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(1) Analysing the reference in detail

When I first saw Jenny Holzer's *Truisms* (1977–1979), I immediately felt a strong connection with the themes explored in my practice. *Truisms* is composed of hundreds of short statement-like sentences, which were originally written as a response – or a neutral translation – to the long and complex reading list from the Whitney programme. Although the language looks simple, the juxtaposition of many statements produces complexity. Holzer arranges these statements alphabetically and prints them in uniform sans-serif capital letters. The text is visually equalised, the author's identity is reduced. This deliberate simplification instead reveals a tension between different positions: each statement seems to state a truism, but the contradictions between them invite readers to re-evaluate what “truism” really means.

I am particularly interested in how Holzer's clean and minimal form compresses the complexity of the original academic texts, yet at the same time reconstructs a new complexity through repetition and contradiction. This closely relates to my own enquiry. Her typography, sentence structure and layout all test the double-edged nature of signs: language can both clarify and obscure meaning; it can deliver strong messages, but also reduce complexity of the original information.

Interestingly, *Truisms* was not only presented as printed posters but was also translated into a light emitting diode (LED) version in 1985 at Tate. This shift not only changed the medium but also transformed the relationship between text and power. The printed version, pasted in public spaces, responded to the authority of elite knowledge. The LED version, however, entered the field of mass media and advertising. The scrolling and flashing texts were constantly “re-read,” leaving only seconds to catch the audience's attention, and the viewer becomes the active selector of information. The reduced text made the loop about 25 minutes long, and whether seen by passers-by or by focused viewers, each period of the piece remained understandable – but its complexity grew over time.

Together, the two versions of *Truisms* form a system oscillating between simplification and complexity. While the printed version offers a comprehensive response to the reading list, the LED version shifts the focus toward mass communication and technology. The printed work still confronts the elitism of academic knowledge, while the LED work redistributes that knowledge through a popular medium. Holzer uses uniformity to build complex reading; I, on the other hand, try to do the opposite, which means breaking the conventions of signs to release complexity again.

(2) Connecting the reference to my project

In reflecting on Holzer's approach, I began to see similarities and contrasts with my own enquiry more clearly. At first, what resonated with me most in *Truisms* was her use of unified text as a visual system, where typography itself became a carrier of meaning. However, as I looked deeper, I realised that although we both address how meaning is simplified under systems of power, our methods are essentially different. This connection helps me clarify my central enquiry:

Stereotypes are simplifications of complexity, and signs, which are made of the signifier (form) and the signified (meaning), can both carry such simplification and perhaps be re-used to restore complexity.

Based on this, Holzer's work offers an important point of comparison: she reveals how text signs can simplify truisms, while I try to explore whether signs can also re-expand complexity.

Holzer once said that “text is image.” Unlike Barbara Kruger, who combines words and images, Holzer uses only text. However, from my perspective, her text cannot be seen as “image”. In *Truisms*, meaning still depends strongly on the conventional sense of each word – *the signified* in Saussure's terms – while *the signifier* (the letters themselves) remains unchanged. The repetition of words works visually similarly to what images do, but it is still based on a linguistic system that relies on public-shared meaning.

My project, instead, aims to challenge this conventional system. I try to dissolve the signified, disrupting the

connections between words and meaning, in order to break stereotypes. Holzer's power lies in the collision of her words with social context; mine focuses more on the internal structure of language itself. In other words, she uses explicit language to expose power, while I want to use structural manipulation to perform quieter, daily resistance.

When the stereotypical meanings attached to language are removed, this becomes a silent resistance to the power system that creates them. Such resistance is not built on loud slogans, but on small structural interventions inside language. Many gender-related words carry hidden expectations or social control; especially for women, these words often reflect how this power simplifies and limits our individuality and diversity.

Knowing that language itself is the weapon that erases diversity, I am wondering how we can reclaim complexity in a world built from signs? So my project turns this "weapon" of simplification into a tool for resistance.

The project begins with a word-association game that always starts from the word "woman." I play this game with 10 female friends and also ask AI to generate its own list of associated words. In both cases, each new word logically extends the meaning of the previous one, forming a growing web of connections that slowly rebuilds the complexity hidden behind "woman." These two sources naturally lead to two different formats – printed and digital – unlike Holzer, who presents the same text through different media. Holzer used two media to expose two kinds of power system: elite knowledge and mass political communication, effectively moving specialised knowledge into public space. My two media reflect two systems of knowledge production: the human, based on personal experience, and the AI, based on data and algorithmic logic. We both explore the power system behind language, but I focus on it within the current technological context and compare how algorithmic and human systems produce meaning.

For the AI-generated version, I present the associations as a digital structure of nested folders. Each folder is named after a word, followed by an emoji that adds subjective meaning. Compared to Holzer's public LED screens, the

computer is a private medium. It is also different from the scrolling text that is more like speaking with speed and direction. Opening one folder after another feels mechanical, emotionless, and repetitive – yet this "neutrality" is deceptive. AI is never truly objective; it represents the logic of power behind its data. For example, after many conversations where I introduced feminist ideas, ChatGPT linked "woman" with "strength"; but another AI, which I had barely interacted with, first connected "woman" with "beauty." This small difference reveals how AI's output is not neutral but shaped by social structures, culture, and algorithmic bias. Unlike Holzer, who exposes ideology through control, I expose it through loss of control by letting AI freely generate language and reveal its own bias. The tension between control and loss of control is one of the biggest difference between my project and Holzer's work.

For the human-generated version, I present the text through printed materials. While Holzer's posters speak loudly in public in the form of a manifesto, inviting the audience to pause and reflect from a certain distance; my language returns to the body through touch, inviting the viewer to actively engage with it. In this printed work, each page builds a new meaning by using the form (letters) of the previous word. I adopt the method of concrete poetry, visually rearranging letters to challenge the signifiers of text itself. Her statements draw power from the conventional meanings of words and their clash with social contexts. In contrast, I aim to go beyond the signified while keeping a readable word sequence, using the process of visual association to disrupt fixed meanings. This design process also reveals my own internalised stereotypes, reminding us that completely eliminating stereotypes is almost impossible. Therefore, my project focuses instead on restoring the complexity that stereotypes erase, turning signs into a form of subtle resistance. Like Holzer, I use a restrained design: consistent type size and weight, and two fonts to separate poems from the word sequence. This simplicity mirrors today's standardised, simplified visual language. Holzer uses consistent typography to highlight how text, under a rational and orderly structure, contrasts with social conventions and expectations. In contrast, my restrained visual control hints at the hidden violence within standardised and simplified language, while the layering

of pages gradually rebuilds the complexity behind words. Although our formal strategies appear similar, our aims are different: she uses order to expose oppression, while I use order to restore complexity. The shift between her “language of power” and my “power of language” becomes the key difference between us.

(3) Identifying new questions through comparison

Understanding the differences between Holzer’s intentions and mine, I now turn to the role of medium itself. The choice of medium can do more than simply reflect the source – it can also generate new tensions and discussions. For the human version, which is the main output, the physical scale of the printed piece becomes important. Holzer’s *Truisms* posters were large (88.4 × 58 cm) and occupied public spaces, while my tracing-paper experiment is small (A5 size), inviting a slower, more intimate reading. I now question whether I want my work to “speak loudly” like Holzer’s or remain quiet like a book. It would directly shape how viewers read and engage.

(Then “4. Veronika Spierenburg, *In Order of Pages*”)