A New Civic Culture?

by David Holloway

It is the evening of November 1, 2004, at the Gelman Library, George Washington University, Washington, DC, three weeks before the re-election of President George W. Bush. In large capital letters formed from blocks of brilliant white light, declassified US government documents from the war on terror scroll across the exterior of the Gelman. Ethereal yet monumental in the chilly autumn air, the glowing texts disclose a grim litany of secrets, including accounts of torture at Guantánamo Bay, autopsy paperwork, post-mortem reports, witness statements describing beatings and executions of Iraqi civilians, and a "wish list" of "alternative interrogation techniques" that would require medical personnel to be "on call for unforeseen complications."[1] This display is a xenon projection, where light is projected using powerful xenon lamps. The woman exhibiting these former state secrets, secrets obtained under US freedom of information statutes through the National Security Archive (NSA)—a non-profit organization that archives declassified US government papers—is American conceptual artist Jenny Holzer, a leading figure in the international art world. Over the previous two evenings Holzer has also used the xenon lamps to project poetry onto the exterior of the Hemphill gallery at 1515 14th Street, including Henri Cole's "To the Forty-third President" (George W. Bush), a complex poem whose themes include the arrogance of power and religious conviction and the feral paranoia of neo-conservatism. The gently castellated, grid-like outer walls of the Gelman are faintly reminiscent of the shattered gothic arches of Ground Zero in New York, so the documents rippling up the building's facade merge in palimpsest with this sudden visual memory of September 11, offering a graphic reminder of the uses to which the September 11 attacks have been put by American and British elites.

Holzer's experiments with written text designed for display in public spaces date from the 1970s, when she used posters pasted guerrilla-art style onto walls abutting public thoroughfares in New York's East Village. Since then she has written a collection of "texts" (the best known being "Truisms" and "Inflammatory Essays") to which she has repeatedly turned, printing, chiselling, painting, scorching, mounting, and projecting extracts from them onto T-shirts, stickers, posters, billboards, bronze plaques, stone slabs, buildings, tree-trunks, waves, mountains, forests, LED signs, and other surfaces designed for digital display.[2] Holzer's use of xenon projectors since the late 1990s has shifted her art into a new monumental phase that makes the public dimensions of her work even more explicit. Visible from great distances and using letters that are sometimes several feet high, her xenon art occupies public space and dramatizes the built environment, incorporating the physical public realm into the performance as a palpable theme and presence. This shift to monumentalism in Holzer's art has overlapped with a growing taste for public culture

since September 11 that has been at its most apparent in the US, but which has also been international in scope. Holzer's spectacular xenon displays have been widely shown in Europe, draped over the Spanish Steps in Rome, the Olympic ski jump in Lillehammer, the Louvre in Paris, and displayed in dramatic public spaces in other major European cities, including Florence, Venice, London, and Newcastle. They have been shown in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro in South America, and in US cities including Miami, New York, and Washington. Since 2004, declassified NSA documents have appeared regularly in Holzer's xenon shows, alongside the poetry used in Washington, DC, and Holzer's own written texts. Xenon projections of the NSA documents were included in her ambitious Truth Before Power exhibition, which centred on the Bregenz Kunsthaus in Austria, June-September 2004, when, as well as installations inside the Kunsthaus and the Johanniterkirche in nearby Feldkirch, Holzer used xenon projections at eight different outdoor sites and billboards located on several of Bregenz's busiest public thoroughfares.

It would be easy to attribute Holzer's recent exposure to the power of her remarkable work alone, if the contemporary appeal of public culture were not also so evident in the tastes of institutions and audiences. When Holzer brought the NSA documents to New York, in September and October 2005, the show, *For the City*—which took as its canvas the facades of the New York Public Library, the Rockefeller Center and the Bobst Library at New York University (NYU)—was supported by federal money from the National Endowment for the Arts. A spectacular public xenon light display was also chosen for the official annual commemoration of September 11, *Tribute in Light*, twin shafts of light beamed into the night sky above Manhattan from 88 Space Cannon xenon searchlights, first seen rising above Ground Zero in March and April 2002. *Tribute in Light* was co-organized by the same public arts organization that Holzer worked with on *For the City*, Creative Time, a group whose mission is to bring art "out of galleries and museums and into the public realm" in projects that "forefront artists as key contributors to democratic society."[3]

The signs of a new taste for public culture since September 11 are everywhere. We can see them in the rituals of commemoration and mourning that prevailed in the immediate aftermath of the attacks: in *Faces of Ground Zero*, for example, the life-size images by photographer Joe McNally of rescue workers and victims exhibited in Grand Central Station in New York during January 2002, or in massive, publicly authored September 11 photography archives like *The September 11 Photo Project* (2002) or *Here Is New York: A Democracy of Photographs* (2001-2003).

We also see the new public culture in the taste of contemporary cinema audiences for political documentary. The best known and most celebrated example is Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), but other political documentaries also received substantial public exposure after September 11—see Jehane Noujaim's *Control Room* (2004), the polemical films of Robert Greenwald, or Errol Morris's Vietnam war documentary, *The Fog of War* (2003). The Bush years also saw re-releases of genre classics like *Hearts and Minds* (1974) and *Winter Soldier* (1972). These Vietnam War documentaries enjoyed new runs in Western cinemas during 2005, where they were promoted, like *The Fog of War*, by critical reviews and marketing suggesting parallels between the Vietnam War and Iraq. We can see this new taste for public culture again in cinema like *Syriana* (2005) and *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005), fiction films made by the influential independent production company Participant Productions, an organization founded by the eBay entrepreneur and philanthropist Jeff Skoll to make "compelling entertainment that will raise awareness about important social issues, educate audiences and inspire them to take action."[4]

The new taste for public culture can also be felt in a revival of the role of the public intellectual as an interventionist actor engaged in civic affairs. The war on terror has revived old, deeply rooted American debates about the incompatibility of republicanism and imperialism (with even Michael Ignatieff, the most influential apologist for American empire among liberal intellectuals in the West, worrying publicly that an ingrained republican antipathy towards empire among ordinary Americans would scupper the Bush doctrine[5]). September 11 and the war on terror have also re-energized discussions about the implications of American hyperpower among Europeans. These concerns have shown up widely in the intellectual history of the post-September 11 era. Ignatieff, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Susan Sontag, John Gray, David Harvey, Noam Chomsky, Christopher Hitchens, Douglas Kellner, Francis Fukuyama, Robert Kagan, Samuel Huntington, and Slavoj Zizek were just some of the well-known intellectuals who made significant public contributions to debates about the war on terror during the Bush years.

As these examples attest, above all else the new public culture has been a civic culture, stimulated by the momentous events of our times (September 11, imperialist wars, apocalyptic clashes—we are told—between

"civilization" and "barbarism"). This civic culture has tended to exhibit some or all of the following traits: a republican taste for representation that acts as a springboard for opinion-forming or debate about public affairs; representation that is made or displayed in public space using the physical public realm itself as a stage or canvas; representation that functions explicitly as political activism; representation in which authority and established power are put on trial, in and by art and culture, or in which "the people" speak, either actually or in some figural sense; and representation that is not simply diagnostic but that is also compensatory, facilitating states of virtual participatory democracy for audiences and practitioners, defending and rebuilding symbolically, in aesthetics, the republican space or process that the new civic culture claims has been eroded or undermined since September 11.

This declinist narrative, which laments the accelerated shrinking of the republican "space" during wartime, as private agendas, sectional interests, and political authoritarianism encroach upon republican process, has American roots that can be traced back to the puritan jeremiads of the seventeenth century. The jeremiad is just one of several American traditions informing the new civic cultures of the war on terror. Long before modernism became the dominant culture in the United States, there were strong native traditions of republican representation that ascribed a vital public role to thought and culture; traditions for which modernism's iconoclastic, individualistic credos about art's autonomy from society and its transcendence of the everyday were anathema, both to embedded notions of republican virtue and to common assumptions about what "culture" should be and do. At significant turning points in modern American history, notably in periods of expansionism and political and economic crisis or transformation, the presumption that culture should play a virtuous republican role as a facilitator of civic participation in public affairs has often been part of mainstream American discourse. We can see this tradition in the pamphleteers of the revolutionary era and the early republican taste for portraiture of heroes from the American War of Independence. We can see it again in George Caleb Bingham's oil paintings of demotic Jacksonianism and in Melville's attempts to, as he put it, "carry republican progressiveness into literature." It is there again in the civic demiurge of Whitman, or the reformist photography of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, and later, most dramatically of all, in the federal New Deal agencies of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which offered employment and support for workers in the culture industries during the Great Depression of the 1930s and 40s. The WPA not only administered key cultural institutions of the period, such as the Federal Art Project, the Federal Theatre Project, the Federal Writers' Project, and Federal Music Project, it also generated the monumental photography archives assembled by the FSA-OWI (Farm Security Administration and Office of War Information), whose imagery is at the heart of the "official" version of American social history enshrined in the expansive American Memory archives at the Library of Congress.

Since the 1960s, a decade in which these old republican cultural traditions, and the idea of participatory democracy itself, often became the provenance of the countercultural New Left, the idea that culture should be civic has often seemed marginal within mainstream society or oppositional to it. Continuing conservative hostility to the legacies of the New Deal has compounded the marginality of civic culture. Since September 11, however, old traditions of republican representation have re-emerged in the mainstream of American thought and culture. In a period when epochal decisions have been made by small groups within tiny governing elites, often in the teeth of widespread popular opposition or concern, the republican construction of culture as a demotic social space for the articulation of political debate and virtuous civic exchange has been dramatically revived. Spurred by the renewal of public discussion about American "empire" and grounded in ancient tensions between imperialism and republicanism, the new civic culture has intervened directly in contemporary controversies, often using aesthetics as a way of holding the powerful to account in the courts of public opinion.

This "trial" motif is implicit in Jenny Holzer's xenon projections of the declassified documents from the National Security Archive, and this motif has become an archetype of the new civic culture generally, reflecting its central concerns with legalities (of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, of military detention and interrogation protocols, and domestic anti-terror legislation) and betrayals (of peoples by their leaders). Like Michael Moore, who reworked the Declaration of Independence in his book *Stupid White Men* (2002), mimicking Jefferson's charge sheet against George III with his own indictments of Bush II ("He has signed ... He has refused ... He supports ... He has scuttled"[6]), Holzer takes it for granted that governments must be closely watched, particularly in democracies where the powers they exercise can be more easily legitimized as "of the people" or "in our name." Holzer's xenon projections of

declassified government files perform this politico-aesthetic watching to (literally) spectacular effect, "locating the exact sources and sites of institutional misdeeds and naming the names of those who have taken it upon themselves to abrogate or rewrite the law."[7]

A large part of the power of Holzer's NSA projections stems from the fact that they are actually being shown at all, the unsettling nature of their heavily censored content heightened by their monumental articulation in public space. In her Truth Before Power exhibition in Bregenz, Holzer explicitly identified her work with an essay by NSA director Thomas Blanton, "The World's Right to Know" (2002), in which Blanton discusses the "international freedom of information movement" that has emerged since the end of the Cold War. Blanton describes a global "disclosure movement" that was "on the verge of changing the definition of democratic governance." The first principle of the disclosure movement was that "the state does not own the information; it belongs to the citizens."[8] Holzer included xenon projections from "The World's Right to Know" in Truth Before Power, and a reprint of the essay was included in the exhibition catalogue. As the hook-up with Blanton and the NSA suggests, the symbolic power of Holzer's war on terror "redaction" art derives in large part from the fact that it appears to be broadcast without inhibition or prohibition, into public spaces and onto public surfaces.[9] The simple act of showing the National Security Archive documents in public is central to the civic drama of Holzer's work and to the perfectly republican illusion it creates, an illusion in which the built fabric of the republic itself appears to hold the powerful to account as "the people" pass through and continue to interact routinely with it.

The trial is a key republican motif, not just in Holzer's art but in the new public culture generally, with its emphasis on civic space beyond the self and the promises it extends to repair or redress breaches in the social contract between citizens and the state. Perhaps the most notable instance of this motif in the new civic culture has been *Guantánamo: "Honor Bound to Defend Freedom"* (2004), a play by a Briton (Victoria Brittain) and a South African (Gillian Slovo) whose script used only words written or spoken by key actors in the Guantánamo controversy. Stitched together from Guantánamo prison letters, from interviews with detainees' families, ex-prisoners and human rights lawyers, and from public statements by politicians (US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld features, as does British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw), *Guantánamo* has been described as "verbatim theatre," a "stage documentary," a "theatrical docudrama," and a "tribunal play" (a form of drama pioneered at the small Tricycle Theatre on the Kilburn High Road, London, by writer Richard Norton-Taylor and director Nicolas Kent). Since the mid 1990s, Norton-Taylor and Kent have produced a string of tribunal plays whose dialogue is assembled from the transcripts of major public inquiries and hearings into political scandals or other controversial public events. *Half the Picture* (1994), the first play to be staged in the Houses of Parliament, dramatized the Arms to Iraq Inquiry chaired by the Lord Justice of Appeal, Sir Richard Scott, into sales of British military equipment to Iraq in the 1980s. Other tribunal plays followed: *Nuremberg—the 1946 War Crimes Trial* (1996); *Srebrenica—the Hague 1996 Rule 61 Hearings* (1996); *The Colour of Justice* (1999); *Justifying War—Scenes from the Hutton Inquiry* (2003), a dramatization (or "edit," as Tricycle referred to it) of the sensational public inquiry into the suspicious death of Dr. David Kelly, a British Ministry of Defence weapons expert who alleged that the Blair government had "sexed up" an MI6 dossier on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction to fabricate a case for war. Tricycle estimates that these plays, which have been performed and televised around the world, have been seen by around 25 million people. In 2005, Norton-Taylor added *Bloody Sunday—Scenes from the Saville Inquiry*, and in 2007 *Called to Account*, which departed from the established "tribunal" model by dramatizing not a formal inquiry but interviews with lawyers, politicians, and other figures in public life, who mull over the legal grounds for arraigning British Prime Minister Tony Blair on war crimes charges.

Strictly speaking, though it is clearly in the idiom, *Guantánamo* is not really a tribunal play, since there has been no public inquiry into the prison camp for it to "edit." Nor is it simply agitprop, though the play's vibrant republican rhythms mean that it is very good at this as well. *Guantánamo* uses the stage not just to promote activism, but also, like Holzer, to make acts of symbolic civic restitution that restore transparency and accountability to the political process, making public what is kept covert by power, giving voice to those who are silenced by power, making central to the narrative the questions that power would prefer kept in the margins of discussion and debate. The play's dramatic authority derives partly from the fact that it offers an authentic *vox populi* of ordinary people caught up in the Kafkaesque horror of Guantánamo Bay and partly because it depends so emphatically on the imaginative participation of its

audiences, positioning them as jurors in an alternative people's court (with the characters as witnesses, plaintiffs, and defendants) under whose jurisdiction the legal entitlements and constitutional due process denied to detainees and their families are figuratively restored, having been resurrected and reasserted in theatre. The success of *Guantánamo* in the US during the Bush years can be explained partly by its aesthetic proximity to traditions of republican culture that have deep roots in American cultural history, traditions that predate the canonical cultures of modernism, and whose closest theatrical antecedent is probably the Federal Theatre Project "living newspaper" dramas of the 1930s.

Guantánamo was one of the earliest cultural events of the war on terror to achieve widespread exposure in the US while constructing explicitly civic art. The play was first produced in London at the Tricycle Theatre during May and June 2004, before transferring to London's West End at the New Ambassadors Theatre, where it ran on through the English summer into early September. It was first staged in the US at the 45 Bleecker Street Theatre in New York, from August to December 2004, in a production by the Culture Project, the critically acclaimed, Tony-award winning activist theatre company revered by the liberal establishment in Hollywood and on Broadway. Rave reviews in New York during a 17-week run were followed by professional productions in San Francisco and Tucson during March and April 2005. Further professional shows followed in Washington, DC, during November and December 2005, and in Chicago during February and March 2006, where the play was presented by the TimeLine Theatre Company who specialize in "stories inspired by history that connect with today's social and political issues" and "theatre that engages, educates, entertains and enlightens."[10]

Substantial professional productions of *Guantánamo* in major American cities on the East and West coasts, in the Midwest, the far Southwest, and in the nation's capital testify to the play's impact on mainstream theatre culture in the US. But the really remarkable thing about *Guantánamo* is the extent to which the play has sunk into the cultural grassroots of local community organizations and amateur dramatics, a status facilitated in no small part by the play's adoption by the Bill of Rights Defense Committee (BORDC). BORDC is a Massachusetts-based civil rights pressure group, founded in November 2001 to help "communities across the country participate in an ongoing national debate about civil liberties and antiterrorism legislation that threaten liberties" and "to encourage widespread civic participation" in the discussion of these issues.[11] In partnership with the Center for Constitutional Rights—a New York-based group that began as an ancillary legal service to the civil rights movement in the 1960s—BORDC co-sponsored the "Guantánamo Reading Project," an initiative that encourages community groups and voluntary organizations to organize public readings of the play.

Under the auspices of the Guantánamo Reading Project, *Guantánamo: "Honor Bound to Defend Freedom"* has become part of the weft and weave of the citizen-led war on terror debate. Community readings in Eugene, Oregon, in February 2006 and May 2007 were presented by "a non-affiliated group of ordinary people" and "a group of concerned residents."[12] In Cleveland, Ohio, in 2005, a local chapter of the Not in Our Name organization (a leading anti-war group that also organizes against post-September 11 encroachments on domestic civil rights) staged a reading on Independence Day, as did the national Not in Our Name steering group in New York, where the performance was co-organized with groups including United for Peace and Justice and the women's anti-war alliance CodePink. In July 2005, the Peace and Democracy Action Group of the First Unitarian Universalist Church were co-sponsors—with the International Museum of Human Rights, Amnesty International, and Voices of Women—of a reading in San Diego. In Cambridge, Dorchester, and Boston, MA, in June 2005, the Massachusetts branch of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) came together for readings with local voluntary groups including the Community Church of Boston and the Cambridge Peace Commission (CPC), a voluntary association formed in 1982 "to promote ideas and programs that affirm diversity and build community within our city ... linking peace organizations, social justice efforts, anti-violence coalitions, communities and the municipal government."[13] Coalitions like these were common in the Guantánamo Reading Project during the Bush years, and often involved a sharing of resources among different groups (churches, for example, were sometimes used as venues) that was reflected in the long list of credits attached to some presentations of the play. The nodal point bringing these disparate groups together as coalitions in a dispersed civic network of political discussion and debate is *Guantánamo: "Honor Bound to Defend Freedom,"* whose sponsors at BORDC also maintain a website offering downloads of the script, tips for high school students and community organizers on staging a reading or performance, notes for directors, suggestions for a post-reading discussion of the play (community readings

were often followed by moderated discussions with audiences), and sample publicity materials.

Another measure of the extent to which discourses of civic culture moved into the mainstream of American life after September 11 can be gleaned from the roster of prominent individuals, groups, and institutions with high levels of credibility in the liberal establishment who became attached to the Guantánamo Reading Project. BORDC's advisory board when the project was launched included a former chairman of Amnesty International USA, as well as attorneys, professors of law and politics, and prominent liberal arts intellectuals. Amnesty International was also involved in readings in San Diego, in December 2004 and July 2005, where the event's co sponsors were the International Legal Studies Program at the California School of Law, the International Museum of Human Rights at San Diego, and the Women's Equity Council of the United Nations Association. Amnesty was again a sponsor when *Guantánamo* was performed in Columbia, SC, as part of the University of South Carolina's "Guantánamo Week" and in Ogden, UT, where the play was presented as part of Weber State University's "Tortured American Values Week." At a local reading in Ithaca, NY, in December 2006, the play was followed by a discussion with Attorney Gita Gutierrez of the Center for Constitutional Rights (a Professor at Cornell Law School who had represented Moazzam Begg, one of the British detainees featured in the play). The Not in Our Name reading in New York on Independence Day in 2005 was co-organized by the renowned feminist writers and activists Eve Ensler and Gloria Steinem, while two memorable performances during *Guantánamo*'s professional run at the 45 Bleecker Street Theatre, NY, in October 2004 even featured Archbishop Desmond Tutu, icon of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, in the role of Lord Justice Steyn. The people involved in the Guantánamo Reading Project as organizers, sponsors, actors, readers, and audiences—a loose coalition of human and civil rights organizations, religious bodies, and a broad spectrum of concerned citizens and voluntary organizations, including intellectuals, students, lawyers, journalists, activists, community groups, and associations formed around individuals directly implicated in the Guantánamo controversy—could not easily be dismissed as ideologically motivated, unrepresentative, or un-American.

The new civic culture, realized in the unexpected success of drama like *Guantánamo* and in art like Jenny Holzer's spectacular xenon lightshows, is more rooted in traditions that are native to America than is sometimes appreciated. One reviewer of Holzer's *Redaction* series paintings (large reproductions of the NSA documents on colourized silk screens) admitted to "some misgiving about how these works function as 'paintings,'" associating Holzer with the machine aesthetics of Duchamp, Warhol, and other conceptual and pop artists. Holzer's *Redaction* paintings, he wrote, are "deadpan reproductions of their sources and reveal none of the hand of the artist or the process we associate with painting." There is "nothing particularly unique about the process of this work," where "content wins out over aesthetics" every time.[14] But these are (romantic) modernist conceptions of value, in which the measure of artistic accomplishment is the achievement of the unique signature style or dramatic aesthetic innovation, and they seem badly out of sync with what Holzer is trying to do. As in Bingham, Whitman, Melville, and Moore, *Here Is New York* or *The Fog of War*, in Holzer's work artist, artifact, and audience are all conceived in essentially republican terms, as entities constituted and made meaningful by their membership in public space. There is real republican humility—the very antithesis of the overbearing artistic selfhood privileged by signature-style modernism—in the way that Holzer's xenon texts mould themselves to the broader environment of the surfaces over which they play, wrapping themselves round columns and sills and windows and doors, at times rippling or breaking up until they become incoherent or illegible, so eager is the xenon text to accommodate itself within (rather than impose itself upon or attempt to "author") the public spaces on which it is projected.

We should be careful, though, not to romanticize the new civic culture by overestimating its influence in daily life or by overplaying its newness. Jenny Holzer and Michael Moore, for example, both had substantial bodies of work behind them before September 11; Creative Time, the public arts organization that co-organized both Holzer's *For the City* and the September 11 memorial *Tribute in Light*, was founded in 1974; the Tricycle Theatre's cycle of tribunal plays dates from the early 1990s. The new civic culture is perhaps better understood less as a transformational moment than as a process of cultural repositioning, a bringing in of traditional discourse from the margins in a well rehearsed American response to periods of national crisis. One reason that traditions of civic culture have re-emerged in the US since September 11 is because they are, to use William Carlos Williams's resonant phrase, so thoroughly "in the American grain."

For this reason too, it is also important to acknowledge that the new civic culture is not always necessarily progressive, politically, whatever the intentions of its practitioners or audiences. Republican cultures can be as reactionary as republican governments or republican military violence, and cultural traditions that locate themselves as "in the American grain" can sometimes be easily appropriated by positions and points of view that claim to speak for the republic in an official capacity. From such perspectives, a publicly-authored September 11 photography exhibition like Here Is New York, for example, tells stories about American victimhood and motiveless attacks on freedom, democracy, and the American way of life (precisely the grounds on which the Bush administration sought to justify the foreign policy adventurism of the war on terror). This is not the story that co-curator Michael Shulan had in mind when describing Here Is New York's exhibition space as a "people's gallery," where "wisdom lies not in the vision and will of any one individual, or small group of individuals, but in the collective vision of us all" (a warning against exactly the kind of appropriation of September 11 by faction and ideology exemplified in the Bush doctrine).[15] Republican culture in the US is always potentially reactionary because it speaks in theory for state power as well as for "the people," with both official and popular rhetorical constructions of American republican democracy often recognizing no meaningful distinction between the two. The iconic Works Progress Administration culture agencies of the Great Depression, it should be remembered, were part of a grand strategy to save American capitalism, not to destroy it.

This raises the problems of what we should want or expect from an authentic republican culture, and where we might draw the line demarcating the civic limits of such a culture today, in the post-September 11 era. A truly republican culture must by definition be a mass culture, as well as a popular culture in the sense that it arises organically from within the experiences and aspirations of ordinary working people. With notable exceptions, however, the new civic culture of the war on terror has often looked more like a middle class culture than a mass culture. The credibility of the individuals and groups involved in the Guantánamo Reading Project, for example, and their ties to the liberal establishment, have contributed to the play's success and cultural significance. But the liberal establishment, and the individuals and groups in local communities who feel themselves affiliated to it, is not necessarily a representative or mainstream political and demographic block; quite the opposite, in fact, in a socio-political scene riven by highly partisan "culture wars." Political documentaries like *The Fog of War* and *Control Room*, or Robert Greenwald's *Uncovered: the War on Iraq* (2004) or *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism* (2004) were generally exhibited in independent or art house cinemas, not multiplexes, and the international audience for Holzer's redaction art barely registers when compared to, say, the numbers watching Kiefer Sutherland torturing enemies of the state in Fox Network's hugely popular TV drama show *24*. The very existence of a quasi-independent film production company like Participant Productions, moreover, was predicated on the fact that Hollywood itself generally stayed well away from open engagement with controversial war on terror issues until relatively late in Bush's second term.

Although the currents of the new civic culture have sometimes flowed in the mainstream of American life since September 11, they have been one cultural influence among many and could hardly, for the most part, be described as part of dominant or mass culture. Nor should the grassroots credentials of a populist phenomenon like *Guantánamo: "Honor Bound to Defend Freedom"* blind us to the fact that many of the more prominent examples of the new civic culture discussed here have been produced or co-ordinated by culture elites (see Michael Moore, Participant Productions, George Clooney, the curators of *Here Is New York*, Jenny Holzer, the *New York Times*, Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio, Michael Ignatieff, and so on). In spirit the new civic culture has been populist, democratic, and republican, but its production in a capitalist division of labour remains largely the sphere of the cultural and intellectual celebocracy, its consumption carried out primarily by the educated professional middle class.

What is the prognosis for the new civic culture? Is it more than a final rallying of fading traditions, fatally weakened in their capacity to act as inclusive civic mechanisms by their association with the countercultural New Left in the 1960s and '70s, then further marginalized within the shrinking public spheres of post Fordist/neoliberal capitalism in the 1980s and '90s? Will the new civic culture survive when the crisis sensibilities of the early war on terror abate or become routine? One important question that Jenny Holzer asks is whether a truly public culture is even possible today, in an age of political authoritarianism and post-industrial capitalism. Holzer's preference for exhibiting her xenon texts on surfaces that blur the distinction between public and private space puts this question at the centre of her art. George Washington University (GWU), where the declassified documents were shown in Washington, is

home to the National Security Archive, a key institution in what Thomas Blanton calls the citizen-led, global public disclosure movement. But GWU is also a controversial private university that has gone to great lengths to prevent its staff from unionizing. Similarly, the Rockefeller Center in New York, one of the facades Holzer used in *For the City*, is neither "public" nor "private" space; it is a contradictory hybrid of both, "another of those [American] meeting places between commerce and culture" that reconfigures "the public spaces of classical and medieval cities in the congestion of free-enterprise Manhattan."[16] In Germany, when Holzer staged *Xenon for Duisburg* in April 2004, the "public" facades she used included formal industrial complexes—steel industry blast furnaces and dockside warehouses—which were thoroughly encoded (like the billboards and other advertising media Holzer has used) with histories of class and market power.

Since the Iraq war, Holzer's inscriptions of her public art on such genealogically "private" surfaces have often looked more like vigorous symbolic reappropriations of the commons than, say, treatises on language or tedious postmodern jokes about the commodifications of late capitalism. Displaying the NSA documents in gigantic xenon-light letters on dramatic public facades, in and of itself, stages a figural regrounding of urban space in monumental civic process. This is bold, confident, committed public art. It also resists what it denounces and puts the fractured civic realm back together again, at least momentarily, in art. But even here, in the work of one of its leading contemporary exponents, the genealogies of private power encoded in the acts of public display, and the ethereal weightlessness of xenon light itself, seem to anchor Holzer's art in the anticipation of disappointment, frustration and compromise, in a sense of political transience and perishability. In the US, where periods of national crisis (and periodizations of cultural history) are often associated with political administrations and presidencies rather than with underlying trends and historical forces that develop over longer periods of time, it may be that the new civic culture of the war on terror has already peaked, that it reached its most highly evolved and culturally diffuse forms during the early post-September 11 period. If so, the most substantial revival of traditional republican culture in the US since the 1960s, perhaps since the New Deal, may be one of the more significant and unexpected cultural and intellectual legacies of the Bush era.

NOTES

1 Anon, "Alternative Interrogation Techniques (Wish List) 4th Infantry Division 1CE," *Redaction Paintings*, Jenny Holzer (New York: Cheim & Read, 2006), 59.

2 For a selection of Holzer's original xenon texts in English and German, see Jenny Holzer, *Die Macht Des Wortes/I Can't Tell You: Xenon for Duisburg* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2006), 93–128.

3 "Creative Time: History," *Creative Time*, <*http://creativetime.org/about/history.html*> [accessed 25 Jan. 2008].

4 "PARTICIPATE: Movies have the power to inspire. You have the power to act. Participate!," <*http://www.participate.net/about*> [accessed 18 June 2007].

5 Michael Ignatieff, "The American Empire; The Burden," *The New York Times Magazine*, 5 Jan., 2003 <*http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B03E6DA143FF936A35752C0A9659C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=2*> [accessed 11 January 2008].

6 Michael Moore, *Stupid White Men...and Other Sorry Excuses for the State of the Nation!* (London: Penguin, 2002), 210.

7 Robert Storr, "Paper Trail," introduction, *Redaction Paintings*, Jenny Holzer (New York: Cheim & Read, 2006), 9.

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9 *Redaction* means editing or revising for publication, so the idea of a redaction painting or xenon projection draws attention both to the original acts of censorship the documents display and to Holzer's own interventions as an artist as she prepares these texts for "publication."

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15 Aletti 2001; Michael Shulan, "Introduction," *Here Is New York: A Democracy of Photographs*, Michael Shulan et al. eds., (New York: Scalo, 2002), 9.

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