

Redux: Jill Posener, *Spray it Loud*, 1982

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Sometimes rude, often crude, the graffiti that Jill Posener began photographing in London in the 1970s and collected in *Spray It Loud*, a slim photobook published in 1982, reflects the signature struggles of the British left in this period. The book's typology of delinquent typography is comprised of feminist tags and antiracist slogans, calls for social housing and for nuclear disarmament. The daubed demands that Posener encountered as she roamed the city with her A-to-Z street atlas appear against a backdrop of urban decay and social deprivation—the context that secured the Conservative Party its mandate to govern in 1979 with a pernicious ideology of free-market capitalism and nationalistic rhetoric. The graffiti, Posener writes in the book's introduction, reminds her “that there is resistance and rebellion.”

Spray It Loud is a record of an ephemeral sign making that marks a place and a time. It's a manual, too, one dedicated to “the spray painters who take all the risks.” A card featuring tips for dealing with an arrest is reprinted alongside the number for a twenty-four-hour emergency solicitor. Posener's images of words are also images of actions. Reproduction in print extends the readership that these slogans command. The book is a protest inasmuch as it augments the resistance that Posener describes.

Posener, who was the first lesbian playwright to work with the Gay Sweatshop Theatre Company, a collective founded in 1974, was committed to many of the causes represented in *Spray It Loud*. Her best-known images underscore the intrusion of feminist politics into the public sphere. This is a politics that forcibly takes its own permissions. A billboard advertising a new Fiat model reads: IF IT WERE A LADY, IT WOULD GET ITS BOTTOM PINCHED. To which someone scrawls the riposte, IF THIS LADY WAS A CAR SHE'D RUN YOU DOWN. The Fiat image was reproduced as a postcard that circulated in such high numbers that a reporter for *Woman of Power* magazine said Posener's pictures stood for a “populist expression of feminism.” Certainly the caustic wit of the one-liners runs counter to the idea of feminists as pious politicians. WE CAN IMPROVE YOUR NIGHTLIFE, reads an advertisement for Rest Assured beds. JOIN LESBIANS UNITED, a vandal replies.

Revisiting *Spray It Loud*, I think of the refrain of a joke that might be repeated at different moments of feminist organizing, its punch line resonating through the entertaining placards carried on women's marches internationally, the media-savvy actions against cuts to services for domestic-abuse survivors in the U.K., and the epithets dashed off in toilet cubicles before anti-abortion laws were repealed recently in the Republic of Ireland. At this moment when the veracity of feminist statements is so blatantly governed by legislative denials, *Spray It Loud* speaks of the politically necessary task of seeking legibility on our terms, against their walls.

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