

# Sounding the Fury

JULIA BRYAN-WILSON ON KIRSTEN FORKERT AND MARK TRIBE

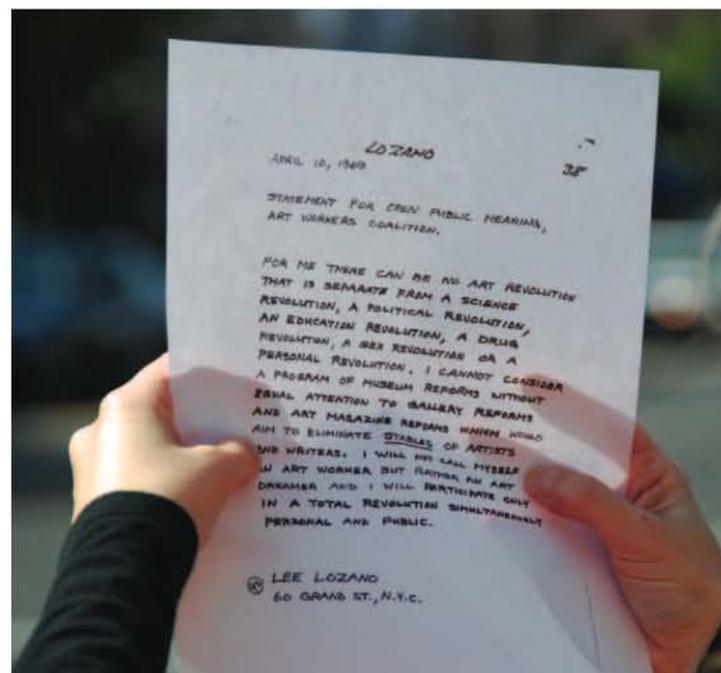
“THE ART WORLD IS A POISON in the community of artists and must be removed by obliteration,” asserted Carl Andre at a late-1960s meeting of the Art Workers’ Coalition, calling for the demolition of a system that he deemed a source of “infinite corruption.” His demands were sweeping: “No more ‘shows’”; “No more ‘scene’”; “No more big-money artists.” An audio recording reveals that Andre’s invective elicited loud applause, and indeed, amid the current orgy of commercialism, his anger retains its relevance, although his idealism seems outmoded. But as it turns out, the speech was not his own: It was penned by *Artforum’s* editor at the time, Philip Leider, as a parody of radical rhetoric; the artist appropriated the text, reading it word for word with full conviction. From satire to sincerity—it is hard to untangle Leider’s ironic exaggeration or hyperbole from Andre’s actual political passion, to get a handle on the exact pitch of this polemic.

This speech and the others presented that day form the basis of Canadian artist Kirsten Forkert’s project *Art Workers’ Coalition (Revisited)*, 2006–. To better grasp this work, one first needs to look back on some history. Founded in New York in 1969, the AWC brought artists and critics together to protest for artists’ rights and forge alternatives to the individualistic nature of the rapidly exploding art industry; it was also involved in wider political issues such as demonstrating against the Vietnam War. Andre’s presentation was given at one of the largest events in the AWC’s brief life, an hours-long public “open hearing” held on April 10, 1969, at the School of Visual Arts in New York, attended by hundreds of artists, critics, and curators. The meeting’s stated focus was to examine “the program of the art workers regarding museum reform, and to establish the program of an open art workers coalition.” Almost seventy people delivered short talks on a range of topics: artists’ solidarity, the commodification of art, and museums’ connections to the military-industrial complex.

These manifestos—some handwritten, some typed out but bearing hasty additions or last-minute revisions—were collected into a volume that has since languished in relative obscurity, known mostly to scholars of the period and artists (such as Andrea Fraser) who

have investigated modes of artistic labor. For her part, Forkert found the book in the library of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York while researching artists’ collectives, and she was struck by how the texts oscillate between the hopelessly naive and the eerily pertinent, even forty years on. At a session of a conference on “Rethinking Marxism,” held in 2006 at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Forkert passed out copies of these documents and asked conference participants to read the texts aloud, giving voice to the words of the AWC artists as they demanded mild reforms as well as profound transformations of the art system. Faith Ringgold denounced art institutions’ racist exclusions; Anita Steckel excoriated the sexism of the art press. Some flirted with more revolutionary proposals—Frederick Castle called for the renunciation of private property. Dan Graham claimed, “The art world stinks; it is made of people who collectively dig the shit; now seems to be the time to get the collective shit out of the system.” (Graham’s suggested solution—dematerialized conceptual art—has proved no escape from the rapaciousness of the market, but the overall tenor of his dismay still rings true.) Possibly most radical of all was Lee Lozano’s brief text, in which she refused to participate in an “art revolution that is separate from a science revolution, a political revolution, an education revolution, a drug revolution, a sex revolution or a personal revolution.” Lozano rejected the label *art worker*, calling herself an *art dreamer*. She went on to announce a “total revolution simultaneously personal and public.” The speech was given in conjunction with her *General Strike Piece*, begun that same year; Lozano made good on her word and soon dropped out of the art world altogether.

How do these proposals resonate today? *Art Workers’ Coalition (Revisited)* unearths and vocalizes



Lee Lozano’s statement from the Art Workers’ Coalition 1969 open hearing, as a public speech reenactment organized by the *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, outside Southern Exposure, San Francisco, May 18–19, 2007. Photo: Steve Rhodes.

**Forkert is not interested in simply recirculating documents that have been somewhat lost in the shuffle of time, but in literally rehearsing such statements, to audibly try them out and test their tone anew.**

words from the past, in part to hear how (and if) such words might still carry force. Forkert is not interested in simply recirculating documents that have been somewhat lost in the shuffle of time, but in literally rehearsing such statements, to audibly try them out and test their tone anew. In conjunction with the Los Angeles-based *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, whose recent issue (edited by Cara Baldwin, Marc Herbst, and Christina Ulke) focuses on political speech, Forkert scanned many of the transcripts from the AWC open hearing for an online text and sound piece. She also recorded artists, writers, and critics reading the transcripts aloud. These audio files are posted on the journal’s website alongside interviews in which the re-speakers discuss how the texts sound when spoken within a different temporal and political climate. (The journal has also held public readings of Lozano’s manifesto.) Some retain their rousing urgency, but some overheated assertions come off as dated or, worse, borderline offensive, and Forkert’s recordings at times reflect the



From top: Mark Tribe, *Port Huron Project 1: Until the Last Gun Is Silent*, 2006. Performance view, Central Park, New York, September 16, 2006. Coretta Scott King (Gina Brown). Photo: Winona Barton Ballentine. Coretta Scott King addressing a peace rally in Central Park, New York, April 27, 1968. Photo: Corbis.

contemporary readers' skepticism. For instance, artist Jee-Eun Kim reads Iain Whitecross with measured sarcasm, in particular when Whitecross asserts that artists are "exploit[ed] and manipulate[d] . . . Like women, like the black people." In her follow-up interview with Forkert, Kim discusses the tensions and contradictions that attend these racist and sexist metaphors. And Los Angeles artist David Burns, who reads Graham's words, notes their macho extremism and concludes, "I can't take it very seriously."

Forkert's work exists in an expanding field of reenactment projects that return to the Vietnam War era—other artists include John Malpede, Lana Lin and H. Lan Thao Lam, Sharon Hayes, and media artist collective BLW. For these artists, archival texts such as interviews, propaganda films, and phone calls are scripts to be performed as much as they are historical documents. The contemporary upsurge in rearticulating this period might stem from the need, in the midst of grotesque distortions, half-truths, and revisionist histories, to set the record straight, or even, for a younger generation, to *hear* the record in the first place. This continues to be a critical task as this

contested era is subject to constant rewriting.

In this regard, it is notable that for Forkert's audio archive, Carl Andre's text was read by New York- and Providence, Rhode Island-based Mark Tribe, another artist engaged in such work. In his ongoing *Port Huron*

*Project*—named after the manifesto Tom Hayden drafted for a 1962 meeting of Students for a Democratic Society, which became a clarion call for the New Left—Tribe restages protest speeches from the 1960s and '70s, employing professional actors to perform the texts. The first reenactment was of Coretta Scott King's 1968 address to a rally in Central Park, three weeks after the death of her husband (*Port Huron Project 1: Until the Last Gun Is Silent*, 2006), which was followed by Howard Zinn's speech at a 1971 peace rally in Boston (*Port Huron Project 2: The Problem Is Civil Disobedience*, 2007), and Paul Potter's 1965 anti-Vietnam War speech (*Port Huron Project 3: We Must Name the System*, 2007). Creative Time is sponsoring three more speeches—first given by Bobby Seale, César Chávez, and Stokely Carmichael—later this year. Tribe, who teaches at Brown University and is the founder of the media-art website Rhizome, has also posted videos of these events online on multiple sites, to be watched by a more atomized—but potentially global—audience.

Tribe's reenactments take place at the sites of the original speeches, and the actors are cast and costumed to resemble the orators, maintaining a certain visual fidelity to the historical events. The impassioned texts are delivered with emotion—but the stirring cries for mass protest are made poignant, if not absurd, as they are spoken live before small gatherings rather than to the vast crowds that first witnessed them. For instance, Potter's speech refers to the twenty thousand people the activist was addressing in 1965; in the 2007 version, only a few dozen were present. The *Port Huron Project* obviates distinctions among art, theater, protest, and research, and the content of the speeches toggles between the dead-on and the dated. There are moments that seem almost uncanny, such as when speakers discuss a climate of repression and an administration justifying war with lies and false documents. Zinn denounces the "calm, smiling, murderous president"; this image

surely suits the present. But there are also moments of strange disjuncture, most especially the speakers' calls to civil disobedience and their shared conviction about the efficacy of such actions. Scott King's announcement that "never in the history of this nation have the people been so forceful in reversing the policy of our government in regard to war" might have been true for Vietnam, but so far, it has limited applicability for Iraq.

In an interview with Ulke in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, Tribe explains that he started the *Port Huron Project* after seeing how politically uninvolved his students were. Tribe's work is tinged with nostalgia for a time when students and artists really thought they could change the world by putting their bodies on the street. But it also underscores that we have few current models of well-placed righteous anger, and that past structures of protest are perhaps insufficient today. "Nostalgia" is, of course, the *bête noire* of any scholarly or artistic return to the '60s and '70s, but there need not be a false binary between indulgent hero worship and outright dismissal. Forkert's participants largely steer clear of overwrought romantic longing, while Tribe's speakers, by turns mournful and enraged, indicate a melancholic recognition of an eroded culture of indignation.

An intractable war overseas, a galloping art market, and widespread disputes about what constitutes artistic labor and how it should be compensated: Sound familiar? If the Iraq war, record-breaking auction prices, and the ongoing Writers Guild of America strike offer up potential parallels between today and forty years ago, Forkert and Tribe also highlight how much has changed. For one thing, both comment on the decreasing primacy of massed bodies in public protest—it is difficult to picture hundreds of artists sitting through a four-hour open-mic meeting about museum reform today. Tribe's work pays homage to antiwar rallies and marches even as it acknowledges that today much protest takes the far quicker, less engaged form of Internet petitions. Fewer outlets exist in which to give voice to revolutionary hope and fervor, much less rage. More than just recovering the past, these re-speaking projects use archival speeches to ask questions about the current place of stridency and forceful dissent, and the possibilities of effective, galvanizing political discourse. □

JULIA BRYAN-WILSON IS ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND VISUAL STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE.

# Los Angeles Times

AROUND THE GALLERIES

## Mark Tribe's Port Huron Project via Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions



REENACTMENT: Actor Ricardo Dominguez performs a César Chávez speech during Mark Tribe's "We Are Also Responsible."

By Christopher Knight, Times Art Critic  
July 25, 2008

Early Saturday evening, Providence, R.I.-based artist Mark Tribe orchestrated a reenactment of a 1971 speech by Chicano labor activist César Chávez protesting the Vietnam War. On the South Lawn of Exposition Park, midway between the Natural History Museum and the Coliseum, a call went out for "organized and disciplined nonviolent action," aimed squarely at those "seeking [their] manhood in affluence and war."

Actor Ricardo Dominguez spoke from the podium to a crowd that numbered perhaps one-tenth of the 2,600 who had gathered in the park 37 years earlier. Tribe's audience, in fact, was roughly equal to the number of uniformed police and plainclothes officers reported at the original (peaceful) event. Most of the attendees were probably not yet born then or were too young to remember when the brilliant, charismatic Chávez joined Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland and other speakers calling for nonviolent civil disobedience to deter American militarism abroad.

The original event represented cross-fertilization in two New Left social movements, pro-labor and antiwar. Its star power -- Fonda and Sutherland's Oscar-winning "Klute" was just about to be released -- also gained special wattage from Chávez's presence. Two weeks earlier, when the California Supreme Court unanimously ruled that his free speech rights were violated by an injunction against a lettuce boycott, he had been released from jail. He had been locked up for contempt.

The performance piece, funded by New York's Creative Time and coordinated by Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, was the fourth of six reenactments in Tribe's Port Huron Project. It was no doubt a bit less surreal here than the first three might have been.

During the last 22 months, a 1968 Coretta Scott King speech was staged in New York City's Central Park, a 1971 address by author and activist Howard Zinn was repeated on Boston Common, and a speech given at the 1965 march on Washington by Paul Potter, president of Students for a Democratic Society, was given again on the National Mall. (Tribe's project takes its name from the Port Huron Statement, the 1962 manifesto of the SDS, which was formed in Port Huron, Mich.) In August, an actress in Oakland will re-create an Angela Davis speech, and in September an actor portraying Stokely Carmichael will repeat a speech near United Nations headquarters in Manhattan.

What made the L.A. component seem commonplace was of course the proximity of Hollywood, where camera crews filming scripted action on the streets are plentiful.

Chávez's words are as meaningful today as they were then, and the occupation of Iraq provided a transparent if unspoken context. Likewise, Potter talked about the government's use of the rhetoric of freedom to justify war, Zinn called on Congress to impeach the president and vice president, and Scott King spoke of women's untapped political power. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

But it's the scripted, taped and electronically distributed nature of these performances that is distinctive, differentiating them from the originals. Tribe's "We Are Also Responsible" -- a line from Chávez's speech that disparages the common tendency to blame "the bosses" while waiting for them to act -- is performance art about the process of one person making a freely distributed Internet video.

The performance at Exposition Park was staged, directed and repeated three times so different camera setups could be arranged.

It employed two actors (Brian Valparaiso was the second) and involved the participation of the audience as extras. The edited results of all six parts are finding their way onto blip.tv and YouTube -- search for "Port Huron Project" -- and the Chávez piece should be online in mid-August. In the fall, portions will make their way onto a jumbo screen in New York's Times Square and to a show about art and political engagement at the New York Armory. The Port Huron Project is a kind of digital samizdat, a technological twist on the distribution of political leaflets that is as American as Tom Paine and as revolutionary as farmers and small-business men toppling the combined power of George III and the East India Co.

Activism seemed futile when, despite the hundreds of thousands of people flooding into city streets around the world in protest before the invasion of Iraq, the ill-fated war went on. Yet there's a difference between old models based on mass culture, which had their zenith in the 1960s era of these original speeches, and the new "niche culture" of our high-tech present. Mass culture is effectively over. The possibility for closing the contemporary gap between activism and the individual is underway in the netroots -- activist blogs and other online communities, including artistic ones.

At the end of Dominguez's second performance of the Chavez speech, the crowd spontaneously erupted into a loud chant of "Si! Se puede! Si! Se puede!" Under the circumstances, it resonated as an Obama moment.

Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 6522 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, (323) 957-1777. Closed Mondays and Tuesdays. [www.artleak.org](http://www.artleak.org)

## RADICAL SPEAK PERFORMANCE ARTIST MARK TRIBE BREATHES NEW LIFE INTO OLD POLITICS.

BY CARLA BLUMENKRANZ

**I**N THE SUNDAY sunshine after Tropical Storm Hanna, about a hundred people—most of them in their twenties, backpacked and sandaled—milled around the northern edge of Tudor City. There was a light police presence nearby, and as the speaker came to the lectern, the audience stood to attention. “Only the white powers of the West will deny that this is a racist war,” the speaker declared. He wore a crisp blue shirt and spoke firmly into the microphone, but he didn’t shout. “When the colored peoples of the world look at that war, they see just one thing. For them, the U.S. military represents international white supremacy.” Cameras snapped. A young woman pumped her fist quickly. “Wow,” someone said.

This was probably the most controversial major political speech delivered the week of the Republican convention. It was also 41 years old. Black Power leader Stokely Carmichael wrote and gave the speech in 1967, speaking to a crowd of hundreds of thousands of peace protesters gathered outside the U.N. The man who redelivered the speech earlier this month was a well-rehearsed actor playing Carmichael in a performance project by the artist Mark Tribe.

Carmichael was 25 when he gave his speech, and although he was known as a powerful orator, he still must have been nervous: The speaker directly before him had been Martin Luther King Jr., whose shadow had hovered over Carmichael’s early career as a younger, more radical activist. Ato Essandoh, the actor who played Carmichael, was born at the very moment that the New Left revolution was ending. Times have changed, and yet they haven’t. Now Essandoh stood shadowed by history, at the center of a performance project that expressed the still overwhelming influence of the New Left.

The son of liberal legal scholar Laurence Tribe, Mark Tribe has spent the past two summers traveling the country enacting what he calls the *Port Huron Project*—his response to current politics through the resurrection of a radical past. Tribe has staged performances of six speeches, borrowing from New Left heroes like Carmichael, César Chávez, and Angela Davis. He hires two actors to deliver each speech, and when he finishes editing the video footage, he posts it to MySpace, YouTube, and Blip.tv.

Tribe said he looks for speeches that made connections between national and international affairs in ways that still resonate today. (As Carmichael put it, the draft sent young black men to kill “people of their own kind: poor and powerless.”) But he’s also trying to link the fighting words of his parents’ generation with today’s more connected, less outspoken political climate. “Are there online equivalents to bodies in the street?” Tribe asks.

This may not be an outstanding time for political protest—at least in comparison with the tenor of Carmichael’s times—but it has certainly been a good year for political art that historicizes it. In fact, Tribe is one of many artists (including Jeremy Deller, Omer Fast, and Allison Smith) currently producing work that resembles reenactments. Earlier this year, P.S. 1 presented “That Was Then ... This Is Now,” a group exhibition of political art inspired by the late sixties. And the *Port Huron Project* is just one part of “Democracy in America: The National Campaign,” a larger Creative Time production that curator Nato Thompson calls a “counterconvention,” in a nod to both this year’s campaign season and the legendary DNC demonstrations in Chicago 40 years ago.

It is striking how deeply enthralled Tribe and the entire Creative Time project seem to be by the New Left—a time of “almost utopian optimism,” says Tribe, “that young people acting together could form a broad coalition that could change the world.” But in a way, it wasn’t just Carmichael’s rhetoric that made the recent U.N. performance rebellious. Tribe, who founded the Web art portal Rhizome, is a strong believer in open-source culture, the free sharing of existing information. (In an earlier work called *Revelation 2.0*, he created abstract images by reducing the CNN Website to bands of color and photographs.)

For the *Port Huron Project*, Tribe didn’t ask for permission to use all the speeches, despite the possibility that an estate might object to their use. But he’s confident in his decision both legally and morally. “Access to our shared history is crucial for the functioning of democracy,” he says. “It makes a lot of sense to me for this project not to lock these speeches down in any proprietary way, but instead to make them available to anyone to appropriate or show or remix.”

After having sponsored five “town-hall meetings” and protest-performance art like Tribe’s across the country, “Democracy in America” culminates next week in a seven-day exhibition at the Park Avenue Armory. The counterconvention will include work by more than 40 artists, an ongoing lecture series, and tables for local activist organiza-

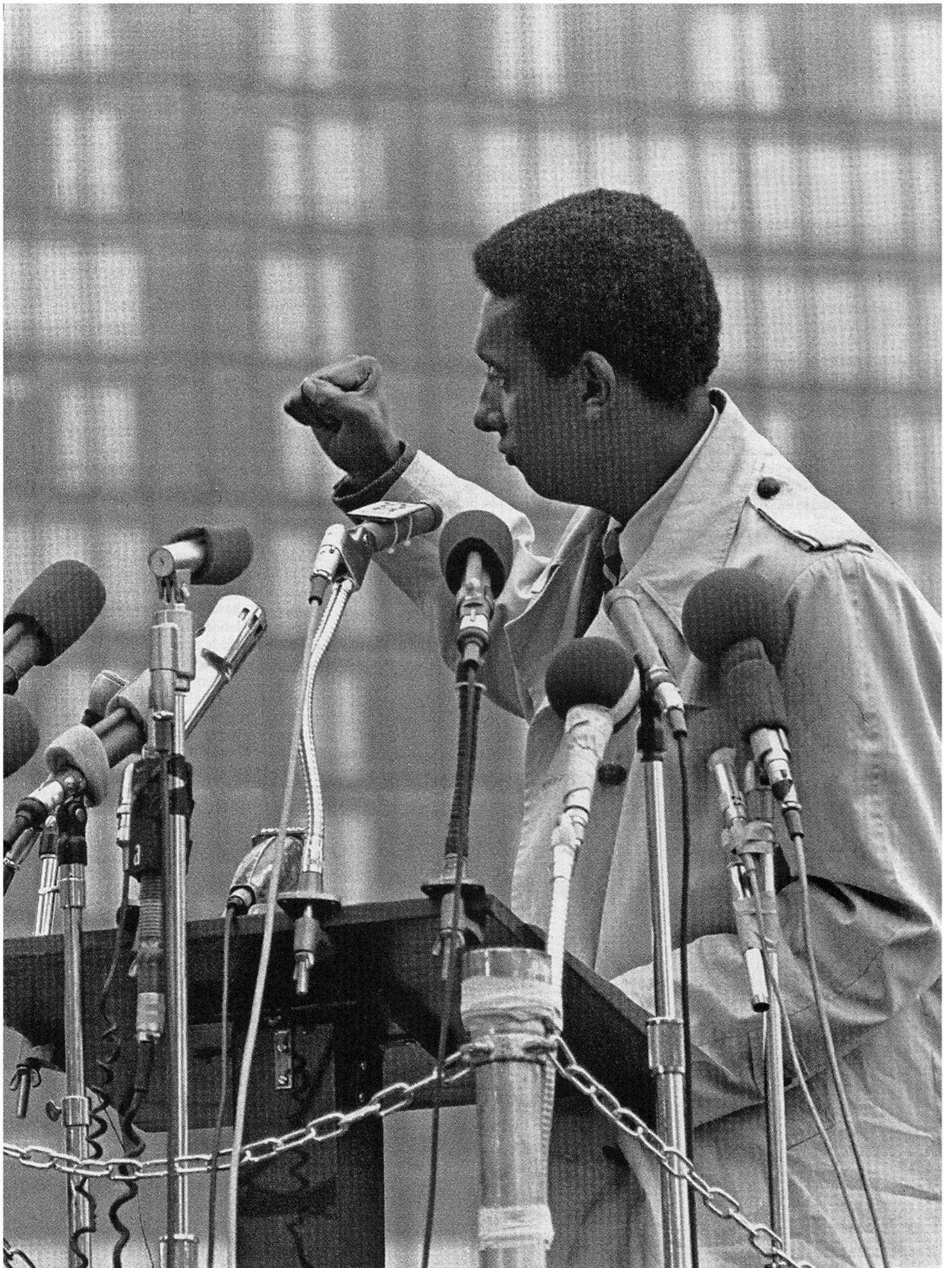
tions. It’s one of the largest undertakings in Creative Time’s 34-year history.

One way to understand “Democracy in America” is as an enormous effort by artists to simulate a grassroots political movement, recycling features of twentieth-century radicalism that now, paradoxically, seem almost familiar. The *Port Huron Project*, however, suggests an act of genuinely contemporary subversion. “I am fundamentally interested,” says Tribe, “in politics that question not only the means but the very assumptions upon which our society governs.”



*Ato Essandoh in Mark Tribe's Port Huron Project, September 7; opposite, Stokely Carmichael, April 15, 1967.*

PHOTOGRAPHS: THIS PAGE, MEGHAN MCINNIS/COURTESY OF CREATIVE TIME; OPPOSITE PAGE, MAGNUM PHOTOS



ART

## With Politics in the Air, a Freedom Free-for-All Comes to Town



Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

"Democracy in America: The National Campaign," an exhibition at the Park Avenue Armory.

By **HOLLAND COTTER**

Published: September 22, 2008

"Democracy in America: The National Campaign" at the Park Avenue Armory is a nonpartisan, nonelectoral but intensely political convention-as-art-exhibition timed to coincide with the 2008 presidential race.

### Multimedia



Audio Slide Show

Performing 'Democracy'

Like its Democratic and Republican counterparts, it lasts just a few days (it opened on Sunday and closes on Saturday) and involves lots of speeches, music, funny hats and parties. But there are differences. The music in this case is protest-song karaoke; the funny hats are on drag queens; the parties serve activist ice cream; you get to give some of the speeches yourself. Got a gripe? Grab the mike.

One other difference is access. Normal conventions are up to their ears in security; admission is tightly controlled.

"Democracy in America," which calls itself a "convergence center," is open to all, no tags, buttons, tickets, proof of citizenship or good will required.

Organized by Creative Time, which specializes in nonprofit public events, it is the final stage of a yearlong project for which its curator, Nato Thompson, traveled the country, talking with artists about work that took democracy, or freedom, as a theme. Creative Time commissioned several related performance-based pieces on the subject that were presented in Denver and St. Paul during the conventions there.

The fruits, or traces, of all of this activity are installed at the Armory. And that late-Victorian pile, its wall adorned with memorials to the Civil War dead, is an apt setting for art that addresses militarism, racism and the contemporary divide between so-called red and blue states.

The show's largest section is installed in the Armory's drill hall and is dwarfed by the space's hangarlike vastness. The Center for Tactical Magic's ice cream truck is here. Used in recent days to pass out Popsicles and political fliers in parks in Brooklyn and Queens, it is equipped like a police command station, with high-power surveillance devices and a media transmission studio, but it looks like a toy in this expanse.

A blinking, winking sculptural pileup of video monitors, cameras and motorized G.I. Joes by Jon Kessler holds its own in the drill hall, as, less securely, does a mural by Chris Stain. But everything else is lost in the space, particularly audience-participation projects that have no visual presence to begin with. To get off the ground, these require lots of active bodies, and even then they feel forced.

Pieces assigned to individual rooms elsewhere in the building come across more strongly, and at least three of them brilliantly. A few are archival displays, the most arresting by the collective called Critical Art Ensemble and the Institute for Applied Autonomy, which for years have operated at the intersection of art, science and politics.

In 2004 a founding member of Critical Art Ensemble, Steven Kurtz, was indicted under the [Patriot Act](#), accused of illegally obtaining bacteria samples, among other charges. The charges were eventually dismissed by a judge. But outrage over the affair is still strong in the activist art world. And the piece at the armory titled "Seized" is Exhibit A in its ethical brief: at the center of the installation is heaped-up trash, including pizza boxes, left behind by government agents who commandeered Mr. Kurtz's home.

The exhibition's best work, though, is film. In the tour-de-force department, the duo Ligorano/Reese projects vintage Hollywood propaganda movies onto the head of a pin. And Kenneth Tin-Kin Hung, in a hilariously scabrous animation called "Residential Erection," offers a take-no-prisoners approach to the current American political lineup: everyone has to go.

This is more or less the approach of the show as a whole. Most of its thinking goes way beyond party politics. It lives instead in utopian realms where the prospect of radical change is taken as a serious possibility with epoch-altering implications.

The artist Mark Tribe finds this potential for change in recent history, which he resurrects in public performances of New Left political speeches from the 1960s and '70s: Angela Davis's incendiary Oakland address on political resistance and Stokely Carmichael's speech at the 1967 "Spring Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam" in New York.

The re-enactments of both speeches, which Mr. Tribe has produced with actors as speakers but with a "live" local audience, appear in the show on film. The panoramic projections make you feel part of the listening crowd. And the speeches, although 40 years old, have a startling pertinence to politics now.

Chris Sollars's film "C Red Blue J" documents major changes in his family's history as he moved back and forth between a "normal" suburban childhood and a fraught adulthood that finds him with a born-again Christian father, a right-wing sister and a mother who lives with a female lover. The film opens with Mr. Sollars in bed, as if he would rather sleep through the familial confusion that follows, which he sets against the background of the 2004 election campaign and the Iraq war.

But he also keeps exhorting himself to wake up and do something. And he does. He looks hard at his past, talks frankly with his family and tries to accept that, for better or worse, and whether he likes it or not, all involved are now free to be what they always wanted to be.

Free to be what they want to be is also the goal of the dozens of performers in Sharon Hayes's wonderful videotaped performance piece, "Revolutionary Love 1 & 2: I Am Your Worst Fear, I Am Your Best Fantasy." The piece, which was performed and filmed twice

— outdoors at the [Democratic National Convention](#) in Denver and at the Republican convention in St. Paul — consists of a kind of choral reading of a text Ms. Hayes wrote, a strange kind of love letter.

The readers in both cases are members of the gay, lesbian and transgendered populations of their respective cities. The text, which incorporates gay liberation material from the 1970s, seems to be addressed to a potential lover, single or collective, gender unspecified, but a lover with power — a United States president, maybe, or a political party or the American people.

The tone of the writing is by turns amorous, anguished, exasperated and defiant. The writer would like to persuade the lover to see reality in a new way, to see that division between them doesn't have to exist, that mutual love is possible, and an offer is being made. And if the offer is rejected? So be it.

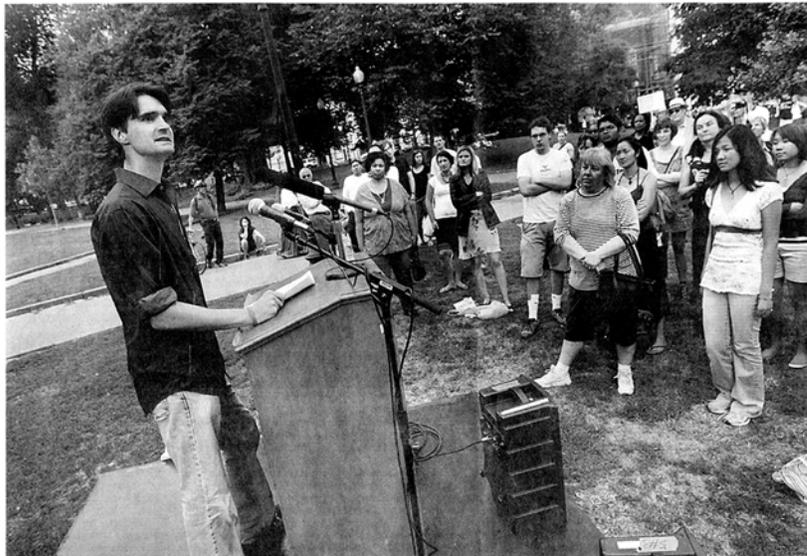
The writer's voice is in fact many voices, all saying the same words, loudly and clearly, as one voice: "An army of lovers cannot lose." And, as Ms. Hayes's passionately intelligent piece asserts, it is at the conventions and everywhere else, and here to stay.

It is, of course, quite a different militia from the one envisioned by the Armory's builders, one that suggests that enormous cultural changes have taken place. To which the artist-activists in the show would respond: "Enormous, but not enough." Democracy — freedom, equality, all of that — still has a long way to go.

To help push it further along, Creative Time has scheduled a series of evening panel discussions and talks at the Armory, which should help bring the drill hall to life. On Wednesday the Guerrilla Girls will scrutinize the ethics of the quasi-democratic entity known as the art world. And Thursday night will be devoted to an "open rant," which means, I gather, that you arrive early, pull up a lectern (there are several to choose from, all artist-designed) and stump for whatever mad dream you dream.

*"Democracy in America: The National Campaign" continues through Saturday at the Park Avenue Armory, 643 Park Avenue, at 67th Street; (212) 616-3930, [creativetime.org](http://creativetime.org).*

Visual Arts



On Boston Common last Saturday, actor Matthew Floyd Miller delivered an antiwar speech from 1971 as part of artist Mark Tribe's "Port Huron Project."



Miller's presentation, a re-creation of an address given by social activist, author, and Boston University professor Howard Zinn (right) at a rally (left) on the Common, is one of a series of reenactments produced by Tribe, an assistant professor at Brown.

# Rallying 'round the past

Reenactments of old protest speeches stir emotions, but do they spur action in the present?

By Ken Johnson  
GLOBE STAFF

On a lovely, sunny afternoon last Saturday, a young man spoke from a temporary podium to a small crowd near the Brewer Fountain on Boston Common. As video cameras on tripods rolled, he called for the impeachment of the US president and vice president and urged his listeners to resist the war through acts of civil disobedience such as refusing to pay taxes. People in the audience vigorously applauded and shouted out words of agreement.

But it was not President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and the war in Iraq that the man was talking about, even if that's who and what the applauders had in mind. His subjects were President Nixon, Vice President Agnew, and the Vietnam War. And the words he spoke were not his own. They were delivered at an antiwar rally more than 35 years ago, close to this same spot on the Common, by Howard Zinn, a social activist, author, and Boston University professor who is best known today for his book "A People's History of the United States." The man at the podium was in fact a professional actor, Matthew Floyd Miller, hired by artist Mark Tribe to reenact one of the most memorable protest speeches of the Vietnam era.

The event was part of a program called "Port Huron Project," a series of reenactments planned and produced by Tribe, an assistant professor of modern culture and media at Brown University. His project is named after the "Port Huron Statement," a manifesto of the Students for a Democratic Society written by SDS members in Port Huron, Mich., in 1962.

Last September, the first of Tribe's reenactments took place in Central Park, New York, where an actress delivered a speech originally given there by Coretta Scott King in 1968. This Thursday, the third installment in the series, a reenactment of a speech delivered by SDS president Paul Potter in 1965 in Washington, D.C., will take place near the Washington Monument.

Standing in the audience and listening to Zinn's speech being delivered by Miller with coolly passionate conviction was for me a strange, almost surrealistic experience. The year the speech was originally made, 1971, was the year I graduated from high school. Revolution was in the air back then, even in Saco, Maine, where I grew up. The world was electric with a sense of new possibilities — social, political, and cultural. If a nationwide grass-roots movement of young people could help stop a war that was being conducted by the world's most powerful government, then almost anything seemed possible. And as I listened

to Zinn's words, I could feel that old sense of euphoria rising up in me again — only to collide with a very different, far less optimistic sense of today's reality.

Reenactment has become a familiar genre in contemporary art. Taking off from a popular recreational activity in which participants dress and act out episodes from historic wars, artist reenactors restage historic events not to escape into adventurous fantasies of the past but to prompt alternative thinking about history and contemporary politics and ideology. In 2001, for example, the British artist Jeremy Deller produced a reenactment of a 1984 miners

strike in Orgreave, South Yorkshire, England. His film of that event was featured last spring in "Ahistoric Occasion: Artists Making History," an exhibition at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art that explored ways of re-representing history by 11 well-known artists.

In popular culture, recycling the old is everywhere. There are new versions of old movies such as "Hairspray" and "Nancy Drew." Tribute bands reenact the music and performances of classic rock groups, and reunited rock groups reenact themselves. Television reenacts the past all the time, from "Deadwood" to "That '70s Show." And clothing fashions are permanently on recycle.

In contemporary art, too, it's hard to find anything that's not an update of something that was new years ago, whether it be Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Minimalism, or even Conceptualism. In 2005 at the Guggenheim Museum, the veteran performance artist Marina Abramovic presented "Seven Easy Pieces," in which she reenacted famous extremist performances by Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman, herself, and others.

A positive take on all this might be that American and European cultures are in a retrospective, ruminative mood. After a century of mind-boggling innovation in both the sciences and the humanities — innovations that have not brought about the global utopia some modern visionaries hoped they would — we have lost faith in the new, and we have entered a period of looking back and trying to assess and digest where we have been and what it has all meant.

The negative view would be that our artistic culture has run out of creative energy and now is resorting to a kind of mindlessly opportunistic self-cannibalism.

In any case, when artistic reenactment and contemporary political activism coincide, as they do in Tribe's project, it raises some fascinating and some troubling questions. If, for example, the purpose is to arouse opposition to the war in Iraq in particular and, more generally, to encourage greater political awareness and involvement, isn't treating an old political speech as a Duchampian found object and importing it into the insular realm of avant-garde art a rather unlikely way of effecting real political change in the real world? Is there a risk of trivializing the issues by funneling them into a kind of sophisticated entertainment for art-world cognoscenti? How different, after all, is this from creating animated tableaux in a waxworks museum for liberal intellectuals?

Yet for me the event at the Common was undeniably stirring. There was an odd sense of chronological dislocation, too, for though the speaker seemed to be addressing people in the present, he was, in a theatrical sense, speaking to an invisible audience, a crowd with a very different sense of the moment. That audience dispersed many years ago, yet one felt it convene as a ghostly presence.

It's worth noting that Tribe, born in 1966, was a child the year Zinn gave his speech. So his project, like those of other reenactors his age, is a quest not to understand his own generation so much as to connect with that of his parents and with the culture and consciousness that shaped them. It is, ironically, the opposite of what happened in the '60s, when young people typically found themselves by breaking away from their parents and rejecting their parents' values. Tribe's father, incidentally, is Laurence Tribe, the famous lawyer, constitutional law expert, and Harvard Law School professor.

Tribe will distribute videos of

his reenactments on the Internet and through the sale of DVDs. You can see the Coretta Scott King reenactment at [www.porthuronproject.net](http://www.porthuronproject.net). But the "Port Huron Project" is not likely to revive the political spirit of the '60s and early '70s on a broad scale, not by itself, anyway. It's too intellectual, too academic to have that kind of popular appeal. But it might prompt some people to reflect, and looking backward could be a way to begin reimagining a new, more promising future.

Ken Johnson can be reached at [kjohnson@globe.com](mailto:kjohnson@globe.com).

## Best in Show

Recommendations by R.C. Baker

The Port Huron Project  
[nothing.org/porthuronproject](http://nothing.org/porthuronproject)

## Figures of Speech

Flags surrounding the Washington Monument flutter gently in a video of a young man standing at a podium, declaring: "The incredible war . . . has provided the razor—the terrible, sharp cutting edge—that has finally severed the last vestige of the illusion that morality and decency are the guiding principles of our foreign policy." He then quotes a U.S. senator: "The United States may very well be the greatest threat to peace in the world today." Whoa—which brave senator is he talking about? A presidential contender? Afraid not. The young orator is actor Max Bunzel, re-creating a 1965 speech by Paul Potter, the president of the Students for a Democratic Society. The war in question is Vietnam; the senator, Oregonian Wayne Morse, a lonely, early voice excoriating President Johnson's foreign policy. The piece, *We Must Name the System* (2007), and other re-enactments of '60s and '70s political declarations are the brainchild of artist Mark Tribe, a professor of modern culture at Brown University, who began these historical simulations to counter the political apathy of his students. The speeches selected so far for *The Port Huron Project* (named after Tom Hayden's 1962 New Left manifesto) reveal sad parallels between yesteryear's wrongheaded military intervention and our own Iraq quagmire. (The first three videos are available online; later this year, Creative Time will sponsor live re-enactments of historic speeches by Bobby Seale, César Chávez, and Stokely Carmichael.) In 2006's *Until the Last Gun Is Silent*, actress Gina Brown, wearing a somber black dress and a midnight-blue hat, channels Coretta Scott King's poignant 1968 Central Park address, derived from notes found in her husband's pocket at the time of his assassination three weeks earlier. She speaks of his vilification for opposing the Vietnam War, then moves on to the tension between the haves and have-nots, noting: "Our Congress passes laws which subsidize corporation farms, oil companies, airlines, and houses for suburbia, but when they turn their attention to the poor, they suddenly become concerned about balancing the budget." *Plus ça change. . .* The production values of these faux time capsules are spare, but the rhetoric resonates across the decades, hopefully making it easier for us—unlike the generation that trusted no one over 30—to heed the wisdom of our elders.

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Veena Rao

**Port Huron statement: Gina Brown re-enacts Coretta Scott King in Central Park.**

## The New York Times

## An Art Project Gives New Life to the Protests of Yore

Giving  
New Life  
To Protests  
Of Yore

By RANDY KENNEDY

WASHINGTON, July 26 — It's not an unfamiliar tableau these days: people gathered on a grassy expanse of the National Mall here, listening to someone deliver an impassioned antiwar speech, with phrases like "aggressive, activist foreign policy," "the war we are creating," "vigorous governmental efforts to control information" and "distorted or downright dishonest documents." At some point, the crowd breaks into applause and a young woman yells out, "That's right!"

She shouts this, however, just after the speaker behind the lectern refers to men with last names like Johnson, Rusk and Bundy and to the destinies

Antiwar words from  
42 years ago,  
reconsidered as art.

of the Vietnamese people. And at its high point, the crowd numbers only about 30 people, many of them involved in videotaping, recording and photographing the event as flags snap majestically in the wind around the Washington Monument.

In other words, if you had wandered into this spectacle on Thursday evening, you would have found yourself not exactly in the midst of an actual protest but somewhere slightly removed, in the disorienting territory where art meets political engagement.

The firebrand orator was Max Bunzel, a 23-year-old actor from New York, juggling the role between movie auditions — for a fee, although he said that the speech, originally delivered by Paul Potter, the president of Students for a Democratic Society, during the 1965 march on Washington, genuinely moved and affected him. Most of the college-age spectators gathered there in a clutch were fully aware they were witnessing art, but by the end they also seemed not to be simply playing along but to be genuinely engaged by Mr. Potter's arguments.

Mark Tribe, an artist and assistant professor of modern culture and media studies at Brown University, has organized a series of such re-enactments at sites where important speeches of the New Left originally took place, and he says his intention was precisely to create such a strange cultural and political straddle. The goal was to use the speeches not just as historical ready-mades or conceptual-art explorations of context, he said, but also maybe as a genuine form of protest, to point out with the help of art how much has changed, yet how much remains the same.



Max Bunzel delivers Paul Potter's 1965 antiwar speech in Washington.

Or, in Mr. Tribe's view, has grown worse since the era when Mr. Potter urged his listeners, with characteristic 1960s deconstructionist fervor, to "name the system" that allowed the Vietnam War to happen.

"Forty years has elapsed," Mr. Tribe said, "and the system that Paul Potter talked about has gotten so much more sophisticated. The military-industrial complex or capitalism or whatever you want to call it has globalized and intensified."

The speech by Mr. Potter (who died several years ago) is the third so far in what Mr. Tribe calls the Port Huron Project, named after the New Left manifesto. The first, performed last summer in Central Park, was a re-enactment of a 1968 speech by Coretta Scott King, and the second, this month on Boston Common, was a reprise of a speech given in 1971 by the activist Howard Zinn urging widespread civil disobedience. Creative Time, the New York public-art organization, has agreed to help produce three more speeches next year.

The project fits into a growing subgenre of historical re-enactment as performance art. Among the best-known practitioners is the British artist Jeremy Deller, who won the 2004 Turner Prize. In 2001 he staged

Phrases spoken about  
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a re-creation of a seminal event in British labor history, a 1984 confrontation between the police and thousands of miners in Yorkshire, England, who were protesting layoffs. His epic re-enactment, filmed with the help of the director Mike Figgis, used vintage clothes, hundreds of extras and thousands of fake bricks (to be thrown by the pretend miners).

Mr. Tribe, by contrast, puts inexpensive ads in Backstage and other theatrical publications and hires one actor per speech, after auditioning many. "We get deluged by applicants," he said, adding with a grin, "We do callbacks." (Mr. Bunzel, the actor for the Potter speech, who was born almost a decade after the Vietnam War ended, heard about it through friends.)

Mr. Tribe found the plain pine lectern he uses for the speeches through craigslist.com. And, with the help of a handful of his students, he schleps it and some basic sound and video

equipment around to the sites, using the Internet to try to draw people whom he hopes will feel the ground shifting a little beneath their feet.

"It doesn't fit neatly into any category," he said. "Is it protest? Well, no, not quite. Is it theater? Not really. What is it? Are we in the present tense? Yes, but we're hearing this speech that was given 42 years ago."

"There's a real kind of surreal quality," he said. "It flips back and forth. It's unsettling."

He said he began to think about such re-enactments when he started teaching at Brown, his alma mater, in 2005 and found that students who said they opposed the war in Iraq did little about it. "There were no protests," he said. "My students didn't even seem to want to talk about it."

His motivation for the project was also — as is the case in many art works — partly personal, he said, a way to connect with childhood memories of his parents' political involvement. (His father is Laurence H. Tribe, the Harvard law professor and frequent champion of liberal causes.)

"I find that time really inspiring, exciting to think about," he said. "Also kind of sexy."

Sometimes the historical conjunctions at such events are more than just conceptual. As Mr. Bunzel began to speak, Paul R. Booth, the organizer of the 1965 march, joined the crowd. Mr. Booth, now assistant to the president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees in Washington, said he remembered how the original speech, heard by 20,000 protesters, the largest American antiwar crowd up to that point, "really blew everybody's mind."

Some of the spectators in the crowd on Thursday did not describe their reactions to the re-enactment quite the same way. Russell Mann, who showed up after reading about the event in the newspaper and stood at the edge of the crowd, said he served as a mechanical engineer on an air base near Saigon in 1973 and feels the United States should never have abandoned its fight in Vietnam.

"I'm not on the side of these people," Mr. Mann said, scowling and gesturing toward Mr. Bunzel. "I just came to hear what I missed in 1965."

ONLINE: PAUL POTTER SPEECH

Audio from the re-enactment of a speech by Mr. Potter at the National Mall:

nytimes.com/arts

More legible version next page →

## Giving New Life to Protests of Yore

By RANDY KENNEDY

Published: July 28, 2007



Brendan Smialowski for The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 26 — It's not an unfamiliar tableau these days: people gathered on a grassy expanse of the National Mall here, listening to someone deliver an impassioned antiwar speech with phrases like "aggressive, activist foreign policy," "the war we are creating," "vigorous governmental efforts to control information" and "distorted or downright dishonest documents." At some point, the crowd breaks into applause and a young woman yells out, "That's right!"

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LONDRA

## De Dominicis Remixed



Nel corso dell'edizione di quest'anno di Frieze è stato chiesto a 3 spazi non profit internazionali — Vitamin Creative Space di Guangzhou (Cina), Townhouse (Il Cairo), e la Wrong Gallery (Londra) — di realizzare 3 progetti site specific appositamente per la fiera. In collaborazione con RS&A Ltd., la Wrong Gallery ha presentato una rielaborazione di *Second Solution of Immortality: The Universe is Immobile*, l'opera di Gino De Dominicis che fece scandalo alla Biennale di Venezia del 1972.

The Wrong Gallery, Gino De Dominicis' *Second Solution of Immortality: The Universe is Immobile*, veduta dell'installazione presso Frieze Art Fair, Londra 2006.

KARLSRUHE (D)

## Paul Virilio e l'arte

Si chiude il 7 gennaio 2007 la mostra a cura di Peter Gente e Peter Weibel intitolata "Paul Virilio and the Arts", presso lo ZKM di Karlsruhe. Paul Virilio (Parigi, 1932), figura centrale per la Storia e Critica d'Arte e per l'Architettura, ha elaborato diverse teorie sul rapporto tra la società moderna e la velocità, le catastrofi e le nuove tecnologie. Il fenomeno della "dromocrazia", il cui prodotto più autentico sarebbe, appunto, l'incidente, è ancora oggi al centro di dibattiti in campo filosofico, della Storia dell'Arte e dell'urbanistica. La mostra presenta il contributo di Virilio alle arti attraverso progetti di mostre (come "Unknown Quantity" del 2003, alla Fondation Cartier di Parigi), saggi, fotografie e documentari. Lo scorso 3 novembre, invece, si è tenuto un simposio organizzato in occasione della mostra, a cui hanno partecipato John Armitage, Marc Augé, Frank Böckelmann, Sara Daniel, Peter Gente, Enrico Ghezzi, Andrea Gnam, Marina Grzinic, Barbara Könches, Maurizio Lazzarato, Claus Morisch, Claude Parent, Jürgen Ploog, Gisela Straehle, Bernard Tschumi, Daniel Tyradellis, Andrej Ujica e Peter Weibel. Per info: [www.zkm.de](http://www.zkm.de)

Un ritratto di Paul Virilio. Édition du Cercle © Paul Virilio.



PARIGI/DIGIONE (FR)

## Karen Kilimnik

Le opere di Karen Kilimnik, un mix di riferimenti popolari e di citazioni dalla letteratura, al teatro e al balletto, sono in mostra in contemporanea al Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris e presso Le Consortium di Digione. Nello spazio parigino, l'artista americana (Philadelphia, 1962) presenta una cinquantina di dipinti, ritratti di personaggi presi a prestito dalle riviste, dal cinema e dalla televisione in contesti storici del passato, come il Rinascimento italiano o il Preromanticismo francese, e 4 installazioni, due delle quali (*The Grotto* e *The Globbed Furniture*, 2006) presentate per la prima volta in questa occasione. La mostra di Digione invece, presenta le opere dell'artista più vicine al mondo della danza e del balletto. Fino al 7 gennaio 2007 al Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (MAM/ARC) e fino al mese di febbraio a Le Consortium, Digione. Per info: [www.mam.paris.fr](http://www.mam.paris.fr); [www.leconsortium.com](http://www.leconsortium.com).



Karen Kilimnik, veduta della mostra presso il Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (MAM/ARC), Parigi.

NEW YORK

## The Port Huron Project

Lo scorso 16 settembre, a New York, un nutrito gruppo di persone è accorso al Mineral Springs del Central Park per assistere al *remake* di un famoso discorso pronunciato nel 1968 da Loretta Scott King, vedova di Martin Luther King. Si tratta della performance *Until the Last Gun is Silent*, ideata e diretta dall'artista e teorico Mark Tribe e realizzata all'interno del festival per la psicogeografia contemporanea *Conflux*. *Until the Last Gun is Silent* è la prima di sei performance del Port Huron Project che Tribe realizzerà nell'arco dei prossimi tre anni in luoghi pubblici di New York, Washington, Chicago e Oakland. Ogni performance consiste nell'appropriazione di discorsi tenuti da attivisti dei diritti civili tra la fine degli anni Sessanta e l'inizio dei Settanta, riproposti nelle loro *location* originarie. Il progetto è ispirato al Port Huron Statement, un documento inneggiante alla disobbedienza civile non-violenta, stilato da Tom Hayden nel 1962 in seno all'organizzazione



Mark Tribe, *Until the Last Gun is Silent*, 2006. Foto della performance, New York.

Students for a Democratic Society. L'idea di Tribe è quella di ricontestualizzare i discorsi di protesta dei progressisti americani così da dimostrare l'attualità della loro portata rivoluzionaria. L'atto dell'appropriazione è, dunque, il supporto tecnico dell'opera così come Jeremy Deller si appropria degli scontri tra scioperanti e polizia in *The Battle of Orgreave*. Quello dell'appropriazione diventa, nelle mani dell'artista, un metodo e uno strumento per indagare la realtà politica e sociale del proprio Paese.

—Francesco Spampinato

VIENNA

## Franz Gertsch



Franz Gertsch, *Medici*, 1971-1972. Olio su tela, 400 x 600 cm. Collezione Ludwig Forum für internationale Kunst, Aachen (DE).

Al MUMOK di Vienna è in corso fino all'11 febbraio 2007 una retrospettiva dedicata a Franz Gertsch, che raccoglie il *corpus* delle opere realizzate dagli anni Cinquanta fino al 1984, fissando le tappe dell'evoluzione dell'artista, dagli anni dei movimenti *hippie* fino a oggi. Attraverso gli scatti tratti da scene quotidiane — *Medici*, esposto per la prima volta a Vienna nel 1979 mostra cinque amici dell'artista all'inaugurazione del Kunstmuseum di Lucerna —, o icone della musica rock (*Patti Smith*, 1980), Gertsch trasferisce le immagini fotografiche su tele di grande formato.

La mostra, a cura di Edelbert Köb, è stata realizzata in collaborazione con il Museum Franz Gertsch a Burgdorf (AT). Per info: [www.mumok.at](http://www.mumok.at)

KUNSTART 06

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Fiera Bolzano  
Messeplatz, 1  
39100 Bolzano  
[www.kunstart.it](http://www.kunstart.it)

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7 - 10 dicembre  
Miami Beach Convention Center  
Miami Beach Florida, USA  
[www.artbaselmiami.com](http://www.artbaselmiami.com)

ARTE FIERA BOLOGNA

26 - 29 gennaio 2007  
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40128 Bologna  
[www.artefiera.bolognafierte.it](http://www.artefiera.bolognafierte.it)

## Flash Art News

Direttore  
Giancarlo Politi

News Editors  
Ilaria Bombelli  
Valentina Sansone  
02 69311218 / 02 89054785

In redazione è in funzione  
una segreteria telefonica  
permanente: 02 6887342

Fax  
02 66801290  
e-mail

[ilaria@flashartonline.com](mailto:ilaria@flashartonline.com)  
[valentina@flashartonline.com](mailto:valentina@flashartonline.com)

# THE BOSTON PHOENIX

## News Features

### Back to the barricades

Can reenacting Vietnam-era protests help us rethink Iraq?

By GREG COOK | October 22, 2008 | Recommended By 6 People

Photos: Guy Fawkes Day



**SPEAK OUT:** A demonstration, organized as part of Tribe's project, contrasts with today's more muted anti-war movement.

In the fall of 2005, when the artist and curator Mark Tribe began teaching at Brown University, he was struck by how little protest there was on campus at a time of war.

"My students appeared initially to me to be really apathetic," Tribe, who is in New York while on sabbatical from Brown's department of Modern Culture & Media, tells me. "I learned very quickly that they weren't — that they in fact cared passionately about everything from Iraq to global warming to immigration policy, labor exploitation, in terms of outsourcing manufacturing to Southeast Asia. But they seemed to believe that

resistance was futile, or at least that the kind of standard forms of protest that became well known during the Vietnam era were ineffective.”

Instead, his students taught English-as-a-Second-Language classes to “undocumented workers,” fought restrictions on music file sharing, and made documentary videos about Central and South America.

“I started just thinking about how protest had changed in the 40 years since the ’68 national Democratic convention in Chicago,” Tribe says, “or since 1966 when I was born.”

This led Tribe, who is best known for founding the prominent new media art news and archive Web site Rhizome.org in 1996, to launch a series of six re-enactments of “New Left” Vietnam-era protest speeches by the likes of Stokely Carmichael, Angela Davis, Cesar Chavez, and Peter Potter, with actors delivering the original text at or near where the speech was first given. Tribe called it The Port Huron Project, after the 1962 manifesto for social justice, peace and community building by the Students for a Democratic Society when they formed in Port Huron, Michigan.

The project — part art, part protest — began in September 2006 with an actress standing before a modest crowd in New York’s Central Park, reciting a speech that Coretta Scott King gave three weeks after her husband was assassinated in 1968: “The work of peacemaking must continue until the last gun is silent.” The speeches (view them at Tribe’s Web site: [nothing.org](http://nothing.org)) call for racial equality, aid for the poor, and an end to the Vietnam War.

The speeches are moving — and disorienting. Tribe purposely selected texts that are alive in their parallels with today — particularly to the war in Iraq.

“Port Huron couldn’t be more timely,” says New York artist and curator Lee Wells, who included The Port Huron Project in an exhibit at New York’s Pace University last fall and is bringing it to upcoming exhibits in Russia. “Outside of them saying Vietnam, these same exact speeches could be given today.”

But the old speeches are also sealed off in their era, their teeth filed down by all the years that have passed. By 2003, when the Bush administration launched its war in Iraq, the absence of a draft, combined with the post-9/11 environment, effectively undercut a broad and sustained public protest movement.

So now, on the eve of an election in which we look again to replace a Texas president who led the nation into an ill-considered war, Tribe’s project raises questions about the parallels between now and then, and about the effectiveness of politically engaged art and activism. In particular, what is its relevance with Bush on his way out and the prospect of some sort of winding down in Iraq?

## **Unearthing the past**

“The people who engage in civil disobedience are engaging in the most petty of disorders in order to protest against mass murder,” a lanky actor said into microphones at a temporary podium before a small crowd in sunny, leafy Boston Common.

It was July 2007, and Tribe had hired the performer to recite a speech given there in 1971 by Howard Zinn, the Boston-area activist, historian, and World War II veteran, urging civil disobedience against the Vietnam War. “We need to do something to disturb that calm, smiling, murderous president in the White House,” the actor said. The audience applauded.

“So let’s restore the meaning of words,” the actor continued. “And let’s tell the world that the government has committed high crimes, and that we don’t want to continue being accomplices to these crimes. And to do that we have to say that in every way our consciousness compels and in every way our imaginations suggest.” The crowd clapped again — endorsing Zinn’s words as a sort of past-present anti-Vietnam-Iraq, anti-Nixon-Bush charge.

“The two things that the reenactment and the original event have in common are the text of the speech and the location,” Tribe explains. “What makes it so strange is you’re standing in the same place that somebody stood 40 years ago hearing the same speech, but the world has changed around you.”

Zinn, now 86, was invited to the performance but didn’t attend, and he hasn’t seen the video.

But he tells me that Tribe’s project is “a good idea especially, because it’s so important for people to remember Vietnam now that we’re bogged down in a war that has a number of similar characteristics to Vietnam. And since the government has been trying to bury the memory of Vietnam so people won’t think about it . . . This is a way of giving historical perspective to what’s going on now and a way of bringing attention to what’s going on now, but bringing attention in a way that gives some historical depth to what’s going on now.

“I think the Vietnam experience is a very crucial one in getting people to understand that what’s happening now is not an aberration, it’s a continuation of American foreign policy, which has been based for a long time on fear and deception and a militarist approach to world problems.”

## **Art and politics**

Last month in New York, Tribe wrapped up the performance part of Port Huron by staging the sixth and final re-enactment. Now he’s organizing exhibits of videos documenting the events and plans to turn them into a book and DVD.

How to gage Port Huron's effectiveness? It has already attracted favorable write-ups in the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, the Boston Globe, and New York magazine — even though the project is only beginning to appear in galleries.

“I have gotten way more press for my little re-enactments than 20,000 marchers get,” Tribe acknowledges. The lesson, he thinks, is that media-savvy theatrics deployed by '60s activists like Abbie Hoffman and the Yippies may be a key in bringing attention to causes.

At the same time, the project's catchy time-warping, everything-old-is-new-again concept perhaps most makes it a creature of the art world, where it stands part of a trend in historical re-enactment.

In 2004, John Malpede re-enacted Robert Kennedy's famed 1968 tour of poor Kentucky communities. Jeremy Deller's 2001 video, *The Battle of Orgreave*, re-enacted a 1984 clash between police and striking British miners. In 2005, Sharon Hayes stood on New York streets holding placards from notable past protests, including “I am a man” and “Ratify the ERA now.”

All this recycling and appropriation seems a reflection of the continuing influence of post-modernism — and nostalgia. And perhaps it serves to make politics more palatable to an art world in which the subjects of Iraq, Afghanistan, and the “War on Terror” are largely absent.

Why not just address Iraq directly?

Re-enactment “operates on more levels,” Tribe says, and is more “interesting, thought-provoking, less predictable perhaps. There's inherent complexity in compare and contrast. Maybe that's part of what enables it to function as art rather than simply as politics.”

Ivette Luna, an organizer for racial, social and economic justice with Ocean State Action, has not seen Tribe's work, but says, “I think it's important for us to revisit what we have done and where we've been to move forward in an intellectual manner. I think we keep repeating the bad stuff. Anything we do to try to capture and continue to push our message forward is important to our work.”

### **Forty years ago today**

“One question that's formed in my mind,” Tribe says, “since I started working on this a couple years ago, is: What would it feel like to believe that together with other like-minded peers I could really change the course of history and open up possibilities for a radically different future?”

“This idea that, in words quoted by Stokely Carmichael, ‘Let another world be born.’ Could you and I and a few hundred other people get together and spawn a new world? It doesn’t seem that way. But people seemed to be able to imagine that 40 years ago.”

Forty years ago, the anti-war movement was changing the mood of the country, and with it the direction of the war, but the fighting still dragged on.

In the 1968 presidential campaign, Democrat Hubert Humphrey became the standard-bearer for the party that had escalated US involvement in the Vietnam War in the early ’60s, but was now pursuing an end to hostilities.

Richard Nixon narrowly defeated Humphrey by rallying the “silent majority” of Americans disaffected or downright offended by the civil rights and anti-war movements, and by pledging “to bring an honorable end to the war.” American troops, though, didn’t leave Vietnam until five years later, in 1973.

The length of US involvement in the Vietnam War helps undercut arguments about the effectiveness of the anti-war movement.

On the other hand, there’s been much talk lately of conservative ideas trumping liberal ones over the past four decades — with little acknowledgment of the role played by conservative violence and government-sponsored extra-legal assaults.

Since World War II, there’s a through line from police and civilian attacks on civil-rights activists, to Southern politicians’ brazen defiance of federal civil rights regulations, to Chicago cops rioting against war protestors at the 1968 Democratic Convention. That year, right-wing fringe figures assassinated preeminent civil rights and anti-Vietnam war leaders Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy.

Conservative violence continued with attacks on abortion clinics and the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. This lineage plays as undercurrent to recent threats against Barack Obama — like a man yelling “off with his head” at a McCain-Palin rally in Pennsylvania on October 8.

Crime and violence weren’t the sole territory of the right, but fringe left groups like the Weathermen and the Black Panthers attacked the bottom of the right (cops and buildings), while the fringe right exterminated liberal leaders. After the ’68 Chicago convention, five protest organizers were convicted of inciting a riot. (The verdicts were later overturned.) The result: a generation of major liberal leaders murdered or sentenced to jail. How could a movement not sputter with its brightest leaders eliminated?

Still, protests won civil rights for African-Americans and other minorities, for women and homosexuals. The presidential candidacies of Obama and Hillary Clinton, the vice presidential candidacy of Sarah Palin, and last Friday’s Connecticut State Supreme court ruling legalizing gay marriage attest to this. But protests against the Iraq War have been

largely shrugged off by the Bush Administration and the mainstream press, and the protests themselves have been sporadic.

The advent of the Internet has also radically changed the playing field. It has become a major tool in left-leaning organizing, fund-raising, advocacy and critique — from MoveOn.org and Howard Dean to Daily Kos and Barack Obama — engaging millions of people, but in a way more removed from the public square.

Luna says, “I think we’re starting to see a new wave [of engagement] due to the different realities we’re entering now” — our wars, economic crisis, the lack of health care. “But I still think it’s not to the same extent” as the Vietnam era.

Zinn says, “Obviously the anti-war movement is not as strong now as it was in the strongest years of the movement then. But I don’t think it should be compared to the high point of resistance, which was 1969, ’70, ’71. I think it should be better compared to the early years of the Vietnam War, because it’s still a developing movement.

“It’s taking longer this time for the American people — although obviously there’s been a change in the American people, two-thirds of them are now opposed to the war, where two-thirds were initially for the war. But still they’re taking a longer time for the anti-war movement to develop and a longer time for soldiers, veterans to organize.”

“If we’re going to compare them,” Zinn adds, “I think we have to compare them at different times in their development and see what’s happening now as a step on the way to a larger movement against the war.”

*You can read Greg Cook’s blog at [gregcookland.com/journal](http://gregcookland.com/journal).*