

BARBARA KRUGER

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Picturing Relations: Images, Text, and Social Engagement

My attempts aim to undermine that singular pontificating male voiceover which "correctly" instructs our pleasures and histories or lack of them. I am wary of the seriousness and confidence of knowledge. I am concerned with who speaks and who is silent: with what is seen and what is not. —BARBARA KRUGER, 1982¹

The richness and complexity of theory should periodically break through the moats of academia and enter the public discourse via a kind of powerfully pleasurable language of pictures, words, sounds, and structures. —BARBARA KRUGER, 1992²

BARBARA KRUGER'S WORK is neither moralistic nor judgmental. Rather, it is observational—it observes the complexities of cultural codes. These codes determine an array of social phenomena, including not only the dynamics of reciprocity, kindness, and benevolence but also those of cruelty, humiliation, and oppression. The work questions what it means to construct those codes: Who gets to construct them? In whose interests do they function? On what conditions do they depend? But it also questions the operation of the codes themselves, exploring their components and assessing their roles in the process of communication.

Cultural codes, Kruger's work repeatedly shows, are relational. They are produced in and through various representational systems, or languages. Moreover, codes have to be "decoded" or "interpreted," and are thus inherently inconstant and imprecise. The meaning we construe as decoders is never exactly that which has been encoded by the sender or deduced by other recipients. The decoder is as important as the encoder in the practice of interpretation—in the translation of a language (both in the sense of words and images) into meaning.³ This is one of the central insights offered by Kruger's work.

¹ Barbara Kruger, "Incorrect" (1982), *Effects* (1983); as republished in Barbara Kruger, *Remote Control: Power, Cultures, and the World of Appearances* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 220.

² Barbara Kruger, "Repeat After Me" (1992), first published in *Remote Control*, 223.

³ My discussion of communication not as a process but as articulation draws on Stuart Hall, "Encoding/decoding," in Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis, eds., *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies (1972–1979)* (Birmingham: Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1980), 128–38, 294–95.

Awareness of the powerful nature of cultural codes marks the difference between conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s and postconceptualist practices such as Kruger's. Conceptual artists like Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner posited meaning as residing in material objects, abstract ideas, or temporal processes in the real world. Language, from this perspective, is purely formal and functions as a transparent medium between things and meaning. It is mimetic. For other conceptual artists, Ian Wilson, for instance, language is expressive. For them, it is the speaker, the artist, who, *through* language, imposes her unique meaning on the world: words and material objects mean what the artist intends them to mean. Therefore, to decode is to grasp exactly what was originally encoded. This fixation on the formal and normalistic nature of language blocked art's relation to other practices, as well as the more general relations among signification, ideology, and history.

The model of language developed by Kruger works through a different methodology—establishes a different kind of address—than that of these legacies of conceptual art. It no longer thinks of language as mimetic, let alone as an act of self-determination, articulation, identity formation, and enunciation. Neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language. Representation is a practice—a signifying practice that *articulates* meaning. Meaning is therefore not predetermined by reality, let alone by the intention of the sender, but is actively *produced* and has its own materiality and effectivity. This notion further implies that since art is the production of meanings, the subjective position of the viewer has to be taken into account. The artwork may signify in different ways for different viewers. Thus Kruger's art disregards conceptualist claims that language could assume the function of pure communication, of visual neutrality, in the way that abstract art had previously claimed neutrality and universal legibility.

However, while Kruger's artistic practice engages a different model of language than those adopted by conceptual art, it retains several crucial elements of conceptualism. For instance, from the beginning of the 1980s, Kruger has produced work that has assumed

widely distributed forms, including pieces in newspapers, announcements on bus shelters, advertisements on billboards, posters on construction sites, messages on matchbooks, and various other easily disseminated objects. These are strategies that continue conceptual art's emphasis on the need to abandon traditional formats and categories altogether in order to make art broadly accessible.

The shift in perspective from a narrow concern with the object, or even with the context of placement, to a broader investigation of the artwork as a phenomenon of the apparatus of publicity, was perhaps best articulated by Dan Graham's works for magazine pages of the mid-1960s.⁴ A case in point is his *Homes for America* (1966). This two-page illustrated magazine piece is embedded from the very beginning in the media channels in which most new art is initially received—that is, into the structure of an art journal. Of course, Graham's move was already largely anticipated by Edward Ruscha in the early 1960s, when, with projects such as *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963) or *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965), he made the form of distribution the artwork's point of departure. Ruscha, whose commercial work as a magazine layout designer in the early 1960s was well known and admired, inverted Andy Warhol's practice of placing photographs of popular iconography on canvases and exhibiting these in a private gallery by inserting vernacular photographs directly into a limited-edition book that was disseminated as a work of art. But while these strategies to distribute art in greater numbers in effect redefined art's relationship to the viewer and enabled it to communicate with a wider audience than had previously been possible, it did little to enhance the audience's understanding. The new art eliminated conventional forms of distribution and altered the traditional limitations of the object, yet it remained incomprehensible to all but a small coterie of insiders who had the knowledge required to decode and discern its aesthetic dimension. Taking this limitation of conceptual art as a starting point, Kruger began in the early 1980s to place her art in public space with the recognition that if it was to be effectively received by a broad public and not experienced as an imposition,

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See Dan Graham, "My Works for Magazine Pages: A History of Conceptual Art," in Gary Dufour, and Dan Graham, eds., cat. (Perth: The Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1985), 6–13.

it would have to do three things: first, it would have to construct a specific readership; second, it would have to address the specific needs and interests of its audience; and third, it would have to be articulated within forms of representation—primarily language, but also visual imagery—that are communicative and accessible, that are within the reading competence of the artwork's presumed spectators.

APPROPRIATION

To a generation steeped in movies and rock and roll . . . the return to imagery and to the play and disruption of narrative were welcome moves.

—BARBARA KRUGER, 1979⁵

Kruger has been making art since the late 1960s, but it was not until a decade later that she began to develop her signature work. Clipping pictures out of books and magazines found in flea markets and thrift shops, in the late 1970s Kruger amassed a large archive of photographic images featuring an array of body parts (hands and faces in particular), gestures, and expressions. Pictures from old photo journals, first-aid manuals, science textbooks and the like, were accumulated alongside glossy photos from mass-culture magazines. The pictures were then cropped, slashed with bands of Futura Bold type, rephotographed, and enlarged into high-contrast, black-and-white prints. More recently, the bands of type have been colored red.

Kruger's construction of a photographic archive is similar to the epistemological and historical project of her peer Sherrie Levine. Both artists began in the late 1970s to appropriate found photographs for use in their own artworks. Both reshot the appropriated photographs, changing the meaning of the originals in turn. However, Kruger's archive was remarkably different from the body of images assembled by Levine. Whereas the latter consisted exclusively of black-and-white art photography (photographs "after" photographs by, for instance, Edward Weston or Walker Evans), Kruger's archive included an array of vernacular images. As the contemporary critic Abigail Solomon-Godeau noted,

Levine's gambit of this period could only function "within the compass of the art world."⁶ Kruger's, by contrast, is much more readily accessible to viewers far beyond that compass. Furthermore, whereas Levine acknowledges, albeit in an offhand way, the makers of the photographs she rephotographs, Kruger gives no credit to the original source. If Levine's work is primarily idea-based (i.e., once the basic idea of the project is conveyed the artwork need not be shown), Kruger's must be seen to be understood. Indeed, the design of Kruger's work is based on a journalistic (rather than fine art) use of photographs, de-emphasizing authorship and craftsmanship and focusing instead on variation in scale, subject matter, and juxtaposition in order to dramatize broad and topical themes in the most powerful manner. In this sense Kruger's work recalls the vocabulary of Richard Prince's early 1980s "Cowboy" series, which features an archive of cigarette advertisements appropriated from the pervasive Marlboro Man campaign. In addition to the actual appropriation and re-presentation of the image and its form, Prince cropped the copy from the advertisement. If Prince's artworks were accompanied by text, it was the slew of theoretical essays on postmodernism published in journals such as *October* and *Art in America* that directed their meaning. Kruger appropriates images without text. Her work also differs from Prince's (and Levine's for that matter) in its direct address to the viewer, an address that is largely due to her reinsertion of texts into her compositions.

Whereas many artists enlist titles or captions to anchor and become implicated in the play of meaning, Kruger places the text directly on the image—articulated not only as a signifying reference but as a visual element. Presumably, this is something that she learned during her decade-long apprenticeship as a graphic designer and picture editor in the magazine world.⁷ But she could have just as easily picked it up by observing the agitprop graphics of punk rock promotional materials in the 1970s. Punk design introduced cut-ups and montage on record covers, flyers, and posters to a young audience that was not content with the status quo. Punk sought to interrupt and change the meaning of things, producing a culture and aesthetic that countered staid

⁵ Barbara Kruger, "The Trap Door," *Ideofacts: Film Journal of the Collective for Independent Cinema*, 9-10 (1979); as reprinted in *Remote Control*, 197.

⁶ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Living with Contradictions: Critical Practices in the Age of Supply-Side Aesthetics" (1987); reprinted in Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 128.

⁷ As Kruger puts it: "The biggest influence on my work, on a visual and formal level, was my experience as a graphic designer—the years spent performing serialized exercises with pictures and words. So, in a sort of circular fashion, my 'job' as a designer became, with a few adjustments, my 'work' as an artist." Barbara Kruger, "Pictures and Words: Interview with Jeanne Siegel," *Arts*, 6:110 (June 1987), 18.

conventions. Its direct connections to Situationist strategies were many—evident as much in its emphasis on détournement as on its mobilization of revolutionary slogans. Punk rock lyrics and song titles, such as the Sex Pistols's "Your future dream is a shopping spree" or the Clash's "Know Your Rights," evoke the graffiti on the streets of Paris in the spring of 1968. But they are also remarkably similar to Kruger's image-texts. Indeed, like punk designs, Kruger's early photomontages were formally chaotic, irregular, and harsh, while as cultural productions they appeared subversive in intent.

The image-text relationship in Kruger's work is ambivalent. Sometimes the text has more power, and sometimes the image diverts the text. It goes back and forth. Which of the two actually has primacy in any particular composition is less important than that the image-text captures the viewer's attention and troubles her preconceived notions. Roland Barthes, in his discussion of the interrelation between text and image within the context of photography, lays out two paradigmatic forms of interaction: in the first, "the image illustrate[s] the text ([makes] it clearer)," and in the second, "the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination."⁸ In fact, he states, since words cannot "duplicate' the image," there is a new space of signification created "in the movement from one structure to the other [where] second[ary] signifieds are inevitably developed."⁹ Kruger employs the "secondary signifieds" produced by the image-text combination as a means with which to merge something observational and critical with something more seductive. The work's direct mode of address depends on that combination, and its success is measured by its ability to communicate. Contrary to the avowed self-reflexivity and autonomy of the modernist artwork, Kruger's emphasis on communication helps to foreground the social dimension of the work of art. But it does so in a highly self-conscious way, which renders it significantly different from conventional documentary practice's belief in the possibility of the unmediated transmission of facts.

So Kruger, in the midst of the punk rock era, used the cold and highly instrumental picture editing and layout design of fashion magazines to produce image-texts rife with doubt. Skepticism and criticality became the predominant characteristics of her work. Picture-texts such as *Untitled (You Are Not Yourself)* (1982), and *Untitled (Your Fictions Become History)* (1983), with their ransom-note lettering and fragmented images of women's faces, or video installations such as *Power/Pleasure/Disguise/Disgust* (1997) or *Twelve* (2004), with their shouting texts and talking heads; do not trade in answers, they ask probing questions. They doubt the surety of all answers. The same is true of Kruger's installation using photography, magnesium tiles, and audio, *Untitled: Talk Like Us* (1994), which addresses the growing ubiquity of instrumentalized forms of communication. The works suggest that social interaction is becoming more and more based on commands and prohibitions, allowances and disallowances. While this can seem to offer a theory of power that dominates social experience leaving little room for resistance, Kruger's work continues to emphasize agency as much as structure: contemporary society is excessive in its demands for order precisely because those with the power to organize society recognize the proliferation of disorder. In this way it is not assumed that the commands and prohibitions have been successfully deployed. In fact, Kruger's understanding of the increasing use of instrumental signification suggests the very opposite. It is precisely because verbal violence and irrationality prevail that contemporary society tries to clamp down on the "openness" of meaning and expression.

REPRESENTATION

I want to put into question how representation works.

—BARBARA KRUGER, 1993¹⁰

Kruger was one of the first artists in the U.S. who set out to deconstruct the patriarchal underpinnings of conventional representation. One of the key questions

⁸ Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message" (1961), reprinted in Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: The Noonday Press, 1977), 36.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Barbara Kruger, from "Barbara Kruger," *Inside the Art World: Conversations with Barbara Kruger* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1994), 154.

confronted in the 1970s and '80s by artists informed by feminism was how to develop new vocabularies. How could linguistic structures of visual objects capable of counteracting the reigning, patriarchal forms of language and visibility be produced? These concerns were partially addressed by psychoanalytic theory, which by then had become a crucial theoretical apparatus for various articulations of feminism. Jacques Lacan, in particular, explained the structure through which access to the Other of language, codes, rules, and laws—what he referred to as the “Symbolic Order”—inevitably provides passage to public power and representation. Such insights assisted artists informed by feminist ideas about the politics of identity formation in exploring the effects of the inability, or *prohibition*, to speak—i.e., the exclusion from access to the power structure of the Symbolic Order—on the constitution, articulation, and representation of female subjectivity.¹¹

The question of how to construct representation capable of transcending the parameters of patriarchal culture within the visual field has been at the center of Kruger's work as much as that of how to dismantle from within the governing forms of visibility and speech. Inevitably, these questions have led to an exploration of agency. Even if language, from Kruger's Lacanian point of view, speaks us, another equally important dimension of her work calls on the viewer to acknowledge that in certain contexts some subjects have more power to speak than others. Kruger's art therefore fuses a concentration on language and the Symbolic Order with a focus on what Michel Foucault referred to as discourse.¹²

In particular, Kruger immerses her work in the discourse of everyday life—the constancy of domestic routines, sexual identity, and so on—neatly designated by the slogan the “personal is political.” Image-texts such as *Untitled (Your Comfort Is My Silence)* (1981), *Untitled (It's a Small World but Not if You Have to Clean It)* (1990), and *Untitled (We Have Received Orders Not to Move)* (1982), with their pronouns that directly address

viewers and require them to acknowledge their positions, bring women's lives and voices into popular discourse, and generate new perspectives in the process. In turn, a critical account of the psychological impact of patriarchy emerges. Indeed, much of Kruger's work implies that the denigration of domestic labor and of women's voices is a social construct, not a natural inevitability that has remained the same in all historical periods and meant the same thing in all cultures. It is only *within* a definite discursive formation that such hierarchies could appear as meaningful. They could not meaningfully exist outside specific discourses, i.e., outside the ways the hierarchies are represented in discourse, produced in knowledge, and regulated by the discursive practices and disciplinary techniques of a particular society and time.¹³

Like Foucault, Kruger, too, rejects the notion that power is unidirectional, radiating from one source. Rather, power relations, from her perspective, permeate all levels of social existence and are therefore to be found operating at every site of social life. Without denying that the state, the law, or the wealthy may have positions of dominance, Kruger emphasizes the many localized circuits, tactics, mechanisms, and effects through which power circulates. “There is,” she maintains, “a politic in every conversation we have, every deal we make, every face we kiss.”¹⁴ Such an approach roots power in forms of behavior, bodies, and local relations, which greatly expands the scope of what is involved in representation.

SUBJECTIVITY

I'm interested in working with pictures and words, because I think they have the power to tell us who we are and who we aren't, who we can be and who we can never be. —BARBARA KRUGER, 1993¹⁵

The traditional conception of the human subject is of an individual who is fully endowed with consciousness; an autonomous and stable entity, the “core” of the self,

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In a late 1990s interview, Kruger speaks about her interest, from an early moment, in how identities are constructed: “Interview with Barbara Kruger by Lyme Tillman,” in Ann Goldstein, *Thinking of You: Barbara Kruger*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 189. Later in the same interview Kruger states “I've always been interested in how identity is constructed” (195).

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The concept of discourse runs through much of Foucault's published work. See in particular his *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (1969), trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith

(New York: Pantheon, 1980). Foucault described discourse as “a group of statements which provide a means for talking about a way of representing the knowledge about—a particular topic at a particular historical moment.” See Stuart Hall's excellent discussion of discourse in “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” in Brian Goble and Stuart Hall, eds., *Formations of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 791.

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Thus, like Foucault's writings, Kruger's work focuses on the “uses and abuses” of power within various institutional spaces/corers. Barbara Kruger, “I make work out of our . . . power and its uses and abuses.” Interview with Barbara

Kruger by Lyme Tillman, *Thinking of You*, 193. And elsewhere: “I am interested in works that address these material conditions of our lives: that recognize the uses and abuses of power on both an intimate and global level.” Barbara Kruger, “Incorrect” (1989), *Remote Control*, 220–21.

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Barbara Kruger, “Arts and Leisure,” *New York Times*, September 9, 1990; reprinted in *Remote Control*, 6.

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Barbara Kruger, from “Barbara Kruger,” *Inside the Art World: Conversations with Barbarade D'Amorim*, 154.

and the independent source of knowledge and meaning. Kruger's conception of language and representation displaces the subject from that privileged position. Subjects may produce particular texts, but they are constituted and operate within the limits of a specific discursive context and culture. As such, to become a subject is to personify the particular forms of knowledge produced by the discursive context in which that subjectivity takes form. Image-texts such as *Untitled (How Come Only the Unborn Have the Right to Life?)* (1992), *Untitled (Your Fictions Become History)* (1984), or *Untitled (Your Manias Become Science)* (1981), pointedly address the relationship between discourse and power. They comment on the self-interested inner workings of discourse—on the ways in which discourse posits certain terms and points of view, which it presents as dominant, to delegitimize other equally valid terms and perspectives.

The direct address of Kruger's art calls on the viewer to "establish" herself quickly and self-consciously as a subject within its discourse. For instance, a work such as *Untitled (Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face)* (1981), only makes sense if one identifies with one of the two locations of meaning indicated by the pronouns. Likewise, the meaning of such image-texts as *Untitled (Give Me All You've Got)* (1986), *Untitled (We Are the Objects of Your Suave Entrapments)* (1984), or *Untitled (It Is Our Pleasure to Disgust You)* (1982), depends on from which position the viewer identifies. So the viewer (who is also "subjected" to the discourse of the work) is presented with two modes of address, two points of identification: the position of the receiver ("you") and that of the sender ("me," "we," "our"). Individuals may differ as to their gender, class, racial and ethnic characteristics (among other factors), but they will not be able to take meaning of the works until they have identified with one of those proffered positions of address, subjected themselves to its rules, and hence become the subjects of its particular perspective. Artworks that explicitly advocate for the rights of women's control over their bodies, such as *Untitled (Your Body Is a Battleground)* (1989), only "make sense" for men, according to this theory, if men put themselves in the position of women—which is the ideal subject-position that the artwork constructs—and

consider the artwork from this female discursive viewpoint. Indeed, works like *Help!* (1991), a bus shelter project commissioned by the Public Art Fund in New York City—for which Kruger superimposed on an image of a man a text that concludes with "I just found out I'm pregnant. What should I do?"—employ the dynamics of identification to mobilize the concept of empathy. Projecting ourselves into the positions of other subjects, identifying with those points of view, subjecting ourselves to their meanings, and becoming their subjects, not only help us as spectators to empathize with other viewpoints but also prompt us to question how we situate ourselves within given discourses.¹⁶

Often with Kruger's work one must distinguish between the act of speaking and the words spoken. This allows a further distinction between the subject who speaks and the subject who is represented by the utterance. In most social exchanges, there is no need to distinguish between the two subjects because they are assumed to be the same. But in image-texts such as *Untitled (I Will Not Become What I Mean to You)* (1983), or *Untitled (We Are Not What We Seem)* (1988), the two are discrete. The subject who speaks and the subject of whom is spoken are necessarily distinguished for the statement to make sense. Such distinctions between the two subjects address the complex relation between representation and subjectivity. They reveal that all notions of personal identity involve elements of misidentification. Thus, Kruger's art produces its own kind of knowledge. Its underlying message is that meaning depends on perspective—on the position from which one decodes.

So Kruger's is a profoundly critical artistic practice. It troubles not only conventional notions of essentialism and individuality but also those of meaning production and interpretation. Her art operates across a broad range of beliefs, convictions, and philosophical assumptions that question how the subject is constructed in the context of contemporary society. Image-texts such as *Untitled (I Shop Therefore I Am)* (1987), or *Untitled (To Buy or Not to Buy)* (1987), do not necessarily focus on a strategy of feminist critique, but generally touch on conditions of contemporary society

¹⁶ Indeed, there is something about the terseness or quickness of the mode of address in Kruger's work—in its notions of direct address and short attention spans, as well as the way it constructs subjectivities—that connects very much with the language and address of the Internet today. The Internet is immersive: one speaks and writes through it. But it is also a reciprocal mode of address, with cameras on top of (or incorpo-

ingly built into) computers, phenomena such as YouTube, Wikipedia, and the like. Although Kruger's work emerges from the perspective of someone raised in the pre-Internet era of television and movies, the direct address of the work and its quick read seem to have understood certain key logics of the Internet even before the medium was publicly released.

in which the process of consumption is perceived as the system within which subjectivity is constituted. Clearly the joke in inverting the most famous philosophical statement of the European Enlightenment, or what is surely the most cited phrase in William Shakespeare's oeuvre, now questions what constitutes the subject, or how the subject is constituted within consumer society. According to the obvious message of these works, the subject is today primarily established in the role of a consumer. "To be" becomes "to shop." So these works and their polemical statements address both a very prominent condition of experience in consumer society, and a philosophical and theoretical concept—namely, the critique of ideology known as "interpellation."

INTERPELLATION

I'm interested in how identities are constructed, how stereotypes are formed, how narratives sort of congeal and become history. —BARBARA KRUGER, 1999¹⁷

Interpellation is a crucial term in Barthes's analysis of mythology. In "Myth Today" (1957), he singles out interpellation as the dynamic element in the construction of myth, a duplicitous form of speech that directly addresses the subject at the same time as it conveys its message.¹⁸ Myth, Barthes writes, is the complete system of public languages—textual and representational languages—most notably embodied in advertising and political ideology. The naturalization process that myth performs is enacted by—depends on—the interpellative act, which calls on the viewer or reader to recognize and identify with the myth.

The structure of interpellation becomes much more complex in the late 1960s writings of the French philosopher Louis Althusser. The latter's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1969), mobilizes Lacan's notion of the Symbolic Order, especially insofar as it takes the form of what Lacan called the "gaze," to analyze the operation of ideology.¹⁹ Interpellation, in Althusser's model, describes the complete condition of ideological experience; the mechanism whereby subjects are invoked—"hailed" is his term—as the effects

of pre-established structures or institutions. This is, of course, a notion of the operation of contemporary ideological experience that is paralleled by the model of the "spectacle" that evolved in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the context of the Situationist International, and was crystallized in Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967).²⁰ For both Althusser and Debord, the individual is constituted as a subject by a pre-given representation; the self-image presented through interpellation is the subject's identity. What vanishes in this is the distinction between subject and representation, for they are one and the same.

But Kruger's art goes beyond even these intricate theories of ideology. Whereas her work is partially in accordance with Althusser's and Debord's concepts of the subject's construction through ideology, it also posits the subject's formation within language as a moment of division. Entry into language is the condition for subjectivity and identity, but also, Kruger's artworks repeatedly show, for the unconscious, which functions to invalidate any attempt to capture the subject's reality. Not unity but division, not identity but non-identity, these are Kruger's terms for the constitution of the subject. From this perspective, there is no possibility of ideological apparatuses or spectacles achieving a complete closure that will hold human subjects in position. A representation can never fully capture a subject; its bids to fix the human subject in place must ultimately fail because the subject is as much the product as the producer of meaning. Meaning and subjectivity, Kruger's work shows, come into being together, each engendering the other in a dynamic process. For instance, people confronted by the same artwork—such as her 1998 installation on the facade of the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton, New York, with the text "If You're A Connoisseur Of All That Is Beautiful And Extraordinary, If You Like To Speculate In Objects And Ideas, If You Think Art Can Change The World, You Belong Here" running along the stairway leading into the faux-Renaissance building—will respond differently.²¹ For the casual art viewers the composition will bluntly challenge their underlying assumptions about art; for the cognoscente it ironically will affirm

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Barbara Kruger, "Interview with Barbara Kruger by Lynne Tillman," *Thinking of You*, 139.

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Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," *Mythologies* (1959), trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 109–149.

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Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970), in *Latin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 121–76. Lacan develops the notion of the gaze in "The mirror stage

as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience" (1949), in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 1–7. According to Lacan, the subject is a representation of the gaze, which is a component of the Symbolic Order.

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Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995). However, whereas ideology in Althusser's model is structured by language and institutions, for Debord and the Situationists social relations

in consumer society are primarily mediated through images, and it is precisely in visual representation that contemporary subjectivity is constituted.

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I have quoted only part of the entire text. The installation also features the statement "You Belong Here" running prominently along the top of the museum's exterior, and the words "Money" and "Taste" vertically flanking the entranceway.

their identity. In each case the subject is constitutive in that the interpretation or particular decoding is not inherent in the artwork—artists or art critics will interpret it differently again; but at the same time the subject is constituted by the artwork, in that, according to the interpretation, she is to a lesser or greater extent transformed by it.

Once again, then, as with most of Kruger's work, the subject is at once the producer and the product of the meaning of the representation; the viewer and the artwork both make their contribution in a powerful form of give-and-take. Both are perpetually and necessarily in process. Two sides of the same entity, to which, however, they do not add up.