainees appealing for their release in order to help their struggling families, or witnesses (both American and Iraqi) of abuse giving sworn testimonials recounting the horrors they encountered or participated in [Fig. 42]. These handwritten letters are powerful, touching, and

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human, amidst other more sterile documents. They reveal, regardless of what side we are on, the interconnectedness we share as people, trying to cope with the atrocities of war.

Other silk-screened paintings focus on detainee autopsy reports, in which the frequent cause of death is indicated as “homicide,” and post mortem, redacted handprints serve as stark reminders of a life snuffed out. The sheer number of these particular document types indicates that they were not singular, sparse occurrences, but rather indicative of a repeated, authorized, systematic pattern of abuse. Holzer states: “In most cases the black partially covers the handprints – so that the prints can’t be identified. Some are almost completely blackened; some have lines through them so the hands look like skeletons. Some seem cartoonish, others appear sinister.”

Though the handprints were mainly rendered in stark black and white, Holzer took a more colorful approach for first-person accounts of abuse. “I wanted more emotional substrates for first-person accounts – pages in which a detainee or soldier says, ‘I was hit,’ or, ‘I was struck.’” To have the desired impact, Holzer employed a wide palette. Deep purples and greens evoke the color of bruising, grays the color of dead flesh, bloody crimsons. On the other

hand, she also uses brighter, cheerier colors to jolt an awareness of dissonance between visual expression and content. *FINAL AUTOPSY REPORT DOD 003235 – DOD 003241 OCHRE* [Figs. 3a and 3b] details a detainee autopsy report at the hands of US soldiers. The bright yellow color becomes almost garish in light of the content of the document, leaving the viewer aghast at the impropriety of such juxtaposition. *AS A PARENT TURQUOISE* [Figs. 46a and 46b] also exemplifies Holzer’s savvy in merging formal properties of her work with selected content. Choosing a light blue hue as a background color, Holzer renders the letter of a detainee’s parents. One would be aloof not to link that color to the one that correlates with traditional baby boy blue/ baby girl pink shades. Is this not just a parent’s child that they so effusively inquire about? Again, viewers are meant to feel the acute emotions Holzer so effectively targets in these works; works which originated from people, were translated into sterilized memos, and through Holzer reclaimed some impression of humanity. *Redaction Paintings* highlights Holzer’s ability to channel the art of choice and association.
Conclusion

Holzer's later works indeed mark her textually authorial absence. However, moving away from her own writings has made Holzer critically aware of the text she does select, as evidenced by her increasingly complex means of exhibiting them. Her authorial silence has been replaced by her aptitude for carefully selecting texts she feels must be brought to the public's attention, and her ability to render those texts in ways that are compelling to the viewer.

Without using her own words, Holzer has proven she is capable of engendering a dialogue based upon texts she has chosen. Over the span of her career, Holzer has honed in on techniques that startle viewers. Often creating installations that make the viewer uncomfortable (mentally), that provoke, or that are unsettling, Holzer reminds the viewer to look, to feel, and to ask questions! She demands that the viewer make his or her own judgments.

No longer anonymous, Holzer has moved past the strategy of wheat-pasting broadside posters onto street corners in order to reach a wider audience; her success has made it possible for her to relinquish her own voice (the voice of one) and instead highlight many voices in ways that promote dialogue as well as introspection. By bringing to light texts which we, the viewer, endow with meaning, Holzer indeed invites and burdens us with the option of choosing truth before power.
Two bodies run together, fuse, and then vanish.
Fig. 2. Jenny Holzer
Thorax, 2008
L.E.D.
104.3 x 58.3 x 37.1 in.
Text: U.S. Government Documents
Fig. 3a. Jenny Holzer

FINAL AUTOPSY REPORT

DOD 003235 –DOD 003241 OCHRE, 2006

Oil on linen (panel 1 of 2; see following page)

66 x 25.5 in.
Fig. 3b. Jenny Holzer

FINAL AUTOPSY REPORT
DOD 003235 –DOD 003241 OCHRE, 2006
Oil on linen: (panel 2 of 2)
66 x 25.5 in.

OPINION
This 47-year-old White male, [redacted] died of blunt force injuries and asphyxia. The autopsy disclosed multiple blunt force injuries, including deep contusions of the chest wall, numerous displaced rib fractures, lung contusions, and hemorrhage into the mesentery of the small and large intestine. An examination of the neck structures revealed hemorrhage into the strap muscles and fractures of the thyroid cartilage and hyoid bone. According to the investigative report provided by U.S. Army CID, the decedent was shackled to the top of a doorknob with a gag in his mouth at the time he lost consciousness and became pulseless.

The severe blunt force injuries, the hanging position, and the obstruction of the oral cavity with a gag contributed to this individual’s death. The manner of death is homicide.

[Signature]

Chief Deputy Medical Examiner
Fig. 4. Jenny Holzer
*Lustmord*, 1996
Human bones, engraved silver, wood table
34 x 70 x 44.5 in
Fig. 5. Jenny Holzer
*For 7 World Trade*, 2006
LEDs on glass and plastic screens (text pictured: “Here is New York,” © E.B. White)
Fig. 6. Jenny Holzer
from Truisms, 1997
Wheat-pasted broadsheet
17 x 22 in
Fig. 7. Jenny Holzer
   from *Truisms*, 1982
   Spectacolor electronic sign (Times Square, New York City)
   20 x 40 feet
Fig. 8. Jenny Holzer
*Monument* (detail), 2008
LED (installation view at Gallery One, Moscow Russia)
Dimensions variable
Fig. 9. Jenny Holzer
Installation view at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1989
LED
14 x 6.369 x 4 in.
Fig. 10. Jenny Holzer
Xenon for the Peggy Guggenheim, 2003
Light projection, Prefeturra, Venice, Italy
Text: “Blur” from “MIDDLE EARTH” by Henri Cole
Alternative Interrogation Techniques (Wish List)
42nd Infantry Division, ICE.

Open Hand Strikes (face and midsection) (no distance greater than 24 inches)
Fairly self-explanatory.

Pressure Point Manipulation
Manipulation of specific points on the human body can cause acute temporary pain but cause no long term effects or damage.

Close Quarter Confinement
Confinement of subject in extremely close quarters. Discomfort induces compliance and cooperation.

White Noise Exposure
Overexposure of subject to noise found to be meaningless and many times monotonous to subject. Often used in conjunction with Sleep Deprivation.

Sleep Deprivation
An initial period of total deprivation (usually 12 to 24 hours) followed by regular and irregular sleep patterns over several days.

Stimulus Deprivation
The human mind requires stimulation, however small, to maintain resistance to suggestion, mental and emotional manipulation and self will. Subject is deprived of this stimulation for 12 to 24 hours during initial stages. Effects on subject’s resistance are monitored with short intense interrogations (15-60 minutes at most). Subject’s resistance will usually rapidly decay after 36 to 48 hours. This technique requires no physical pressure to be applied. However, subject must be carefully monitored.

*There are a number of “coercive” techniques that may be employed that cause no permanent harm to the subject. These techniques, however, often call for medical personnel to be on call for unforeseen complications. They include but are not limited to the following:

Phone Book Strikes
Low Voltage Electrocutation
Closed-Fist Strikes
Muscle Fatigue Inducement

EXHIBIT D 6627

Fig. 11. Jenny Holzer
WISH LIST BLACK (selected panel 1), 2006
Oil on linen (16 panels)
33 x 25.5 in.
Fig. 12. Jenny Holzer
*Inflammatory Essays, 1979-1982*
Offset posters
Installation view at La Friche Belle de Mai, Marseille
Fig. 13. Jenny Holzer
from *Laments*, 1989
Verde antique marble sarcophagus and electronic LED sign; installation at MoMA New York
Sarcophagus 18 x 54 1/16 x 24 1/8 in.
LED sign 128 ¼ x 9 ½ x 5 ½ in.
Fig. 14. Jenny Holzer
from *Mother and Child*, 1991
Installation at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, after Venice Biennale installation, Gallery A
Ankara red marble tablet with Nero Marquina marble border and Carrara Goia marble floor tiles, and vertical LED signs
Signs: 12 ft., 9.5 in. x 5.5 in. x 4 in. each
Fig. 15. Jenny Holzer
*Lustmord*, 1993
Photograph of handwriting in ink on skin
Fig. 16. Jenny Holzer

*Lustmord* (detail), 1996

Human bones, engraved silver band
Fig. 17. Jenny Holzer
Black Garden, 1994
Dark foliage
Nordhorn, Germany
Fig. 18. Jenny Holzer

*Black Garden* (details), 1994

Above: Black Mondo grass
Below: Queen of the Night Tulips
Fig. 19. Lawrence Weiner
*Quid Quo Pro*, 2008
Vinyl on walls
Gagosian Gallery, Rome, Italy
I had this old pencil on the dashboard of my car for a long time. Every time I saw it, I felt uncomfortable since its point was so dull and dirty. I always intended to sharpen it and finally couldn't bear it any longer and did sharpen it. I'm not sure, but I think that this has something to do with art.

Fig. 20. John Baldessari
The Pencil Story, 1972 – 1973
Marian Goodman Gallery, New York
Color photographs with colored paper mounted on board
Fig. 21. Fra Angelico
*Annunciation*, c. 1432-34
Tempera on panel
69 x 71 in.
Fig. 22. Limbourg Brothers

_Tres Riches Heures du Duc de Berry_

Detail folio 110v, c. early 15th century
Fig. 23. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
*Moulin Rouge: La Goulue*, 1891
Lithograph
74 13/16 x 45 7/8 in.
Fig. 24. Pierre Bonnard  
*Champagne*, 1891  
Lithograph  
31 1/8 x 23 in.
Fig. 25. Gustave Caillebotte
*Interior*, 1880
Oil on canvas
45.5 x 35 in.
Fig. 26. Georges Braque
*The Portuguese*, 1911
Oil on canvas
46 ¼ x 32 ¾ in.
Fig. 27. Pablo Picasso

*Still Life with Chair-caning*, 1912

Oil and oilcloth on canvas, with rope frame

10 5/8 x 13 ¾ in.
Fig. 28. Georges Braque
*Still Life BACH*, 1912
Pasted paper and charcoal on paper
Fig. 29. Marcel Duchamp

*La Boîte Verte*, 1934

93 documents (photos, drawings, notes and one plate, from years 1911-1915)
Fig. 30. Rene Magritte  
*The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1930  
Oil on canvas  
32 x 23.5 in.

Fig. 31. Rene Magritte  
*The Betrayal of Images*, 1929  
Oil on canvas  
25 x 37 in.
Fig. 32. John Heartfield
*Deutschland über Alles*, 1929
Cover of *The Avant-Garde in Print* by Kurt Tucholsky
Yellow cloth, with complex colored photomontage laid into embossed cover of book
Fig. 33. Adolph Gottlieb
*Mariner’s Incantation*, 1945
Oil, gouache, tempera, on canvas
39 13/16 x 29 7/8 in.
Fig. 34. Franz Kline

*Untitled II*, 1952

Ink and oil on cut and pasted telephone book pages on board

11 x 9 in.
Fig. 35. Richard Hamilton
*Just What is it that Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing?*
1956
Collage
10 ¼ x 9 ¾ in.
Fig. 36. Jasper Johns  
*Gray Alphabets*, 1956  
Beeswax and oil on newspaper on canvas  
66 1/8 x 48 ¾ in.
Fig. 37. Andy Warhol
*Green Coca-Cola Bottles*, 1962
Oil on canvas
82 ½ x 57 in.
Fig. 38. Gillian Wearing

*Work Towards World Peace*, from series *Signs that say what you want them to say and not signs that say what someone else wants you to say*

1992 -1993

Photograph on paper

47 x 31 in.
Fig. 39. Shirin Neshat
*Unveiling* (from the ‘Women of Allah’ series), 1993
Ink on gelatin silver print
65 x 48 in.
Fig. 40. Jenny Holzer

*Phase III Complete Regime Destruction*, 2007

Oil on linen

79 x 102 ¼ in.

Text: U.S. government documents
Fig. 41. Jenny Holzer
*Red Yellow Looming*, 2004
LED
144 x 109 x 52 in.
Text: U.S. government documents
Fig. 42. Jenny Holzer

*BY THE NAME OF GOD GREEN*, 2006

Oil on linen

33 x 25 ½ in.

Text: U.S. government documents
Fig. 43. Jenny Holzer

*PALM, FINGERS & FINGERTIPS 000407*, 2007
Oil on linen
58 x 44 in.
Text: U.S. government documents
Fig. 44. Jenny Holzer

Left Hand (Palm Rolled), 2007
Oil on linen
80 x 62 in.
Text: U.S. government documents
Fig. 45. Jenny Holzer

*HAND YELLOW WHITE* (panel 6), 2006
Oil on linen
33 x 25 ½ in.
Text: U.S. government documents
September 26, 2003

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter for my wife and myself. The purpose of this letter is to appeal to you, as a parent, for relief for my son (1st Lt. ) in his current situation. I understand that the U.S. Army wants to court martial him and send him to prison. Without getting into the specifics of the charges against him I simply want to appeal to you, as a father, to allow him to resign with an honorable discharge. My son is not the type of person that deserves to be placed in prison. He has never been in any trouble what so ever until these charges.

I know you don’t know me, or my son, so if you don’t mind please read this letter because it is important to me that you know who I am, and more importantly, who my son is before you make a recommendation about how to treat him.

First, so that you know a little about me and my perspective on young men I have written a little about my background. I have been in secondary education for 30 years. I have been a for 10 years. This June, Florida Governor Jeb Bush appointed me as . Our school system has 40,000 students and 5,200 employees. My headquarters are located in , a small city that is the home to Congressman Cliff Stearns and former Florida governor Buddy McKay. So you understand that I evaluate the quality and nature of my employees and interact with my community’s leaders on a weekly basis. I am also heavily involved in activities with our Veteran’s groups.

My family is very important to me and all of us are totally involved in our community. My wife recently retired after spending 17 years as the business manager of our 1,000-member church. My two daughters and their husbands are teachers. One daughter recently became our church’s full time youth director. We are committed to our city, our county, and our country.

My son, has always been a leader academically and athletically, and has excelled at everything he has attempted. He has been chosen by adults throughout his life to be a leader in boy scouts, chosen as a camp counselor on several occasions, and represented our local VFW and our high school at Boys’ State. This will be his first failure.

Quite frankly I find it hard to believe that he is not wanted and needed in our Army. He used to want to be a career officer. He had a great attitude and I believe, the right morals to make the tough decisions every time. It breaks my heart to know that he no longer feels wanted by a country that he so wants to

Fig. 46a. Jenny Holzer
AS A PARENT TURQUOISE, 2006
Oil on linen (panel 1 of 2)
33 x 51 in.
Text: U.S. government documents
April 12, 2003—"...You both can’t possibly imagine how appreciative I am of you. Not just thankful, but proud. Proud to be raised by you both. Proud to be in such a strong family with such strong morals...you never asked why I joined but today I know why more than ever. I am here to embrace those values, those memories that you gave me. Only by sharing, and in this case leading others, do I feel I can possibly repay the debt that I owe you and the society that would allow for such a life to exist...I couldn’t think of a happier time in my life. I am doing exactly what it is I have always wanted to do. Without this experience I would feel incomplete for the rest of my life, debts unpaid and talents unrealized."

July 12, 2003—At the start of the investigation by the Army he writes: “Needless to say the Army has made a decision, or helped me make a decision, that I will only serve for 4 years. I still love my country and have faith in her virtues, though she has none in mine. If this goes to court martial I will be broadcast over the news and my name, and yours, will be tarnished forever. You didn’t sign up for that, but I did. If this happens I apologize in advance. All I ever wanted to do was to serve and protect those who loved me, and spread freedom to others less fortunate. I have brought hundreds of criminals to prison, captured countless weapons, saved lives of coalition and civilian personnel, have my life threatened on a daily basis from insurgents and criminals alike. Yet all I ever wanted was to be left alone with my platoon so I could continue doing what I love the most..."

As you can tell my son loves his country and I assure you he is not a criminal. Please allow him to keep his dignity and pride. If he must be released from the Army, then please allow him to resign his commission and receive an honorable discharge. I often hear that Generals are treated as gods from my friends who have served. Please act like a compassionate god, and a reasonable man, and allow my son to be released from all charges with dignity. I beg of you, as a father, for my son’s life.

Sincerely,

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Fig. 46b. Jenny Holzer
AS A PARENT TURQUOISE, 2006
Oil on linen (panel 2 of 2)
33 x 51 in.
Text: U.S. government documents
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Exhibition Catalogues


