

# What is Journalism?

*The Art and Politics of a Rupture*

CHRIS NASH



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palgrave  
macmillan

Chris Nash  
Monash University  
Caulfield East, Australia

ISBN 978-1-137-39933-5      ISBN 978-1-137-39934-2 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-39934-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016948416

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Cover illustration: © Hans Haacke

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature

The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd.

The registered company address is: The Campus, 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW, United Kingdom

*For*  
*Wendy, Emma and Luke,*  
*Hans and Linda,*  
*Izzy and Esther*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is the outcome of discussions with colleagues and students over many years, and I am deeply grateful for their enthusiasm and generosity in grappling with the ideas in it. Felicity Plester at Palgrave commissioned the book, and I thank her for her support and patience, and Sophie Auld for her diligence in managing the production process. Luke Bacon, Wendy Bacon, Chrisanthi Giotis, Nicole Gooch, and Peter Mares read the manuscript in various sections and stages, and Marion Gevers provided expert proofreading against a tight deadline. Thanks to Verso for permission to reproduce the graphic of the Harvey-Lefebvre matrix, and to Hans Haacke for the images of his work. It has been the intellectual achievement and generosity of Hans Haacke and Izzy Stone that has inspired this work throughout. Wendy Bacon was there at the inception that crisp winter's morning in New York, 2008, and has been intimately engaged with it every step of the way to its conclusion. The rigour of her journalism is a constant beacon. The book would not exist but for her.



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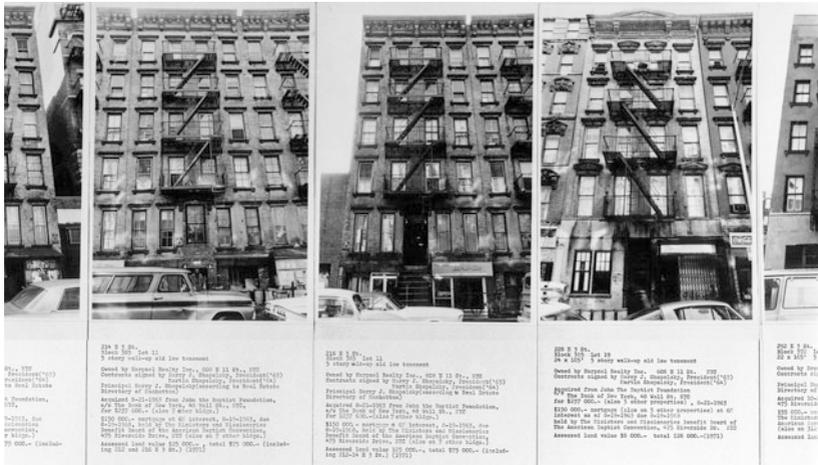
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## The Case for a Rupture

Hans Haacke is a German-American artist born in 1936 in Köln, Germany, and since 1965 living in New York. His practice is related to conceptual art, with a long list of works, exhibitions, commissions, international honours and publications to his credit. In 1970 Haacke was invited by the Guggenheim Museum in New York to stage a one-person show, which was “for a German-born artist just thirty-five years old .... a remarkably early canonisation.”<sup>1</sup> Shortly before the exhibition was due to open in April 1971, the Museum Director, Thomas Messer, cancelled it on the grounds that three of the works produced for the exhibition were not art but journalism.

The rejected works were *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* and *Sol Goldman and Alex diLorenzo Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*, plus a proposed anonymous survey for exhibition visitors. The survey comprised twenty questions about demographic status and political, social, and economic attitudes (Fig. 1.1). The two real estate works comprised a series of black and white frontal photographs of slum tenement buildings in a flat uninterpretive style, supplemented with publicly available information from the New York City County Clerk’s Office detailing lot number, address, basic building description, ownership and most recent transfer, assessed land value, and mortgage status (Fig. 1.2). A street map identified the location of the properties (Fig. 1.3), and charts detailed the various companies and individuals that owned the properties, the interconnections between them, and the sources of mort-





**Fig. 1.2** Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971. Hans Haacke (3 Buildings)

gage funding (Fig. 1.4). Shapolsky, Goldman and DiLorenzo did not have any association with the Guggenheim Museum.

The curator of the exhibition, Edward F. Fry, was a well-published authority on cubism and contemporary art. He wrote: “In his works Haacke has succeeded in changing the relationship between art and reality, and consequently he has also changed our view of the evolution of modern art.”<sup>2</sup> Fry defended Haacke’s work and was in turn sacked by Messer, never again to be employed by a US museum despite his preeminent international reputation, although he did go on to have a successful academic career in the USA.<sup>3</sup> Quite clearly, the scale and scope of this confrontation indicated that much more was at stake than a mere difference of opinion over the merit of some individual artworks. *Shapolsky* was exhibited in a group show the following year at the University of Rochester and at the 1978 Venice Biennale; it and *Sol Goldman* were subsequently purchased by the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Tate Gallery in London, respectively.<sup>4</sup> Haacke had a solo show at The New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York in 1986, and other work by him has been exhibited in the USA over the years at commercial galleries, in group shows and at some smaller public institutions, but until 2008 not in a solo exhibition at a leading US public institution. *Shapolsky* was co-purchased with the

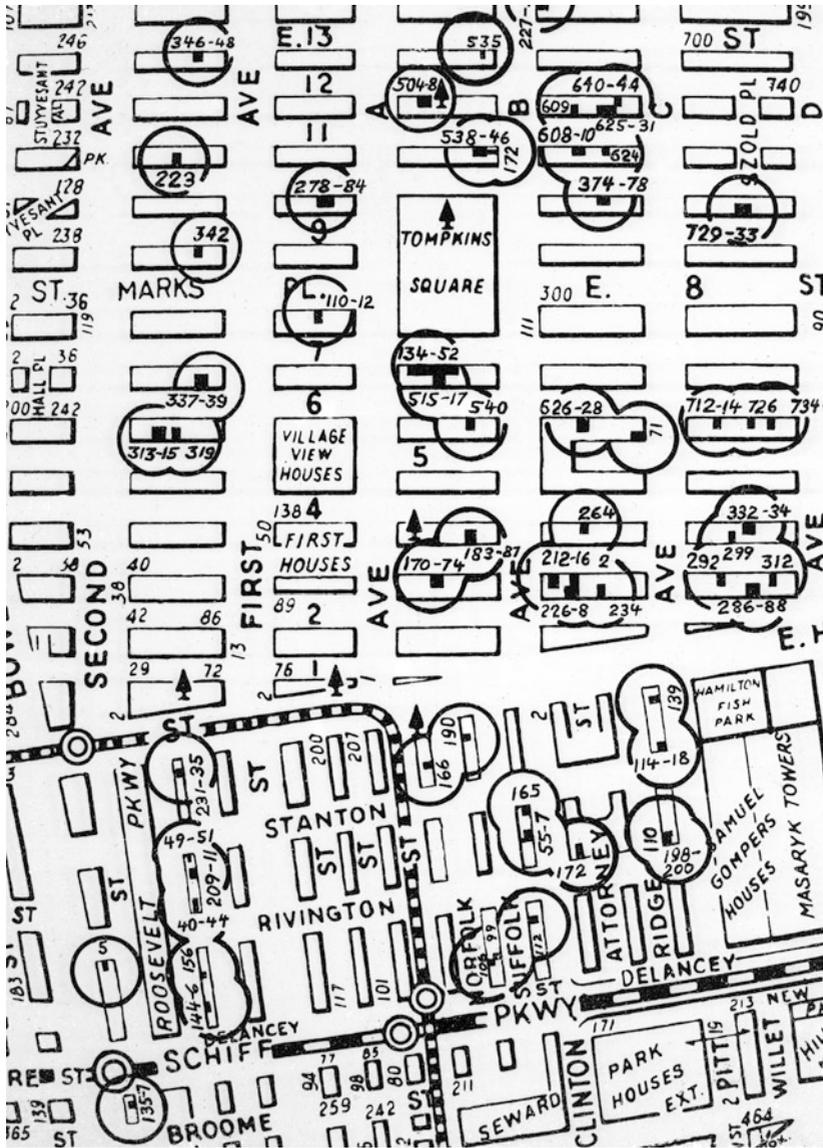
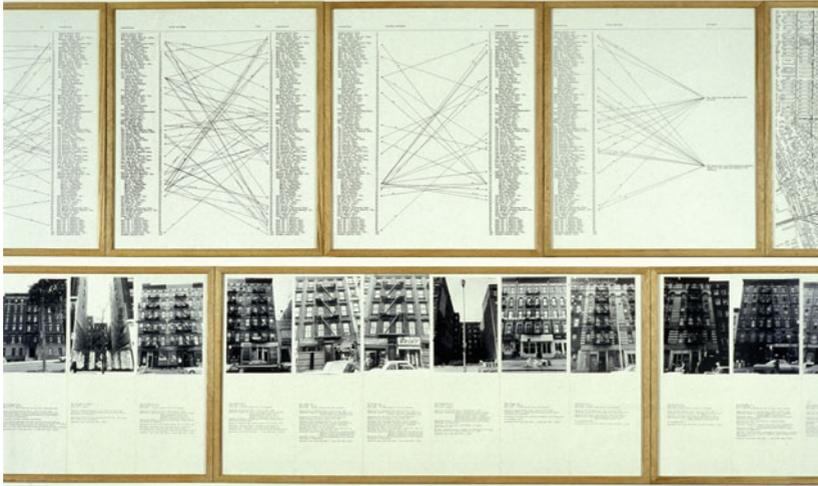


Fig. 1.3 Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971. Hans Haacke (Map of Lower East Side)



**Fig. 1.4** Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971, 1971. Hans Haacke (Excerpt of Bldgs & Charts)

Museu d'Art Contemporani Barcelona (MACBA) in 2007 by the Whitney Museum of American Art, where it was included in a group show of recent purchases the following year (Fig. 1.5).

In the meantime Haacke had been enormously productive and exhibited in leading venues internationally, including multiple invited appearances at Documenta and the Venice Biennale. He was invited by the newly reunited Germany to occupy that country's pavilion at the 1993 Venice Biennale, where he and fellow exhibitor German-Korean artist Nam June Paik were awarded the Golden Lion Prize for the best pavilion of that year. In 2000 he was commissioned amid controversy by the German Bundestag to produce the work *DER BEVÖLKERUNG* for the renovated and reoccupied Reichstag building in Berlin. In 2012 he was invited to produce a new work and stage a major retrospective by the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid. This exhibition was titled *Castles in the Air*, and concerned the contemporary burst real estate bubble and impact of the global financial crisis in Spain; the retrospective included the *Sol Goldman* piece excluded from the Guggenheim forty-one years earlier. In 2015 *Gift Horse* was commissioned by the City of London to occupy the vacant fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square (Fig. 1.6). So the jury of his



**Fig. 1.5** Shapolsky et al. *Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System*, as of May 1, 1971. Hans Haacke. Whitney Museum 2007 (Photo Hans Haacke)

peers, major galleries, and leading scholars and critics internationally, *contra* Thomas Messer, has judged that Haacke's work is certainly art, and indeed that he is one of the major artists of the last half-century.

But we cannot let Messer go so lightly, and have to ask – is it also journalism? And if so, what is journalism? This book addresses these two questions. Its short answer to the first is yes, to that extent agreeing with Messer, but that opens up the much more interesting questions of what sort of art is journalism, and inversely what sort of journalism is art, and what do the two have to offer each other? I will come back to these questions in Chap. 7. A long answer to the second question – what is journalism? – is the main project of this book.

The conflict over *Shapolsky* and *Goldman* reflected a major rupture in the way that art was to be conceived and practiced, a rupture that precipitated a new way of thinking about art in relation to reality. If the art is also journalism, then similar issues arise: what is the relationship of journalism to reality? This is a profound epistemological issue, which in journalism studies is still largely stuck in the rut of debates about representation. Fry's claim that Haacke's work transcended the representation debates in