

Matthew TEDFORD

Tactics of Engagement in Art

POLITICS, PLURALISM, AND PROGRAM

DOES SIMPLY REFERENCING POLICY-MAKING OR CURRENT AFFAIRS make an artwork political? Is there more to a work's politicization than its content? To say that a work of art is political if it has a political message uncovers nothing of the work's nature. In fact, as aesthetician and political philosopher Jacques Rancière argues, an artwork is not rendered political because of "the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world," nor because of the way it represents this world, but rather because of the "type of space and time it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples this space."¹ In other words, it is the way an artwork functions in the world that makes it a political phenomenon.

This essay considers the form and operation of artworks in order to hypothesize about what makes an artistic project politically effective—or not. Is there a way that political phenomena act or look? Is there a way to be political? If so, should an artwork that has this way of being be considered significantly more likely to contribute to discourse and social change than one that does not? To answer these questions we must first establish the form of political art. I will do so by looking at Public Ad Campaign's *New York Street Advertising Takeover* (2009), a guerilla street art project. The project was a response to the inability or unwillingness of the New York City Department of Buildings (DOB) to enforce regulations on street level

advertising. The project targeted more than one hundred illegal billboards to be whitewashed and have their commercial imagery replaced with a variety of noncommercial murals. Whether wittingly or not, NYSAT operated in such a way that nurtured the central characteristics found in political phenomena, ultimately resulting in a measure of success, ensuring enforcement of DOB regulations.

A number of philosophical precepts guide my analysis of the project. These parameters, based upon the political theories of the twentieth-century German-American political philosopher Hanna Arendt, view politics as springing forth from a pluralism of members in a given social system. If a space of freedom and action exists, debate and contestation between these members produces politics. Such a precept implies that the context and display of an artwork is as important to its political efficacy as are its formal characteristics. Once inserted into a social context, the modes of operation of an artwork may contribute to or diminish the level to which the work can be seen as political. Stemming from these fundamentals, my examination of this concept finds that it possesses four primary dimensions: the expressive, the regulatory, the conflictual, and the ephemeral. These contextual and formal characteristics give us a better understanding of how a work of art would need to operate in order to be successfully political.

Politics is an inherently public affair and originates in the interactions of people. The decisions that a woman makes in solitude are personal decisions. It is when these decisions are made with, against, and for others that they become political. The content of an action, event, or artwork does not necessarily determine whether it is political. These entities are not merely political just because they seem to be *about* certain issues, such as labor, voting, or poverty. In some ways, this line of reasoning is merely arguing against a circular definition of politics. But it is prudent to note this, because in vernacular speech

we often consider something political if it is involved with issues we have deemed political. One who wishes to engage in the political must understand that content, though it may be necessary, is not sufficient. Conversely, a phenomenon's form is a necessary consideration, but may not be sufficient in determining whether it is political or not.

To understand the intimate relationship between politics and action, Arendt turns to freedom. The concept of politics is in contrast with authority. This may seem counterintuitive; often politics is seen as the attempt to attain or hold on to authority. Authority, however, is something that "demands obedience."² The Jewish god has authority; the tyrant who needn't suppress his people because they do it themselves has authority. Rancière similarly rejects the notion that politics is "the exercise of, or struggle for, power." Instead, he says that politics is "the configuration of a specific space," the framing of particular experiences concerned with the "common," and a putting forth of arguments about these experiences.³ That is to say, politics has what I will call a regulatory dimension. Politics is concerned with the basic structure and function of society. Persuasion and authority are incompatible with one another.⁴ If a populace can engage in argument and persuasion (or even have the *possibility* to persuade), with regards to the function their society, they enter into the realm of politics.

For this reason, freedom is a central ingredient of action. When one cannot choose to act differently than she already is, she is under the subject of an authority. When she cannot disobey or make a decision, authority is at work. But on the contrary, if she is able to decide to disobey or obey, if she is free to *act*, she is free. This freedom should not be taken as absolute. A hypothetical agent may be free in some instances and not in others. There may be more than one authority (and we should not think of authorities as only states or state agents). But whenever action is possible, some degree of freedom is

present.⁵ Action is, in a way, the practice of freedom. Any time you experience action, you are witnessing the result of freedom. Arendt argues that “[t]he *raison d’être* of politics is freedom.” We must be careful with the semantics: freedom is not merely the reason, the cause, of politics; it is its reason for being. Freedom is not just what makes politics possible, it is what politics exists *for*. Arendt writes that we “become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves.”⁶ This echoes her belief that politics is tied to pluralism. But now it is not just politics but also freedom that is tied to pluralism. We cannot be free unless we are in relationship with others. And since we cannot have politics without freedom, and we cannot have freedom without pluralism, politics ultimately springs from pluralism.

Climactically, the final bind between politics and freedom comes when the philosopher states that the end of politics is “to establish and keep in existence a space where freedom and virtuosity can appear.”⁷ This begins to give a glimpse of the form of politics. A political phenomenon is one that creates or maintains a space where freedom can thrive. The expressive nature of this space stems from the fact that the acting one does inside of it exists only to be experienced by others—it exists for others. In this space, authority is limited in favor of an uncertainty that allows for agents to act. We should remember that a space of argumentation and persuasion is not a space of authority, but one of freedom. Debate and contestation are forms of action. Finally we begin to see the disparate ingredients blending together: pluralism, action, and freedom all come together to offer a form of politics. The dialogic aspect of politics is integral; for Rancière politics occurs when spectators become actors, when those that don’t normally “front up as inhabitants of a common space” become active in reconfiguring the community in which they live.⁸ Arendt’s

space of freedom is a place where this politically necessary communication and civic engagement can and must reside. This is a definition of politics that is inherently expressive. Political agents are like actors in a play. There is a temporality in all of this. Actions only exist in very precise moments and then they are gone. Politics is inherently limited by time and space.

All of these dimensions can be seen clearly in the planning and execution of the *New York Street Advertising Takeover*. In the case of NYSAT, the DOB’s regulation of street-level advertising is strict and clear. Any advertising on the city’s ubiquitous construction sheds and fences (this is known as “wildposting”) is prohibited.⁹ Though illegal, before NYSAT wildposting was widely practiced, and regulations against it were rarely enforced. Further, the city’s building code requires advertisements of varying sizes and locations to obtain permits before posting, and stipulates that any person who places or maintains an advertising sign on a building without the proper permit is subject to up to \$15,000 in fines for the first offense and \$25,000 for the second offense. Each day that a sign remains is considered a separate violation.¹⁰ Nonetheless, using the city’s own databases, NYSAT’s organizer, artist Jordan Seiler, located more than 500 street-level billboards that were being illegally operated by NPA Outdoor. This represented at least 7.5 million dollars in potential first-offense fines for the city. Whether out of unwillingness or inability, the DOB was not enforcing its own laws.

In response to the city’s inaction and ineffectiveness, Seiler stealthily organized the NYSAT in order to take action and bring attention to this crime spree running rampant through the streets of New York. But Seiler’s action was more than a blind attempt to ensure the enforcement of city laws. He was quoted in the *New York Post* as saying that when a city is filled with commercial messages it no longer

serves as a public space, but rather becomes a commercial space.¹¹ At stake for the artist was community authorship. Citing advertising as a force rather than a dialogue, Seiler stated that his goal for the project was to “help create an environment where citizens of New York City feel empowered to interact with their shared public spaces” and to “help people to develop strong physical ties with their environment and to develop a sense of responsibility for the space in which they live.”¹² There is a clear link between Seiler’s sentiment and Arendt’s requirement that politics be a space of free discourse. In Arendtian terms, the commercial space could be seen as one nearing authority, rather than politics. This authority stems from a lack of control and participation in the creation of one’s own home. Making the city enforce their own laws would be a means to combating illegal commercial spaces, but the ultimate goal was to engage people in the expressive creation of their own public spaces.

The artwork involved more than eighty participants who learned about the action through word of mouth.¹³ The majority of the 120 targeted signs were located south of 23rd Street in Manhattan, with a handful in west Brooklyn. A group of thirty people individually whitewashed these billboards in little over an hour. Fifty artists then arrived to paint murals on these fresh canvases.¹⁴ The participants were given fake “letters of permission” from the fictional Municipal Landscape Control Committee. These letters specified the actual laws being broken by NPA Outdoor and informed the reader that the billboards would be whitewashed pending structural removal.

Equipped with official-looking OSHA-regulation construction vests, the whitewashers painted over much of the city’s corporate graffiti. The murals that replaced advertisements for movies and clothing ranged from minimal geometric shapes to large-scale portraits and elaborate designs (*figs. 1–2*). Ultimately, however, the police and

FIGURE 1—Public Ad Campaign. New York Street Advertising Takeover, April 25, 2009.
Photo courtesy of Aakash Nihilani

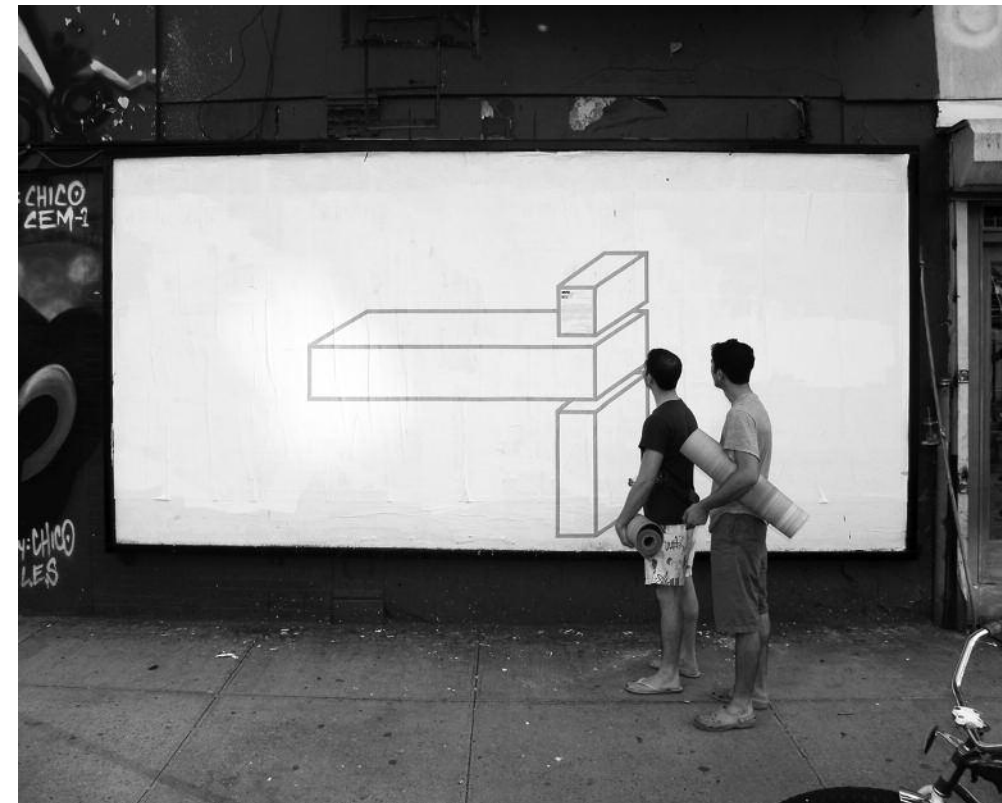


FIGURE 2—Public Ad Campaign. New York Street Advertising Takeover, April 25, 2009.
Photo courtesy of I AM and Posterchild



the DOB caught on and cracked down on the semiotic vigilantes. Those muralists who had not finished were stopped, and four of the participants were arrested. All the charges, however, were eventually dropped because NPA refused to sign the relevant depositions, not wanting to bring attention to themselves and their illegal practices. By the end of the same night, NPA had reversed the work done by PAC and reasserted their claim to illegally control 20,000 square feet of public space in New York City, covering the murals and blank canvases once again with solicitations for goods and services.¹⁵ The city's walls were set back to square one, and no material evidence of PAC's hard work remained in existence.

This artwork, however, had far-reaching effects. It received national coverage by NBC news, as well as in Spain's daily *El Pais* newspaper.¹⁶ Chatter about the work spread across the Internet. Despite NPA efforts to avoid attention, *NYSAT* ultimately began just that. A dialogue was created about the company's private use of public space. The head of the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection even called Seiler to both congratulate him on his innovative tactics for handling the issue and to inform him that NPA was operating illegally on the other side of the country as well.¹⁷

With the issue now in the open, the New York City DOB decided to take action. In her documentary *On Corporate Graffiti*, journalist Sarah Berman reports that NPA was cited for several sign violations, forcing the company to dissolve out of inability to pay such high fines.¹⁸ Unfortunately, later reports indicate that while NPA dissolved, many of their assets were taken over by a new company, Contest Promotions. The "new" company simply adds a small sign to the top or bottom of existing billboards, inviting passersby to enter the store to collect "prizes," which are merely copies of the posters on the billboard. The theory is that this transforms the billboards into legal signs

that invite customers into the adjacent stores, much as a “LIQUOR” sign in front of a liquor store does.¹⁹

Despite the inability to put a complete stop to illegal advertising in the city, *NYSAT* was successful by a number of measures. Seiler reports that an anonymous source at the DOB has stated that the department will continue to enforce its advertising laws with Contest Promotions.²⁰ When NPA transferred their assets to Contest Promotions many of their signs that were not attached to stores, and thus not operable under the new business model, came down. Seiler estimates that this accounts for about one third of NPA’s signage. And more significantly, wildposting on construction sheds and fences has dramatically decreased.²¹ The anonymous DOB source commented that the actions of PAC and the press that they generated had some effect on all of this.

The measure of the work’s success, however, should not be gauged solely by the enforcement of preexisting laws that followed. Seiler’s stated goal was to empower citizens to interact with and shape their own public spaces, creating stronger bonds to their community. By acting upon the cityscape, participants performed community-creation. This creation may have been short-lived (at least in terms of the material residue), but any urban environment is dynamic, and the reclaimed billboards represent a strong form of civic engagement, regardless of how long they lasted. In this sense, no matter the results, the work was bound to be politically successful, as it was an inherently expressive political dialogue with the city.

Engaging with a plurality was at the core of *NYSAT*. Participants were not hand-selected, but came almost out of the ether, having heard about the project through the Internet. Moreover, instead of aiming their critique at a gallery audience or stating it on an anti-billboard blog, PAC took to the streets. To convince the city to enforce its laws,

Seiler and his group needed to convince the public that laws were being broken and that they should care.

To make this a truly political action, the public had to be addressed. Nearly all of the 120 sites took place in the small, densely populated and highly trafficked area south of 23rd Street. According to Seiler, the reason for enacting *NYSAT* in broad daylight was to engage the passing public. Many of the participants were asked what they were doing, and this interaction allowed them to explain the project, its aims, and the crimes of NPA. Literal dialogue occurred between the artists and their audience. The two parties did not need to always agree or see eye to eye, but there needed to be exchange and feedback, not a lecture.

An employee at a business (on the corner of 10th Avenue and 26th Street in Chelsea) that had a billboard targeted in the project spoke to me about his experience; he was not aware of the illegality of the billboards when we spoke. And though he spoke passionately about the mural that has permanently replaced a very large twenty-six-by-six foot NPA billboard, he grew angry when he learned that the advertisements were illegal. “It’s not their property!” he said of the DOB. He was not in agreement with the building code, and yet he supported the results of *NYSAT*. This is the kind of nuanced conversation that needs to result from such a project, creating the dialogue and debate that is central to fostering politics.²²

An added benefit of operating in daylight was that PAC wanted to give the public the opportunity to see the advertisements removed and replaced all in the course of one day.²³ This elucidated certain commercial and governmental systems that were operating, unseen and unacknowledged, in front of the residents’ very eyes. Through this transformation and reversal PAC made it clear that the city wasn’t prosecuting corporate crimes. By granting liberties to commercial

graffitists that would not be granted to individuals engaged in the same kind of activity, the government's favoritism toward businesses was exposed. These various reasons for the transparent daylight execution illustrate how pluralism was truly integrated into all facets of the work, from planning to implementation to audience.

The billboards, Seiler states, "became empty spaces on which the public could project their own thoughts and desires."²⁴ The work created both a physical and a conceptual space of freedom. This happened literally by turning the one-way communication of the billboard into a dialogue between citizens and the cityscape. The civil disobedience created a space for artists and citizens to display their voices in a place that would normally require thousands of dollars just to make a whisper. This is an instance of the core communicative aspect of politics. Rancière has suggested that politics occurs when people make "pronouncements on the common which cannot be reduced to voices signally pain."²⁵ Though *NYSAT* was a reaction to the inability to create one's own community, the visual manifestation was optimistic and often cheery, certainly not a painful expression of the dire situation at hand. The murals depicted beautiful landscapes, colorful scribbles, and declarations such as "free your mind" or "live, love, laugh" (figs. 3–6). Legal or not, *NYSAT* empowered inhabitants of the community to act and to shape their own community. The project was not one of victimization, but one of community liberation, expression, and strengthening. In the face a much wealthier corporation and impending arrest, projected a vision for the city they wanted to see and live in through the murals themselves.

Like any political phenomenon, *NYSAT* engaged a plurality of perspectives in order to create a regulatory debate. In this case, PAC entered into a conversation with the public, the DOB, and NPA over the meaning of public space and how it should be structured and utilized.

FIGURE 3—Public Ad Campaign. New York Street Advertising Takeover, April 25, 2009.
Photo courtesy of Derek Amengual



FIGURE 4—Public Ad Campaign. New York Street Advertising Takeover, April 25, 2009.
Photo courtesy of MOMO



FIGURE 5—Public Ad Campaign. New York Street Advertising Takeover, April 25, 2009.
Photo courtesy Free Your Mind



FIGURE 6—*Public Ad Campaign*. New York Street Advertising Takeover, April 25, 2009.
Photo courtesy of Will Sherman



The pluralistic and active nature of this work fomented this debate. Stripped of advertisements, the reclaimed billboards became blank canvases that created a literal space where participants could display their vision for the proper role of this small particular space in their community. True power rested in the hands of the DOB, but to get any action from them, the public needed to be informed and persuaded. Whether wittingly or not, at every stage of its execution, the *New York Street Advertising Takeover* possessed the characteristics that I have identified as common to political acts; these features ultimately afforded the work a measure of success. While the battle is not over for Public Ad Campaign, the city has several thousand fewer square feet of commercialism, and dozens more community shapers.

The political power of art, however, need not be relegated to that which happens in the street. Sometimes the subject of a work may be tied to the politics of the institution itself. In such cases, the homogenous constituency is the necessary audience for a given work. The genre of institutional critique is a great example of a practice that requires just this; its critical engagement with specific institutions and practices requires an audience of museumgoers and professionals. By attending to this specific pluralism, an institutional critique can reiterate the expressive, conflictual, and ephemeral dimensions of politics. Such an exhibition exists in a precise time, for a precise audience, engaging with precise issues, and these factors can coalesce into a political debate.

The artist Fred Wilson is known for his work in this vein. His installations take as their subject both the display and collection practices of museums, as well as racial themes underlying museums and art under colonialism. One of his early and most well-known works is the 1992–93 exhibition *Mining the Museum*, which took place at the Maryland Historical Society (MHS) in Baltimore. Wilson scoured the

museum's archive and assembled an installation that highlighted Maryland's nefarious racial history, as well as the Historical Society's representation (or lack thereof) of this history. *Mining the Museum* arose from a purported crisis of museum identity.

Lisa G. Corrin, co-curator of the exhibition, claimed that at the time the purpose of museums was being called into question because of the historical, political, and social contexts in which they operated.²⁶ The exhibition came on the heels of shrinking funding and the culture war launched by Senator Jesse Helms and Reverend Pat Robertson. In response to this focus on collecting practices, Corrin invited Wilson to work with the collection of one of the city's museums to create a self-reflexive exhibition. Wilson visited many of Baltimore's museums, ultimately deciding to work with the MHS.

Wilson's choice of the MHS stemmed from the fact that he found the museum to have more "raw material" to work with than others in the region. Further, even though he found the artifacts in the museum to be "completely American," and even though he is an American himself, he felt "completely alien" inside the historical society. His urge to run away was ultimately what brought him back.²⁷ Serendipitously, as Wilson was selecting a museum the MHS was already interested in bringing itself "up-to-date." They hoped to create an audience that was in tune with the diversity of the larger Baltimore and Maryland community.²⁸

Wilson made it clear that the exhibition was a personal statement, and was not meant to be a universal claim about the purpose or future of the museum. Upon entering the lobby, visitors were greeted with a video of Wilson describing the museum as a place meant to "make you think, to make you question."²⁹ Wilson stressed that he did not want to impose a vision, but rather create a dialogue. He wanted to provoke questions and contemplation, and let the

viewer come to his own conclusion. In an interview with Leslie-King Hammond, former dean of graduate studies at the Maryland Institute College of Art, Wilson said that "if no dialogue arises, then to me the work is not successful."³⁰ It is in this way that Wilson centered the exhibition around a dialogic engagement with the audience.

In similar fashion to PAC's attunement with the expressive nature of politics and the decision to work in broad daylight in order to speak with passersby, Wilson makes explicit his desire and need to create dialogue with visitors to the MHS. This, of course, is at the core of politics; and its centrality not just to the work but even to the curatorial introduction positions *Mining the Museum* as a firmly political phenomenon. It is one thing to say that a work of art or an exhibition is a dialogue and another thing entirely to make it so. Wilson, however, took great care to ensure that this was more than self-aggrandizing rhetoric. Prior to the exhibition's opening, Wilson traveled from New York to Baltimore every weekend, until he began staying in Baltimore full-time, to speak with the staff of the MHS and the Contemporary Museum, as well people in the larger Baltimore community. As an out-of-stater, Wilson did not want to stride into town and tell the residents what their history was. He explains that it is very important to him to get to know the people in the community in which he is working. It is important that he knows "where people are coming from" so that he doesn't make assumptions about them, and that he honors the proclamation that his work "is all about context and the underlayers of context."³¹ Wilson's insistence on basing his work, to a degree, on his conversations with those closely involved with the institution cemented an aspect of exchange and negotiation into the very creation and genesis of the exhibition.

Once a visitor stepped out of the elevator he was immediately confronted with Wilson's use of juxtaposition—an element that permeated

the entire exhibition. A silver-plated copper globe with the word “TRUTH” emblazoned across the western equator faced the viewer. An affixed plaque explained that the globe was awarded for truth in advertising. To the right of the globe were three white pedestals supporting busts of Henry Clay, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Andrew Jackson, historical figures that had no important connections to Maryland. Flanking the truth statue on the left was a group of three black pedestals labeled Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Benjamin Banneker; no corresponding busts were present (fig. 7). The ensemble called into question the veracity of the MHS collection, which favored unrelated historical figures over important black Marylanders. The pedestal-flanked trophy, for example, is an amalgamation of unlike and heterogeneous artifacts. The trophy has no apparent direct link to the white busts, which in turn have no direct link to one another. Nor is there a direct link between the white busts or the trophy and the labeled pedestals without their busts. Yet somehow these unrelated objects are brought together to create a new, unified whole. The bust/trophy piece displays the relationship between the museum’s display and collection practices and the veracity of its representation of Maryland’s racial history. Its sardonic accusation reveals to the visitor that the MHS is guilty of making the state’s black population virtually invisible in favor of portraying irrelevant white subjects. Juxtapositions like this populated the museum, conflating the seeming banality of the permanent collection objects with the oppression and erasure of entire populations.

The exhibition included a form that asked visitors to respond to several questions about their experience of the show. Many of the completed questionnaires were selected for publication in the accompanying exhibition catalogue. These responses reveal a wide range of emotional perspectives, highlighting the inherently dialogic

FIGURE 7—Fred Wilson. *Truth (detail)*, installation view from *Mining the Museum*, the Maryland Historical Society, April 4, 1992–February 29, 1993



and conflictive nature of *Mining the Museum*. The curators actively sought the opinions of the visitors, making it clear that they did not cease to matter once they had paid admission. Asking questions creates dialogue, but such questions become more powerful when they are not merely rhetorical. Giving visitors pen and paper allows for a deeper contemplation that sometimes only occurs when an individual is forced to put oft-nebulous emotions into words. Wilson wanted to ensure that all involved with the presentation, including those who encountered it as viewers, had a voice in interpreting what they see. The exhibition is nearly twenty years gone, but the reactions of a handful of visitors—even those who were vicious or bored—are forever cemented in the catalogue, which as the primary documentation of the exhibition is as much a part of the work as the presentation in the galleries.

The visitor commentary is also evidence that the MHS accomplished its goal of reaching a wider, more diverse audience. Though, once again, the selected visitor responses cannot be considered statistically representative; many of the respondents were outside the typical MHS visitor demographics—they were, namely, non-whites or Jews who had never been to the museum before.³² As the museum was, for all intents and purposes, not for them, they had had no reason to attend; the museum programming had excluded them from the museum, and by fiat, from Maryland history. What's more, during the exhibition's run, from April 4, 1992 to February 28, 1993, the museum broke its previous attendance record with more than 55,000 visitors.³³ Each one of these individuals was openly confronted with Maryland's history as well as an admission from the MHS that their portrayal of history had been limited, at best. Wilson's incorporation of debate and collage in the gallery presentation nurtured a space of free exchange and negotiation of ideas. Consensus was not reached,

of course, but a conversation surfaced that may have otherwise remained hidden. Per day, the audience that saw *Mining the Museum* may have been much smaller than that which witnessed *NYSAT*. But if Wilson wished to challenge the notion of museums and of contemporary art, his audience needed to be composed of subjects familiar with museums or contemporary art. An institutional critique relies on those who inhabit, or could reasonably and potentially inhabit, the institution. As Wilson insisted, the success of this work hinged on creating a dialogue with and between the visitors about the display of Maryland's sordid history. This debate was created through a conscious attention to the conflictual and expressive dimensions of politics in a time-specific exhibition regarding the role of a specific social institution.

Mining the Museum is now a canonical work of political art. It serves as an important model of how artworks can address the problematic historical and contemporaneous representation of race in our society. In contrast, though the *New York Street Advertising Takeover* can serve as a model for an artwork politically engaging the public, it belongs to a tradition of art making that has less art historical and theoretical standing. Though there is a modicum of evidence that this is changing, the discourse on political street art is largely relegated to blogs and publications in the popular press.³⁴ By examining *NYSAT* and *Mining the Museum* side-by-side, I wish to illustrate how these two seemingly divergent works of art operate in manners that are truly similar. In both works, one can see a temporary but passionate regulatory debate (about public space or history) performed in front of and with a plurality of perspectives. These models can be replicated, refined, and experimented with in the service of both art and politics.

Notes

- 1 Jacques Rancière, "Aesthetics and Politics," in *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009), 23.
- 2 Hannah Arendt, "What Is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 92.
- 3 Rancière, "Aesthetics and Politics," 24.
- 4 Arendt, "What Is Authority?" 93.
- 5 Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 147.
- 6 Ibid., 148.
- 7 Ibid., 154.
- 8 Rancière, "Aesthetics and Politics," 24.
- 9 "What You Need to Know about Advertising Signs," NYC Department of Buildings, http://www.nyc.gov/html/dob/html/guides/advertising_signs.shtml (accessed October 14, 2010).
- 10 "Sign Enforcement Program," NYC Department of Buildings, accessed October 14, 2010, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dob/html/violations/signs.shtml>.
- 11 Amber Sutherland and Leonard Greene, "Painters in brush with law," *New York Post*, October 26, 2009, http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/manhattan/painters_in_brush_with_law_W8Bo9o147WjYcNQcHnescI.
- 12 Jordan Seiler, interview by Jen Carlson, "Jordan Seiler, Public Ad Campaign," *Gothamist*, April 30, 2009, http://gothamist.com/2009/04/30/jordan_seiler_public_ad_campaign.php.
- 13 In an email conversation Seiler referred to Public Ad Campaign's several projects as art. Jordan Seiler, email to author, October 16, 2010. In an interview with Hrag Vartanian he has also referred to NYSAT as "[a]ctivism informed by art and the artistic process," suggesting that "[s]ometimes it takes a few hundred artists to move the law forward." Hrag Vartanian, "Public Space Can Be Used Against You: NY Street Ad Takeover #2," *Hyperallergic* (blog), October 27, 2009, <http://hyperallergic.com/687/nysat/>.
- 14 Hrag Vartanian, "Public Space Can Be Used Against You: NY Street Ad Takeover #2," *Hyperallergic* (blog), October 27, 2009, <http://hyperallergic.com/687/nysat/>.
- 15 "About the NYSAT Program," Public Ad Campaign.
- 16 Brian Reis, "Artists Reclaim the City's Illegal Billboards," NBC New York, April 27, 2009, <http://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local-beat/Artists-Reclaim-the-Citys-Illegal-Billboards.html>. Barbara Celis, "Arte para borrar la publicidad," *El Pais*, May 9, 2009, http://www.elpais.com/articulo/Tendencias/Arte/borrar/publicidad/elpelitdc/20090509elpelitdc_1/Tes.
- 17 Jordan Seiler, e-mail message to author, October 16, 2010.
- 18 Sarah Berman, *On Corporate Graffiti*, video, 12:44, 2010, accessed October 20, 2010, <http://sarahberms.com/2010/08/22/on-corporate-graffiti/>.
- 19 Jordan Seiler, "Is NPA Shutting Down and Letting Contest Promotions Take Over," *Public Ad Campaign* (blog), March 24, 2010, <http://daily.publicadcampaign.com/2010/03/is-mpa-shutting-down-and-letting.html>.
- 20 Jordan Seiler, "NPA Leaves NYC For Good, Contest Promotions Still at Large," *Public Ad Campaign* (blog), March 25, 2010, <http://daily.publicadcampaign.com/2010/03/npa-leaves-nyc-for-good-contest.html>.
- 21 Jordan Seiler, e-mail message to author, October 16, 2010.
- 22 In the intervening time since the project, this former billboard site has housed several murals, the latest of which had only been up for a couple of months when I visited the business on January 7, 2011. Though Public Ad Campaign no longer interacts with the site, it has come to be thought of as an exhibition space for the enthusiastic employees, local gallerists, and street artists. A lasting space of expression seems to have been created.
- 23 "About the NYSAT Program," Public Ad Campaign.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Rancière, "Aesthetics and Politics," 24.
- 26 Lisa G. Corrin, *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson* (Baltimore: New Press, 1994), 2.
- 27 Ibid., 32.
- 28 Ibid., 10-11.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid., 33.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Please see Corrin, *Mining the Museum*, 66-75 for a variety of detailed visitor reactions to the exhibition. Respondents indicated demographic information including race, age, and gendering, highlighting a level of diversity in the chosen responses.
- 33 Corrin, *Mining the Museum*, lxxi.
- 34 See Carolina A. Miranda, "Beyond Graffiti," *ARTnews* 110 (January 2011) and the 2011 exhibition *Art in the Streets* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, for recent examples of the consideration of street arts by traditional art publications and institutions.