

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: MARY COBLE: PERFORMANCE ART AND  
POLITICS OF AN ARCHIVE  
Savneet Talwar, Doctor of Philosophy, 2010

Dissertation directed by: Professor Nancy L Struna  
Department of American Studies

This dissertation explores the relationships among performance art, the archive and intersubjectivity. Using methods of critical ethnography, visual and textual analysis, I examine the archive of performance art, and the discourses of the body, especially in the work of performance artist Mary Coble. I explore the ways in which performance art disrupts the ideological discourses of the institutional archive, especially those surrounding the body and constructing normative sexual and civic identities. The institutional archive has served as a guardian of memory that makes it the creator of knowledge. Performance artists work within the conceptual space of an archive as a way to make visible the ideological systems of power; this they do through reenactments and representations, in effect creating a counter-archive of political and gendered memorial spaces. I question how performance artists, critiquing the visual hegemony of the white, male dominated art world, confront issues of identity and

difference, including ones of race, gender, sexuality and citizenship. I am interested in how “knowledge” is situated in the embodied experiences of the performer, researcher, artist, community and its participants. In this sense the archive is not simply a site of documentation and knowledge retrieval, but also as a locus of the feelings and emotions that produce knowledge and meaning.

MARY COBLE: PERFORMANCE ART AND POLITICS OF AN  
ARCHIVE

by

Savneet Talwar

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
2010

Advisory Committee: Professor Nancy L. Struna, Chair  
Professor John Caughey  
Associate Professor Katie King  
Assistant Professor Jeffrey McCune  
Professor Martha Nell Smith

© Copyright by

Savneet Talwar

2010

The dissertation document that follows has had referenced material removed in respect for the owner's copyright. A complete version of this document, which includes said referenced material, resides in the University of Maryland, College Park's library collection.

For Jeffrey...

for sharing your love of contemporary art and supporting me every step of the  
way in my doctoral studies.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank the department of American Studies for the critical scholarship that opened avenues for my research in performance art. First and foremost, I want to thank performance artist Mary Coble for her generous spirit in sharing her artistic research and works of art.

I wish to thank my advisor, Dr. Nancy L. Struna, whose professional and moral support was a guiding force in pushing me to engage with the complexity of my dissertation. I owe a great deal to Dr. John Caughey in inspiring me to engage and observe the finer details of everyday life. I am also grateful to Dr. Jeffrey McCune for introducing me to performance studies. My gratitude goes to Dr. Martha Nell Smith and Dr. Katie King for being on my committee. Finally, I would like to thank the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, especially Dean Lisa Wainwright, for giving me the release time to complete my dissertation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures-----	vi
Chapter One: Introduction-----	1
Chapter Two: Contemporary Performance Art: Mary Coble-----	18
Chapter Three: Archive of Performance Art-----	44
Chapter Four: Performance Art and the Politics of the Archive: A Theoretical Framework-----	86
Chapter Five: Intersubjectivity: Disrupting Viewing Practices -----	119
Chapter Six: Conclusion -----	144
Figures -----	151
Bibliography -----	183

## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1.1	Yves Klein, <i>The Leap into the Void</i> , 1960	151
Fig. 2.1	Mary Coble, <i>Note to Self</i> , 2005	152
Fig. 2.2	Mary Coble, <i>Note to Self</i> , 2005	152
Fig. 2.3	Mary Coble, <i>Note to Self</i> , 2005	153
Fig. 2.4	Mary Coble, <i>Notes to Self</i> , 2005 Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC	153
Fig. 2.5	Mary Coble, <i>Drag Kings</i> , 2004	154
Fig. 2.6	Mary Coble, <i>Drag King</i> , 2005	154
Fig. 2.7	Mary Coble, <i>Asphyxiation of Genderfication: Blurring Boundaries</i> , 2004	155
Fig. 2.8	Mary Coble, <i>Asphyxiation of Genderfication: Blurring Boundaries</i> , 2004	155
Fig. 2.9	Mary Coble, <i>Asphyxiation of Genderfication: Blurring Boundaries</i> , 2004	156
Fig. 2.10	Volcano DelGrace, <i>Elvis Herselvis &amp; Harriet Dodge</i> , San Francisco, 1998	156
Fig. 2.11	Mary Coble, <i>Boy and Girl</i> , 2004	157
Fig. 2.12	Mary Coble, <i>Boy and Girl</i> , 2004	157
Fig. 2.13	Mary Coble, <i>Binding Ritual, Daily Routine</i> , 2004, Video Projection	158
Fig. 3.1	Yves Klein, <i>Anthropometries of the Blue Period</i> , 1960	159

Fig.3.2	Manzoni, <i>Living Sculptures</i> , 1961	160
Fig. 3.3	Carolee Schneeman, <i>Eye Body</i> , 1963	160
Fig. 3.4	Carolee Schneeman, <i>Meat Joy</i> , 1964	161
Fig. 3.5	Carolee Schneeman, <i>Interior Scroll</i> , 1975	161
Fig. 3.6	Yoko Ono, <i>Cut Piece</i> , 1964	162
Fig.3.7	Gilbert and George, <i>The Singing Sculpture</i> , 1969	162
Fig.3.8	Vito Acconci, <i>Seed Bed</i> , 1971	163
Fig. 3.9	Gunter- Bruss, 1960	163
Fig.3.10	Marina Abramović, <i>Lips of Thomas</i> , 1975	164
Fig. 3.11	Marina Abramović, <i>Lips of Thomas</i> , 1975	164
Fig.3.12	Marina Abramović, <i>Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful</i> , 1975	165
Fig. 3.13	Chris Burden, <i>Shoot</i> , 1971	165
Fig. 3.14	Howardena Pindell, <i>Free White and 21</i> , 1980	166
Fig. 3.15	Lorraine O'Grady, <i>Millie Bourgeoisie Noire</i> , 1980-1983	166
Fig. 3.16	Keith Herring, <i>Silence = Death</i> , 1989	166
Fig.3.17	Andres Serrano, <i>Piss Christ</i> , 1989	167
Fig.3.18	Robert Mapplethorpe, <i>Ajitto</i> , 1981	167
Fig.3.19	Felix Gonzales-Torres, <i>Untitled</i> , 1991	168
Fig.3.20	David Wojnarowicz, <i>Silence=Death</i> , 1990	168
Fig.3.21	Catherine Opie, <i>Self Portrait</i> , 1993	169
Fig.3.22	Catherine Opie, <i>Dyke</i> , 1992	169
Fig. 4.1	Francis Galton, «Composite-Fotografie», 1903	170

Fig. 4.2	Bertillon poster of physical features, <i>Musée des Collections Historiques de la Préfecture de Police</i> , 1879	170
Fig. 4.3	Du Bois Archive, Two African American women, half-length portrait, facing each other, 1899-1900	171
Fig. 4.4	Du Bois Archive - African American man, half-length portrait, facing right, 1899-1900	171
Fig. 4.5	Du Bois Archive- 5 female Negro officers of Women's League, Newport, R.I., 1899-1900	172
Fig.4.6	Du Bois Archive - Officers of Tobacco Trade Union, Petersburg, VA.1899	172
Fig. 4.7	Elenor Antin, <i>Reflections of my Life with Diaghilev</i> , 1975-1978	173
Fig. 4.8	Eleanor Antin, <i>Carving a Traditional Sculpture</i> ,1972	173
Fig. 4.9	Eadweard Muybridge, <i>Dancing Females</i> , 1887	174
Fig. 4.10	Carrie Mea Weems, <i>House, Field, Yard, Kitchen</i> , 1995	175
Fig. 4.11	Carrie Mae Weems, <i>Kitchen Table Series</i> , 1990	176
Fig. 4.12	Lorna Simpson, <i>Coiffure</i> , 1991	176
Fig. 4.13	Mary Coble, <i>Aversion</i> , 2007	177
Fig. 4.14	Mary Coble, <i>Aversion</i> , 2007	177
Fig. 4.15	Mary Coble, <i>Aversion</i> , 2007	178
Fig. 4.16	Mary Coble, <i>Aversion</i> , 2007	178
Fig. 5.1	Mary Coble, <i>Marker</i> , 2006	179
Fig. 5.2	Mary Coble, <i>Marker</i> , 2006	179

Fig. 5.3	Mary Coble, <i>Marker</i> , 2006	180
Fig. 5.4	Mary Coble, <i>Marker</i> , 2006	180
Fig. 5.5	Mary Coble, <i>Blood Script</i> , 2008	181
Fig. 5.6	Mary Coble, <i>Blood Script</i> , 2008	181
Fig. 5.7	Mary Coble, <i>Blood Script</i> , 2008	182

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

In this dissertation I explore the relationships among performance art, the archive and intersubjectivity. Using methods of visual and textual analysis, as well as critical ethnography, I focus my project within two main categories. The first category is the archive of performance art, which centers on discourses of the body. Here, I am mainly concerned with the work of performance artist Mary Coble. The second category entails issues surrounding the documentation of performance art; they include the archive and its circulation as they relate to the life of a performance beyond the event itself. My main concern in both areas is the role of intersubjectivity; I wish to explore how the audience and performer collaborate in making or disrupting meaning within the social dimensions of performances, ones that confront issues of identity and difference, especially gender and sexuality. Although I examine race, class and citizenship, my project does not engage with an intersectional analysis.

### **Researcher**

My interest in Coble's performance art emerged from the ways in which she uses her body as a medium to reenact and re-present issues surrounding the cultural construction of queerness, in turn, challenging her position of marginality as a White lesbian. Her early performances, for me, unveil then disrupt the process by which gender and sexuality are culturally viewed, conflating and complicating memory and subjectivity on an embodied level. In the role of viewer, I found myself challenged on a personal and intellectual level. In my

twenty plus years of transatlantic displacement, from India to the United States, I have negotiated my own identity, its representation and performance. Having lived between the margins and in the state imposed by hyphenated identity categories, I am all too familiar with the negotiation of identity on an everyday basis, as well as the need for subversive acts to disrupt socially imposed roles and categories. I embarked on this project as an outsider, as a heterosexual woman, but as someone who grasps the challenges of resisting dominant representations of subjectivity. Although Mary Coble's art challenged my own assumptions and understanding of gender construction and sexual desire, I remain specifically interested in issues of identity and cultural performance in her work. In particular, I am concerned with how Coble's self-reflexivity offers a platform for expressing her stigmatization, which is not only connected to gender, but also to her embodied experiences at the intersections of language, politics, individual freedom, desire, culture, reproduction, identity, truth, censorship, terror and violence in everyday life.<sup>1</sup> In redefining the meaning of her subjective experience, Coble uses, in her performances, strategies of reenactment and representation to complicate the concept of "queer", engaging, as she does, with issues surrounding gender and sexuality, the power of language, emotions and embodiment.

### **Artist**

Influenced by her desire to articulate her identity as a White lesbian and to confront the issues that affect the members of her community, Coble's early

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Warner in *Fear of a queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) argues the need for locating queer critique in the social sphere and queer experiences of daily life.

performances are based in identity politics (*Asphyxiation of Genderfication: Blurring Boundaries, Note to Self and Aversion*). Working from her everyday experiences of disenfranchisement, she uses her body as a visual and textual palimpsest to question the embodied cultural norms surrounding the construction of gender and sexuality. Her use of the body, text, cutting, pain and blood, references the performances that in the 1960s and 1970s were instrumental in disrupting the regulatory regimes of power that sought to normalize categories of social difference. Coble continues to use the early performance strategies in her later work (*Marker* and *Blood Script*) to examine the use of everyday language and hate speech, and to argue for embodiment of feelings and oppression in everyday life. Moving beyond identity-based formations, she complicates the performativity of “injurious speech acts”<sup>2</sup> that produce not only feelings of shame, pain and guilt, but also that of fear. Of particular interest to my project are the ways in which Coble draws on her lesbian identity as a researcher, archivist and artist to conceptualize her performances and to move from notions of “homosexual” identity construction to queering concepts of social and cultural formations of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and citizenship. This project follows the narrative arc of Coble’s performances and the means by which each one becomes the point of departure for her next work of art. The research and artistic strategies Coble employs, reveal the ways in which her embodied autobiography and commitment to human rights become an important concern in

---

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, “Burning Acts: Injurious Speech,” *Roundtable*, 3, (1996) 199- 221, argues for hate speech and its power to deny rights and liberties protected by Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution. She questions the performativity and impact of such hate speech enacted by citizen-subjects, especially towards minority groups.

her work, culminating in the complex dynamics between language and embodiment as illustrated in *Blood Script*.

On the level of identity-based movements, Coble's performances can be open to criticism as performances specifically for queer spectators. In the past, identity-based groups have been seen as confirming and expanding the views of several disenfranchised populations, especially in relationship to voting rights, civil rights and equality. More recently, ethnic, racial, women's, gay and lesbian groups have come under attack in "debates over multiculturalism, identity politics and political correctness."<sup>3</sup> Although it is important for queer artists to address the criticism that they are preaching to the converted, the dismissal of their work on such grounds undermines the social movements that engender their works.<sup>4</sup> In this project, I illustrate how performance art lends itself as a powerful strategy to counteract popular and dominant ideologies and provide "alternative viewpoints and practices stifled or dismissed in the broader reaches of contemporary American culture."<sup>5</sup> Critics may remain skeptical of identity-based and community-based work, but I am interested in how performance artists draw from their personal and social experiences to theorize the body, offering a more nuanced understanding of the social and cultural archives for American studies. Such an approach not only enriches our understanding of marginalization, difference and subjectivity, but also offers an embodied theorization of emotions and feelings in the process of meaning making for the artist, researcher, and

---

<sup>3</sup> Linda Martin Alcoff, Michael Hames-Gracia, Satya P. Mohanty & Paula M.L.Moya eds. *Identity Politics Reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006), 2.

<sup>4</sup> David Román. *Performance in America: Contemporary U.S. Cultures and the Performing arts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Roman (2005),39.

community beyond the body of spectators. Performance art has long centered on theorization of the body, arguing for the temporality and materiality of the body as a subject of political discourse. I, however, ask how performance art offers alternative sites to understand the role of cultural resistance, embodiment, language, memory and feelings in producing knowledge and disrupting meaning.

### **Audience/Intersubjectivity/Embodiment**

In order to consider emotions and affect in performance art, the participation of the audience becomes a central consideration. In essence, the performance, staged or spontaneous, functions in relationship to its spectators to evoke intersubjectivity. Emotions, Neurologist Antonio Damasio argues, are complementary to rational thought, and that to understand the relationship between cognition and emotion one has to consider affect as well. He, though, notes that emotions are the key to understanding homeostasis, the affective equilibrium of the body.<sup>6</sup> Emotions are not something that emerge into our consciousness, rather emotions are an ongoing process of response that helps to regulate the body in relationship to social and cultural experiences. In this sense embodiment refers to memory and how the body is shaped by social and cultural experiences. Positive or negative emotions mediate in the collaboration that occurs between the performer and the audience.

Exploring the intersection between the humanities, social sciences, biology and psychology, Elspeth Probyn takes up the role of shame, arguing that shame is both an emotion and an affect. Although shame has been a powerful and

---

<sup>6</sup> Antonio Damasio, *"Descartes" Error: Emotions, Reason and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994).

potentially destructive way to patrol normativity and organize bodies socially, internalized shame directly relates to the emotional and affective components of pain and fear, inhabited socially, as made explicit by Coble in her performances. Drawing from her personal and social experiences of shame, fear, pain and violence, she complicates identity beyond the presupposed categories of race, gender, sexuality and citizenship; identity, her work reveals, is informed by emotions. Within this context Coble's performances evoke a viscerally intersubjective response as it relates to how emotions register the proximity of others.

Performance art situates embodiment, feelings and emotions at the center of subjectivity, rather than at its periphery. I thus examine the role of emotions and the affect of proximity when bodies interact with each other. How do emotions highlight the social nature of the body and our relationships to others? What roles do pain, fear and shame play in intersubjectivity?

My concern with intersubjectivity relates both to meaning making and meaning disruption. Coble's performances have been received with enthusiasm, but on several occasions her performances have also evoked a sense of repulsion and anger. Several audience members interviewed for this project characterized Coble's performances as a political intervention. Some also expressed the sense of being caught between the dialectics of the performance and feelings of pain and fear on behalf of the performer. Yet several participants also expressed a sense of deep empathy with and connection to Coble through her performances. In this sense, performance art not only offers an exchange between the spectators

and the performer, offering a new site for sociality and identification to promote agency, but also evokes negative affect as a means of disrupting public spheres and intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity in this sense is not a neat, linear process of meaning making, rather it involves the messiness of subjectivity as it relates to the emotions and affect that destabilize the construction of knowledge and the authorial function of the archive.

To this end, my project engages with the question of how performance art disrupts the ideological discourses of the institutional archive, especially those surrounding the body. How do strategies of re-presentation and re-enactment create counter archives? Finally, what role do feelings and emotions play in producing or disrupting knowledge and meaning?

### **Research Method and Theoretical Frames**

In addition to visual and textual analysis, my study looks at the historical and contemporary archives of performance art. Drawing on ethnographic methods of inquiry, I argue for complicating the experiences of a culture within the structure and history of performance art. While I lean towards performance ethnography to highlight the importance of “embodied practice,” the body as “site of knowing”<sup>7</sup> and “how culture is done in the body,”<sup>8</sup> I also draw on life history methods and critical ethnography practices.

---

<sup>7</sup> Dwight Conquergood. “Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics,” *Communications Monograph*, 58 (1991) 179-194, 180.

<sup>8</sup> Joni Jones. “Performance Ethnography: The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity,” *Theater Topics*, 12 (2002), 1-15, 7.

Although principally based on the performances of one artist, my project is multi-layered. I began by interviewing Mary Coble, seeking to find her motivations and the conceptual basis of her performances, I have remained concerned with how she collaborates with her audiences in constructing her performances. I began by collecting my ethnographic data with several audience members who had witnessed her performances. In addition, I was also able to interview, in Chicago, two individuals who had viewed Coble's performances via webcam. As I became more involved with Coble's art and my work on it, I have leaned towards a combination of ethnographic methods that can accommodate the multiple layers of my research: the artist, performer, audience/spectators, performance and myself as the researcher.<sup>9</sup> A mixed method of ethnographic inquiry allowed me to focus on how bodies interacted in public spheres, as well as on my role as a scholar in representing Coble's performances in scholarly settings. Furthermore, my participation as a co-presenter at Ohio University offered me the chance to have direct access to the varied and even contradictory points of views of the spectators. The experience has allowed me to be part of a live performance that deepened my understanding of intersubjectivity. Finally, my collaboration with Coble has been central in writing the dissertation, especially in keeping myself in check when representing her and the responses of

---

<sup>9</sup> It has been difficult to delineate one ethnographic model for my project. Historically, performance ethnography emerges from the cultural performances of the 1960s and 1970s. It is not till the 1980s it becomes recognized as a distinct method. In similar ways John Caughey (2006) in probing the cultural dimensions of everyday life argues that life history projects work in complex and powerful ways to understand how culture works. Jim Thomas (1993), a critical ethnographer argues for postmodernism as a cultural critique challenging the arbitrary nature of cultural images, signs and their codes. In his view a postmodernist influenced ethnography confronts the centrality of cultural images, their representation and how they are culturally produced and consumed.

the viewers. During the course of my research, it became extremely important that I represent Coble's works of art and performances as accurately as possible in my dissertation. Also, to move beyond the limits of spoken language, I often paraphrased the responses of the interviewees to accurately portray the ideas that were being expressed.

I began by transcribing my oral and visual data. Using an inductive approach, I examined the interviews for repeated themes. In addition, I also viewed the videos and documents of Coble's performances, along with researching blogs, newspaper articles and reviews of her performances. I examine my data to explore the relationships among performance art, the archive and intersubjectivity to "open the space between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice."<sup>10</sup> Performance studies has critiqued the privileging of text over embodied experiences, arguing that there has been an entrenched hierarchy that values intellectual labor over manual labor. Conquergood calls for collapsing the opposition in order to revitalize the connection between "artistic accomplishment, analysis and articulation with communities; between practical knowledge (knowing who), propositional knowledge (knowing that), and political savvy (knowing who, when and where)."<sup>11</sup> Working from Foucault's concept of "subjugated knowledge,"<sup>12</sup> Conquergood challenges the academic position on how knowledge is produced, arguing for an active, intimate and hands-on participation that moves beyond text and textuality and engages with all forms of cognitive exchange and social

---

<sup>10</sup> Conquergood (2002), 146.

<sup>11</sup> Conquergood (2002), 153.

<sup>12</sup> M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972).

interaction.<sup>13</sup> Conquergood's "knowledge" is situated in the embodied experiences of the performer, artist, researcher, community and its participants, rather than in some universal sphere that pretends to transcend location.

### **Performance Art and Documentation**

Drawing from a wide range of interdisciplinary fields—performance studies, feminism, gender studies, queer theory, critical race theory, cultural theory, post modernism and post structuralism—my project explores the role of performance as a transgressive practice. The terms "performance," "performer," "performing," "performativity," "enactment," and "re-presentation" have been used by theorists to describe the ebb and flow of everyday life.<sup>14</sup> The common noun "performance" has been defined critically as an "act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism, a way of revealing agency."<sup>15</sup> The "performative," in contrast, "foreground[s] the intersection of politics, institutional sites, and embodied experience. In this way, performance is a form of agency, a way of bringing culture and the person into play."<sup>16</sup> Judith Butler, influenced by the work of J.L. Austin and Jacques Derrida, employs the term "performance" as one embedded within language.<sup>17</sup> For her, performativity refers to the "power of discourse to reproduce the phenomena that it regulates and

---

<sup>13</sup> See also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Norman K. Denzin. *Performance Ethnography: Critical pedagogy and the Politics of Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Denzin (2004).

<sup>17</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993).

constrains.”<sup>18</sup> Butler further argues that the performance contests gendered identities, thus creating a space for queer politics of resistance<sup>19</sup>. In a performative utterance, the speaking subject is already spoken for. In this sense performance and performativity intersect with the speaking subject, a subject with a gendered and racialized body.<sup>20</sup>

Performance is the doing of “certain embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others.”<sup>21</sup> It is “the doing” and a “thing done,” between the past and present, presence and absence, consciousness and memory. Performance is a way to invoke the continuum of history and make it possible to expose and interrogate cultural inscriptions and to offer alternative possibilities for change.<sup>22</sup> Although I draw from performance studies, I argue for performance beyond the live event and the ways in which the documentation and artifacts of the live performance serve its afterlife. The use of documentation, though, raises methodological issues.

A concern central to the study of performance art is the place of documentation, whether photographs, videos or some other form. Peggy Phelan, a proponent of performance as a medium, argues that the authenticity of the performance derives from the medium (performance) and not what is being documented. In the following chapters, I discuss performances based on interviews with the artist, participants, critics, members of the audience, as well as

---

<sup>18</sup> Butler (1993), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Butler (1993).

<sup>20</sup> Katharine Langellier, “Personal narratives: Perspectives on theory and research,” *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 9 (1989), 243-276.

<sup>21</sup> Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Diamond (1996).

my own experience. One further body of evidence comprises of photographs and videos of performances, both creations mediated through the sensibility of the photographer or videographer, in other words, someone other than the performer (though the artist may make the final choice of which become public). Amelia Jones has responded to those who criticized her history of performance on the grounds of her not having actually witnessed the works she writes about. Jones answers the criticism by arguing for the evidentiary value that documentation has for scholars and their research. She argues that since it is impossible for scholars to be present at all performance events, the archival documents form the necessary basis for writing history. Although Jones admits the centrality of the live event—the real medium of performance art—she also embraces documentation as the “photographic, textual, oral, and/or film traces”<sup>23</sup> of the performative act. Jones contends that, in any event, most subjective experiences reveal that “there is no possibility of an unmediated relationship to any kind of cultural product, including body art.”<sup>24</sup> Jones’s stance suggests that the only meaningful stance in relationship to experience is one of scholarly detachment, for which documents such as videos and photographs become a perfect resource.

Confronting the issue, Philip Auslander expands on the notion of documentation in performance art from two categories, “documentary” and “theatrical.” He argues that there is an assumption that the documentation of performance provides a record, through which one reconstructs the event.

---

<sup>23</sup> Amelia Jones, “Presences” in *Absentia: Experiencing Performance in Documentation*, *Art Journal*, 56,4 (1996), 11-18. Jones argues for the problematics of presence and the writing about performance from documents.

<sup>24</sup> Jones (1996), 12.

Auslander and Jones both challenge the “ontological priority of the live performance.”<sup>25</sup> They argue that the documentation and performance are mutually dependent. The performance is original only in its documentation and, while the photograph and video are proof of the event’s having taken place, the documentation needs the performance “as an ontological ‘anchor’ of its indexicality.”<sup>26</sup> Several artists stage performances solely to be photographed, in what is termed “performance photography,” which Auslander calls “theatrical.” In this context the document would have no prior existence as a performed event presented to an audience. “The space of the document (whether visual or audiovisual) thus becomes the only space in which the performance occurs; . . . the image we see thus records as event that never took place except in the photograph itself.”<sup>27</sup> In fact, one of the earliest images credited to performance photography is Yves Klein’s iconic *Leap into the Void* (1960) (fig. 1.1), which captures the artist jumping from an apartment building. This image, restaged in two parts, was re-performed for its documentation, ten months after Klein’s first, undocumented leap. The initial image was shot as a group of Klein’s friends stood below to catch him on a tarpaulin after he leaped from the window. The second was of the empty street where the leap was staged. Later the two images were collaged into one. Klein’s photograph, in turn, helped shape future generations of artists, particularly in the lengths to which an artist would go in testing limits. After Klein came Chris Burden (*Shoot*), Carolee Schneemann

---

<sup>25</sup> Philip Auslander, “The Performativity of the Performance Document,” *Performance Art Journal*, 84 (2006), 1-10,2.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

(*Interior Scroll*) and Marina Abramović (*Lips of Thomas*), whose performances centered on violent and invasive acts. Like Klein, all three recorded their performances in images that are, unlike Klein's, unmanipulated. Burden's record of *Shoot* looks amateurish and home-made in a way that supports its candid value (cf. Chapter Three).

Going beyond Jones's stance or that of Auslander, I would argue that most contemporary performance artists now consider documentation as an important and strategic aspect of their practice. The performance does not disappear, but serves "to do things in the future"<sup>28</sup> as part of a secondary archive of documents and artifacts. For contemporary artists the camera and new media technology are important tools in creating their art. Darsie Alexander uses the term "reluctant witness," in relationship to the role of documentation and performance in the early 1960s. She notes that "a range of artistic investigations into the concept of art, phenomenon, site, performative presences, and process radically changed the terms of art and the role of photography within its newly formed boundaries."<sup>29</sup> Performance, as a new art form, forced artists to consider the significance and power of the camera for the documentation of their work, as well as to communicate their work with the larger public. The case of Mary Coble is one of an artist who began as a photographer and then turned to performance as her principal medium. She has carefully crafted the documentary record of her work.

---

<sup>28</sup> Jose Muñoz in "Queer Punks, and the Utopian Performative," in *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, eds. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006)9-20, cites J.L. Austin to complicate the role of photographs and performance in the work of Kevin McCarty, further explored in Chapter 5.

<sup>29</sup> Darsie Alexander. "Reluctant Witness: Photography and the Documentation of the 1960s and 1970s Art," in *Work Ethic*, ed. Helen Moleworth (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003),53.

In the following chapters, I will take the performance archive and its afterlife as subjects for study as important as the live event.

### **Performance Art, Archive and Intersubjectivity**

Artists have produced compelling works to problematize the nature and meaning of the archive that is “how we create, store and circulate pictures and information.”<sup>30</sup> While no single definition of the archive is able to convey its complexities, performance artists have pushed the boundaries in investigating it as a conceptual and physical space to trouble the memories that are preserved and how history is written. While some artists use historical documents to illustrate its performative functions, others explore contemporary media footage to bring attention to archival structures that shape contemporary social and political meaning. Using diverse methods of imagined biographies, photomontages, film, video and photographs, performance artists reappropriate, reconfigure, reinterpret and reinterrogate the archive to offer alternative meanings of images.<sup>31</sup>

To this end, my project is not only concerned with how performance artists draw from the archive as a conceptual and physical space, but also what such discourse means in relationship to intersubjectivity for the spectators who attend such performances. To understand and enrich our understanding of intersubjectivity it is essential to consider, as noted above, the role of emotions evoked through performance art as one that may produce meaning, create awareness, or act as a disruption of viewers’ normative assumptions. The role of

---

<sup>30</sup> Okwui Enwezor. *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Enwezor (2008).

the performer in this regard is to complicate the distance between the sign and the signified, the viewer and the viewed, by reenacting the social dramas of embodied culture to articulate the constructedness of the material body.

The next chapter begins with the performance art of Mary Coble (Chapter two). I examine her first two projects (*Asphyxiation of Genderfication: Blurring Boundaries* and *Note to Self*) to highlight the role of the artist as archivist and to situate the concept of the archive in relationship to performance art. I argue that Coble's performances challenge the spectator to rethink issues surrounding performance of identity, memory, history and loss. Using her body as archive, Coble takes up the loss of memory and the exclusionary history of official archives. To fully engage with discourses of the body, the archive and intersubjectivity in performance art, I offer, in Chapter three, a brief history of performance and the theoretical frameworks through which its practitioners have questioned the politics of the body. Of central importance are the work of feminist performance artists and their critique of the visual hegemony of the white, male-dominated art world. In Chapter four, I question the traditional framework of the archive beyond a concrete space or repository of historical records. Delving into a critical analysis of photography and its impact on archival theory, I am interested in the nature and meaning of the archive. Examining Coble's performance *Aversions*, I illustrate how Coble, along with other performance artists, investigates the archive as a conceptual space to contest its authorial function. In Chapter five, I examine Mary Coble's performances

*Marker* and *Blood Script* to ask, in part, what sorts of issues arise in the reception and circulation of the performance art through an unmediated archive. Examining performance art and intersubjectivity, I explore the ways in which performance art is a transgressive practice that engages its spectators in public spheres. Finally, in Chapter six, I offer my concluding thoughts to contextualize new frameworks and questions that arise out of this project. Focusing on embodiment, Coble's performances complicate queer epistemology in opening alternatives readings of the archive as it relates to issues of power and the "body as archive."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Contemporary Performance Art: Introducing Mary Coble

On Friday, September 2, 2005, Mary Coble performed *Note to Self*. The performance was given at Connor Contemporary Art, then at the old Dupont Circle location in Washington, D.C. A small rectangular space, the gallery was on the second floor accessed from the street by a staircase with one turn. Coble sat, dressed only in her underwear, with her back turned to the audience as tattoo artist Leah Kym systematically inscribed names on her back. Kym's hands, covered in blue latex gloves, worked efficiently as onlookers quietly watched from a distance.

Kym and Coble had previously collaborated on the piece "*Boy*" and "*Girl*", for which they had worked out a method of tattooing words on Coble's body. Kym would use extra heavy gauge needles but no ink. As the blood rose after the repeated puncturing of the skin, the name would appear and a negative imprint was then made of it. The performance of *Note to Self* lasted twelve hours, running late into the night and the next day, as Kym tattooed 438 names on Coble's body. Kym recalls being exhausted by the effort. One visitor that evening remembers hearing the buzz of the tattoo gun immediately upon entering the door to the gallery.<sup>32</sup> The tattoo artist began at the base of Coble's neck and proceeded down the back of her body until nearly every surface was covered (fig.2.1). As each name was inscribed, the blood was then transferred to a 2 x 3" piece of blotter paper (fig.2.2). The blood prints were then pinned to the wall of the gallery (fig. 2.3). Kym reported on the absolute silence of those inside the

---

<sup>32</sup> March 17, 2009: Interview with Karyn Miller.

gallery,<sup>33</sup> and a spectator on the different reactions of the witnesses, both horror and inspiration.<sup>34</sup> During the evening, one viewer, moved by Coble's performance, left a bouquet of flowers and a note that read, "remembering our dead."<sup>35</sup> Because only first names were used, audience members saw "their own names plus those of their lovers, friends and family members appear" on Coble's body.<sup>36</sup> The gallery was closed to visitors at 8:00 p.m., but the entire performance, which ran to 5:00 a.m., was webcast. Clare Britt, a college friend of Coble's, logged on-line from Chicago to watch. She vividly remembers the strong impact the performance had on her, especially the pain she imagined Coble enduring as each name was inscribed on her body.<sup>37</sup> Others logged on from as far away as Israel and Australia.

For the viewer the most memorable aspect of the performance is the artist's body in pain. In the gallery the viewers watched quietly but intently as the buzzing tattoo gun repeatedly marked Coble's skin. The performance was, in fact, the culmination of considerable research. Drawing on the limited archive of hate crimes committed against gays and lesbians, Coble spent countless hours doing preliminary work, compiling a list of hate crime victims. Although she received some information from the Southern Poverty Law Center and The Human Rights Commission, she soon realized that neither the federal nor state governments mandated the reporting of hate crimes. Additionally, her research uncovered the fact that over 75% of such crimes go unreported and never become

---

<sup>33</sup> March 16, 2009: Interview with Leah Kym.

<sup>34</sup> Grammar.polic, <http://grammarpolice.net/archives/000759.php> (September 14, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> Susan Ross. "Jorge, Jose Jr., Joseph, Joseph, Joseph," *NY Arts Magazine* (2005).

<sup>36</sup> Ross (2005).

<sup>37</sup> February 26, 2009: Interview with Claire Britt.

part of an official record. Coble assembled her own list of names, creating an archive, uncertain of what she would do with it. Her research also revealed that one common aspect of hate crimes against gays and lesbians were words like “dyke” or “faggot” found inscribed on the victim’s body. As the list of names grew, Coble began to conceptualize her performance. *Note to Self* evolved as a way to redress the “stunning gap between crime statistic reporting in the United States,” and to convey the pain of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community.<sup>38</sup> Coble states that her goal in tattooing the names of 438 hate-crime victims on her body was to “offer her audience a visceral experience that would heighten awareness of such crimes and the related human rights concerns”<sup>39</sup> and to promote intersubjectivity.

Coble recalls the night of her performance with trepidation and excitement. She remembers the prick of tattoo needle on her skin, first with fear and, as the pain grew, with the doubt that she would be able to complete the performance. She credits the support of her viewers and their presence with giving her the strength to finish. She states: “It’s like a real interesting connection develops between what you’re doing and your audience.” She recalls collecting the names of the hate crime victims and finding repeated names, “like Jose, Jose, Jose, or Joseph.” One drag queen was called Chocolate, so that is what got tattooed. For Coble the names are related to the memory of hate crimes. She says that “people get upset about them, they’ll protest, something happens then people forget and no legislation is passed, no statistics are taken, nothing’s done and it

---

<sup>38</sup> Ross (2005).

<sup>39</sup> September 28, 2007: Interview with Mary Coble.

happens again and everyone acts surprised.” For her the repeated names are both the repeated killings and their loss from memory, since the names on her body fade with time.<sup>40</sup>

A few hundred people witnessed *Note to Self*. Susan Ross, writing in *NY Arts* magazine, described Coble’s performance as a “transfixing and beautiful spectacle.” She further states that “as row after row of names is neatly applied the initial redness of the pierced skin is soon tempered into a soft pink. The repeating names become like lyrics to a song, Jorge, Jose Jr., Joseph, Joseph, Joseph.”<sup>41</sup>

Blogger Kriston compared the performance to an evangelical youth group gathering. She writes: “the gallery was filled with onlookers, gawking in horror and inspiration, many of whom really felt their hair standing on end even before they entered the space when the sound of the tattoo gun greeted them on the stairs. Kriston further describes Coble’s imagery as “. . . unrelentingly Christian. The blood transverses her back, arms, and legs; the performance centered on her back, as she sat, nearly laying prostrate. ‘Note to Self’ is rife with sacrifice: sacrifices forced upon the victims of these murders, who probably never realized that they would be martyred for their nature, and Coble’s physical sacrifice as tribute.”<sup>42</sup>

Joey Orr logged online from Atlanta to watch Coble’s performance. Orr, then curator of Atlanta Celebrates Photography, noted that the act of tattooing names on the skin derived from the anti-gay epithets becomes an act of empowerment in this performance. He stated, “Women took back the word ‘CUNT,’ just as the

---

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> September 28, 2007: Interview with Mary Coble.

<sup>42</sup> Grammar.polic, <http://grammarpolice.net/archives/000759.php> (September 14, 2005).

GLBT community took back the word ‘queer.’”<sup>43</sup> Orr was particularly intrigued by his on-line experience of watching Coble’s performance. Writing for the *Atlanta Pride*, he observed that “while the audience at the performance was asked to leave at 8 pm, I could continue to check on the etching of the names that went on till 5 am.”<sup>44</sup> Orr points to the power of performance art, but questions “what happens when performance went on when viewers are not there but instead participated in real time in cyberspace? Would that still be considered live performance art? What happens to the connection between performer and audience when their interaction is mediated by cameras and monitors?”<sup>45</sup> Orr’s questions challenge the authenticity of Web-cast performance art, generally taken to be an unmediated live event.

The performance of *Note to Self* survives in documents: photographs, video, and the blood stains on 438 pieces of blotter paper. With the partial support of collector Mitchell Storey, the Hirshhorn Museum acquired *Note to Self* from Connor Contemporary Art. It was exhibited in a new acquisitions show mounted in 2007. Hung on the short wall of an L-shaped space in the first-floor gallery is a photograph of Coble seen from behind, her head turned to look toward the viewer (fig.2.4). Neatly pinned to the longer, adjacent wall are the pieces of blotter paper with the names inscribed in blood. I was at the Hirshhorn one day after *Note to Self* has been installed. As I walked through the installation I noticed a woman approach Coble’s work. She intently studied the portrait and then proceeded to the larger wall, looking at the names, trying to figure out what the

---

<sup>43</sup> Joey Orr, “Fly on the Web: When Performance Goes On-line,” *Atlanta Pride* (2006).

<sup>44</sup> March 9, 2009: Interview with Joey Orr.

<sup>45</sup> Orr (2006).

imprints on the pinned sheet of paper meant. She then went over to read the wall text, which described the work. I saw her body tense up as she continued reading. After she was finished, she turned away taking a deep breath and shaking her head in disbelief.<sup>46</sup> I am intrigued by the viewer's reactions and question the role of documentation in the context of embodiment, emotions and intersubjectivity.

Scholars like Amelia Jones and Philip Auslander have accepted the evidentiary nature of performance documents. Yet it seems clear that a profound gap stands between the performance and the documents exhibited in the art museum. What is the status of performance documents, and do they continue to perform the archive and produce valid meaning and emotion? Mitchell Storey, who supported the Hirshhorn's acquisition of *Note to Self*, is a collector of Coble's performance-based photographs, and he follows Coble's work closely. For him Coble's art concerns "integrity and intent" and speaks clearly to his everyday experiences as a gay man. He is particularly drawn to the complexity of Coble's work, especially *Note to Self*, which highlights queer politics and the pain of the LGBT community. He notes that Coble's performances make him think and feel beyond just the personal. Although taken by the sociopolitical aspects of her work, he says that he is more concerned with her artistic conceptualization of the body in performance art.<sup>47</sup> Storey and Orr raise questions about how performance artists like Coble problematize the contours of performance art. Like Orr, I question what constitutes performance art when web cams and videos

---

<sup>46</sup> February 9, 2008: Personal observation at the Hirshhorn Museum.

<sup>47</sup> March 20, 2009: Interview with Mitchell Storey.

mediate viewers' response; live performance art is known for its immediate and visceral impact.

*Note to Self* was the first public performance Coble created as a professional artist. She describes her early childhood, in a relatively rural community in North Carolina, as one that was protected. She attended high school with kids that she had known since kindergarten and remembers how there was little opportunity to experience anything other than straight families, so she had no context in which to address struggles around her sexuality. She recalls being tomboyish and mostly interested in playing sports. It is not until high school that she became aware of her own sexuality, as her peers teased her for not being "feminine." Despite doing things to fit in, like shaving her legs, she remembers her high school prom experience as a disaster, only increasing her confusion at not being attracted to boys. On a whim she decided to cut her hair short. One of her friends responded to her new look with amusement, blurting out how she looks "totally gay." In the same exchange her friend confessed to being gay herself. Although Coble remembers being upset by her friend's confession, she also remembers being affirmed in her own sexuality.

Coble recalls her first experience of feeling accepted. It came as she began to hang out with other lesbians in Greensboro, and later when she attended the University of North Carolina Greensboro as a design major. Her biographical approach to art surfaced early, at Greensboro; the focus of her Bachelor of Arts show was gender and sexuality. In 2002 she moved to Washington, D.C., to

pursue an MFA at the George Washington University. Her encounter with alternative gender narratives, especially ones centering on female masculinity, began soon after her move to Washington, where she started attending local clubs. She characterizes her experience of going to clubs, a way to meet other “folks like her,” as at first confusing. She had frequented gay clubs in North Carolina but never heard of drag king performances. Intrigued by the concept of drag kings, she began to seek out shows and, along with her partner, dress in more masculine attire. Coble’s fascination with—as well as growing ability to articulate her subjectivity through—the drag king performances led her to photographing them, an obvious step since her MFA field of concentration was photography. Her photo shoots then drew her into the personal lives of several of the drag kings, who in time became her friends. For Coble, the drag kings “challenge and subvert the social boundaries that attempt to keep the categories of female and male separate and distinct.”<sup>48</sup> Motivated by her personal experiences and artistic inquiry, as well as by the documentary character of her drag king photographs, Coble began to raise questions about gender variant subjects and their exclusion from historical archives. Interested in destabilizing the binary system of male/female, she questioned the role of embodiment and memory of queer desire.

Coble’s announcement for her MFA show *Asphyxiation of Genderfication: Blurring Boundaries* is a postcard image with the words “boy” and “girl” printed on it. In summarizing Coble’s show the gallery press release read

---

<sup>48</sup> Comments by the artist come from interviews conducted by the author.

‘Gender’ is the premise of this body of work: how people display gender and how others perceive it. Not all people accept the dichotomous paradigm society has created. Some individuals, by the simple act of living their lives in a way that feels natural, eliminate an either/or way of understanding and classifying gender and break down the boundaries that have been constructed. Others take a more activist approach and resist fitting into a single category. The combination of these approaches, the variety of ways in which people choose to express themselves, is what is needed to redefine gender, to make it less rigid, more fluid. This exhibition is both powerful and provocative. Coble employs a variety of artistic methods to address these important issues, from a series of vivid color images that portray drag king performances in several local clubs to a video component that depicts Coble systematically applying duct tape to her breasts and tearing it off for approximately one hour with a simultaneous video of a small audience watching. The purpose of the work is not its mere shock value, but its ability to raise questions about society and the assumptions and biases placed on people. Asphyxiation of Genderfication asks society to rethink the concept of gender and allow for fluidity without boundaries.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> George Washington University, Dimock Art Gallery, Press Release, April 9, 2004. [http://www2.gwu.edu/~media/pressrelease.cfm?ann\\_id=11463](http://www2.gwu.edu/~media/pressrelease.cfm?ann_id=11463)

Intrigued by the title and description, I walked over to the Dimock Gallery to see Coble's MFA show. The gallery this opening day, April 22, 2004, was full of people. Coble was dressed in masculine attire: black pants and shirt, a Mohawk and complete facial hair. She was with a group of people, all dressed like her. I was struck by the group's appearance as I walked past them to enter the gallery. On the walls were works created during her years as a graduate student. One wall of the gallery was covered with photographs of drag kings in performance. The second wall of the gallery had a series of photographs of Coble's back with the words "boy" and "girl" inscribed on her skin. In a third area a video was being shown. Each of the three sections represented work from a different stage of Coble's growth as the artist who would soon perform *Note to Self*.

Coble's photographs of the drag kings intrigue me, especially how she captures the hyper-masculinity of the performers' sexual gestures (figs. 2.5, 2.6). Concerned with the "representation" of gender categories and the "enactment" of masculinity, Coble documents the ways in which the women transform themselves for the performances, both by adding and subtracting. Her photographs depict the deliberate concealing of a principal aspect of the performers' gender through the process of binding the breasts, using ace bandages, sports bras, duct tape and back braces (fig. 2.7). The performers also use "packing," socks or soft packs (soft dildos) and strap-ons (fig. 2.8), to create the buldge made by a penis. Applying facial hair is a third part of creating the illusion (fig. 2.9). The photographs capture the fluidity of the performance of the

drag kings and complicate gender normativity; in this way they offer an alternative narrative for performing queer subjectivities; Coble's frequent use of blurred images seems itself a revealing metaphor. The pleasure and joy in the enactment of masculine sexuality are revealed in the facial expressions and the performing bodies of the drag kings. For Coble, the process involved in preparing for the performance becomes a means to expand and disrupt the boundaries of gender. She comes to understand, as she later recalls, that "masculinity and femininity do not have to be mutually exclusive to males and females, respectively. These two characteristics are interchangeable."<sup>50</sup>

Influenced by her graduate training and delving into the theoretical frameworks surrounding gender, sexuality and female masculinity,<sup>51</sup> Coble states she became more interested in challenging the norms of officially-sanctioned archival photographs. Siobhan Somerville, Jennifer Terry and Dana Seitler examine the archives of "queer physiognomies" critiquing discourses around sexual perversion, privileging the medical construction of homosexual identity.<sup>52</sup> Within this context, Coble's photographs of enacting masculinity reveal the layered, performative aspects of gender, creating a counter-archive for the performance of alternative gender roles. Coble's photographs capture the theatricality of performance, revealing multiple ambiguities as they uncover the

---

<sup>50</sup> September 28, 2007: Interview with Mary Coble.

<sup>51</sup> See reads Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* ([1990] London: Routledge, 1999) and Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>52</sup> See Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2000); Jennifer Terry, "The Seductive Power of Science in the Making of Deviant Subjectivity," in Halberstam and Livingston, eds., *Posthuman Bodies*. (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995), 135-161; Dana Steiler, "Queer Physiognomies; Or, How Many Ways Can We Do the History of Sexuality," *Criticism* 46 (2004), 71- 102.

permeable boundary between acting and unselfconscious being. In this sense, the drag kings are all performing their queerness as a way to expose the artificiality of conventional gender roles.<sup>53</sup> Judith Halberstam (whom Coble read as a graduate student) examines performance and performativity as means to examine the cultural and social construction of gendered masculinity.<sup>54</sup> She observes that as a society we have difficulty defining masculinity, yet we can easily recognize it. She offers numerous examples of alternative masculinities, as when she examines “female masculinity” performed through the photographs of Volcano Del LaGrace. Halberstam notes that the performativity and performance of drag king shows serve to challenge the hegemonic models of gender conformity. She also questions why heterosexists and feminists have vilified female masculinity. Both hetero- and homo-normative cultures view female masculinity as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment. Female masculinity, she contends, has become variously codified: as a form of rebellion, a sign of sexual alterity, or a place of pathology. Halberstam argues for the need to produce a model of female masculinity that recognizes and ratifies differently gendered bodies and subjectivities and, especially, grasps “the logic of embodiment.”<sup>55</sup>

Del LaGrace along with Halberstam, published portraits of drag kings (fig. 2.10). They are carefully composed images, which capture the theatricality of gender performance. As you move through the pages of *The Drag King Book*, the portrait of each king disrupts what we recognize in terms of gender or sex,

---

<sup>53</sup> Halberstam (1998), 261.

<sup>54</sup> Halberstam (1998).

<sup>55</sup> Halberstam (1998), 42.

appearance and reality.<sup>56</sup> Most portraits often present a perfect rendition of masculinity. Some photographs have two or more figures interacting, sometimes employing sexual gestures and other times just posing for the portrait. Gender in these portraits becomes a complex set of negotiations between recognizing and defining. Del LaGrace offers us a model of inversion through her camera lens that captures the likeness to masculinity in every way.

Coble uses photography quite differently from LaGrace. Her photographs point at ambiguity, sites where male and female, masculine and feminine, are intertwined. Each of the drag king performance photos embodies the pleasure of performing masculinity. Images of the process of identity concealment, or the process of transformation, concentrate on the body that is undergoing transformation. Several are headless revealing no emotion, while the performing bodies are emotive and the fluidity of gender is further enhanced through the use of long exposures, during which the figure's motion is captured (an anti-documentary technique). Coble's images are not about hiding or concealing, but about the transformative act underlying the performance of female masculinity as well as the performance itself.

Drawing from Butler to contextualize difference, especially gender and the body, Coble further investigated how gendered behavior is learned and performed, especially how femininity and masculinity are imposed by heterosexual norms implicit in our culture.<sup>57</sup> Her next series of photographs in the

---

<sup>56</sup> Volcano Del LaGrace and Judith Halberstam, *The Drag King Book* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1999).

<sup>57</sup> Butler (1990).

MFA show have the words “*Boy*” and “*Girl*” tattooed on her body (fig. 2.11). This was Coble’s first collaboration with tattoo artist Leah Kym. Coble states that to complicate the performativity of gender she wanted to create a piece to question gender and the dominant, hetero-normative categories of subjective experience. “*Boy*” and “*Girl*” questions how subjectivity is formed and informed, how culture imposes two categories, neither of which adequately captures the artist’s own subjectivity. For Coble, the embodied, corporeal memory relates to the performative of identity, raising for her viewers questions of how gender is recognized in everyday life. Arguing for gender as an unstable cultural construct that changes in relationship to each individual’s reality, “*Boy*” and “*Girl*” foregrounds the role of memory and embodiment in relationship to the archive. In the piece, Coble seems to offer the body as an unstable memory archive.<sup>58</sup> For three weeks, she photographed the tattoos as they slowly healed and then, finally, disappeared (fig. 2.12 ). As the process came to an end, the two words, “boy” and “girl,” are rendered invisible, leaving in their place only the performance (its memory or physical record in the photographs), referring to the power of sexuality in producing both emotion and knowledge<sup>59</sup>. Playing with the representation of gender, the artist questions the unconscious imprinting of memory and the problematics of nature-versus-nurture: biological determinism versus the cultural production of subjectivity. Through her work she argues that we cannot assume a stable subjectivity in which we perform gender roles. Rather, the very act of performing gender is what constitutes who we are. Coble,

---

<sup>58</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

referencing Butler, thus shifts the definition of gender to highlight its socially constructed, artificial, and performative nature, challenging the hegemonic status quo to argue for the rights of marginalized identities (especially gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and queer identities)<sup>60</sup>. There are no original performances and identities; every performance is both an original and an imitation<sup>61</sup>.

Finally, at the very end of the gallery was a video playing the work entitled *Binding Ritual, Daily Routine*. This is a two-part performance piece shown in dual projection. The first component is the video that shows Coble wrapping and unwrapping her breasts with silver duct tape (fig. 2.13). The second video shows the audience watching the performance. Coble had invited a group of close friends to witness the event. The only instructions she supplied were to react in whatever way spectators felt but not to interfere in her performance. Coble says that “It was important for me to have an audience present because the viewing of the actual event was a much more visceral experience than viewing the video. Watching a projection creates a certain amount of distance between viewers and the artist.”<sup>62</sup>

Both videos were shown together on opposite walls of the gallery (fig. 2.14). The camera angles were devised to allow the audience and performer not only to look at each other, but also, when projected, to look directly at the viewer. I watched the video, split between the artists and the viewers. I felt as if I had

---

<sup>60</sup> Butler (1990)

<sup>61</sup> Denzin (2004).

<sup>62</sup> September 28, 2007: Interview with Mary Coble.

been caught in the middle of the stares of the audience, several of whom were crying. My personal response to the performance was that it is too painful to watch, as the blood rose to the surface of Coble's skin each time she peeled off the strip of duct tape. As do many other viewers, I, too, turned away, feeling a sense of confusion (possibly the performance disrupts my own assumptions and privileges, taken for granted as a heterosexual woman).

Coble's show was reviewed in the *Washington City Paper* under the title "Duct and Uncover."<sup>63</sup> The reporter, Bidisha Banerjee, wrote that "With her brown mohawk and boyish clothes, photographer Mary Coble gets called 'sir' a lot in restaurants. And when she goes into a bathroom, other women sometimes tell her she's in the wrong place. So when Coble decided to deal with gender labels in 'Asphyxiation of Genderfication: Blurring Boundaries,' her new photo and video exhibition at George Washington University's Dimock Gallery, it was almost a given she would turn the camera on herself. But not as just another self-portraitist: In the well-worn tradition of endurance artists Gina Pane and Marina Abramović, 'Asphyxiation' shows Coble being branded, and bled, and duct-taped before a live audience."<sup>64</sup> Coble was subsequently invited to participate in "Academy 2004," an annual show of area graduate student work hosted by the Conner Contemporary Art Gallery in Washington. Michael O'Sullivan's article "Connecting Past, Present and Futures" reads: "Mary Coble of George Washington University engages both the past and the present in her formally staid but gender-bending portraits of drag kings. Culled by exhibition organizer Jamie

---

<sup>63</sup> Bidisha Banerjee, "Duct and Uncover," *Washington City Paper* (April 23, 2004).

<sup>64</sup> Banerjee (2004).

Smith from Coble's 'Blurring Boundaries' series, the pictures are a pointed hodgepodge of tattoos, lace bras, men's underpants, fake beards and lipstick."<sup>65</sup>

Her next performance *Note to Self* deals with embodiment, the archive and intersubjectivity. Coble's conceptual framework—using her body as a palimpsest for the employment of text through the repeated marking by tattooing, her emphasizing blood and the body in pain—offers the body as a site for debates about representation, gender, sexuality, history and postmodernism. She uses pain and blood as strategies to convey the corporeality of the body. Orr related the museum installation of the negative imprints of the names in *Note to Self*—the grid style and repetition (fig. 2.4)—to minimalist art and post-minimalist strategies, as well as to the early body art performances of feminists Carolee Schneeman, Hannah Wilke and others. Orr argued that Coble uses her body to erase the anti-gay epithets by replacing the victims' true identities, undoing the criminal logic behind the heinous crimes. He further noted that the blood recalls the “show of sacrifice and a symbol of absolution in the Judeo-Christian tradition.”<sup>66</sup> The act of scarring the body, “records an aspect of the GLBT community's social and political struggle, a grim but integral part of our history.”<sup>67</sup> While I concur with Orr, I am also interested in how the act of tattooing can refer to the doing and undoing of the archive and the body, and can become a strategy to disrupt social norms. Coble's performance makes the body an archive as each name is “done” through tattooing and “undone” when the body

---

<sup>65</sup> Michael O'Sullivan, “Connecting Past, Present and Futures,” *WE45* (August 27, 2004).

<sup>66</sup> Orr (2006).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

heals and the names disappear. Coble's performance speaks to the pain of the LGBT community as a result of the hate crimes, but the negative imprints create an archive of the names that remain undocumented. The marking and the unmarking of her skin, as well as her body being the subject, acted upon by her tattoo artist, offers the body as a "dialectical and dialogical"<sup>68</sup> site to contest the archive.

On an aesthetic level, the power of Coble's performance comes from the accumulation of names carefully inscribed in a tight group on her body. It thus inevitably calls to mind Mya Lin's Vietnam Memorial in Washington (and the installation of *Notes to Self* at the Hirshhorn Museum seems to be calculated to evoke the war memorial, a work in the minimalist style). The Vietnam Memorial centers on the names of what some might regard as victims of an unjust war, and its effect is largely created by the relentless accumulation of names. Similarly, Coble's performance concerns not individuals, but a collective. By inscribing only the first names of the victims, she provides her audience an intersubjective opportunity to experience the grief and pain of remembering their friends or loved ones who have been directly affected by hate crimes. Coble's back becomes a metaphor that further asserts institutional and political indifference to crimes committed against a marginalized group. The imprinting of each name further acts as a surrogate archive for writing history and underscoring the absence of institutional records of the victims' deaths. Her performance in effect transcribes onto her audience her rage at the lack of concern for the hate crime victims.

---

<sup>68</sup> Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," *TDR: The Drama Review* 46 (2002), 145-156.

Finally, the fading of the names from her body is like the fading memory of the crimes themselves. But in the forgetting there is always a remembering that gets inscribed on an affective level; this is characterized by Eve Sedgwick as “shame.” She argues that “shame effaces itself; shame points and projects; shame turns itself skin side out; shame and pride, shame and dignity, shame and self display, shame and exhibitionism are different linings of the same glove. Shame, it might finally be said, transformational shame, is *performance*.”<sup>69</sup> Coble’s performance transforms the shame and silence producing a powerful illustration of the body as archive.

*Notes to Self* raises some important questions about intersectionality and the negotiation of gender and sexuality in everyday life. The life of the murdered victims is often lived on the margins of invisibility and visibility. Although academic discourses have paid attention to the social construction of subjectivity, there is little devoted to the impact of embodiment of emotions, memory and history in relationship to the archive. How do Coble’s performances question the effects of the institutional power inequities and the authority of the archive, asking for a queer analysis of subjectivity that goes beyond intersectionality? How is an intersectional analysis of race, class, gender and sexuality complicated when names of all victims, irrespective of their identity categories are inscribed on her white body? How does her performance queer the gendered body offering an improvisational space for the “politics of resistance?”<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup>Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy and Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 39

<sup>70</sup>Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality I, An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 95.

## Contesting the Archive

Coble's MFA show can be said to describe a narrative arc informed by her biography: her personal struggles growing up in a small town in North Carolina, finding acceptance for her own queer subjectivity, exposure in a big city to drag king performances in lesbian clubs, leading her to photographing shows and eventually participating, then to deeper, more meaningful exploration of the underlying issues in the work *Binding Ritual, Daily Routine*. Her first experience with performance was staged in a club setting and videotaped for exhibition. Here, Coble experienced the power of performance and its intersubjective dimensions. Her MFA show related specifically to identity politics, especially the cultural trauma and pain of the LGBT community. Following graduation, she was taken up by a Washington gallery and performed *Note to Self* before an invited audience from the art community. Although identity politics has come under attack for its essentialism, I argue that Coble's conceptualization and execution of *Note to Self* calls for the need to construct a queer analysis that contests the archive and how people think of identity politics. Cathy Cohen argues for destabilization and not the "destruction or abandonment of identity categories."<sup>71</sup> She suggests the importance of the multiplicity and interconnectedness of identities that provide promising avenues for destabilization and radical politicization, but rejects any queer analysis that ignores the usefulness of

---

<sup>71</sup> Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" in *Black Queer Studies*, eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae. G. Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 21-51.

categories and roles, shared experiences of oppression to build resources, shape consciousness and act collectively.<sup>72</sup>

Building upon Cohen's ideas, I argue that Coble's performances contextualize the embodied experiences of the LGBT community. Coble's enactment of the affective experience and the embodied practices of transgendered individuals in *Binding Ritual, Daily Routine*, touches on what Ann Cvetkovich calls "an archive of feeling"<sup>73</sup> generated to explore embodied subjectivities as repositories of feeling and emotions. While Coble is careful not to generalize her performance to the experience of all male to female (MTF) transgenders, she argues for the embodiment of culture and the ways in which everyday practices surround the production and reception of identity. Her performances argue for the theorization of the archive beyond one that consists of material objects, texts and history; one that accounts for the body as archive to include corporeality, subjectivity and feelings produced through dominant public cultures.

Coble's video performance *Binding Ritual, Daily Routine* grew out of the preparatory ritual of the drag kings, and gave it an urgent political message. The video performance begins with the identity politics surrounding gender and sexuality for a white middle class lesbian and unfolds to effectively destabilize identity and dramatize the pain of her community. The pain lies, literally and metaphorically, in the very concealment of their identity as an everyday practice. In the performance she actively engages the viewers, who are part of her

---

<sup>72</sup> Cohen (2005), 45

<sup>73</sup> Cvetkovich (2003), 7

community, as she goes through the everyday performative act of breast binding experienced by transgendered individuals; in this way, Coble evokes their history of invisibility. The representation of transgendered individuals is produced and reproduced countless times as a performative act of binding the breasts with duct tape. The reenactment in the performance becomes an act of intervention concerning the materiality of the body, the ways in which the transgendered body resists being framed and categorized. Performing *Binding Ritual, Daily Routine* thus becomes a strategy that mutually constructs and deconstructs, expands and delimits the body as archive in the everyday life of some FTM transgenders. For Coble this becomes a way to understand better the transgendered's physical and mental pain. "FTM individuals who bind every day want to be perceived as having no breasts at all. To bind that tightly can be extremely painful; imagine having to experience that pain day after day for the majority of your lifetime . . . It was important for me to perform the act of binding myself. I needed to experience the pain of repeatedly binding and unbinding my breasts with tape. I wanted to create a physical manifestation of the mental space where I imagined transgendered individuals silently suffer. Granted, this is a secondhand, simulated experience, but I believe by watching this video piece, viewers will be more sympathetic to the extreme anguish that is overlooked by most of our society." In my opinion, the performance becomes a representation of embodiment: how the body is shaped by the emotions and feelings of everyday experiences. Embodiment in this sense represents how history and memory are performed in everyday life.

Coble's *Note to self* recalls the work of artists Marina Abramović, Ron Athey and Catherine Opie, who have used their bodies to perform and contest the archive, citing issues of gender, sexuality, AIDS and citizenship. Drawing from these artists, Coble, too, uses her body to contest the limits of the archive as a source of knowledge and to address the logocentrism of the archive. By tattooing the names of the dead on her skin, she evokes the loss and disappearance of queer narratives from official archives. *Note to Self* thus makes an argument for the body as archive to convey embodied memory and history and to demonstrate the profoundly affective power of sexuality in producing both emotions and knowledge surrounding the invisibility and silence of queer history. Through the repeated inscribing of each name on her body, *Note to Self* becomes a counter-archive in citing the loss as a way of reinscribing the archive.

*Note to Self* raises questions about the “dialogical and dialectical” relationship between the archive and the body in performance art. Coble's work references the historical debates surrounding performance art, ones that shifted the perceptions of body beyond just “content.” Engaging in the “doing” of the body, performance artists engage the body as archive, revealing temporality, contingency and instability, to explore how identity is performed within cultural boundaries, rather than some inherently stable quality.<sup>74</sup> Exploring the physical and psychological body they sought to express “the self that was invisible, formless and liminal.”<sup>75</sup> Pushing the limits of the body, performance artists set

---

<sup>74</sup> Warr, Tracy. “Preface,” in *The Artists Body*, eds. Amelia Jones and Tracy Warr (London: Phadion Press, 2000).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid

into motion the de-materialization of body, addressing issues of fear, death, danger, desire and perversion, for mobilizing history and memory.

Artists like Coble, draw from postmodernism and poststructuralism to destabilize the semantic systems representing the body. Along with other artists, Coble uses performance strategies of pain, blood and tattooing, adding an important dimension to understanding the concept of the “body as archive,” especially its relationship to embodiment, memory and history. Coble problematizes the imprecise visual, verbal and textual contours of corporeality and language, highlighting the language of the body and its performativity as one that is “inflexible and too flexible.”<sup>76</sup> The body becomes a site to explore the visual and linguistic categories of the body (gender and sexuality), in turn disrupting the representation and hierarchies of power,<sup>77</sup> that define the social and cultural norms of identity categories. In doing so, Coble joins other performance artists, raising questions about the archives of gender and sexuality, representation, notions of the self, the signifying systems of the body, challenging the construction of the private and public archives.

At the same time Coble’s performance also raises questions about “authenticity” of the archive, what is included and what is excluded in the process of history writing? What constitutes performance art, when documented photographs and videos are exhibited after the event? The public nature of performance art raises issues of intersubjectivity and the process of meaning making. What is the role of emotions, especially pain, in producing meaning

---

<sup>76</sup> Warr (2000), 13.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

among the viewers? How does the reenactment of history and memory become strategies to construct and deconstruct, expand and delimit the archives of race, gender, sexuality and citizenship in everyday life?

To contextualize Coble's works of art and her subsequent performances, it is important to place her work within the historical context of performance art, its archive and discourses of the body. Her work complicates what constitutes contemporary performance art, especially its resistance to documentation.

Performance art has mainly been considered as something live that, paradoxically, lives only through its disappearance.<sup>78</sup> I argue performance documents--photographs, videos, and film--and their afterlife not only recall, or cite, a past event, but also underscore the "factual, fictive, public and yet private"<sup>79</sup> nature of the archive. To this end, performance artists like Coble access the archive as medium, form and feelings to contest public memory and private history. The active body becomes not only the archive for knowledge retrieval but knowledge construction and agency as well.

Coble's works reference the historical use of the body in performance art as a means of contesting the archive on a personal and political level, questioning the relationship between the public and private. In this context, Coble's performances bring to the forefront structural and institutional factors that make issues of gender and sexuality invisible, questioning the organization of the archive, especially who is included and who is excluded. Her performances offer

---

<sup>78</sup> Peggy Phelan. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), considers that performance enacts the productive appeal of the non-reproductive through its disappearance. For Phelan performance is always live and in the present.

<sup>79</sup> Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October*, 110 (2004), 3-22, 3.

a theorization of the body for engaging in new forms of critical practices, especially her research in and on the archive to offer an examination of everyday life of queer desires and pain, in that, she offers the body as archive, moving the invisibility of the queer body from past into a visible present. She makes the role of emotions and feelings central in the process of conceptualizing, constructing, and performing. They are a central component of the documents exhibited in the afterlife of the performance.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Archive of Performance Art

In this chapter I examine the archive of performance art and the ways in which performance becomes a form of political practice to critique the hegemonic institutions of the art world and institute the body as a medium of artistic expression. I look at the origins of performance art and its focus on the discourses of the body, especially the contribution of the feminist performance artists in establishing the contingency of pain. To make my case, I show that performance art offers a theorization of embodiment as it relates to the cultural construction of subjectivity, especially in signifying the archives of history and memory to question the raced, gendered and sexual body.

The flowering of performance art coincides with the unsettled cultural and social life prevailing in Europe and America during the second half of the twentieth century. Events led to a destabilized climate that gave performance art a prominent platform in the art world. Artists were questioning and redefining the meaning and function of art. And in the process, artists became concerned for not only the significance of their work to the audience it was created to serve, but also just how the work of art connected with the viewer. Performance art historian Rosalee Goldberg, for example, stresses how performance artists sought to eliminate the “element of alienation between performer and viewer” inherent to traditional media.<sup>80</sup> Turning their bodies into the most direct form of expressive

---

<sup>80</sup> Roselee Goldberg. *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, 2nd ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, [1979] 2001), 154. Goldberg’s 1979 Goldberg’s publication remains an important source for a survey of performance history.

medium, performance artists transgressed the conceptual boundaries imposed by conventional tools and materials: paint, brush, canvas, and so on. Their focus became the gendered body, dissolving, fragmenting, blurring, and displacing its centered presence.<sup>81</sup> The body emerges a site for debates about representation, gender, and history, and as a means to resist the traditional archive that defined the parameters of artistic practice and art institutions. Discourses on the body open the archive to the erotic and sexual, especially the gay, lesbian, transgendered, and the AIDS body—becoming a feature of postmodernism.

Philip Auslander notes that although scholars have debated the exact meaning of postmodernism in relationship to performance art, there is a consensus that a new critical spirit encouraged artists of the 1960s, 70s and 80s in the examination of social, cultural and political conditions. Although it is not until the late 1960s that performance art becomes a recognized medium of artistic expression, it does have forerunners. The Happenings and Fluxus performances in the early 1960s were rooted in the Dada movement of the early twentieth century. What separates performance art from Dada, Happenings or Fluxus events is the grounding of the concept of “representation” in the actual presence of both artist and audience.<sup>82</sup> Deconstructing representation becomes a crucial postmodernists strategy for resistance in performance art.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> Charles Garoian, *Performing Pedagogy: Towards an Art of Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

<sup>82</sup> Philip Auslander, *Presences and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1992). Goldberg (1979), 9, argues that performance art made visible “the live presence of the artist, and the focus on the artist’s body became central to the notions of ‘the real’ and a yardstick for installation and video art, as well as art-photography of the late twentieth century.”

<sup>83</sup> Garoian (1999).

Jayne Wark, an art historian, charts the genealogy of American art to argue for representation as a form of political practice, especially in the contribution of the feminist movement to art practice. She argues that while the historic avant-garde movements of Futurism, Constructivism, Dadaism and Surrealism recognized and set out to challenge the autonomy and institutional isolation of art, the political intentions of these movements were never realized. The avant-garde, however, impacted the performances of the 1960s and 1970s. Wark notes that performance never entirely disappeared, but it did not regain a renewed interest until the 1950s Jackson Pollock's drip paintings that became popularized by Hans Namuth's film *Jackson Pollock* and the Robert Goodnough's article in *Art News*, "Pollock Paints a Picture." In these two works, the painting became not an object but an act of performance, their success undoubtedly based on a fundamental element of Pollock's art, which is how clearly the work reveals the mechanics of its making. Pollock's work became an inspiration to generation of artists who, in the 1960s, explored the possibility of performance-based art practices. Painter Allan Kaprow, influenced by Pollock, organized Happenings, and created a performance based practice to expand the gestural nature of painting and its physical interaction with elements of everyday life. Amelia Jones notes that the "Pollockian performative"<sup>84</sup> radically shifted artistic practice from a modernist to a postmodernist conception of art and subjectivity, performance and the body. Jones argues that within the historical and critical discourses of art, the artist body had remained invisible, upholding the modernist pretext of the body as

---

<sup>84</sup> Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998)53.

a neutral. The Pollockian performative thus changed the tenor of art and its neutrality to raise questions about embodied subjectivity, which eventually becomes the “basis for a newly politicized art practice by emergent feminist artists.”<sup>85</sup>

The Fulxus movement and the parallels Happenings of the 1960s also upset the distinction between high art and popular culture. Feminist performance artists like Carole Schneeman and Yoko Ono made significant contributions in addressing issues of gender and the marginalization of women artists in the art institutions of the time. As Peggy Phelan notes, performance art, mostly political and cultural in nature, becomes the chosen medium for articulating “difference” in the contexts of multiculturalism, history and memory. She takes up the problematics of visibility and invisibility to explore the ways in which performance artists have used their bodies as a medium to enact their specific cultural identities, and challenge or transform their positions of marginality. By performing particular subjectivities (race, gender, sexuality, class or nation), artists dramatically unveiled the process by which non-normative subjects are conventionally excluded from art historical and cultural narratives.<sup>86</sup> Thus, performance art, throughout the twentieth century, for some artists becomes an experimental laboratory and for others a radical art form, making the archive a space that is live and embodied rather than a static, concrete repository of documents. To this end, I argue that live work by contemporary performance

---

<sup>85</sup> Jayne Wark, *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America* (Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 31.

<sup>86</sup> Amelia Jones interpreting the work of Peggy Phelan, in Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, *Performing the Body, Performing the Text* (London: Routledge, 1999), 6.

artists uses the “body as archive” to complicate psychological, perceptual and conceptual boundaries, further elaborated in Chapter 4.

The terms “performance art” and “body art” have been used interchangeably. There are, however, several scholars who distinguish between them. Amelia Jones uses the terms “body art” and “body works” to emphasize the centrality of the body in performance art from the 1960s to the mid-70s. She argues that in the 1960s the gendered and sexual body emerged onto the scene in a particularly charged way. For her, body art “*takes place through an enactment of the artist’s body, whether it be in a ‘performance’ setting or in the relative privacy of the studio, that is then documented such that it can be experienced through photography, film, video, and/or text*” (Jones’s italics).<sup>87</sup>

Performance and body artists may draw from literature, architecture, music, dance, painting, video and film; the definition of performance art is open-ended. Even though performance art refers to the acts performed live by artists, contemporary artists have complicated the notion of “performance” to expand its scope. Influenced by critical theory, performance artists have used technologies such as photography, video and film to complicate the role of the viewer as a partner in the creation. At the same time, the “term ‘performative’ has come to describe this state of perpetual animation”<sup>88</sup> to argue for the significance of engagement by artists and viewers. While I don’t distinguish between performance art and body art as somehow separate, I contend, along with Jones

---

<sup>87</sup>Jones (1998), 13.

<sup>88</sup>Roselee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since 60s* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998),10.

and Goldberg, that performance and body art are predicated on the capacity of art to disrupt, challenge and transform hegemonic power structures of the archive. While the goal is not always utopian, the focus on the body falls within the realm of “the aesthetic as a *political domain*,”<sup>89</sup> particularly its emphasis on the body as socially embedded entity. In this sense, the “body as archive” becomes the source and medium of both knowledge retrieval and knowledge construction to disrupt the authorial functions of the archive in how bodies have been constructed and shaped. Finally, performance art is dependent on the activation of intersubjectivity of artist and viewer. Its focus on the exchange of meaning between the performer and viewer “points to the impossibility of any practice being ‘inherently’ positive or negative in cultural value.”<sup>90</sup>

### **Anchors of Performance Art**

Roselee Goldberg locates the official archive of performance art in Cubism and Futurism, movements of the first quarter of the twentieth century. She argues that when artists reached an impasse they turned to performance as a means of breaking down categories and exploring new directions in art.<sup>91</sup> For her, performance manifestos from the Futurists to the present have been expressions of dissent and means to evaluate the place of the art experience in everyday life. In fact, performance is a marginal art form until the late 1960s, when it emerges as a recognized medium of expression. Its emergence coincides with the conceptual art movement, which insists that art is concerned with ideas rather than products;

---

<sup>89</sup> Jones (1998), 13.

<sup>90</sup> Jones (1998), 14.

<sup>91</sup> Goldberg (1979), 7.

art is more than a commodity to be bought and sold. Performance art, which has both entertained and shocked audiences, led to a reevaluation of notions of art and its relationship to culture. The active interest and participation of audiences in performance led artists, as individuals or groups, to perform in places ranging from art galleries to museums, as well as in alternative spaces: bars, cafés and on the streets. Performances could last from a few minutes to hours and even days, sometimes repeated several times, with or without preparation. Performance artists have defied traditional limits and definitions to create a medium of expression, thus denying “precise or easy definition beyond the simple declaration that it is live art by artists.”<sup>92</sup>

I situate the archive of performance art within two broad contexts, the art institutional framework and the body. First, as Goldberg realizes, within the institutional framework performance art differs from theater by its taking place in museums, galleries or private studios, whether its Yves Klein’s *Anthropometries of the Blue Period* (1960) in the Galerie Nationale d’Art Contemporain, Paris, Carolee Schneemann’s *Eye Body* (1963), performed in a private studio in New York, Vito Acconci’s *Seedbed* (1971), performed at the Sonnabend Gallery, New York, Chris Burden’s *Shoot* (1971) at F Space, Santa Ana, California, or Maria Abramović *Lips of Thomas*, reperformed at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 2005. The modalities of theater, dance and music, often refer to the performer as an actor, musician or dancer, usually executing a rehearsed narrative, score or set of movements: a preestablished framework that guarantees a degree of uniformity from performance to performance. The audience is mostly passive,

---

<sup>92</sup> Goldberg (1979), 9.

seated behind the “fourth wall.” In performance art, the performer is the artist who rarely follows a set framework, so performances tend to be unique events. Issues of time, space, the performer’s body, and the relationship between the performer and audience become central to its production and reception, since the audience at a performance event enjoys a more intimate relationship with the performer. There is no fourth wall as in the theater.

The second overarching aspect of performance art is its chosen medium. At all times the “body” is the central focus of performance art, and it is this focus that provides four anchors for my discussion. It is through the discourses of the body that, first, performance art confronts intersubjectivity to dissolve the boundary between the viewer and the work of art. Second, performance art challenges the traditional archives of the institutions, along with others, of the established art world—galleries and museums—questioning what constitutes art and who is its audience. Third, it challenges the social, cultural and political boundaries of the archive to critique the visual hegemony of the white, male dominated art world, raising questions of inclusion and exclusion. Fourth, its critical stance in regard to cultural institutions leads to a confrontation with issues of representation, including ones of race, class, gender, sexuality and citizenship, as an unstable archival construct—the issues that were coming to be debated beyond the walls of art institutions, and which soon brought performance artists into direct confrontation with the United States government, especially the NEA controversy of the 1990s.

In considering the four anchors of performance art, I admit that they cannot be separated into neat, distinct categories. Instead, they operate simultaneously, varying in degree according to the intent of the artist. While the early works of performance art focus on destabilizing the barriers between high art and popular culture, later works foreground issues surrounding the archives of race, class, gender, sexuality and citizenship, seeking to reclaim the body as a subject for art, particularly for women and especially women of color, gay and lesbian artists. Performance artists came to challenge the objectification of the human body, as well as the contours of subjectivity and its social constructedness. As it came to be widely recognized among the avant garde, particularly feminists, the work exhibited in museums and galleries reinforced hierarchies of patriarchal oppression. Gonzales, for example, contends that museums, and anthropologists in particular, deployed the racialized body, as material evidence of social and historical events.<sup>93</sup> I contend that the second generation of performance artists contests the archival records and representations of race, class, gender, sexuality and citizenship as a powerful tool in shaping the attitudes of the viewer.

### **Discourses of the Body: Performance Art in the 1960s and 70s**

The 1960s open on two, highly publicized performances.<sup>94</sup> Arguably, they helped frame modern performance art. The first was staged by the French painter Yves Klein and the second, a year later, by the Italian proto-conceptualist Piero Manzoni. Klein entitled his performance *Anthropometries of the Blue Period*

---

<sup>93</sup> See Jennifer A. Gonzales, *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>94</sup> Klein's performance was reported in the popular press: *Time*, Jan 27, 1961.

(Fig.3.1). It was held, in 1960, at the Galerie Nationale d'Art Contemporain in Paris, where it took place before a live, seated audience and included an orchestral accompaniment. Klein himself appears in a tuxedo and directs a group of nude women. The women, Klein's "living brushes," apply thick paint to the fronts of their bodies and then lie down on large sheets of paper or canvas and move at the artist's direction, leaving imprints of their bodies. In April 1961, Manzoni staged his performance at the Galleria La Tartaruga, in Rome, where he signed his name on both visitors and nude models, changing them into works of art. Known as Manzoni's "Living Sculptures" (*Sculture viventi*), each person was a completed work of art accompanied by a declaration of authenticity (Fig.3.2).<sup>95</sup> A red stamp certified that the subject was a whole work of art for life. A yellow stamp limited the artistic status to a body part, while a green one meant that the individual signed by Manzoni was a work of art under certain circumstances (e.g., only while sleeping or running). Finally, a purple stamp stuck on the receipt of authenticity meant that the service had been paid.

Both performances look backward to the long tradition of the nude female body as a subject of art and reflect the words of John Berger, writing about the history of images: "men act, women appear."<sup>96</sup> Or, in the words of Marita Struken: "men are depicted in action and women as objects to be looked at."<sup>97</sup> Klein's work also relates to more contemporary movements, in particular, abstract expressionism, and the work of painters like Jackson Pollack, whose paintings are

---

<sup>95</sup> Goldberg (1979), 148.

<sup>96</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Press, 1972), 47.

<sup>97</sup> Marita Struken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 81.

a record of the physical gestures made in their creation. Manzoni's work looks to that of Marcel Duchamp, especially Duchamp's Ready Mades: common, industrially-produced objects purchased by the artist, then signed by him and exhibited in an art gallery. Goldberg writes that Klein was celebrated for his daring conceptual ideas as well as his humor,<sup>98</sup> whereas Jane Blocker, situating Klein in the tradition of the French avant-garde, argues that Klein pushes the boundaries of painting.<sup>99</sup> Klein contended that he had rejected the brush and was instead using rollers. In the performance, he says, the brushes become alive and color is applied with exactness on the canvas. Furthermore, Klein was able to maintain a precise distance from the creation yet still dominate its execution. Finally, the artist says that he did not have to get himself dirty, not even his fingertips. Blocker finds profound incongruities in Klein's rhapsodies. She contends that while the models' bodies are physically engaged in the performance, Klein remains distant. His reliance on the women's bodies, she points out, may celebrate their flesh, but it also creates a kind of intellectual anonymity. Klein's experiment lies uncomfortably close to a fear of material contamination, which even extends to the tips of his fingers.

The performances by Klein and Manzoni have social and cultural implications, and both had a profound influence on the rising generation of performance artists, many of whom were women seeking, in reaction, to reclaim the female body. In doing so, they repositioned the body as a site for artistic inquiry and exploration in ways that tended to divorce performance art from the

---

<sup>98</sup> Goldberg (1998).

<sup>99</sup> Jane Blocker, *What the Body Cost: Desire, History, and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 65.

institutional history of art as a history of painting and sculpture with their dominant tradition of the nude female. Artists replaced the traditional materials paint and canvas with the immediacy and physicality of the human form. Using the body became a way of investigating physical, psychological, and emotional contours of the archive and challenging the viewer's experiences as well. Performance artists physically and mentally pushed the capabilities and limits of their bodies.

Feminism of the 1960s and 70s took strength from the civil rights movement to challenge the assumptions underlying gender and women's roles. Feminist theorists were studying gender as a system of signs, or signifiers, and the social roles assigned to differentiate sexually dimorphic bodies. As feminist writers were arguing that gender was a social construct, artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Yoko Ono and Marina Abramović, among others, used art as their platform for dissent; together they brought to the foreground issues surrounding gender inequality, sexuality, reproduction, and the lived experiences of women reclaiming the female body as a subject for art,<sup>100</sup> contesting the archive and its representation.

Carolee Schneemann was one of the first woman artists to appear nude in her performances, rendering female sexual agency from two perspectives: investigating the female body as a desiring subject and the objectification of women as a sexual body. In *Eye Body* (Fig. 3.3), performed in 1963, Schneemann challenges the discourse on gender, sexuality and the body, especially the female

---

<sup>100</sup> Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal & Sue Scott, *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art* (New York: Prestel, 2007).

body as used by artists like Klein and Manzoni. In this piece, Schneemann photographs her nude body covered in paint, glue, fur, feathers, garden snakes, glass and plastic. Schneemann says that she wanted to merge her own body with the environment to contest the idea of materials and the image.<sup>101</sup> In doing so, she becomes the material, the image and its maker, re-signifying the archive as an embodied space. Most essential for her is the idea that she is the one marking and writing over her body as an erotic, sexually desired and desiring body. Her later works, especially *Meat Joy* of 1964 (Fig. 3.4), further explore the medium of flesh as an erotic site that can be excessive, indulgent and material. Using raw fish, chickens, sausages, wet paint, transparent plastic, rope brushes and paper scraps, she creates a performance that shifts between tenderness and eroticism, control and abandon. The qualities enacted, she contends, could at any moment be sensual, comic, joyous or repellent.<sup>102</sup> As Goldberg notes, such performances functioned on both a visceral and intellectual level, and they transformed the spectators into “voyeurs, sucked into a vortex of contained eroticism surrounding the performance.”<sup>103</sup>

Over the years, the medium of blood, especially menstrual blood, became an important medium in Schneemann’s work. In my opinion, her most powerful performance is *Interior scroll* (Fig.3.5). In the work, performed in 1975, Schneemann ritualistically stands on a table, her body painted with mud. She

---

<sup>101</sup> Carolee Schneemann, *Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>102</sup> Schneemann (2003).

<sup>103</sup> Goldberg (1998), 95.

spreads her legs and slowly extracts a paper scroll from her vagina while reading from it. Schneeman states that:

I thought of the vagina in many ways-- physically, conceptually: as a sculptural form, an architectural referent, the sources of sacred knowledge, ecstasy, birth passage, transformation. I saw the vagina as a translucent chamber of which the serpent was an outward model: enlivened by its passage from the visible to the invisible, a spiraled coil ringed with the shape of desire and generative mysteries, attributes of both female and male sexual power. This source of interior knowledge would be symbolized as the primary index unifying spirit and flesh in Goddess worship.<sup>104</sup>

The performance focuses on the urges of the female body, its bodily functions and emotions. While Schneemann's work challenged the taboos associated with the female body, it also contested the male-dominated art world in an effort to take back the female nude.<sup>105</sup> Unlike the work of Klein and Manzoni, Schneemann's was attacked not only from conservative quarters, but also from left-wing male and female artists and even feminists.<sup>106</sup>

The second early performance artist whose work was important in reclaiming the female body is Yoko Ono. Ono's *Cut Piece* (Fig.3.6) was performed, in 1964, in Japan and later reperformed in New York.<sup>107</sup> Ono sits on the floor of the stage in front of a large audience with a pair of scissors next to her. The audience was invited to cut her clothes, while she sat still before them.

---

<sup>104</sup> Schneemann (2003), 153.

<sup>105</sup> Heartney et. al. (2007).

<sup>106</sup> Marsha Meskimmon, "Chronology Through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally," in *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, eds. Cornelia Butler and Lisa Mark (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).

<sup>107</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvQ36yHGfzE>

Influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of existentialism, she enlisted her viewers to complete her works of art in order to complete her identity. *Cut Piece* also breaks through the invisible frame male artist's like Klein were using in performance art. Her direct engagement with the audience in completing her performance can seem at first to minimize the role of the artist, but only when judged by the traditional standard of artist as maker of objects. *Cut Piece* heralded a new era. It touched on issues of gender and sexism as well as the greater, universal affliction of human suffering and loneliness. Marsha Meskimmon argues that Ono's performance "implicated her audience in voyeuristic, potentially violent encounters with women, thus staging the parameters of masculine power. . . . Ono's body acted as a docile 'Oriental woman' and a troubling reminder of the endurance of the Japanese after Hiroshima."<sup>108</sup> For her, in the postwar restructuring of economies, Ono's body represents the imperialism and complexity of articulating female subjectivity within a cross-cultural framework.

While the performances of Klein and Manzoni were admired for breaking the traditional boundaries, Schneemann's work was criticized and ignored by reviewers, "indignant that a female artist could insert her nude self into her art work."<sup>109</sup> Ono's daring *Cut Piece*, was criticized by several male artists for being too "animalistic."<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, the work of Schneemann and Ono had a significant impact on feminist art and scholarship, even if it took decades for their

---

<sup>108</sup> Meskimmon (2007), 332.

<sup>109</sup> Goldberg (1998), 96.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

pioneering work to be assimilated and properly credited.<sup>111</sup> Historically, Schneeman and Ono's performances complicated the embodiment, memory and history of the representation of the female body. Their performances disrupt the private and public representation of women in order to reinscribe, reconfigure and resignify the "body as archive." They are both image and its maker.

Amelia Jones contends that feminist body art has the potential to achieve certain radically dislocating effects through the notion of engagement and exchange. She reads the work of Schneemann and other artists from contemporary theories of subjectivity and aesthetics. For her, their works are a dialogue with bodies and selves as expressions of postmodernism in the context of the performer and the spectators. She also contends that performance and body art offer an exploration of particular practices, ones in which the body "radically negotiates the structures of interpretation that inform our understanding of visual culture."<sup>112</sup> The performative self-exposures and enactments of artists like Schneeman and Ono make them both author and object, and therefore pose the subject as intersubjective. In this way the performance artist work in and on the archive, making the social, cultural and political contexts crucial in the analysis of performance and body art.<sup>113</sup>

Paralleling the feminist artists, several male artists of the 1970s began incorporating their bodies in a variety of ways, influenced by the practice of conceptual art. In particular, Vito Acconci and the performance art of British duo Gilbert & George offer important insights into the discourses of the body in

---

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Jones (1998), 10.

<sup>113</sup> Jones (1998).

performance art. Gilbert & George used the human body to perform as “living sculptures,” making themselves the art object. Perhaps the first openly gay artists of the period, they began working together in 1967, after they met at St. Martin’s School of Art. Gilbert and George appeared as figures in their own work, making their debut in *The Singing Sculpture* (Fig. 3.7), performed in 1969. In this piece they covered their heads and hands with bronze-colored metallic powder, stood on a table, and sang along to a recording of Flanagan and Allen's 1931 song “Underneath the Arches.” The performance lasted an entire day. Eventually the suits they wore for the sculpture became for them a sort of uniform, and they rarely appear in public without suits, dress shirts, and ties. They continue to collaborate and remain partners until today, and have virtually never appeared apart. Gilbert & George argue that they cannot disassociate their art from their everyday lives, insisting that everything they do is art. Although the artists claim that anything is a potential subject, their work has in fact addressed social issues, in particular, taboos. Implicit in their work is the idea that an artist’s sacrifice and personal investment is a necessary condition of art. They have depicted themselves as naked figures, recasting the male nude as something vulnerable and fragile, rather than as a potent figure of strength. Their art over the past four decades has been seen as subversive, controversial, and provocative, because it deals with themes of religion, sexuality, race and identity, urban life, terrorism, superstition, AIDS-related loss, aging, and death.

In the early 1970s, Vito Acconci began subjecting himself to actions, tasks, and manipulations that tested in varying degrees the limits and malleability

of the human body (and in this he was not alone). Acconci is known as a performance and video artist who uses his own body as the subject. His performance and video work complicate the role of confrontation and location for his viewers. Acconci directed his attention to the body in a series of performances in which he bit himself or burned the hair off his body. His most noted performance piece is *Seedbed* (Fig. 3.8). In *Seedbed*, performed on January 15 to 29, 1971, at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York, Acconci lay hidden underneath a kind of ramp or false floor that ran the length of the gallery. Lying under the ramp, he masturbated while talking through a loudspeaker, describing his fantasies about the visitors walking above him on the ramp.

For Acconci, *Seedbed* was a way to involve the public in the work's production by creating a situation of reciprocal interchange between artist and viewer, and in this regard his performance recalls that of Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*. In an interview with Shelly Jackson, Acconci emphasized the importance of language and the body in disclosing an activity that would have otherwise remained private. He further stated that "like the body, language is both utterly personal and basic currency of public relations."<sup>114</sup> Acconci's later works play on the paradox of the body and language. Jones's analysis of Acconci's work argues for a parallel between feminist body art projects like those of Schneemann and Ono. She contends that while Acconci "question[s] the previously assumed authority of the implicitly heterosexual, white male artist by multiplying the

---

<sup>114</sup> Shelly Jackson talks with Vito Acconci  
[http://www.believmag.com/issues/200612/?read=interview\\_acconci](http://www.believmag.com/issues/200612/?read=interview_acconci).

effects of his body on display,”<sup>115</sup> he also opens the space for an investigation of spectatorial desire. Judith Butler explains the performative reiteration as one confirmed by the body, though always assumed to be the white, middle-class, heterosexual male. She is interested in the “power of discourse” that regulates and constrains performativity.”<sup>116</sup> From this perspective Acconci’s art is inexorably involved in the disrupting the social and cultural archives that regulate the public and private body in relationship to sexual desire. Acconci challenges the archive and the representation of the public and private body as a strategy for resistance.

### **Contingency of Pain and Blood in the Performance Art**

The political climate of Europe and the United States in the late 60s and early 70s was in uproar. The mood was of irritation and anger as students and workers protested against the “the establishment.” Several younger artists approached the institutions of art and its archive with open disdain as reflections of bourgeois society. Questioning the premise of art, artists took it upon themselves to take up new directions, and the gallery and museum were attacked as institutions of commercialism. As artist like Aconcci, Gilbert & George and others responded by disrupting the archive’s formal properties of time, space, location, and subject matter, others like the Viennese Actionists (Fig. 3.9) were far more openly political and radical in nature. Hermann Nitsch, founder of the group, gave performances reenacting ancient Dionysian and Christian rituals that involved horrific sacrificial acts with animals and blood. He, along with Günter

---

<sup>115</sup> Jones (1998), 104.

<sup>116</sup> Butler (1993), 2.

Brus, Otto Mühl and Rudolf Schwarzkogler, produced some of the most provocative, insurgent and challenging performances of the 1960s. Their sexually-charged and anti-social works created a profound and irreparable upheaval in the way in which art was conceived. Using their own bodies as raw material, the Actionists undertook experiments in cruelty that disassembled the human body and its acts into compacted gestures of blood, meat and excreta.<sup>117</sup> According to Philip Ursprung, the Viennese Actionists used the “artist’s body as a place for the encounter of public and private.”<sup>118</sup> Several times members of the group were arrested at their performances for causing a public disturbance. Their actions and responses in the public spheres underscored the highly oppressive Austrian postwar society. Ursprung argues that to transgress the boundaries of the art world, the Actionists’ main addressee became the police: their ideal audience. As the police reacted to the Actionists’ transgressive activities, the media amplified the public response by photographing the arrests at exhibitions, creating counter-archives and narratives. Ursprung argues that the moment of imprisonment becomes a compensation for the lack of official recognition of the Actionists by museums.<sup>119</sup>

Marina Abramović is another European performance artist whose early work, in the 1970s, centers on political resistance, especially the embodied memory of oppression, and whose body is her medium. Abramović’s early performances were deeply rooted in her unhappy childhood growing up in

---

<sup>117</sup> Philip Ursprung, “Viennese Actionism in the 1960s,” in *Performing the Body/ Performing the text* eds. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>118</sup> Ursprung (1999), 146.

<sup>119</sup> Ursprung (1999), 147.

Yugoslavia during Marshal Tito's repressive regime. In her work, she put her body in extreme danger in order to explore the relationship between performer and audience, the limits of endurance, and the possibilities of the mind.

Abramović early work *Lips of Thomas* (Figs. 3.10, 3.11) derived from St. Thomas Aquinas, whose *Summa Theologica* addresses (among other issues) the question of whether God should be praised with the lips.<sup>120</sup> After noting all the scriptural arguments for and against verbal devotions, Aquinas answers that we praise God with our lips to arouse our own devotion and that of other people, but that "it profits one nothing to praise with the lips if one praise not with the heart." Read in this context, Abramovic's wordless *Lips of Thomas* pulls her heart back and forth between her family's incompatible Christian and Communist beliefs.<sup>121</sup>

In the performance, Abramović was naked, seated behind a table covered with a tablecloth. She ate a kilo of honey with a silver spoon and then drank a liter of red wine from a crystal glass. After breaking the glass she cut a five-pointed, communist star into her abdomen with a razor. She then whiped herself repeatedly and laid down on a block of ice shaped in a cross with a heater suspended above. The heat caused Abramović to bleed profusely, even as the ice froze the back of her body. The audience interceded to end the performance by wrapping her in coats. *Lips of Thomas* coincides with the development of feminist art during Tito's regime. Abramović continues to present performances on various issues centered on the body, often putting herself in perilous and

---

<sup>120</sup> Hartney et. al. (2007).

<sup>121</sup> Marla Carlson, *Marina Abramović Repeats: Pain, Art, and Theater*, <http://www.hotreview.org/articles/marinaabram.htm> (2005).

painful situations.<sup>122</sup> She subsequently worked with her partner Ulay, who “shared this need to confront their limitations, their egos, their identities – sometimes at great physical risks. They shared the same birthday and felt they were karmic twins.”<sup>123</sup> In one performance Ulay sewed his lips shut with a needle and thread. Abramović answered all the questions as if she were Ulay. The performance ended at the moment when she felt she had spoken as herself.

Important aspects of Abramović performance art have been her expectation of the public and her faith in the process of art. Although Abramović herself is reluctant to see a connection between her art and the feminist body art of the 1970s, Hartney and others contend that her performances are about spectacle, power and commerce,<sup>124</sup> I would argue that Abramović pushes the limits for her body to make explicit the limits of the physical and psychological body in discourse. For example, in a performance entitled *Role Exchange* she traded places with a prostitute in the Amsterdam red-light district. In *Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful* (Fig.3.12) she confronted the psychological boundaries of art and fashion as they relate specifically to gender. Confronting the viewer in this performance she violently brushed her hair for an hour repeating the words “art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful,” in an attempt to destabilize the parameters that define art and gender practices.

Abramović and the Actionist’s performances highlight the personal as political, and the body in performance as one that relates to embodied history and

---

<sup>122</sup> Hartney et. al. (2007).

<sup>123</sup> C. Carr, *On Edge: Performance at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), xiv.

<sup>124</sup> Hartney et. al. (2007).

memories of oppression. They use pain as an important element to transmit and evoke emotions in their audiences to disrupt the authorial function of the archive. Drawing on the body as archive, they created a political discourse centering on oppression and degradation of humanity, emphasizing blood and pain in a public setting. The goal of political art was not simply the (re)presentation or critique of structures of authority; rather it was to question and expose an ideology and its basic premises and redefine images and how they mediate between audiences.<sup>125</sup>

Finally, no discussion of the body and pain is complete without acknowledging the work of controversial artist Chris Burden, whose performances were the ultimate test of bodily endurance. Burden is most famously known for *Shoot* (Fig.3.13), staged, in 1971, at F Space, Santa Ana, California. In *Shoot* Burden asked a friend to shoot him at close range with a .22 caliber rifle. He was struck in the arm, and at a more dangerous point than the preagreed upon one. The performance survives in the evidence of photographs and as a short video, available for viewing on the Internet. Although the photographs and video of *Shoot* are evidence of what took place, Burden's circulating photographs and video complicate that notion of performance, taking it beyond a live event (and beyond the body in relationship to intersubjective experience, discussed in Chapter 5).

Like Abramović, Burden argues that for him “art does not have a purpose[...]; it is a free spot in society, where you can do anything.”<sup>126</sup> C. Carr contends that artists like Burden establish their art outside the social contract,

---

<sup>125</sup> Hal Foster, “Readings in Cultural Resistance,” *Recoding: Art, Spectacle and Culture Politics* (New York: New Press, 1985).

<sup>126</sup> Carr (1993), 20.

creating a space for artists and spectators to do what they would otherwise think inappropriate.<sup>127</sup> The performances of several of the artists cited test the limits of the body, yet some, like Burden, prove reluctant to categorize or disclose the meaning of their work. (Scholars have seen a protest against the violence of the Vietnam War in Burden's *Shoot*.) In the absence, scholars have taken various positions to offer critical frameworks in which performances might be understood. Lea Vergine's *Body Art and Performance: The Body as Language*, published in 1974, was one of the first to take up the birth and development of body art. Vergine argues that artists of the body art movement offer

an intimate acquaintance with all the possibilities of self-knowledge that can stem from the body and the investigation of the body. The body is stripped bare in an extreme attempt to acquire the right to a rebirth back into the world. Most of the time, the experiences we are dealing with are authentic, and they are consequently cruel and painful. *Those who are in pain will tell you that they have a right to be taken seriously.*<sup>128</sup>

Vergine chooses a psychoanalytic lens to examine the works of the artists she selects as she takes up the themes of love-hate and aggression-recompensation. Scholars and cultural critics in the 1960s and early 70s leaned heavily on psychoanalysis to understand performances that often centered on misogyny and physical pain, or included the ingestion of urine and feces, in arguing for what was real and what was unreal. Kathy O'Dell sees the concerns of artists like Burden and Abramović as a "masochistic performance," though

---

<sup>127</sup> Carr (1993).

<sup>128</sup> Lea Vergine, *Body art and Performance* (Milano: Palazzo Casati Stampa, 2000).

influenced by everyday life.<sup>129</sup> She calls attention to the structure of the “contract” to emphasize the powerful link between the audience and the performer. For her, performance artists of the 60s and 70s emphasized cultural suffering as a means to point to two interconnected social institutions: the law and the home, both founded upon the contract.<sup>130</sup> Using this metaphor, she argues that the artists used the contract to address volatile social and political issues like Communism and the Vietnam War. Although O’Dell emphasizes the performance strategies as intensely political, she employs a Lacanian perspective to explain the psychological motivations of the performance artist, undercutting her argument by assigning a low value to audience participation, thus avoiding the issue of emotional engagement. Works, I would contend, may be fraught with psychological meaning for both performer and viewer, and in addition they create a discourse that destabilizes the Euro-American notions of a white, male dominated art scene; furthermore, they critique the “desired utopia or perceived dystopia”<sup>131</sup> to expose the structures of authority and assumptions of truth that construct the archives of race, nation, gender and human sexuality. The body becomes intrinsically linked to the archive as medium, form and emotions to contest the authority of institutions on a personal and political level. To this end, performance artists move discourses of the body beyond the material and

---

<sup>129</sup> Kathy O’Dell, *Contact with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>130</sup> O’Dell (1998), 12.

<sup>131</sup> Foster (1985), 147.

psychological to complicate the ideological discourses that define and mediate between images and their audiences.<sup>132</sup>

### **Identity and Essences: 1980s and 1990s**

Clearly, Mary Coble's performances look back to the artists and movements that I have cited. She uses pain inflicted upon and blood and derived from her own body as principal media in her performance work. But the underlying themes of her work, with the exception perhaps of political oppression (broadly considered), have little to do with those of early performance artists like Burden, Acconci and others. The oppression of which she so clearly speaks in fact develops out of another aspect of early performance, and it, in turn, develops out of the Civil Rights movement as it comes to impact the then hermetic art world. Like several Artists of the 1980s and 90s, Coble's focus on identity politics and the body highlights the contingency of pain and blood to complicate the logocentrism and embodiment of the archive, using the strategy of reenactment, performing and copying history as a means to draw the audience to stimulate, repeat and reproduce the archive.<sup>133</sup> Robert Blackson notes that the conventional element necessary to construct a reenactment is drawing from one's personal motivation of the past or from historical reference. Once the reenactment has been performed it is open to interpretation. It need not follow the path provided by historical evidence and has no predictable

---

<sup>132</sup> Auslander (1992).

<sup>133</sup> Robert Blackson, "Once more . . . With Feeling: Reenactment in Contemporary Art and Culture," *Art Journal* (Spring 2007), 28-40.

conclusion,<sup>134</sup> allowing for an analysis of performance art beyond the lens of psychoanalysis to include questions of multiculturalism and postmodernism.

Just as the humanities and social sciences were challenged by discourses concerning the social and cultural construction of identity and difference, so have contemporary art practices been reshaped. The Civil Rights movement shifted discourses of race and the social construction of the archive, especially in relationship to the body. I question how performance art is indeed political and, if so, how artists contest hegemonic discourses of the body and practices of everyday life. In the 1970s, performance artists of color confronted their racial marginalization at the hands of museums and galleries. Responding to the shifting social, cultural and political landscapes, artists deepened the analysis of identity and difference, especially the social constructedness of subjectivity.

Performance art of the 1960s and 70s profoundly influenced artists of the 80s and 90s, especially when articulating issues around identity and difference. Charles Garoian argues for pedagogical strategies that shape performance art, problematizing the relationship between culture, language, ideology, race, the body and technology. He critiques the way performers and viewers interact, using language that codifies and stereotypes the self and the body. Garoian contends that performance art generates spaces of resistance, empowers citizens and examines the aesthetics that surround the embodied expression of culture; it's racial and gender codes. Performance art, in his view, critiques the cultural practices that produce oppression. He argues that on a performative level, this

---

<sup>134</sup> Ibid

pedagogy of performance is the point of location between the repressive spaces and new discourses that make the struggles of the marginalized more visible.<sup>135</sup>

Performance artist Fred Wilson staged, in 1992, a performance for the Whitney Museum of Art in New York. He began his performance by greeting a small group of docents and arranged to meet with them in an upstairs gallery and to give them a tour of his exhibition. He then disappeared and changed into the uniform worn by the Whitney Museum guards and took up a post in the gallery, remaining silent as the docents waited for him. After waiting for the artist for some time the docents began wandering the gallery, walking past the artist in his uniform and not paying attention to him or recognizing him. When Wilson revealed himself, several of docents responded with surprise and embarrassment. Jennifer Gonzales calls attention to the “race specific framing of the museum where ‘black’ bodies are visible if they appear in the works of art, or in the midst of ‘white’ museum going public, but are effectively invisible as part of the staff.”<sup>136</sup> Wilson’s performance, entitled *My Life as a Dog*, demonstrates the ways in which the black body remains invisible and read as insignificant by “visual regimes that support cultural, racial, and class hierarchies.”<sup>137</sup>

Artists over the past two decades have addressed the relationship of the black body and its social, historical and even aesthetic frameworks through which subject formation acts in relationship to discourses of race. In similarly powerful ways African American women artists like Howardena Pindell, Lorraine O’Grady and Adriane Piper draw attention to the display of bodies, images and artifacts,

---

<sup>135</sup> Charles Garoian (1999).

<sup>136</sup> Gonzales (2008), 1.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

offering a critique of history and the persistence's of race as a form of visual hegemony that dominated archival practices.

From a historical standpoint, the art world saw dramatic changes in conjunction with the Civil Rights movement, which impacted the social and political fabric of American culture. Responding to the racial and gender relations in the public sphere, an increasing number of underrepresented artists of color emerged to challenge conventional distinctions between high and low art and offer critiques of traditional exclusionary practices that dominated the art world. The early African American artist Howardena Pindell (1970s), instrumental in the artist consciousness-raising group, expressed her disappointment with white feminist artists who considered her personal experience as a black woman as too political and “therefore not worthy of being addressed.”<sup>138</sup> Other artists of color--including Betye Saar, Ana Mendieta, Faith Ringgold, and Adrian Piper--were excluded from the women's art movement and exhibitions.

In her 1980 video *Free, White and 21* (Fig.3.14), Howardena Pindell responded to the feminist movement as well as the racism she experienced as a Black women artist. From her own experiences of racism in schools, places of employment and other social settings, she critiqued both the art world and the practices that marginalized Black Americans; she did so she says “to satirize the condescension and hostility she encountered from many white women in the

---

<sup>138</sup> Maura Reilly, “Introduction: Towards Transnational Feminism,” in *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, eds. Maura Reilly & Linda Nochlin (Brooklyn: Merrell Publishers Limited, 2007), 15-45, 29.

feminist movement.”<sup>139</sup> Pindell plays two roles in the video, wrapping and unwrapping her head in gauze bandages. She recounts stories of racist abuse while performing the role of a white feminist who denies the veracity of her story. Moving between roles she wears a blond wig, white stage makeup and dark sunglasses. In the end, Pindell pulls a white stocking over her head to draw a visual connection between the dismissiveness of white feminists and a mugging. Pindell’s work challenges the complex relationship of Black Americans as members of communities in relationship to race and gender and their rights to citizenship. Challenging the material conditions and oppression experienced by Black Americans, she argues that history has influenced and shaped every fabric of their lives, including participating in the art world.

Performance artist Lorriane O’Grady, a Jamaican immigrant, articulates her experiences negotiating the diverse pressures of middle and upper class British colonial values: the Irish ethics taught to her in a girls prep school, and those of the neighboring working-class Black culture. Her performance *Millie Bourgeoisie Noire* (1980-83, Fig. 3.15) offered a powerful critique of race, class and gender. In it she invaded several select New York art openings as an invented character, wearing a tiara, celebrating the Silver Jubilee of her coronation, and a sash with the words “Millie Bourgeoisie Noire.” O’Grady disrupted art events by reading poems about art and race. Sewn on her gown were 180 pairs of white gloves that represent the unknown histories of the women who had worn them.

---

<sup>139</sup> Valerie Smith, “Abundant Evidence: Black Women Artists of the 1960s and 70s,” in *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, eds. Cornelia Butler and Lisa Mark (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).

Flagellating herself with a whip, she criticized Black artists for falling to assert themselves, crying, “That’s enough! No more boot-licking . . . no more ass-kissing . . . Black art must take some risks!”<sup>140</sup>

Shannon Jackson argues for the tensions and obfuscations about racial identification and injury, crediting the feminists of color (Audre Loure, Gloria Anzaldua, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, among others) who have contributed important critiques in troubling identity claims. Mapping performativity’s theoretical derivations, she contends that theories of performativity have important implications for understanding not only sex/gender identity, but also racialized subjectivity. She examines Adriane Piper’s *Calling Card* to complicate the relationship between the “performer and audience,” in relationship to gender, race and class. Performed at several venues in the late 1980s, Piper would hand a card to members of the audience on which she had written:

Dear Friend,

I am black. I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do.

---

<sup>140</sup> Smith (2007).

I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me.

In critiquing Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick, Shannon Jackson equates the homophobic reaction with a racial encounter. She states: “while the declaration of homosexual identity is received as a seduction (Butler’s position), the declaration of racial identity is received as accusation.”<sup>141</sup> Using Piper’s “racial” work as an illustration, she argues that performances create “self-recognition and identification in one audience member, at the same time [they elicit] shock and discomfort in another.”<sup>142</sup> Such performances repeat normalized stereotypes not to reify them but to expose them, and the audience finds different ways of being accused, injured or left out.

Allowing for a deeper level of investigation of race, performance and performativity, Jackson shows that performances of racialized body, such as Piper’s, can offer a particularly illuminating laboratory for investigating race privilege and race injury. She argues that “the performativity critique asks us to reconsider the models of subjectivity and dynamics of locution with which artists experiment. From this view, a number of performance based artists might turn out to be ‘performativity coordinators’ after all.”<sup>143</sup> To this end, I argue that Black artists have engaged with the discourse of the racialized body and its archives, not only as a source of knowledge retrieval, but knowledge construction and agency as well.

---

<sup>141</sup> Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theater in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 187.

<sup>142</sup> Jackson (2004), 186.

<sup>143</sup> Jackson (2004), 216.

Although issues of race gained attention in art world in the 1970s, it is not until 1982 that the first exhibitions to raise issues about contemporary art and homosexual identity was organized; it was entitled “Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art.” Bringing gay and lesbian artists together, the exhibition attempted to identify, from both personal and political perspectives, the nature of gay and lesbian art in regards to content and sensibility. While the reactions to the exhibition by the gay community were mixed, some questioning the validity of a universal gay sensibility, the AIDS crisis and the NEA Controversy, of the late 1980s, over the body and sexuality would unite the gay community, emphasizing the marginalization of the queer body and its invisibility in museums and galleries. The founding of ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) in 1987 led to organized public demonstrations and the shop-window display of AIDS activist posters at the New Museum of Contemporary Art. Keith Haring, who until this time had sublimated his gay identity in his colorful cartoon caricatures, made a moving work of art for the ACT-UP fundraiser in 1989. Entitled *Silence = Death* (Fig. 3.16), it became the organization’s motto. The poster consists of a square black field with dozens of intermingling figures outlined in silver. The figures are shown in gestures that denote sobbing and grieving. Over the center of the image is a large pink triangle as a defiant protest against indifference.<sup>144</sup>

For gay and lesbian artists, one result of the national visibility of ACT-UP was the backlash from the religious right. The battle that ensued came to be

---

<sup>144</sup> GLBTQ Arts, [http://www.glbtc.com/arts/performance\\_art.html](http://www.glbtc.com/arts/performance_art.html)

known as the “culture wars” of the 1990s. Joining the liberal side were the social minorities--gays, African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics--that became all the more defiant and determined to defeat the conservative agenda of exclusion and hate. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), which had provided modest grants to artists and shows, emerged as the lightning rod for conservative and homophobic attacks. Fearing the loss or reduction of its budget by Republican senators, the NEA became a cultural surveillance agency that exerted control over artists and museum curators by withdrawing or threatening to withdraw public funding. The NEA ruled that no grant would be given to artists whose work was deemed “obscene,” especially those whose works had any erotic or sexual content. Art that involved sexual or bodily functions was categorized as “morally reprehensible.” Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ* (Fig.3.17) became the center of controversy in 1989.<sup>145</sup> The Reverend Donald Wildmon of the conservative American Family Association, of Tupelo, Missouri, held a press conference to denounce NEA funding of “anti-Christian bigotry,” referring to the exhibition of Serrano’s work in which he submerged a crucifix in a jar of his own urine. The controversy later expanded to include the work of other artists, especially the homoerotic photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe (Fig. 3.18) and the work of Karen Finley, whose performances and recordings contained graphic depictions of sexuality, abuse, and disenfranchisement.<sup>146</sup> Shortly after the American Family Association press conference, Senators Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Alfonse D’Amato (R-NY) denounced Serrano’s work; thirty-six senators

---

<sup>145</sup> <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/dacasey/Serrano.htm>

<sup>146</sup> [http://phomul.canalblog.com/archives/mapplethorpe\\_robert/index.html](http://phomul.canalblog.com/archives/mapplethorpe_robert/index.html)

subsequently signed a letter to the NEA expressing their outrage. Representative Dick Armey, a Republican from Texas and long-time opponent of federal arts support, sent a letter, signed by 107 representatives, to the NEA calling attention to a retrospective entitled “Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment,” scheduled to open at Washington's Corcoran Gallery of Art in July 1989. Armey characterized Mapplethorpe’s work as “morally reprehensible trash.” The Mapplethorpe show was cancelled by the Corcoran, but the Washington Project for the Arts later hosted it. The action by the Corcoran was strongly criticized, and in September 1989 the Director, Christina Orr-Cahall, issued a formal statement of apology: “The Corcoran Gallery of Art in attempting to defuse the NEA funding controversy by removing itself from the political spotlight, has instead found itself in the center of controversy. By withdrawing from the Mapplethorpe exhibition, we, the board of trustees and the director, have inadvertently offended many members of the arts community which we deeply regret. Our course in the future will be to support art, artists and freedom of expression.” Artists, along with gay and lesbian rights activists, picketed the Corcoran, as slides of Mapplethorpe’s photographs were projected on the beaux-arts façade of the museum.<sup>147</sup>

Lynda Hart points out how the NEA controversies explicitly concerned policing the display of bodies, and to some extent related to sexual anxiety and attitudes towards our own bodies and those of others. She writes that the sexualized body is always a body in relationship to others, and this body is where ‘identities’ get constructed. Because the signifiers of the lesbian

---

<sup>147</sup> GLBTQ Arts, [http://www.glbtc.com/arts/performance\\_art.html](http://www.glbtc.com/arts/performance_art.html)

and gay ‘bodies’ as opposed to racial, ethnic, or gendered bodies, are less secure, harder to read, presumably less fixed in a visible economy, the gay and the lesbian affirmative slogan ‘we are everywhere’ must indeed seem ominous to the paranoid gaze that seek identifiable objects.<sup>148</sup>

In this context Hart examines the work of Karen Finley, one of the artists who was “defunded” by the NEA for the (deemed obscene) content of her performances. Hart stresses the link between defunding and homophobia, though Finley was the only heterosexual artist to have her funding withdrawn. She argues that through the gender-transgressive content of her performances, Finley, too, becomes a victim of homophobia. Hart further argues that Finley’s straight body enacting queer is enough to make the spectators and funding bodies uncomfortable.

The NEA controversy has had a huge impact on the scholarship in the humanities, especially that dealing with feminist and queer theory. Additionally, the AIDS epidemic brought attention to the sexualized body and strong responses from artists that contest the hegemonic forces (social, familial and legal) to confront the status of the homosexual body in relationship to the dominant modes of heterosexual identity. Gay and Lesbian artists, drawing from autobiography and history, challenge the public and private archives to question their authenticity and authority. In a similar way Cvetkovich emphasized the need to address queerness and the discourses of the body in the gay-lesbian archive to makes visible the traumatic loss of history that accompanied sexual life and the

---

<sup>148</sup> Lynda Hart, “Reconsidering Homophobia: Karen Finley’s Indiscretions,” in *Reader in Cultural Criticism: Performance Studies*, ed. Erin Striff (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillian, 2003), 66.

formation of sexual politics. She argues for the archive of feelings, especially the role of memory and affect in compensating for institutional neglect.<sup>149</sup>

Works by artists Felix Gonzalez-Torres and David Wojnarowicz offered a moving account of the marginalization of the gay community highlighting the body and performance. With sponsorship from the Museum of Modern Art, Gonzales-Torres created, shortly after his lover's AIDS-related death, photo-billboards of his own empty, rumped bed. They are an historic, but little discussed milestone of 1991 (Fig. 3.19). Emphasizing the absence(s) of the AIDS body and queer discourses from museum collections, Gonzales-Torres's billboards reflect on the devastating effect AIDS had on his community. At the same time, they suggest how fully AIDS radicalized art institutions. Although works like Gonzalez-Torres's have forebears in conceptual and feminist art of the seventies, major museums never sponsored such provocative work before the AIDS epidemic. As one of the reviewers writes, "Felix Gonzales-Torres's art was always charged with the sensibility of an overtly queer man, his art nonetheless often passed under the radar of the self-appointed moral guardians in both the political and art worlds. He was able to infiltrate mainstream consciousness in a most beautiful and poetic way. Activist without being didactic, a catalyst of that rare combination of sensuality and political empathy, he raised the bar on future

---

<sup>149</sup> Cvetkovich (2003).

Judith Halberstam, *In Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

queer art making, and continues to be one of the most influential artist of his generation.”<sup>150</sup>

David Wojnarowicz was one of the most bitter opponents of Senator Jesse Helms and the Reverend Donald Wildmon. Wojnarowicz responded to the NEA controversy and the AIDS crisis through performance art. The tragedy and injustices of the AIDS epidemic within the gay community became the central subject of his art and writings. Using his work as a polemical tool he raises questions about social responsibility and the AIDS epidemic, documenting his own suffering. In 1990 he had his lips sewn shut in a performance that appeared in the *Silence=Death* ACT-UP Video (Fig. 3.20).

Several other artists in the years to follow have taken up issues of gender and sexuality, citing works of Judith Butler as central in their efforts to destabilize the definition of gender and highlight the socially constructed, artificial and performative nature of gender identity.<sup>151</sup> Catherine Opie, among others, creates self portraits to explore to an extreme degree the psychological and physical body, which she subjects to painful processes. Opie’s early work centers on issues of identity politics. Using photography she questions readability/un-readability of gender. She employs her back as a screen on which to project photographic memory images. In one portrait she questions the predominance of the heteronormative narrative by having a friend etch into her skin a child-like drawing of a house and two female stick figures holding hands (Fig. 3. 21). In another portrait, Opie has the word “dyke” tattooed on her neck (Fig. 3.22). Her

---

<sup>150</sup> <http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/FelixGT/FelixIntro.html>

<sup>151</sup> Butler (1990)

self-portraits confront the viewer with her queer identity and assert the stereotype of her butch performative stance through her haircut and tattooing. Opie's work—which is known and admired by Mary Coble—affirms the stance of feminist theorists and the two fundamental contributions they have made in understanding individual identity. First, feminist theory separated the social from the biological, arguing that the product of biology is relatively stable and unchangeable. Second, having separated social from the biological, feminist theory insisted that gender was not something "essential" to an individual's identity. Halberstam argues that Opie's self portrait from the back becomes a means to disrupt the social gaze. In this manner the artist's work opens up a space for gender variation and for different inscriptions of the sexed body.<sup>152</sup> Opie, positions her butch female body, combining physical presence and time, raising questions for her audience to trouble the boundaries of heteronormativity and the desires of the queer body.

Ron Athey is another artist whose performance art deals with issues of HIV. As a gay artist, diagnosed with HIV, Athey creates elaborate performances that deal with public fear, the body and misconceptions surrounding HIV. He uses needles, crowns of thorns, razors, knives to cut into his body, using his body and blood as a medium of his art. Athey was the target of the 1994 NEA controversy, as he had received \$150 of federal funds to support his art that had visibly gay content.

In his performance, an excerpt from *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life* at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 1994, Athey cuts into his co-performer

---

<sup>152</sup> Halberstam (1998).

Darryl Carlton's back. Before the performance all audience members were asked to sign a release. As the co-performers back starts to bleed, Athey places strips of absorbent paper towel to the cuts to soak up the blood. The blood-stained paper towels were hung high above the ground, so when spectators walked into the performance space, they had to walk under the hanging blood stained paper towels. The local paper wrote a sensational front-page story about the performance in Minneapolis Star-Tribune. The story quickly made national headlines. Athey's performance works as a testimony in exposing the fear and lack of knowledge of the general public of HIV/AIDS and the body. His performance further reinforces the politics of his critics and lawmakers like Jesse Helms, reinforcing the social and cultural anxiety and stereotypes surrounding the queer body and misconceptions of HIV/ AIDS.

The works of art discussed in this chapter demonstrate the ways in which performance artists, historically, have complicated the relationship between theory and practice, one that opens the platform for a theorization of embodiment, the archive and intersubjectivity. Performance art and performance studies scholars have argued that performance art challenges hegemonic and injurious speech acts by decentralizing the authority of the speaker. Garoian, Auslander and Jones argue for the concept of "re-presentation," which assumes that identity and ideology are continual formations, not fixed ones. Garoian advocates a pedagogy of performance art as a mutual engagement between the student/teacher, artist(s)/audience or researcher/participant that invokes personal

memories and histories through performance.<sup>153</sup> In a similar way, Elin Diamond defines performance as the doing of “certain embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others.”<sup>154</sup> She goes on to write that “the doing” and a “thing done,” between the past and present, presence and absences, consciousness and memory, invoke a continuum of history, making it possible to expose and interrogate cultural inscriptions and to offer alternative possibilities for change. Madison (1998) conceptualizes performance as the “politics of possibilities.” Drawing from political theater, she notes that performance shapes subjects, audience and performers alike. In honoring subjects who have been mistreated, such performances contribute to a more “enlightened and involved citizenship.”<sup>155</sup>

Artists like Abramović, Opie, Athey, Coble and others, draw on their embodied cultural and everyday experiences to reenact memory and history, disrupting ideological discourses of the archive surrounding race, gender, sexuality and citizenship using the body as powerful medium. In the traditional sense, the archive of performance art is created by, and survives in, the objects, photographs, films and videos documents of live performances. Performance artists frequently exhibit their photographs and videos at museums and galleries; in the latter, they are generally for sale.<sup>156</sup> In addition, artists and curators show these documents during lectures. Such practices, although understandable for the survival of the artists, complicates the concept of performance as a live event, one

---

<sup>153</sup> Garoian (1999).

<sup>154</sup> Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1.

<sup>155</sup> D. Soyini Madison, “Performance, Personal Narrative, and the Politics of Possibilities,” in *The Future of Performance Studies: Visions and Revisions*, ed. Sharon Dailey (Washington, D.C: NCA, 1998), 276-286.

<sup>156</sup> Recently in New York (Aug, 2009) I came across an unsigned still photograph from the Maria Abramović performance, *Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful*; the price was \$30,000.

that lives only through its disappearance. In the next chapter, I offer a theoretical framework to contextualize the archive and its significance for performance art practices and the body. I examine the use of technology, especially photography as a medium was deployed in creating an archive of the body to uncover knowledge and truth for medicine and scientific research, constructing deviant and perverse bodies in relationship to race, class, gender and sexuality. Questioning the methods of archival practice and the authority of the archive, I explore the role of documentation in relationship to performance art practices, especially as it relates to deconstructing the archive to redefine, contest and reinvent historical knowledge regarding subjectivity. I also examine how technology and the World Wide Web offer new sites for public spheres that destabilize the authorial nature of archive. What kinds of issues arise in the reception and circulation of the performance art through an unmediated archive?

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Performance Art and the Politics of the Archive: A Theoretical Framework**

In the first two chapters, I employ the term “archive” in discussing the early performance artists of the 1960s and 70s and the work of Mary Coble. In this chapter I examine in greater depth aspects of the archive, its history and historiography, to expand the theoretical framework of my discussion. Archives have existed as collections of papers and documents thought worthy of preservation by states or powerful individuals. Sometimes, the records considered important were collected in buildings constructed with the express purpose of housing them. Archival documents possess an inherent authenticity—their basic nature is a factual one—that gives them a fundamental role in the writing of institutional history. Michel Foucault dramatically changed the limited conception of the archive in the late 1960s in his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, first published in France in 1969 and followed by an English translation, in 1972. Moving beyond “the institutions, which, in a given society, make it possible to record and preserve,” or even “the sum of all texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past,” Foucault proposes the archive as the law of discourse within a discipline.<sup>157</sup> For him, the archive is a “system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events” by giving them meaning within a particular branch of study.<sup>158</sup> Allan Sekula, in his discussion of the nineteenth-century creation of photographic archives of criminals, relies on a Foucauldian analysis when he writes of how the intertwined disciplines of

---

<sup>157</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972), 146.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

physiognomy and phrenology “were instrumental in constructing the very archive they claimed to interpret.”<sup>159</sup> The photographic images and phrenological texts were mutually informing and comprised a closed, internally-consistent system of discourse. By the last decade of the twentieth century and continuing into the twenty-first, the term “archive” has come to be widely applied to a variety of phenomena, some substantial and others ephemeral: individual canons of texts, collections of family photographs, community oral histories, and performances treated as archives of “feelings.”<sup>160</sup> All of these phenomena can be considered relevant to some aspect of my study.

Scholars have examined the emerging field of archive theory from various perspectives, often in order to question the role of the archive in everyday life and to explore its political implications. They question the constitution of archives and the methods of interpreting their contents, and in doing so they engage with the legitimacy of the archive, as well as its authorial function. Archival theory recognizes both physical and imaginative spaces. The one lies within protective walls as the repository of knowledge that “preserves, reserves, protects, patrols, regulates”<sup>161</sup> the production of institutional history and cultural memory; it entails artifacts with a truth value and engenders counter-institutional histories. The other is a conceptual space whose parameters are always changing. Increasingly, the archive as a privileged space for affirming cultural norms has become a site of disruptive critical practices. The work of contemporary artist Thomas Hirshhorn

---

<sup>159</sup> Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October*, 39 (1986), 12.

<sup>160</sup> Paul J. Voss and Marta J. Werner, “Towards a Poetics of the Archive: Introduction,” *Studies in Literary Imagination*, 32 (1999), i-viii; Harriet Bradley, “The Seduction of the Archive: Voices Lost and Found,” *History of the Human Sciences*, 12 (1999), 107-122; Cvetkovich (2003).

<sup>161</sup> Voss & Werner (1999), i.

centers on elaborate installations using trash (old newspaper articles, pamphlets, found objects like television sets and other electronics). In his installation for the 2008 Carnegie International (Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh), Hirshhorn created an installation resembling a cave made out of discarded cardboard boxes, duct tape and cheap lumber. Embedded in this space were photographs, texts, graffiti, books, newspaper articles and everyday objects delineating a system that concerns everything from philosophy to global travel.<sup>162</sup> Hal Foster discusses this dense and seemingly chaotic space in an important article published, in 2004, in the journal *October*.<sup>163</sup> Foster, a critic and art historian, views the archive conceptually, as an impulse in contemporary art; for him is it a shared notion in artistic practice that uses objects to explore events, philosophy and history. He argues that artists both draw from and contest the archive of mass culture in gestures of alternative knowledge or counter memory. Hirshhorn's installations, for Foster, are the artist's means of articulating the subject-object relationship in the era of advanced capitalism. The viewing public is exposed to its detritus as a means to reimagine a relationship and effect change. Here, in this analysis, are two of the important aspects of archive as it can be applied. One is its polemic value, its presentation of an argument. The other is the power accorded to an individual to select those documents that make a meaningful record of the past or contemporary events, whether those documents are electronic parts, aluminum cans or discarded papers and magazines. Hirshhorn can appear in effect to be saying to the public, "This is your archive."

---

<sup>162</sup> <http://blog.cmoa.org/CI08/2008/02/thomas-hirschhorn.php>

<sup>163</sup> Foster (2004).

Foster's essay on the archive appears to have brought the concept into the art historical discussion. It was soon followed by Charles Merewether's collection *The Archive* (2006), and by the exhibition curated by Okwui Enwezor and entitled *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (2008).<sup>164</sup>

Curators and, to some extent, art historians have objects as their subject, so it is not surprising that for them "archive" often entails photographs and reproductions of photographs in the popular media. Thus, Enwezor's exhibition *Archive Fever*, mounted at the International Center for Photography, New York, consisted almost entirely of photographs, newspapers and videos. In his catalogue essay he notes how "archival legacies become transformed into aesthetic principles," although he also emphasizes how individual artist's archives can create narratives that run counter to society's "master narrative."<sup>165</sup> Given its often politicized nature, performance art has proved to be a medium whose practitioners likewise deal with disruptive practices. We can look back to feminist art practice of the 1960s and 70s as highly influential in shaping the contemporary outlook. Feminist performances addressed identity formation, agency and subjectivity (Schneemann, Ono, Piper, Opie, among others) in relation to what we would now call the "archive." Several performances can be seen as interrogating not only personal archives, but also widely accepted cultural ones, those that center on social codes and institutional structures (Piper, Pindell, O'Grady, among other). Feminism redefined the political in relationship to the art

---

<sup>164</sup> Charles Merewether, ed. *The Archive* (London: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2006); Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2008); the title of the latter derives from a 1994 lecture by Jacques Derrida (later published as *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression*).

<sup>165</sup> Enwezor, *Archive Fever*, 22.

world and praxis of everyday life, liberating the art world, at least momentarily, from the object.<sup>166</sup>

My particular concern for the archive emerges out of an engagement with the work of performance artists. I am interested in the ways performance disrupts the ideological discourses of the institutional archive, especially those surrounding the body and constructing normative sexual and civic identities. The institutional archive has served as a guardian of memory and knowledge in ways that make it the creator of knowledge. Performance artists work within an archive as a conceptual space to make visible the ideological systems of power through reenactments, in effect creating a counter-archive of political and gendered memorial spaces. They can also use materials traditionally associated with the archive in their subversive projects.

There are, therefore, two aspects to the archive that must be addressed, and each involves different histories and critical approaches. There is the performance or performative act that can be viewed as a form of private archive with public implications for the spectators present at the event. But performances also live on in the form of documents, be they photographs or videos of the actual performance or secondary artifacts that attest to the performative act, but do so in ways that extend its meaning for the viewer (the blotter sheets with names from Coble's *Note to Self*, sheets that are themselves individually photographed and disseminated to collectors). I propose first to take up the archive as a physical entity, but within the context of performative acts, either ones intended or those designated as such by a subsequent archivist. My examples center on

---

<sup>166</sup> Wark (2006).

photography, which since the Victorian era has come to be associated with many archival projects. Its documentary strength arises from the apparently unmediated quality of photographic images.<sup>167</sup> Questioning the methods of archival practice and the authority of text and archive, I then explore the concept and function of the archive beyond a physical repository of objects and documents and how performance as a conceptual archive leads to the creation of a counter-archive to offer alternative narratives of race, gender, class, sexuality and citizenship. Although the history of the archive entails conservation—the saving of select materials—it is necessarily also a history of loss, of what went unrecorded, of the gaps that others attempted to fill later on. Through examining Coble’s performance of *Aversion*, I illustrate how the performance event and its documentation—photograph, film or video—can become a form of “reenactment” of the history of loss, which lives through its reproduction and reception of a new archive. Within this context it becomes important to critically examine the role of the archives of nineteenth-century photography and question how science influenced the ways in which the body is categorized and defined, shaping citizenship and everyday life.

### **Photography, the Archive and Counter-Archive**

Sciences that purported to read the body and determine traits of character emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their purported goal was to protect society, the body politic, by uncovering evidence of criminality and

---

<sup>167</sup> The unmediated truth value of photographic images is one of the modern dogmas that post-modern artists have consistently challenged and upset.

insanity. Photography, with its clear documentary advantage over all other media, provided the archival material for studies of social deviancy. The images of deviancy produced in the Victorian era come to be an archive for later generations, especially ones in the late twentieth century. It is important to understand the circumstances underlying the creation of the images, and then to look briefly at one, very early response (in the work of W.E.B. Du Bois).

Examining the use of photography in the nineteenth century, Sekula argues that institutional policies supported, and even hinged on, the discourses of difference. He demonstrates how the camera becomes the apparatus to establish the social categories useful to criminology and ethnography, often in contrast to the examples of bourgeois normativity. The investment in the discursive cataloguing and surveying of bodies also supported ideological investments in colonialism and nation building. Photography came to establish and delimit the terrain of the other, defining the means of recording and reading bodies and translating the logics of Social Darwinism. While the British anthropologist Francis Galton and theorists Thomas Huxley created a photographic archive along the axis of primitive to modern (Fig. 4.1), French bureaucrat Alphonse Bertillon was producing the archive of criminality (Fig. 4.2), which became a system of profiling and measuring moral degeneracy corresponding to features of race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Photography provided the objective evidence to justify scientific objectivity and the civilizing mission of colonial imperialism. The role of photography in institutional archives produced and shaped knowledge of bodies in relationship to race and class. In this sense, photography made the

racial, gendered and sexual body transparent, as a readable and categorizable text, to reinforce and serve the ideology of middle-class norms by instantiating concepts such as deviance and the perverse body.<sup>168</sup>

In addition to criminology and ethnography, photography served in supporting the growing medicalization of non-normative sexualities.

Photographic images were taken to capture the visual traces of the homosexual body. Scientific practices and methods must, of course, be read within political, economic, cultural and historical contexts. Although science is (as commonly understood) invested with authority on the basis of its objectivity and rationality, the medical gaze paradoxically “maps what produces or constructs ‘queer’ subjectivities in the twentieth century.”<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, the fascination with the body becomes the source of scientific evidence for the construction of perversion. Through clinical surveillance and diagnosis, the body is territorialized, becoming an object that is measured, zoned, mapped and read as text. In critiquing scientific discourse, new media and technology, Jennifer Terry argues that photography in particular becomes a means of popularizing representations of difference based on race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Visual images illustrate deviancy from a norm and critically play a “role in the hegemonic production of a standardized normative subjectivity.”<sup>170</sup> Terry adds that homosexuals were one of the “internal others,” “alongside criminals, prostitutes, and the feeble minded – whose bodies were believed to carry the germs of ruin.”<sup>171</sup> Science and medicine

---

<sup>168</sup> Sekula (1986).

<sup>169</sup> Terry (1995), 136.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Terry (1995), 139.

were installed as keepers of public trust. Social inequality was merely a matter of biology.

The links among race, criminality and non-normative sexuality have also been stressed by Siobhan Somerville, who surveys medical and sexological literature of the early nineteenth century. She suggests that the “structures and methodologies that drove dominant ideologies of race also fueled the pursuit of knowledge about the homosexual body: both sympathetic and hostile accounts of homosexuality were steeped in assumptions that had driven previous scientific studies of race.”<sup>172</sup> Following the nineteenth-century methods of racial science, sexologists began to document what they took to be visually discrete markers of difference between the hetero- and the homosexual body. Somerville offers a detailed history of methods used as a visual key to ranking bodies according to norms of sexuality and race. Paralleling the development of eugenics, sexuality becomes explicitly intertwined with questions of reproduction and the maintenance of racial origins and white purity. The medical photographs employed to locate the discrete markers of difference, especially homosexuality, form an archive, one that Dana Seitler set out to uncover. Although she finds an archive of “perverse bodies,” they are not located in sexology texts; instead, she finds them in popular, scientific and juridical texts that took up concerns other than sexuality. In particular, the criminologist Thomas Mosby “deployed photographs of ‘sexual perverts’ to support his Lombrosian concern with visible signs on the body that may expose and may predict criminality.”<sup>173</sup> She notes that

---

<sup>172</sup> Somerville (2000), 17.

<sup>173</sup> Seitler (2004), 77.

the images featured in several of the texts she examined reveal the social and scientific anxiety surrounding corporeal perversion and its relationship to the “erosion of sexual, racial and gendered bodies.”<sup>174</sup> A visual culture of race, gender and sexual imagery approved on scientific principles enabled the framework of deviance to validate its claims to protect society from deviant bodies.<sup>175</sup>

In the face of the growing medical and pseudo-scientific archive of deviancy, W. E. B. Du Bois set out to create a counter archive for the Paris *Exposition Universelle* of 1900. Du Bois’s collected 363 photographs for an American Negro Exhibit (Figs. 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6). The clear purpose of Du Bois’s collection of photographs, as Shawn Smith has shown, was to challenge the prevailing racist taxonomy.<sup>176</sup> Just as the photographs underlying the racist taxonomy have been credited as an archive, so also can Du Bois’s exhibition be seen as an archive. Working as an archivist, Du Bois creates an argument by choosing, placing and juxtaposing images in relationship to one another; he thereby redefines the place of the African American in contemporary American society.<sup>177</sup> Using the very method of photography, with its inherent truth claim, Du Bois challenges the authority as well as the legitimacy and normalizing power of the prevailing archive. Du Bois constructs the private nature of the Black body and controls its public circulation. Du Bois’s archive opens a space to question the meaning of visual technologies to culturally specific histories. His work

---

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Seitler (2004), 80.

<sup>176</sup> Shawn Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. DuBois, Race and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

demonstrates the ways in which viewers are instructed to see race in a specific way, highlighting the relationship between representation and the act of looking. In this sense his work challenges the authorizing archive that enables viewing.<sup>178</sup>

### **Subverting Archival Photography Techniques**

Artists working generations after Du Bois have used photography to subvert the archive in similar ways. In the execution and display of their work, they reference, critique and disrupt prevailing truths regarding race, gender and sexuality. Staged photography, also known as performance photography, is a principal genre, and it arguably has its roots in early tableau and masquerade.<sup>179</sup> Tableau, according to Roland Barthes, is a self-conscious device used by artists to present moral subjects in a thought-provoking way that also engages the viewer on an emotional level as it generates meaning. For Barthes a key aspect of tableau is the creation of an artificial whole that embodies excess to signify the idea at stake; the work does not precisely mimick the world at large.<sup>180</sup> The influential performance artist, filmmaker, and installation artist, Eleanor Antin critiques the culturally imposed ideals of feminine beauty and feminine identity in a historical context. Antin has created mock stage roles to expose her many selves. Her most famous persona is that of “Eleanora Antinova,” the tragically overlooked black ballerina of Sergei Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes*; Eleanora appears in the work entitled *Reflections of my Life with Diaghilev* (Fig. 4.7), recently

---

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Lucy Soutter, “Enigmatic Spectacle: Key Strategies in Contemporary Stage Photography,” in *Role Models: Feminine Identity in Contemporary American Photography*, ed. Susan Fisher Sterling (London: Scala Publishers, 2008).

<sup>180</sup> Ronald Barthes, “Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,” *Music-Image-Text* (New York: Noonday Press, 1977).

exhibited in the show *Role Models*. Appearing as Antinova in scripted and non-scripted performances for over a decade, Antin has blurred the distinction between her identity and that of her character. In the process, she has created a rich body of work detailing the multiple facets of her beloved Antinova, including a fictitious memoir. In a second work in the *Role Models* show, entitled *The Angel of Mercy*, Antin assumes the role of Florence Nightingale. By creating tableaux of a black woman performing roles they would never have played at the purported time the photographs were made, Antin highlights the history of Euro-American discrimination. Antin's photographs can be seen as a kind of natural extension of Du Bois's portraits of African Americans as average people into another realm of the unusually gifted by ironically using famous personas.

A second facet of Antin's practice derives its strength, at least in part, from the documentary photography associated with medical and racial science. Her *Carving a Traditional Sculpture*, of 1972, which was part of the exhibition *WACK!*, distinguishes between naturalistic transformations and those that are more psychological in nature. In this performance, Antin endured a thirty-six day diet, which she documented in photographs recording the front, back, left and right sides of her nude body (Fig. 4.8). Antin installs the photos in a grid so that they appear to be a clinical record of the body, cold and scientific. Together, the photographs highlight the process of physical transformation, doing so in a way that pits the subjective image against an ideal of femininity. Although Antin has stated that she was playing with the concept of the carving of a traditional Greek sculpture, her work actually recalls the archival techniques using photography that

mapped and zoned the racial, gendered and sexual categorization of bodies. Furthermore, the installation of her photographs remind us of the work of the pioneer Victorian photographer Eadweard Muybridge, whose grids of images record changes in bodies over time, though usually only the briefest intervals.<sup>181</sup> His studies of motion centered on animal and human bodies, some photographed nude, accorded his work the status of scientific record for capturing the moving body (Fig. 4.9). Antin, however, has stated that her idea of “carving” her own body was inspired by an invitation from the Whitney Museum of Art for its biennial, a survey exhibition that considers only the established categories of painting and sculpture. Her piece was considered too conceptual for the exhibition. This work of art has been mostly interpreted from the lens of a white woman, commenting on the history of the generic nude in an art historical context. Lisa Bloom notes that critical attention needs to be given to the work within an ethnic subtext, to the fact that Antin uses self portraits depicting a “short, attractive Jewish woman.”<sup>182</sup> In this regard Antin begins with her own body and reveals what it means to be an embodied female and ethnic subject. Bloom also asserts that the installation of the photos in a grid that highlights visual properties of staged photography of physiognomically based race theories of the nineteenth century.

The use of archival and mock-archival images to subvert the very arguments they were created to support occurs in the work of the artists Carrie

---

<sup>181</sup> Eadweard Muybridge, *The Human figure in Motion* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955).

<sup>182</sup> Bloom, Lisa. “Contests for the Meaning of the Body Politics and Feminists Conceptual Art: Revisioning the 1970s through the work of Eleanor Antin,” in *Performing the Body: Performing the Text*, eds. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (New York: Routledge, 1999), 156.

Mae Weems and Lorna Simpson. Both use archival photographs to explore their Black feminine identity and thereby complicate issues of gender, race, class and sexuality. In one series, Weems challenges the ethnographic representations of enslaved African Americans. She rephotographs documentary portraits and prints them in a deep sepia tone. The images are then framed in oval Victorian frames, giving them an authentically old appearance (Fig. 4.10). On the glass covering each is etched a word that relates to the individual's slave identity: "House," "Field," "Yard" and "Kitchen." The viewer sees through the word, so that the human identity of each nameless figure is cancelled out by the impersonal role each played as a slave. In her *Kitchen Table Series* (1990), Weems creates a series of documentary photographs of narrative tableaux (Fig. 4.11). In them, she takes up universal themes of family, but does so in terms of the personal, cultural and political issues affecting the history of the African American family. Weems mixes hard realities with a personal vision, to convey the pointedly political, bitter and painful past of being African American. The work presented in the *Kitchen Table Series* relates to her personal experience, using family pictures that bring out the racial undercurrents of gender, parenting and individual identity. Weems's photographs especially explore her relationship with her daughter at the kitchen table. The staged photographs are taken from one end of the table that is left vacant. In this way the viewer becomes part of the narrative, and as Weems herself points out, "the power of the work comes out of the fact that is it not me, but about us."<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>183</sup> Susan Fisher Sterling and Kathryn Watt, "Fashioning Feminine Identity in Contemporary Photography," in *Role Models: Feminine Identity in Contemporary American Photography*, ed.

Lorna Simpson combines images of body and text in order to lead us to question racial stereotypes and assumptions about class, gender and sexuality. One of her concerns has been to highlight cultural practices and identity through the repetition of words and images. In her photographic works—*Untitled (guess who's coming to dinner)* (2001) and *Study* (2000)<sup>184</sup>—she photographs a woman and man in profile views reminiscent of nineteenth-century portraits. Simpson complicates the discourses of misperception and misrepresentation that produce stereotypes of black subjects, constructing an archival realignment.<sup>185</sup> In *Untitled* the portraits of a woman are shown in vertical rows embedded in a frame of Plexiglas. The surface of the Plexiglas is incised with titles of American films produced in the 1960s. *Study* shows profile photographs of a black man, but the work is underscored by paintings of male figures as subject, found in collection of American museums, *Study of a Black Man* and *A Negro Prince*. She uses similar strategies in *Coiffure* (Fig.4.12), where she juxtaposes three black-and-white images: the back of a woman with closely cropped hairstyle, a coil of braided hair, and an African mask. The representation of hair, especially braided hair, is a recurring theme in Simpson's work. Images of braided and coiled hair highlight associations between hair and culture, ethnicity, gender, and possibly even the whole body. The mask serves as an object through which public and private ritual, as well as the discontinuities and contradictions of ethnic identity, especially African American identity, can be explored. Simpson work refers specifically to the identity of African Americans and how they conform to, or

---

Susan Fisher Sterling (London: Scala Publishers Limited, 2008) 35-43.39.

<sup>184</sup> I was unable to find reproducible quality images to include in this project.

<sup>185</sup> Enwezor (2008) notes how the approach can now be found in American films.

rebel against, prevailing white standards of beauty by braiding, dying, weaving, and processing their hair. Simpson offers a powerful illustration of the social constructedness of race and gender, using hair as a cultural product to negotiate, resist or define social relationships.

In similar ways, Coble subverts the photographic process to create a counter- archive of Drag King performances (Figs. 2.5,2.6). The vibrant images of behaviors that would at one time have been seen as perverted, she presents as the joyful playfulness and theatricality of performance. The works together create a counter-archive of queer subjectivities. Coble's photographs and subsequent performances allow for an analysis of the body as a literal and conceptual center of discourse to assert the active and self-determining principles of personal narrative. In this sense, by intersecting the personal with the performative, performance blurs the distinction between the author and agent, subject and object.

### **Performing *Aversion***

In the early twentieth century, the work of Havelock Ellis and Magnus Hirschfeld influenced the views on human sexuality, especially the psychiatric interpretation of homosexuality. Until 1973, homosexuality remained a diagnostic criterion in the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual* (DSM) of the American Psychological Association. In turn the pathological status of homosexuality gave rise to therapeutic interventions and treatment strategies that had as their goal converting homosexual behavior to heterosexual. Since it was assumed that all

homosexuals were pathological, there was little attention paid to methodical soundness of treatment and techniques used, which would need to have been measured by their success. One treatment strategy was electro-convulsive shock therapy.

Mary Coble took up the use of electro-convulsive therapy administered, until 1973, to thousands of gays and lesbians as the subject of her performance titled *Aversion* (Fig. 4.13). Performing on May 18, 2007, at the Conner Contemporary Art Gallery in Washington, Coble reenacted a moment in the historical past as a way to reference the marginalization of sexual minorities; the greater context was provided by current opinions of homosexuality held by the religious right wing. Coble, who first heard of the shock treatment when she was in her teens, states that her performance arose from the need to reembody a historical moment when sexuality was pathologized. Her research into the civic identity of gay and transgender people over and over again returned to the views of the religious right wing and organizations such as Exodus International, which advocated freedom from homosexuality through the power of Jesus Christ. Her subsequent research also highlighted the devastating effect of the shock treatment, which left participants with burns and irreversible damage from the tubular electrodes of the TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation) units. Know by several names—aversion therapy, reorientation therapy, reconditioning—the common goal was to reverse the sexual orientation of gay and lesbian subjects.

Attended by a large audience, Coble walked into the gallery wearing white pants and a sweatshirt, looking stoic and restrained. She sat in a black leather chair, resembling something one would find in a therapist's office. The other chairs, lined in theater style, were full of spectators. Forty feet away were several other viewers watching the performance on a computer screen via webcam, since there was no more space in the gallery for them to sit. The viewers were transfixed as they watched Coble's body being repeatedly shocked. Coble states: "Nobody was moving. Nobody said a word. Nobody's cell phone went off."<sup>186</sup> At the same time, viewers logged in from other cities on the Internet to watch Coble's performance.

Coble sat on the reclining chair (Fig. 4.14), while her assistant attached two electrodes on her left arm. The black leather chair looks comfortable and inviting compared to the two cool and hard electrodes. The wires attached to the electrodes were hooked into a small machine that sat on a table next to Coble's chair. As the performance began, a slide projector cycled loudly, projecting a new image of scantily clad men and women every few seconds. Each time an erotic image of two women was shown, Coble's assistant released a jolt of electricity. At first there was a gentle movement of Coble's arm as it lifted off the arm of the chair. As the performance continued the shocks become more frequent; they caused Coble's arm to rise more severely, jerking her arm and making her hand move backwards, the response to obvious pain (Figs. 4.14, 4.16). The shock was repeatedly administered to Coble for 30 minutes.

---

<sup>186</sup> Rachel Beckman, "Aversion: A Jolt of an Experience," *The Washington Post* (May 17, 2007).

The post performance show at the Conner Contemporary Art Gallery exhibited the artifacts of *Aversion*, which included the slideshow, the leather chair and electrodes used in the performance. Also on exhibit and for sale were the documentary photographs and a video of Coble's hand clenching and releasing during shock therapy. The exhibited pieces also included three installed videos. *Session One* and *Session Two* each focus on one of Coble's hands as she experiences the treatment. The third, *Aversion (Recounted)*, a twenty-one minute video, shows a series of interviews that Coble recorded in 2007; in them, unnamed individuals deliver firsthand accounts of their experiences with electroconvulsive aversion therapy.<sup>187</sup> When asked about the participants, Coble does not comment on the identity of her participants, or if they were actual patients or actors. Since then, Coble has been invited to exhibit her photographs and videos in local and international exhibitions. A short video can be viewed on her website.

Kelly Rand, writing for *Arts and Events*, asks her readers to question the motivation of the spectators who witnessed Coble's painful performance of *Aversion*. She questions if seeing the performance would force them to confront the ugly reality that people often do very bad things to others. In response to the display of artifacts at the gallery Rand states, "The display is disconcerting and ominous on its own. That's how one might feel when approaching Mary Coble's new show, *Aversions*, at Conner Contemporary Art. Coble confronts the horrible effects of electro shock therapy prescribed to gays and lesbians to re-condition

---

<sup>187</sup> Kriston Capps, "Mind the Zap," *Washington City Paper* (May 17, 2007).

their sexual orientation, in a sparse but powerful collection.”<sup>188</sup> Joey Orr, logged on from Chicago to see Coble’s performance, writes for the *Gay & Lesbian Review*. He notes that Coble’s *Aversion* taps into the everyday life of her personal experiences and those of her community as she reenacts and repeats her queer reality. She offers herself as site of contestation and political action using “her body to create a new kind of archive about the body politic.”<sup>189</sup>

Although some spectators are repulsed by Coble’s strategies of pain and the body, others have found her work powerful, paralleling the body art of the 1960s and 70s. In performing the embodied history of her community, subjecting herself to painful procedures, Coble offers the body as a queer archive. Operating within the dialectics of the archive of memory and history, Coble disrupts the archive by complicating past and present as a “construction site.”<sup>190</sup> In this sense, Coble’s performance extends the agency of art to the body, the archive and intersubjective experience. For Coble the body becomes a source and subject of the past archive to build and replay her own embodied and constructed history.<sup>191</sup> Her work offers a concrete link between performance art and testimony and evokes strong responses in her viewers. In reenacting the history of the queer body, her viewers respond with empathy, recalling a moment of cultural memory. Coble’s performance offers a queer theorizing of the archive, one that complicates conceptions of history, memory and the body as a means of making forms of

---

<sup>188</sup> Kelly Rand, “Aversion @ Conner Contemporary,” *Arts and Events* (June 5, 2007).

<sup>189</sup> Joey Orr, “Mary Coble’s Body, Electrified,” *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* (Sept-Oct, 2007).

<sup>190</sup> Keith Jenkins in *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991), argues the need to separate the past from history. For him, the former is a “construction site,” on which the latter is built. In this way, he argues that facts impose no meaning in and of themselves.

<sup>191</sup> Blackson (2007), 31.

repressed history visible, allowing for a collective way to remember. Central to this notion is the role of feelings and emotions, especially the contingency of pain and its relevance to the archive in locating the motivation for the transformative effect of oppressed voices.<sup>192</sup>

Even before birth, individuals are patterned in the kind of subjectivity they will be permitted to live out. Subjects are “regulated, branded, and shaped”<sup>193</sup> by the ideological apparatus of the archives of race, class, gender, sex, and social powers. Chela Sandoval draws on Foucault’s conception of power and resistance as a cultural and social mutation in producing an oppositional consciousness, making individuals capable of confronting the most intrusive forms of domination and subordination. In this regard, the political, ethical, social and philosophical problem is not one of liberating the individual from the institutions of the state, but rather promoting new forms of subjectivity to counter the histories of fear, pain, hatred and hierarchy. They come through the rejection of the forms of individuality imposed on the subject.<sup>194</sup> Emotions and feelings thus become important factors in producing oppositional or differential forms of consciousness to resist the performativity of the archive.

### **Archive as a Conceptual Space: Addressing Memory, Emotions and Pain**

In arguing for the conceptual nature of the archive and its impact on everyday experiences of subjectivity, scholars across disciplines have recognized

---

<sup>192</sup> Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, argues for de-coloniality as a transitive zone in which modes of resistance were first lived, identified and defined resulting in transformative effects for an oppositional consciousness.

<sup>193</sup> Sandoval, (2000),163,4.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

the need to account for memory, history and emotions as they relate to discourses of the body. Performance art presents the intersection of history and memory as one inextricably linked to the embodied experiences of everyday life. Memory theorists believe that experiences of the past are cumulative, and that individuals do not have the ability to recall past experiences with precision. Theorists, nevertheless, do recognize the sensory imprints of memory that relate to the embodiment of social and cultural experiences of oppression and trauma.<sup>195</sup>

Performance studies scholars have added to the discussion of the archive from the perspective of embodiment, memory and history as it serves to foreground issues of race, class, gender, sexuality and citizenship. David Román, for example, contends that contemporary performance is embedded in a historical archive of past performances that help contextualize history. For him “contemporary practice is an ongoing dialogue with once contemporary works now relegated to literary history, the theatrical past, or cultural memory.”<sup>196</sup> In a similar way, Joseph Roach sees performance as attending to counter-memories. Roach understands performance as an archive of the past and an ongoing engagement with the retrieval of history. From his perspective, performance constitutes both a political intervention and an embodied theorization.<sup>197</sup>

Performance studies scholars have also argued that performance offers a repository for the continuous re-articulation of cultural memory, which, over time, creates repositories of meaning for audiences. Like Román and Roach, Diana

---

<sup>195</sup> Bassel van der Kolk, “The Body Keeps the Score: Memory and the Evolving Psychobiology of Posttraumatic Stress,” *Harvard Review Psychiatry*, 15 (1994), 253-263.

<sup>196</sup> Román (2005), 13.

<sup>197</sup> Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum- Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 26.

Taylor stresses the archive's importance to history and memory as an embodied practice. Examining everyday ritualistic practices and cultural events, she argues that performance serves as a means both to commemorate and contest the past. Performance for her is a system of learning, storing and transmitting knowledge that is embodied that she refers to as the "repertoire." Taylor starkly distinguishes between the role of performance in the archive and the repertoire; she writes that "performance can never be captured or transmitted through the archive. A video of a performance is not a performance, though it often comes to replace performance as a *thing* in itself (the video is part of the archive; what it represents is part of the repertoire). Embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive's ability to capture it."<sup>198</sup> While refraining from creating a binary—between the archive and the repertoire—Taylor is very specific about the active and passive principles of the two concepts. In its literal meaning, she notes, archival memory exists in documents, texts, maps, letters, archaeological remains, videos, and film: the material conditions of the archive resist change. She adds that the archival memory, in its materiality and documentation, succeeds in separating the source of knowledge from its knower. In this context, the material and historical documents in the archive exceed the live performance. In my view, Taylor's theorizing happens in the interstices between the archive and the repertoire. I would argue that in the case of Coble the performance event, the documents, artifacts and audience response are all part of the archive. In this sense the archive and repertoire are not separate or oppositional, but instead are

---

<sup>198</sup> Diana Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

mutually constructing and deconstructing each other, and the repertoire resides within the archive as a conceptual, imaginative space that contextualizes embodiment and emotions as essential to the process of meaning making and intersubjectivity.

Historically, performance art practice has evoked emotional responses due to its resistive and provocative content. Performance art can take on a disruptive form that artists use to respond to change, whether political, cultural or social. The aim of performance art, especially that using the body, is not to seduce its audience but rather to “unravel and examine critically the techniques of seduction, unnerving viewers in the process, rather than providing them with an ambiguous setting for desire.”<sup>199</sup> Performance art can sometimes be grotesque and frightening, evoking strong emotions, such as disgust, pain, hate and, in many cases, fear. The aim of some performers is to “expose the roots of taboo and fear through their work;”<sup>200</sup> this, I contend, offers a space for emotions and feelings to provoke resistance to the archive as a process of meaning making, changing or disrupting power norms.

Emotions and feelings within the context of performance art and the archive become important subjects for my project to address queer approaches to public cultures. Ann Cvetkovich argues for the “archive of feelings”<sup>201</sup> to contextualize everyday experiences that circulate in the vicinity of trauma alongside moments of everyday emotional distress often ignored by cultural theorists. She calls for recognizing the importance of both everyday and

---

<sup>199</sup> Goldberg (1998) 13.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Cvetkovich (2003),7

historical events in the formation of lesbian subjectivities, especially how the textures of everyday lesbian experiences resist the authority of medical discourses. In this sense, embodied subjectivities are repositories of feeling and emotions. Affective experiences are encoded not only in the content of the cultural meaning but also in the practices that surround their production and reception. In this way the archive becomes a conceptual space that also accounts for the corporeal subjectivities that form the archive of feelings, a product of the dominant public culture.

Offering a different perspective of “feelings” in relationship to the archive, Sara Ahmed illustrates how emotions register the proximity of others. She describes emotions as “the flesh of time” and explores how emotions are attributed to objects, such that objects become sticky, or full of affective value. Ahmed is interested in “the public nature of emotions, and the emotive nature of publics.”<sup>202</sup> The archive in this sense is not about the conversion of the self into a textual gathering, but a “contact zone.” For her, the archive takes on multiple forms of contact that include, institutional forms (records, libraries, websites) and everyday contacts (friends, family and others) within which the personal and the public, the individual and the social are shaped through interaction with others.<sup>203</sup>

Performance artists, in my view, situate embodiment, feelings and emotions at the center, rather than the periphery of analysis. Coble’s work evokes a response in viewers that serves to foreground the messiness of subjectivity as constructed and shaped by the historic functions of the archive. In this sense, the

---

<sup>202</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 14.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

performance artist contests the regulating principles of the legal authority of the archive using pain, emotions, cutting and the bleeding body as a strategy of provocation. Artists like Chris Burden, Marina Abramović, Carolee Schneemann, Catherine Opie and Mary Coble have made their mark by pushing the limits of the body to provoke their audiences. To this end, pain and the body offer a powerful analysis of embodiment in relationship to the archive.

Eliane Scarry notes that pain is inaccessible to language. It is expressed through the sensory, affective or cognitive elements of the body and perception. In performance art, pain is a literal representation as it is enacted directly upon the body. The political consequences of pain are bound up with power, especially in relationship to torture (pain has mostly been theorized in relationship to torture and war). Scarry stresses, first, that pain is inflicted on the person, second, that the body experiencing the pain is objectified and made visible to those witnessing the pain, and, third, that “the objectified pain is denied as pain and read as power, a translation made possible by the obsessive mediation of agency.”<sup>204</sup> Her analysis opens the debate to questioning the role of the body in pain in performance art and its relationship to intersubjectivity. In this sense, the contingency of pain and how pain is experienced by others offer an important basis for theorizing embodiment of culture and emotions as political and public discourses. While pain is about suffering on the one hand; on the other, it is about the empowerment of individuals and communities that come together to express their personal, political and cultural marginalization.

---

<sup>204</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 28.

As witnessed in Coble's *Note to Self*, the reenactment of pain inflicted on the victims of hate crimes become a means of "doing and undoing" the authorial legality of the archive. The inscribing of the name followed by creating a negative imprint, followed by pinning it to the wall, become a way to re-inscribe what has been lost and forgotten, to redress the gap between the private and public by extracting the narratives of marginalized subjects. Coble's performance retells, reenacts the absences of the archive of hate crime victims as a way to re-write history and recreate the past on her body, queering the parameters of the archive. In *Aversion* Coble directly draws from the historical archive to juxtapose psychological diagnosis, neglectful treatment and the cultural production of homosexuality. In tracking the factual and yet fictive nature of the archive, Coble plays with the role of testimony by creating a video of individuals who underwent shock therapy, but refrains from revealing the true identities of the participants. Performance in this sense uses the strategy of repetition, reenactment and reproduction as means of constructing and deconstructing the authenticity of the archive. Artists like Coble perform in and on the archive as a way to disrupt its performative and authorial function by becoming the absent subjects of the archive. By enacting the history of loss, she offers the archive as a conceptual space, disturbing the performativity of the archive as a means of reimaging the archival space of her communities' marginalization, offering alternative knowledge or counter-memory. In this way, the performance artist draws from public and private archives, acting as a cultural worker to re-inscribe the archive, destabilizing its evidentiary and historical authority. Coble's performances offer

an implicit view of the past as “empirical truths,” as they simultaneously disclose the relative character of the present and therefore evoke skepticism in her viewer for the subjectivities excluded from the archive. In citing the lack of evidentiary documents in the archive, Coble’s performance points to issues of representation and interpretation, questioning the evidence and authenticity of identity,<sup>205</sup> especially as it relates to the body, gender and sexuality.

### **Internet and the Archive - A Mnemonic System**

Coble’s archive of 438 undocumented names of hate crime victims, makes visible the marginalization of the LGBT community. She uses the archive as source and subject to highlight its performativity. She also raises questions concerning the limits of the performance of everyday life and the ethics and credibility of the archive. In addition, by going live on the Internet, Coble reaches audiences that would otherwise be unable to experience her performance. The Internet raises new issues for performance art and archival practices. Although the live performance disappears, Coble’s videos and photographs of her performing can be viewed on her and others’ websites. That Coble’s performance archive and its dissemination via the Internet create new public spheres for discourses of the body, performance art and the archive, are questions that will be addressed in Chapter 5. Here, I am concerned with the role of the performance event, its documentation and afterlife as it relates to intersubjectivity. What

---

<sup>205</sup> Thomas Osborne, “The Ordinarity of the Archive,” *History of the Human Sciences*, 12,2 (1999), 51-64.

happens to the physical archive when it goes public in museums, exhibited in future shows or circulates on the Internet?

Thomas Osborne, writing in 1999, argued that the existence of an archive depends upon its audience or public. Although access to an archive may be restricted, its role is still to serve some kind of public memory. New technology has not only affected artistic practices, it has equally affected the role of knowledge and access to archives via the World Wide Web (WWW), once considered the domain of a restricted few. Howard Caygill, also writing in 1999, argued for the Internet as an archival mnemonic system. He notes that the debates surrounding the future of the web are intertwined with politics that “largely depends on it being able to overcome the hierarchies of access to knowledge that have traditionally characterized the archive.”<sup>206</sup> The accelerating dissemination of information via the Web seems to be bypassing the hierarchies that once controlled access to traditional archival collections. While the Internet allows for a new kind of memory and archive, it calls into question the hierarchies that it does confirm and the utopias and dystopias that it provokes. The fact remains that the Internet as a mega-archive has had an extraordinary impact on the cultural organization of experience and memory.<sup>207</sup> Foster, in his study cited at the outset, proposes the Internet as the ideal archival medium. The Internet follows the principles of post-industrial production and mass consumption; even if it cannot replace tactile and face-to-face interaction, it effectively supplants it. At the same

---

<sup>206</sup> Howard Caygill, “Meno and the Internet: Between Memory and the Archive,” *History of the Human Sciences*, 12 (1999) 1-11, 2.

<sup>207</sup> Caygill (1999).

time the shift in information appears as a “virtual readymade.”<sup>208</sup> Although the Internet may not provide an affective intersubjective interaction, it offers a dialogical space for the repetition and access of performances that required the physical presence of the viewer at a given time. In this regard, the Internet serves as a virtual platform that disseminates information through photographs and video documents, offering a space of public contestation and debate—it is political, with the intent of serving recipients in the present and the future.

Within this context it is further interesting to note that the photographic archives, be it Du Bois’s counter-archive or the photographic documents of Francis Galton and Thomas Huxley, can be easily accessed and viewed from any computer on the Internet. A Google search on Francis Galton reveals books and original documents used by Galton for studying the aspects of the human body. Images from the average American male to boys of all ages can be found on the *Image Archives of the American Eugenics Movement* website. Similarly, a special collection at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, has a digital archive of Du Bois’s photographs that can be accessed on the Internet. The archive in its contemporary accessible form has shifted the tenor of academic debates over the production and institutionalization of knowledge.<sup>209</sup> The defining features of the archive, once considered a physical domain of knowledge and authority open to a privileged few, mainly designated scholars, are not just disrupted, but entirely redefined, by the easy availability of archival material on the Internet. Although new technology challenges the authority of the archive, it is important to question

---

<sup>208</sup> Foster (2004).

<sup>209</sup> Anjali Arondekar, “Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14 (2005), 10-27.

how the Internet complicates the concept of the archive in relationship to the viewing practices of the body. Also, how do performance artists challenge the historical archive, especially the materiality of the body as the medium of their art by disseminating their work via the Internet?

### **Conclusion**

Coble's performance, its conceptualization, the audience response, the documents and the afterlife of the performance, offer several points of discussion, especially in regards to the body, the archive and performance art. Drawing on the history of homosexuality and psychiatry, Coble performs the archive to highlight the consequences of historical knowledge of the body, which excluded and made invisible queer desire, relegating queer bodies to the realm of pathology. Performance studies scholars have argued for the need to comprehend how "human beings fundamentally make culture, effect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world."<sup>210</sup> Performance in this sense complicates the interrogation of the archive of history, identity, community, nation and politics in the everyday and the ordinary, and in so doing reveal the complexity of meaning production.

Performance studies has sometimes asked us to rethink the "world as a text" in favor of the "world as a performance."<sup>211</sup> Anthropologist James Clifford raised similar questions that apply to print media, questioning the methods used to

---

<sup>210</sup> D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera, "Performance Studies at the Intersections," *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, eds. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), xi-xxv.

<sup>211</sup> Dwight Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics," *Communications Monograph*, 58 (1991) 179-194. 180.

evaluate and verify the truth of cultural accounts.<sup>212</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his critical analysis of race, also points to the Western privilege given to writing: the belief that “without writing, no repeatable sign of the workings of reason and mind could exist.”<sup>213</sup> All point to the authorial nature of texts, and argue for the need to reevaluate the methods used in constructing knowledge and meaning making, including embodied knowing. Within this perspective, Coble’s *Note to Self* and *Aversion* complicate corporeality and the materiality of the body in relationship to the archive. Coble’s performance of the body becomes “the doing” as well as the “thing done;” it stands between the past and present, presence and absence, consciousness and memory, invoking a continuum of history, making it possible to expose and interrogate cultural inscriptions and thus offer alternative possibilities for change.<sup>214</sup> In conceptualizing performance as the “politics of possibilities,” D. Soyini Madison notes the importance of political theater in shaping subjects, audience and performers alike. In honoring subjects who have been mistreated, such performances contribute to a more “enlightened and involved citizenship.”<sup>215</sup> In a similar way Coble uses the historical repetition and reenactment of pain and the body as a performance strategy. Similar to *Note to Self*, her performance of *Aversion* evokes an equally strong emotional response in her viewers.

---

<sup>212</sup> James Clifford, “Introduction: Partial Truths,” *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. J. Clifford and G.E. Marcus (Berkeley: California Press, 1986).

<sup>213</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Race,” *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1986)

<sup>214</sup> Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1.

<sup>215</sup> Madison (1998).

The archive for my project thus becomes multidimensional. It can designate a source of documents, objects and events that are accessed by artists to conceptualize their performances. From this standpoint, the artist becomes the archivist, working in and on the archive. The archive can also be a conceptual space that encompasses the artist's personal experiences of embodied history and memory. In this sense, the body as archive becomes the source and subject of the everyday experiences that performance artists draw from to resist, exceed, and overwhelm the constraints of the archive. Performance artists use diverse means to make visible their embodied practice to claim the body as a "site of knowing."<sup>216</sup> The body as the medium, form, source and subject "centers performance as a primary mode of experiencing and radically intervening in the world,"<sup>217</sup> to account for "how culture is done in the body."<sup>218</sup> In this way the archive becomes an important concept in relationship to intersubjectivity. Performance hinges on the emotions and feelings evoked in the viewers. When history and memory are juxtaposed in relationship to the public and private, visibility and invisibility, cultural theorists have to take into account the role of feelings and emotions in intersubjective process, further discussed in chapter 5.

---

<sup>216</sup> Conquergood (1991), 180.

<sup>217</sup> David Donkor, "Performance, Ethnography and the Radical Intervention of Dwight Conquergood," *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2007), 821-825.

<sup>218</sup> Jones (2002), 7.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Intersubjectivity: Disrupting Viewing Practices**

In the previous chapters, I examined the archive as a physical repository as well as a conceptual space that performance artists access to engage audiences in participatory practices. Coble's performances, based on strategies of reenactment and re-presentation, create counter archives to reinscribe absence and invisibility and account for the loss of marginalized narratives. Her role as an artist and archivist and her detailed research prior to her performances, all serve to highlight the social and political systems of oppression. Her live performances and subsequent exhibitions of photographs and artifacts take place in the context of the active participation of the audience or spectators.

In this chapter, I explore the role of intersubjectivity, a prominent anchor for performance art. In order to do so, I explore intersubjectivity and the role of emotion and embodiment, both of which relate to Coble's two performances *Marker* and *Blood Script*. In examining them and their documentation, I aim to complicate intersubjectivity as a concept that operates not just within a live performance, but one that can be elicited through the secondary archives of Coble's performance art. On the basis of the discourses surrounding the documentation of performance art, the archive, its circulation and the afterlife of the performance beyond the live event, I am interested in how meaning is created or disrupted within the social dimensions of the live performance, as well as its documents. Through the relationship between participatory experience and performance, performance art serves as a conceptual space to bridge

intersubjectivity in meaning making, sometimes disrupting hegemonic norms of power in public spaces. I look at the social dimensions of participation and the “politics of emotions” to examine how collaboration between performer and audience offers a theorization of embodiment in the collective dimension of social experience as means of producing agency.

### **Intersubjectivity and Public Spheres**

The term “intersubjectivity” has been defined as a process “involving or occurring between separate conscious minds or accessible to or capable of being established for two or more subjects.”<sup>219</sup> A term used originally in phenomenological sociology, intersubjectivity was coined to refer to the mutual constitution of social relationships. It denotes a set of relations, meanings, structures, practices, experiences, or phenomena evident in human life. Theorist Herbert Mead argued that the development of cognitive, moral, and emotional capacities in individuals is dependent upon the extent to which they take part in socially symbolic and mediated interactions with other individuals. For Mead, human interaction was essentially and irreducibly intersubjective.<sup>220</sup> An intersubjective process in this sense suggests that individuals within a community or group can reach consensus about knowledge or their everyday life experiences. As a dialectical and dialogical process, intersubjectivity is about participation and mutuality, but not always about agreement. In this sense, intersubjectivity becomes a meaning making and meaning disruption process as it relates to the personal, social and political experiences of individuals.

---

<sup>219</sup> Merriam- Webster’s Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

<sup>220</sup> George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).

Another viewpoint that emerges out of the work of psychological theory concerns the role of embodiment and intersubjectivity. Daniel Stern states that “Intersubjectivity is the capacity to share, know, understand, empathize with, feel, participate in, resonate with, and enter into lived subjective experiences of another.”<sup>221</sup> He argues for the verbal and non-verbal interactions between individuals as co-creative acts of meaning making. The non-verbal sources, especially gestures, posture, silences and rhythms that relate to embodiment, along with the content of speech, produce the empathic and participatory resonance of intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity, for him, is not only a process of understanding, but also one central to producing the feelings and emotions that are an important component to meaning making. He argues that intersubjectivity stands at the core of empathy, identification and internalization of early social and cultural experiences. The cohesion within human groups is greatly enhanced by the moral emotions of shame, guilt and embarrassment—being able to “see oneself through the eyes of another – that is, as you sense the other sees you.”<sup>222</sup> The shortcoming of psychological theory is that it privileges the role of meaning making as one that is largely creative. It fails to account for the subversive role of disconnection and disruption in intersubjective experience, and is therefore of limited value for the study of performance art. One needs to turn to cultural theory as it relates to performance and the idea of “public spheres.”

---

<sup>221</sup> Daniel Stern, “Intersubjectivity,” in *The American Psychiatric Textbook of Psychoanalysis*, eds. Ethel Person, Arnold Cooper & Glen Gannard (Arlington: American Psychiatric Publishing Inc, 2005), 78.

<sup>222</sup> Stern (2005) 84.

Public spheres consist of constantly shifting temporary communities. Scholars have stressed the connection between the emotions and politics as one that motivates social change in public spheres. Jill Dolan supports a “utopia in performance:” live performance that provides a “place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world.”<sup>223</sup> It is the aesthetics of performance that lead to “both effective and affective feelings and expression of hope.”<sup>224</sup> Dolan makes an argument for the link between performance and politics; they are, she writes, always intertwined and shaping intersubjective experience. For her it is the small but profound moments in which the audience is lifted slightly above the present, leaving remnants of hopeful feelings of a better world, that is the “utopian performative.” The utopian performative takes us beyond the “now” of material oppression and unequal power relations, and leads us toward the promise of a present that opens a better future. Dolan writes that the utopian performative springs from a “complex alchemy of form and content, context and location, which takes shape in moments of utopia as doings, as process, as never finished gestures towards a potentially better future.”<sup>225</sup>

Some critics believe that performance art has distinct limitations. They liken performance to the theater; it is in the moment, its reality confirmed by its volatility. This is the position of Peggy Phelan, who posits an ontology of performance as one of disappearance, “invisibility and the unconscious where it

---

<sup>223</sup> Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Dolan (2005), 8.

eludes regulation and control. Performance resists the balanced circulation of finance. It saves nothing; it only spends. While photography is vulnerable to counterfeiting and copying, performance art is vulnerable to charges of valuelessness and emptiness.”<sup>226</sup> Phelan’s position has been criticized by Miranda Joseph, who concedes that performance may resist exchange value, but sees Phelan’s position as one that fails to take into account the role of the audience and intersubjectivity. Jose Muñoz takes Joseph’s argument further, stating that the “kernel of potentiality” is the real force of performance due to its intersubjective ability to generate “knowing and recognition” that facilitates minoritarian belonging. Arguing for a “utopian potentiality,” he contends that utopia is “an ideal, something that should mobilize us, push us forward,”<sup>227</sup> but he also recognizes that utopia concerns the politics of emotions. He makes an argument drawing from Ernst Bloch’s “principle of hope” for “minoritarian” subjects, whom he takes to be trapped in a world of hopelessness. For Muñoz, the process of getting to utopia binds people, not just from a positive sense of belonging, but also through “negative” emotions like shame, disgust and hate. He argues for the punks who reject the normative feelings of belonging through the “emotional work of negative affect.”<sup>228</sup> The “utopian potentiality,” he stresses, accounts for the effects of performance through the process of documentation, such as the photographic records that represent the utopian performative. I agree with Muñoz that the relationship between the performance

---

<sup>226</sup> Phelan (1993), 148.

<sup>227</sup> Muñoz (2006), 9.

<sup>228</sup> Muñoz (2006), 10.

and the audience is one of “knowing and recognition” that facilitates a belonging, especially “minoritarian” belonging. For him, rather like J.L. Austin,<sup>229</sup> the performance does not disappear, but serves “to do things in the future.”

A related and useful concept is that of “transmission of affect,” which is explored by Theresa Brennan. Brennan writes that the emotions and energies of one person or group can be absorbed by or can enter directly into another individual or group. Her theory of affect is based on constant communication between individuals and their physical and social environments. She believes that, “individuals are affected by a feeling in a group.”<sup>230</sup> Jill Bennett’s develops this idea further. Although she supports the view that art is a vehicle for the interpersonal transmission of experience, for her “the affective responses engendered by works of art are not born of emotional identification or sympathy; rather, they emerge from the direct engagement with sensation as it is registered in the work.”<sup>231</sup> If so, then the use of the material body and pain offer new strategies for performance artists.<sup>232</sup> Kathy Smith takes into consideration pain, performance, body, discourse representation and abject to locate the spectator’s position in contemporary performance art, questioning the dynamics and politics of the body. The material body is located within a discursive formation, one that is constantly shifting between “performance/representation, the culture which

---

<sup>229</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>230</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2004), 73.

<sup>231</sup> Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>232</sup> Jean Forte, “Women’s Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism,” in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990) 251-269 argues for the undeniable presences of the material body in feminist’s performance art.

both accommodates and provokes representation, and the spectating subject.”<sup>233</sup>

She emphasizes the visceral body-to-body response between performer and spectator. She is interested in the disquieting gap between the material body and the body in discourse. For her, “the politics of performance – the dynamic interstices between pain and discourse, the interface and disjuncture between the material body and body in culture- and these schisms and raptures are where the politics reveals itself, in the moments of unmediated visceral responses, where bodies speak and respond directly to each other.”<sup>234</sup>

I take performance art to be a dialogical and dialectical site in which intersubjective experience is created, mediated or disrupted by evoking powerful emotions and feelings. As a dialogical site performance documents experiences, addresses crises in the public and private archives of memory and history. The archive as a conceptual space for performance art becomes a dynamic site: a point of intersubjectivity that serves to bridge history, memory, emotions, feelings and embodiment as means to offer alternative narratives for meaning making, changing or disrupting the performativity of the archive.

### **Spectatorship: Subversive Participatory Practices**

A performance, be it live or on video, film or photographs, is always in the context of a viewer in a public sphere (and it is this fact that separates performance from theater whose ontology has been theorized as one of disappearance). The public views and evaluates what is exhibited in museums

---

<sup>233</sup> Kathy Smith, “Abject Bodies: Beckett, Orlan, Stelarc and the Politics of Contemporary Performance.” *Performance Research* 2007, 12 (1): 66-76, 66.

<sup>234</sup> Smith (2007), 76.

and galleries, where art provides an aesthetic or educational experience, leading the viewer, often through wall labels, into a past world of lost codes. The experience, especially of the art of the past, tends to be private. Boris Gorys has explored another branch of art, participatory. In the Futurists and Zurich Dadaists movements, he sees the dissolution of artistic individuality played out in public spaces. Both groups reached their audiences by deliberately scandalizing and provoking the viewer. The main goal was to shock the audience out of its passivity. “In this way the Futurists created a new synthesis between politics and art: they understood both a kind of event design – as strategies of conquering public spaces by means of provocation.”<sup>235</sup> The Dadaists, coming on the heels of the Futurists, used strategies of repetition to dissolve individuality and authorship. For example, they staged public performances of simultaneous poetry: multiple speakers and poetry recited in numerous languages, drowning out the individual voices. “The disappearance of the individual voice amid the collective, resonant whole was the actual aim of the event.”<sup>236</sup> Rudolf Frieling identifies the paradox of the “happening” in art, especially happenings with a strong performative component. By embracing chance, inviting an audience to participate and giving up control, the production dismantles the norms traditional to evaluating art. Artists remain closely intertwined with art and anti-art as the driving force behind participatory actions. Frieling contends that “ultimately, if artists wish to operate in the art world, they will inevitably be perceived as the one responsible for the work, even if they involve collaborators, let others take on the production, utilize

---

<sup>235</sup> Boris Groys, “A Genealogy of Participatory Art,” *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now* (Ed.) (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: Thames and Hudson, 2009)

<sup>236</sup> Gorys (2009), 25.

online networks . . . . court unknown participants.”<sup>237</sup> Within this context, Frieling is convinced that “art is constituted only through the participants activity.”<sup>238</sup> Clarie Bishop sees the role of participation as one that tends to be allied within all or one of the following concerns: activation, authorship and community. Activation is concerned with the desire to create an active subject. The goal is empowerment through participation, as well as an examination of the viewer’s social and political realities. Thus, the aesthetic of participation directly relates to the way art is experienced (as well as the production of individual/collective agency). Authorship is concerned with the level of control artists give up in collaborative productions. Although there is greater risk in shared production, collaborations are noted to “emerge from, and to produce, a more positive and non-hierarchical social model.”<sup>239</sup> Finally, the communitarian aspect of participatory practice is seen as a “restoration of the social bond through a collective of meaning.”<sup>240</sup>

The explosion of new technologies and the breakdown of medium-specific art in the 1960s provided opportunities to engage the viewer to explore the social dimensions inherent to participation. Performance art in particular strives to collapse the distinction between “performer and audience, professional and

---

<sup>237</sup> Rudolf Frieling, “Towards Participation in Art,” in *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*, eds. Rudolph Frieling, Boris Groys, Robert Atkins, and Lev Manovich (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: Thames and Hudson, 2009), 35.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid

<sup>239</sup> Claire Bishop, ed., *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 11.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid

amateur, production and reception.”<sup>241</sup> Participatory practices in this sense can seek to be provocative as well as embrace collective creativity; they can be disruptive and interventionists, while others can be constructive and ameliorative. In all events, participation becomes inextricably linked to questions of politics. The emphasis is on collaboration and the collective dimensions of social experience.<sup>242</sup> Drawing from idea of interpretation and meaning making, I have stressed the importance of the active participation of the viewers in the performance art venues. Contemporary performance artists have used visual methods and strategies to question memory as it operates within social and cultural frameworks. From memorializing to self-reflexive practices, contemporary performance artists have insistently created work that conveys embodied, social and cultural memory. Lisa Saltzman notes that artists “preoccupied with losses that reach from broadly historical, to the acutely personal, to the strictly theoretical, such art comes to function as a catalyst for and an agent of memory.”<sup>243</sup> For her such art comes to function as a mnemonic device, which I contextualize further through examining Mary Coble’s performances of *Marker* and *Blood Script*.

### **Mary Coble’s *Marker* and *Blood Script***

Mary Coble first performed *Marker* in New York on a cold October afternoon in 2006. She stood motionless, inviting viewers to write on her body a

---

<sup>241</sup> Bishop (2006),10.

<sup>242</sup> Bishop (2006).

<sup>243</sup> Lisa Saltzman, *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

derogatory word or a slur that they had either used or been called. As viewers walked by, intrigued by the content of the performance, they picked up a sharpie and wrote on Coble's body (Figs.5.1, 5.2). Coble describes her first performance of *Marker* as difficult, mainly because participants did not pay attention to her directions and tagged her with a wide variety of words. She particularly remembers the harsh weather and her increasing discomfort caused by the cold and wind. Coble has linked the process of performing *Marker* to her research for *Note to Self*. While she was studying hate crimes, she discovered several reports that included hate speech. For Coble, *Marker* addresses the relationship between the power of hate speech and its impact on people. Interested in the subversive nature of derogatory words and their power to promote discrimination, she wanted to perform an embodiment of language that shapes subjectivity. She also wished to confront the participants with the power of hate speech and how it produces shame and fear as part of the process of "othering." While some participants wrote what they had been called, others wrote words that they had used intentionally or by mistake.

Coble re-performed *Marker* in Washington, D.C., in July 2007, and then again in Madrid, in February 2008. She notes that the process of repeating the performance gave her the opportunity to rethink and explore more deeply the power of hate speech, especially its social and political significance when racial, gender and sexual epithets are used. In Washington and Madrid, Coble was more organized, and she specified just how she wanted participation to take place. At each site, she had her assistants hand out a flyer telling participants about the

nature of the performance before they wrote on her body. The flyer read, “You are invited to write on the artist’s body derogatory words that have been used against you or slurs that you have used or heard used against others.”<sup>244</sup> At each of the performances, Coble stands motionless. Coble notes her surprise at the different ways in which participants interacted with her in Washington and then Madrid. She found that when performing *Marker* in non-art venues in New York and Washington, participants were uncomfortable; they avoided looking directly at her and were discreet about which part of her body they wrote on. The participants in Madrid freely invaded Coble’s personal space, writing all over her body, including her face. She remembers her experience in Madrid as “different,” especially the vulnerability of being alone and not knowing what was being written or said by the spectators and participants. Slurs and derogatory words were imprinted on her body in several languages.

Coble speaks of her expectations at the performances and how she is often surprised by the way participants interact with her body. One reaction is discomfort among her participants as they write on her body. She recalls several powerful incidents: in New York an agitated Armenian man shared his story of repeatedly being called a “towel head” since he began living in the United States. In Washington an African American man walked towards Coble pulling a woman by her arm. Reading his aggressive gesture, Coble’s helpers tried to stop him from getting closer, explaining the purpose of the performance. He insisted that he understood the purpose of the performance and proceeded to pick up a marker and write the word “cunt” on Coble’s neck (Fig. 5.3). He then turned around to

---

<sup>244</sup> *Marker*, flyer handed out to participants.

his companion, apologizing for using the word and promising never to use it again on her. Another incident Coble remembers fondly is the touch of a small child's hand on the cold windy day in New York. She heard the voice of the child asking her mother, "Mom, I don't know how to spell 'stupid.'" As her mother spells out the word, the child writes it on Coble's body. She recalls how other kids have written words like "retard" and "sissy" on her body.

Following her performance in Madrid, Coble is invited to do a piece at the Pulse Contemporary Art Fair in New York. Following a pattern reminiscent of the creation of *Note to Self*, Coble folds the three *Marker* performances into a research effort that had as its result the collection of a large number of epithets. From the list she selected seventy-five words to be used in the performance of *Blood Script*. As in *Note to Self*, she collaborated with a tattoo artist (Fig.5.4) who would inscribe the words on the front of her body. As each word was tattooed, again without ink, a negative imprint was made on watercolor paper and then pinned to the wall (Figs. 5.5, 5.6). Her goal was to get her viewers to "reflect what the insults mean to them. The dynamic process mediates a silent dialogue between the artists and her audience as the performance progresses."<sup>245</sup> The performance went on for twenty hours. Where a simple, unadorned style of writing was employed in *Note to Self*, the words of hate speech for *Blood Script* were inscribed using highly formal and relatively complex Gothic letters. She notes that the script was deliberately chosen to engage the viewers and challenge them to identify with the inscribed insults. The choice, however, is open to different interpretations. For some viewers, the Gothic lettering creates a

---

<sup>245</sup> Performance Announcement, *PULSE New York* (March, 2008).

powerfully ironic tension between the content of the words and the way they are written, namely in a form of writing that conjures up medieval manuscripts, which are generally associated (rightly or wrongly) with sacred content. Younger viewers, though, might associate the form of writing with the nihilism of death metal bands, and thus creating no ironic tension.

*Blood Script* is different from *Note to Self*, in that it is performed in front of an audience at a large art fair, not a small group in the intimate space of a small art gallery. Over the two days of the performance several thousand viewers stopped by to witness *Blood Script* being performed. The atmosphere in the audience wavered between tension and awe. Although some viewers were put off by the smell of witch hazel, sight of blood and viewing the process of tattooing, others watched with empathy. Coble describes the performance of *Blood Script* as her most difficult so far because of the amount of physical pain she had to endure. Sara Hubbs, one of Coble's assistants for *Blood Script*, recalls her increased protectiveness towards the artist as the performance continued into the second day. She states that "knowing the context of the performance made it easier for me to understand the importance of the pain that Mary was going through. This made the performance of *Blood Script* much more significant for me. When spectators got upset, I felt even more compelled to explain what the performance was about." She also recalls Coble's performance was one of the first things that fairgoers encountered upon entering the space. Viewers were not expecting to be confronted by blood and tattooing. They were expecting to see art objects and paintings. The performance of *Blood Script* survives in the seventy-

five blood prints and photographs of Coble being tattooed, including a full frontal pose after the process came to an end (Fig.5.7).

### **The Role of Affect and Emotions in Intersubjectivity**

Coble's previous performances *Note to self* and *Aversion* were given at the Conner Contemporary Art Gallery in Washington. Several of the audience members were familiar with her focus on identity politics, and many were friends who had supported her work over the years. Unlike the previous performances, *Blood Script* moves Coble's work significantly beyond identity politics and toward more global concerns of embodiment and the power of the language that produces shame and fear as it relates to race, class, gender, sexuality, religion and citizenship. In soliciting hate speech from her audience in *Marker*, Coble creates a "dialogue with and implies a certain complicity on the part of the viewer,"<sup>246</sup> who publicly confesses to the knowledge of hate speech and tacitly acknowledges its power. Hate speech has the ability to wound and produce an affective experience that is culturally bound up with the politics of emotions. Coble's *Blood Script* demonstrates the impact of emotions in shaping and categorizing bodies as they make contact with others through language in public cultures. The power of language is central in addressing the importance of emotions in shaping social processes that shape individual experience, memory and history that get affectively inscribed.

In order to consider emotions and affect in performance art, the participation of the audience becomes a central consideration. In essence the performance, staged or real, functions in relationship to its spectators to evoke

---

<sup>246</sup> Shelly R. Langdale, The 5th Annual New Prints Review, *Art on Paper* (2008).

intersubjectivity. Often the response to Coble's performances cover a range of positive and negative emotions that affect the viewers, be it her live or the secondary photographic and video archive of her performances. The words used to describe her work range from "brilliant," "ingenious," "amazing," "beautiful" and "compassionate" to "painful," "shocking," "disgusting" and "hurtful." Other words that emerge are pain, blood, and the body relating to the conceptualization of her performances. After a lecture at Ohio University, where I accompanied Coble, one spectator commented on her feelings of anger and disgust evoked after reading about Coble's performance art in the local newspaper *Athens News*, then followed by her web search for more of Coble's performances. After the lecture the same spectator's reaction moved to one of understanding and empathy commenting "you are not an 'angry dyke.' Quite the contrary, you are compassionate, using your art and body as a vehicle for healing of pain, hurt, violent crimes and discrimination. Thank you for your positive spirit and humor and for making yourself venerable in order to speak for those who no longer have a voice because they were murdered." Another spectator stated, "I felt a strong reaction to some of your performances. It made me realize things about myself that I do and should not do." Another viewer highlighted the role of pain, stating "I was deeply impressed by you're ability to mediate private pain—pain that society expects people to keep private—your performances force others to confront this pain they are conditioned to be ignorant of." Another spectator comments "you made me feel like I belonged. I realize how dangerous and susceptible a person like me is to certain hate-crimes. Yet, I also realized that there are allies

out there.” Referring to the *Marker* performance one spectator commented “fascinating to hear about the marker performance, the child’s perspective of what a hurtful word was, about people actually using your body as a human billboard of sorts, advertising how painful words can be.”

Offering an analysis of pain and the body, Elaine Scarry argues for the relationship between torture and war. She notes that pain is inaccessible to language; rather it is expressed through the sensory, affective or cognitive elements of the body and perception. Sarah Ahmed, however, takes a different approach. Examining the politics of pain and how the lived experience of pain is shaped by contact with others, she contends that the “pain of others is continually evoked in public discourse, as that which demands a collective as well as an individual response.”<sup>247</sup> For her, pain evokes history, but it also stands for the history of suffering and injustice. She contends that narratives that arouse the feeling of pain are less about overcoming the pain than the empowerment of the other. In the tattooing process, the experience of pain centers the body as a site of cultural knowing and memory. In this sense, the complex process of culture becomes written on the body. The individual’s pain is made meaningful through a collective experience that, in the performance, generates an intersubjective response. Coble asks her viewers to think about how hate, pain, anger, fear and shame are mutually constitutive on a daily basis. On the one hand, Coble wants to highlight the power of hate speech for marginalized individuals, but, on the other, to subvert the power of derogatory words through her, a lesbian’s,

---

<sup>247</sup> Ahmed (2004).

reappropriation. Coble's performance retells and reenacts history as a way to re-write and recreate the past in a different way. Furthermore, Coble continues to evoke the lost narratives each time her work is displayed in a museum or she lectures, showing images of performances as a way to evoke intersubjectivity among audiences in the future. Coble's performances allow for the contingency of pain and shame to queer the experience of her audience. The subversiveness of pain and shame evokes the personal and political dimensions to queer the archive. In evoking emotions and affect the performance works not only to acknowledge suffering, but also to empower the audiences and spectators through offering a counter archive, re-inscribing memory and history.

### **Intersubjectivity and the document**

Following the live performance of *Blood Script*, Coble was invited to exhibit the related documents and artifacts of her performance in several venues. In 2008, she showed the documentary photographs of *Blood Script* in the exhibition "Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection," held at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, The Brooklyn Museum of Art. This is followed by "Gallery Artists: Recent Works" at the Conner Contemporary Art Gallery in Washington, as well as "Perspective," at the Anaid Art Gallery in Bucharest, Romania. In 2009, she exhibits the documentary photographs of *Note to Self* at the Schroeder Romero Gallery and "Talk Dirty to Me" at the Larissa Goldston Gallery in New York. In May 2009, Coble was invited to participate in an international show in Copenhagen titled *Lost and Found - Queering the Archive*. Showing the work of thirteen contemporary

artists, the exhibition focused on memory and history in relationship to gender and sexuality. Curators Mathias Danbolt, Jane Rowley and Louise Wolthers, were concerned with the compilation of archives and how the writing of history creates canons. In the exhibition they take up questions of inclusion and exclusion in the context of marginalized identities: whose story is told and whose is left out. They present a series of “art works that question normative history to generate new narratives based on private memories and experiences that go beyond gender and sexuality norms.”<sup>248</sup> In doing so, the show questions how we can create an archive for the private memories relating to gender, love and sexuality, ones that have been erased by official archives and excluded from the writing of history. How do we record and store feelings and intimacy? Using photography, video, silent movie footage, jukebox archives of pops songs, and installation, the works of art chosen for exhibition reconstruct past performances in a thought provoking way to address the artistic visions of histories compiled and performed from a queer perspective.<sup>249</sup>

While the show questions notions of history and memory, deconstructing and constructing power structures that are embedded in and preserved in the archives, it also raises important questions about documentation and the afterlife of the performance art. Coble, represented in this show, exhibits the documentation of her live performance of *Blood Script*. For the show she installed the archive of the blood impressions of the seventy-five words, as well as

---

<sup>248</sup> Jane Rowley and Louise Wolthers, “Lost and Found: Queeyring the Archive,” in *Lost and Found: Queeyring the Archive*, eds. Mathias Danbolt, Jane Rowley and Louise Wolthers (Nikolaj: Copenhagen Contemporary Arts Society, 2009) 9-23,9.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid

photographs of her being tattooed. Although Coble's installation can be described as a "commemoration and remembrance" of speech and violence in society, I view her documents and photographs as evoking in her viewers a sense of deep fear, pain and empathy. I am personally intrigued by her strategy of using florid and evocative calligraphy that seductively draws the viewer into contact with her. While there are clinical and documentary close ups of the words inscribed on her body, the photograph of her being tattooed and returning the viewers gaze is particularly intriguing. While the viewers are entranced by the script and words on Coble's body, the photographs of her performance have a powerful emotional impact on her viewers. The strategy of juxtaposing a formal script for the language of hate speech creates a level of tension that cannot be articulated, but only experienced.

Artists concerned with recreating the past are interested in producing documentation "not of the past as incomplete,"<sup>250</sup> but rather "of history as incomplete."<sup>251</sup> For performance art in particular the process of documentation leads back to an issue addressed by Walter Benjamin in the context of "mechanical reproduction." Whereas Benjamin argues for the loss of authenticity, the aura created by the unique existence of the original and lost through widespread photomechanical reproduction, contemporary performance artists use new technologies to destabilize the notion of a singular, authentic object. Coble's photographic and video evidence of her performances are as important as live performances. Although the performance disappears, it

---

<sup>250</sup> Santone, Jessica. "Marina Abramovic's Seven Easy Pieces: Critical Documentation Strategies for Preserving Art's History," *Leonardo*, 41, 2, (2008),147-152,147.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid

continues to be referenced through the installations of the photographs and videos of the performance. What is subsequently acquired by the Hirshhorn Museum as the *Note to Self* performance is the installation of the secondary archive of the negative imprints of the names and a large photograph of the artist's back covered with the names of the 438 hate crime victims. (Additionally her gallerist continues to sell a limited edition of the photographic image of Coble's performances of *Note to Self*, *Aversion* and *Blood Script*). Coble's performance documents, photographs and videos, link memory and personal experience, and in this way serves to represent the historical silence and loss of queer culture. There is a "significant link between performance art and testimony in terms of a shared desire to build culture out of memory. The life stories of performance art are often structured around, if not traumatic experiences, moments of intense affect that are transformative or revealing."<sup>252</sup> In this way the audience participation at Coble's performance, where audience members leave notes and flowers, becomes an embodied archival practice. The body of the performer, especially the pain endured, impacts the transmission of feelings and affect on to the audience.

Exploring the ways in which contemporary artists seek to contribute to a "narrativized and/or mediated understandings of the past that already come after an originary moment,"<sup>253</sup> Jessica Santone argues that the archival material does not necessarily have a sequencing logic or ordering, rather the archival document is performative as it circulates to repeat and multiply historical ideas it wishes to complicate. Taking up the role of documentation and its parameters in

---

<sup>252</sup> Cvetkovich (2003), 26

<sup>253</sup> Ibid

performance art studies, Santone distinguishes between artist-initiated documentation versus institutionally sponsored documentation. She asks that we question the role of technology and how it complicates body-based performance practices, especially issues of reproduction, authenticity, and authorship in relationship to medium.<sup>254</sup> In this sense documentation in performance art becomes as a mode of production that engages with critical interpretation of the archive, one that mutually informs, constructs and deconstructs the archive.<sup>255</sup>

Coble's performances, artifacts and photographs play a crucial role on two levels. First, her performance summons the role of body and its social framing to complicate the function of official archives and second it complicates the parameters of performance art beyond a live event. While the live performance has a visceral impact on the viewers, so do the photographs and display of artifacts in future exhibits, as well as images that circulate on the Internet. On the one hand, Coble's performance as a conceptual archive contest the history of loss as it relates to narratives of queer life, "the stuff of life that never usually makes it into the archive."<sup>256</sup> On the other, Coble's medium and documentation, using her own blood to create the negative imprints of the hate speech inscribed on her body and the photographs of her being tattooed, disturb the issues of medium and authenticity as it relates to performance art.

Coble's performances raise questions about the extent to which her original performances are mediated in their afterlife. What choices she makes as

---

<sup>254</sup> Santone (2008).

<sup>255</sup> Santone refers to the research program Documentation and Conservation of Media Arts Heritage/Documentation et conversation du patrimoine des arts mediateques (DOCAM). For her, documentation is a mode of production and critical interpretation.

<sup>256</sup> Rowley & Wolthers (2009), 10.

an artist in the process of selecting the images she shows in future exhibitions, not just in art shows, but also through her website. I contend that the exhibiting of documents of the original performance in Coble's case is performative, though its repetition and multiplication are controlled by Coble in its afterlife. The original performance is conceptualized and documented strategically to ensure its circulation in the future. Coble carefully crafts and documents her performance experience as an essential aspect of her work in question. While she cannot control the original performance, the pain and her collaboration with the tattoo artist, she is purposeful in creating a counter archive through her documentation that is not based on "disappearance and loss,"<sup>257</sup> rather one that accounts for the loss. In this sense the document "emerges from and continues to reproduce the loss."<sup>258</sup> Additionally, embodiment of loss and pain has to be considered not only in relationship to the materiality of the body, but also culture. Bennett places pain within the nexus of social relationships. She argues that the lived experiences of pain are shaped by language, as well as the silences that surround it.<sup>259</sup> Coble's performances (*Note to Self*, *Marker* and *Blood Script*) use the body as archive to bridge the embodiment of pain and loss to argue for how lived experience is shaped by language that silences, shames and produces fear.

To this end, the reenactment of performances is a means to remember the historical moment as well as the prior archives of those performances. Román links contemporary performances to the past performances, arguing,

---

<sup>257</sup> Phelan (1993).

<sup>258</sup> Santone (2008), 148.

<sup>259</sup> Bennett (2005).

“performance might be said to serve as its own archive.”<sup>260</sup> In this context, performance art, its documentation, and dissemination become an alternative archive to create global audiences. Drawing from Román, Munoz and Joesph, I argue that the etymology of the archive of performance lies in its performativity. It is through performance and its documentation that a counter-archive is introduced in the archive. For Phelan, performance hinges on the visibility and invisibility, its appearance and disappearance. For Taylor performance is about the ghosting and visualization that acts politically even as it exceeds the live. For me, the archive, especially in relationship to performance art and intersubjectivity, mutually construct and deconstruct audience experiences, offering a “counter-archive” in the “after life of the performance.”<sup>261</sup> Through documentation, its transmission (photographs, websites, video, and films) new publics spheres are created to contest the hegemonic performance and politics of the archive. In this respect the archive becomes a site for knowledge retrieval and new modes of knowledge construction that offer revisualization, especially for minority subjects. In Taylor’s words, the performance “ disappears only to hover; it promises or threatens to reappear, albeit in another shape or form.”<sup>262</sup>

Performance’s political efficacy and intersubjectivity lies among audience members that they are rooted in history and have agency to shape the future that links performance to the possibility of social change. Performance offers “new social formations” and is inherently counter-hegemonic.<sup>263</sup> It “becomes a vehicle

---

<sup>260</sup> Román (2005), 152.

<sup>261</sup> Román (2005), 137.

<sup>262</sup> Taylor (2003), 44.

<sup>263</sup> Román (2005).

through which the body is ‘exposed’ and multiply delineated.”<sup>264</sup> In this sense performance art, conceptually, questions subjectivity and knowledge construction as a political and transgressive act, engaging spectators in public spaces in producing intersubjectivity.

---

<sup>264</sup> Alicia Arrizon, *Latina Performance Taversing the Stage* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999), 73.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **Conclusion: Embodied Biography**

My dissertation project has focused on the queering of archival practices as they relate to knowledge construction, performance art and intersubjectivity. Focusing on issues of embodiment, emotions and feeling as they relate to knowledge production, I took up the ways in which performance art explores non-normative narratives of gender, sexuality, race and citizenship. The traditional archive functions in a manner that determines and regulates social and cultural categories of traditional difference. If we reach beyond its limitations, expanding the concept of the archive beyond a physical repository of documents, we can arrive at alternative readings of the body and authorial power.

The archive and the body involve issues of power. I have argued throughout this project for the power of performance art to resituate discourses of the body as they relate to multiple knowledge construction and knowledge production. Feminist performance artists, in particular, have disturbed the boundaries of the archive for over four decades, creating alternative discourses of the body, re-animating the archive and contesting its defining nature. By reinscribing the archive as a conceptual space, one in which the body becomes the direct medium, feminist artists argue for the power, limits and credibility of the archive. Their practice moves the body beyond a subject limited by traditional archival discourses by actively disrupting archival knowledge, challenging what is remembered by revealing what is ignored, the collective memories that are engendered and those that are forgotten. In this sense, an embodied biography

like Coble's offers a "queer perspective" to open up alternative readings of the archive as it relates to queer subcultures, as well as to complicate non-normative experiences that move beyond the intersections of gender and sexuality. At the same time, Coble's performances make visible the embodied language of desire, provocation, violence and loss. They show how memory becomes inscribed as a means to account for queer counterhistories, alternative narratives, queer subcultures and counterpublics. The body as archive in this sense is multiply delineated, one that queer epistemology suggests needs to "embark on an expanded investigation of normalization and intersectionality."<sup>265</sup>

Recognizing the conceptual nature of the archive and its place in contemporary discourse, Judith Halberstam notes that "the nature of queer subcultural activity requires a nuanced theory of archive and archiving."<sup>266</sup> Along with Ann Cvetkovich and José Muñoz, Halberstam is concerned with how the everyday experiences of queer life emerge out of ethnographic interviews, archives that exist online or outside of unofficial document repositories. As important as documents, papers, posters, zines and accounts of queer life may be, the redefinition of the archive must extend beyond the physical, whether places and things. It needs to be a floating signifier for the kind of life implied by the documents. In this sense, the archive has a theoretical significance through its

---

<sup>265</sup> David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and Jose Muñoz, eds. *Social Text: What is Queer About Queer Studies Now?* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 5.

<sup>266</sup> Halberstam (2005), 169.

cultural relevance in constructing collective memory that relates to a complex record of queer activity.<sup>267</sup>

Performance artists examine, contest and reinvent the archive to de-center history and memory as a means to complicate the concept of “queer” beyond a marker of identity, as one that is complicated when politics, emotions, language and embodiment intersect with race, class, gender and sexuality. In particular, I see performance art focusing on the subversive ways in which artists create themselves as historical subjects, offering the body as an archive. Referencing the archive of forgotten histories and memories, they engage with ways to reimagine “history and genealogy, both individual and communal, and demonstrate how performance functions as an archive itself.”<sup>268</sup> Performance art in this sense becomes a form of cultural critique to theorize embodiment in the present as it relates to the past—the traces of history and memory—in order to complicate the present. Performance art provides a critical space for evoking feelings and emotions to enable new forms of cultural sites for alternative modes of being and intersubjectivity, complicating the concept of “queer.” The term “queer” in this sense relates to multiple readings of the body, beyond the intersection of gender and sexuality, that emphasize the role of embodiment, desire, intimacy, space, time, and audience as important components of meaning making and disruption.

An intersectional perspective presupposes and builds on categories of difference and inequality, and the resulting knowledge relates directly to the

---

<sup>267</sup> As Halberstam writes (2005), 169: “In order for the archive to function it requires users, interpreters, and cultural historians to wade through the material and piece together the jigsaw puzzle of queer history in the making.”

<sup>268</sup> Romàn (2005), 3.

defining authority of the archive. The “difficulties of categorization go the heart of the politics of archiving, and in this way queer critiques of identities disturb the logic of the archive.”<sup>269</sup> In order to upset the archival order that constrains and shapes identity, queer theory advocates the “continual pushing and troubling of such categories and definitions.”<sup>270</sup> Although queer studies scholars have criticized the positivist assumptions inherent in identity politics, I argue for identity base formations as an important part of challenging the archival order, to produce counter-archives of marginalization, difference and intersubjectivity. Yet, to destabilize and queer the archive, it is critical to pay attention to “queer” as a process of dissonance (as well as harmony) that emerges from the embodiment of emotions and feelings as they relate to the temporality and materiality of the body as a subject of political discourse. In this sense, performance art becomes a critical site of cultural resistance, embodiment, language, memory and feelings in producing knowledge and queering the archives relationship to the past and how it is engaged in the present.

Coble’s most important strategy is her focus on the body, its lapses and excesses to reenact the queer historical subject and raise questions concerning the limits of the traditional knowledge archive, its ethics and credibility. She draws on the power of the law and the ways in which the “archive as law organizes social and historical difference”<sup>271</sup> in regulating, silencing and patrolling

---

<sup>269</sup>Mathias Danbolt. “Touching History:Archival Realtions in Queer Art and Theory,” in *Lost and Found: Queering the Archive*, eds. Mathias Danbolt, Jane Rowley and Louise Wolthers (Nikolaj: Copenhagen Contemporary Arts Society, 2009), 34.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid

<sup>271</sup> Reddy, Chandan. “Asian Diasporas, Neoliberalism, and Family: Reviewing the Case for Homosexual Asylum in the Context of Family Rights,” in *Social Text: What is Queer About*

sexuality, queer desire, and intimacy. She performs in the gaps of imposed cultural norms and queer desire as one that is provocative and pleasurable, yet one that is constantly constrained by fear and violence. For Coble the body becomes a medium of political agency that is produced when emotions, feelings and embodiment are expressed through performance. She pushes beyond Foucault's concept of docile bodies that are shaped, regulated and produced within the legal sphere of the archive. In reenacting the historical subject and documenting her performances, Coble complicates the definition of the body and the document. The traces and documents synonymous with the archive raise questions of not only the past with the present, but with the performance event and its occurrence as well as with the everyday experiences and representation.<sup>272</sup> In *Note to Self* Coble complicates the relationship between text and the body by inscribing names of victims of hate crimes making evident the fragility of the archive's authority. In disturbing the archive's structure or lack of it, the body becomes a point of intersection for a redefinition. The body in this sense becomes an archive in the form of multiple texts, one that is marked by history, memory, feelings of pain and fear, irrespective of race, class gender and sexuality. By making the invisible inscriptions visible through tattooing, the body mediates to challenge the viewing practices of the audience. By making the familiar strange, the body opens the space for new critical inquiry of the archive.

---

*Queer Studies Now?* eds. David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and Jose Muñoz, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 115.

<sup>272</sup> Paul Riceour, "Archives, Documents, Traces," in *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Charles Merewether (London: Whitechapel, 2006).

Coble's move towards a broader critique of queering the archive (*Marker* and *Blood Script*), results in complicating the power of language as it relates to race, class, gender, nationality, religion and sexuality. In reappropriating hate speech, she offers an alternative meaning to the archive of language and the body, illustrating history as written, inscribed and performed beyond the norm, an alternative language. In this sense, her refusal to be a subject of the archive directly relates to her own queer subjectivity, dissolving the "opposition between theory and practice."<sup>273</sup>

To conclude, the history of performance art has been grounded in the postmodern concept of representation as it relates to activating intersubjectivity between the audience and the artist. Performance artists have deconstructed representation using postmodern tactics as a crucial strategy for resistance raising questions about institutional power, the body politic and the performance of gender, sexuality, race and citizenship in everyday life. In this sense postmodernism has been concerned with the rhetorical significance of ideas, not their truth or rationality. Feminist theorists have argued for the limitations of postmodernism, emphasizing the need to move beyond just deconstructing cultural representations of gender and sexuality to account for the materiality of the body. To have a more nuanced understanding of representation, theorists must engage with the "complex interactions of the body and culture" to account for the body beyond a cultural text shaped by social and historical systems. Performance artists complicate the theorization of the body, not simply as one being "acted upon," but rather as one that shapes contemporary discourses as an

---

<sup>273</sup> Conquergood (2002), 146.

active agent of change. By raising questions about the lived experiences of the body, performance artists actively engage with how the body is shaped by emotions and feelings in relationship to cultural and social processes, contesting the nature of power and truth. Though highlighting the overwhelming power in repressing and marginalizing subjectivities, performance artists have turned to the body as a “tool” to create new realities and knowledge that open the door for political and social discourses. Performance artists in this sense work within the conceptual space of the archive, not only to critique the ideological systems of power, but also to offer alternative discourses and counter-archives. In turn, artistic strategies, especially the focus on the body, queers the viewing practices of the audience and spectators at performance art events. Performance art in this way not only makes archives visible, but also creates new archival forms.<sup>274</sup>

To this end, although Coble’s artistic practices play within the contradictions of the archives, making its concrete nature ephemeral, investing identity categories with emotions and feelings and re-presenting the historical subject as one with agency. At the same time, they raise questions for future research, especially with regard to the privileging of race, class and the body; what does it mean to mark an unmarked white body? What role does the viewer’s race and class play in promoting intersubjectivity at performance events? Finally, do race and class determine the kind of audiences who frequent galleries and museums to attend such performance events?

---

<sup>274</sup> Cvetkovich, (2008).

## List of Figures

## Bibliography

- Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- Alexander, Darsie. "Reluctant Witness: Photography and the Documentation of the 1960s and 1970s Art," in *Work Ethic*, ed. Helen Moleworth (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).
- Alcoff, Linda Martin., Hames-Gracia, Michael., Mohanty, Satya P. and Moya, Paula M.L. eds. *Identity Politics Reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006).
- Arondekar, Anjali. "Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14 (2005), 10-27.
- Arrizon, Alicia. "Chicano Art and Identity: Beyond Chicanismo," *Latina Performance Taversing the Stage* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999).
- Auslander, Philip. "The Performativity of the Performance Document," *Performance Art Journal*, 84 (2006), 1-10.
- , *Presences and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1992).
- Austin, J.L. *How to do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).
- Banarjee, Bidisha. "Duct and Uncover," *Washington City Paper* (April 23, 2004).
- Barthes, Ronald. "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," *Music-Image-Text* (New York: Noonday Press, 1977).
- Blackson, Robert. "Once more . . . With Feeling: Reenactment in Contemporary Art and Culture," *Art Journal* (Spring 2007), 28-40.
- Beckman, Rachel. "Aversion: A Jolt of an Experience," *The Washington Post* (May 17, 2007).
- Bennett, Jill. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005).
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Press, 1972).

- Bishop, Claire, ed. *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).
- Blocker, Jane. *What the Body Cost: Desire, History, and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).
- Bloom, Lisa. "Contests for the Meaning of the Body Politics and Feminists Conceptual Art: Revisioning the 1970s through the Work of Eleanor Antin," in *Performing the Body: Performing the Text*, eds. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (New York: Routledge, 1999).
- Bradley, Harriet. "The Seduction of the Archive: Voices Lost and Found," *History of the Human Sciences*, 12 (1999), 107-122.
- Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2004).
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* ([1990] London: Routledge, 1999).
- . *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993).
- . Burning Acts: Injurious Speech, *Roundtable*, 3, (1996) 199- 221.
- Capps, Kriston. "Mind the Zap," *Washington City Paper* (May 17, 2007).
- Carlson, Marla. *Marina Abramović Repeats: Pain, Art, and Theater*, <http://www.hotreview.org/articles/marinaabram.htm> (2005).
- Carr, C. *On Edge: Performance at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993).
- Caygill, Howard. "Meno and the Internet: Between Memory and the Archive," *History of the Human Sciences*, 12 (1999) 1-11.
- Clifford, James. "Introduction: Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. J. Clifford and G.E. Marcus (Berkeley: California Press, 1986).
- Conquergood, Dwight. "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," *TDR: The Drama Review* 46 (2002), 145-156.
- . "Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics," *Communications Monograph*, 58 (1991) 179-194.

- Cohen, Cathy J. "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" in *Black Queer Studies*, eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae. G. Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 21-51.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
- Damasio, Antonio. *"Descartes" Error: Emotions, Reason and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994).
- Danbolt, Mathias. "Touching History: Archival Reactions in Queer Art and Theory," in *Lost and Found: Queering the Archive*, eds. Mathias Danbolt, Jane Rowley and Louise Wolthers (Nikolaj: Copenhagen Contemporary Arts Society, 2009).
- Diamond, Elin. *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
- Denzin, Norman K. *Performance Ethnography: Critical pedagogy and the Politics of Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2004).
- Dolan, Jill. *Utopia in Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).
- Donkor, David. "Performance, Ethnography and the Radical Intervention of Dwight Conquergood," *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2007), 821-825.
- Eng, David L., Halberstam, Judith and Muñoz, Jose, eds. *Social Text: What is Queer About Queer Studies Now?* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
- Enwezor, Okwui. *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2008).
- Fisher Sterling, Susan and Watt, Kathryn. "Fashioning Feminine Identity in Contemporary Photography," in *Role Models: Feminine Identity in Contemporary American Photography*, ed. Susan Fisher Sterling (London: Scala Publishers Limited, 2008) 35-43.
- Forte, Jean. "Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism," *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990) 251-269.
- Foster, Hal. "An Archival Impulse," *October*, 110 (2004), 3-22.
- . *Readings in Cultural Resistance, Recoding: Art, Spectacle and Culture Politics* (New York: New Press, 1985).

- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972).
- . *History of Sexuality I, An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1980).
- Frieling, Rudolf. "Towards Participation in Art," in *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*, eds. Rudolph Frieling, Boris Groys, Robert Atkins, and Lev Manovich (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: Thames and Hudson, 2009).
- Garoian, Charles. *Performing Pedagogy: Towards an Art of Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).
- Gates Jr., Henry Louis. "*Race*," *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1986)
- GLBTQ Arts, [http://www.glbtc.com/arts/performance\\_art.html](http://www.glbtc.com/arts/performance_art.html)  
<http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/dacasey/Serrano.htm>  
[http://phomul.canalblog.com/archives/mapplethorpe\\_robert/index.html](http://phomul.canalblog.com/archives/mapplethorpe_robert/index.html)
- Goldberg, Roselee. *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, 2nd ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, [1979] 2001).
- . *Performance: Live Art Since 60s* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998).
- Gonzales, Jennifer A. *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).
- Grammar.polic, <http://grammarpolice.net/archives/000759.php> (September 14, 2005).
- Groys, Boris. "A Genealogy of Participatory Art," in *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*, eds. Rudolph Frieling, Boris Groys, Robert Atkins, and Lev Manovich (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: Thames and Hudson, 2009).
- Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).
- . *In Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
- Hart, Lynda. "Reconsidering Homophobia: Karen Finley's Indiscretions," in *Reader in Cultural Criticism: Performance Studies*, ed. Erin Striff (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillian, 2003).

- Heartney, Eleanor., Posner, Helaine., Princenthal, Nancy. and Scott, Sue. eds. *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art* (New York: Prestel, 2007).
- Jackson, Shelly. Talks with Vito Acconci  
[http://www.believmag.com/issues/200612/?read=interview\\_acconci](http://www.believmag.com/issues/200612/?read=interview_acconci).
- Jackson, Shannon. *Professing Performance: Theater in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- Jenkins, Keith. *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge,1991).
- Jones, Amelia and Stephenson, Andrew. *Performing the Body, Performing the Text* (London: Routledge, 1999).
- Jones, Amelia. *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
- . ““Presences” in Absentia: Experiencing Performance in Documentation,” *Art Journal*, 56,4 (1996), 11-18.
- Jones, Joni L. “Performance Ethnography: The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity,” *Theater Topics*, 12 (2002), 1-15.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998).
- LaGrace, Volcano Dell and Halberstam, Judith. *The Drag King Book* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1999).
- Langellier, Katharine. “Personal narratives: Perspectives on theory and research,” *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 9 (1989), 243-276.
- Langdale, Shelly R. “The 5th Annual New Prints Review,” *Art on Paper* (2008).
- Madison, D. Soyini. “Performance, Personal Narrative, and the Politics of Possibilities,” in *The Future of Performance Studies: Visions and Revisions*, ed. Sharon Dailey (Washington, D.C: NCA, 1998),276-286.
- Madison, D. Soyini and Hamera, Judith. “Performance Studies at the Intersections,” *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, eds. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), xi-xxv.

- Mead, George Herbert. *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).
- Merewether, Charles. ed. *The Archive* (London: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2006).
- Meskimmon, Marsha. "Chronology Through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally," in *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, eds. Cornelia Butler and Lisa Mark (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).
- Muñoz, Jose. "Queer Punks, and the Utopian Performative," in *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, eds. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 9-20.
- Muybridge, Eadweard. *The Human figure in Motion* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955).
- O'Dell, Kathy. *Contact with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
- Orr, Joey. "Fly on the Web: When Performance Goes On-line," *Atlanta Pride* (2006).
- . "Mary Coble's Body, Electrified," *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* (Sept-Oct, 2007).
- Osborne, Thomas. "The Ordinarity of the Archive," *History of the Human Sciences*, 12,2 (1999), 51-64.
- O'Sullivan, Michael. "Connecting Past, Present and Futures," *WE45* (August 27, 2004).
- Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
- Probyn, Elspeth. *Blush: Faces of Shame* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
- Rand, Kelly. "Aversion @ Conner Contemporary," *Arts and Events* (June 5, 2007).
- Reddy, Chandan. "Asian Diasporas, Neoliberalism, and Family: Reviewing the Case for Homosexual Asylum in the Context of Family Rights," in *Social Text: What is Queer About Queer Studies Now?* eds. David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and Jose Muñoz, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

- Reilly, Maura. "Introduction: Towards Transnational Feminism" in *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, eds. Maura Reilly & Linda Nochlin (Brooklyn: Merrell Publishers Limited, 2007), 15-45.
- Riceour, Paul. "Archives, Documents, Traces," in *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Charles Merewether (London: Whitechapel, 2006).
- Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum- Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
- Román, David. *Performance in America: Contemporary U.S. Cultures and the Performing Arts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
- Ross, Susan. "Jorge, Jose Jr., Joseph, Joseph, Joseph," *NY Arts Magazine* (2005).
- Rowley, Jane and Wolthers, Louise. "Lost and Found: Queeyring the Archive," in *Lost and Found: Queeyring the Archive*, eds. Mathias Danbolt, Jane Rowley and Louise Wolthers (Nikolaj: Copenhagen Contemporary Arts Society, 2009).
- Saltzman, Lisa. *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- Santone, Jessica. "Marina Abramovic's Seven Easy Pieces: Critical Documentation Strategies for Preserving Art's History," *Leonardo*, 41, 2, (2008), 147-152.
- Schneemann, Carolee. *Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy and Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
- Somerville, Siobhan. *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, Duke University Press,
- Sondoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

- Soutter, Lucy. "Enigmatic Spectacle: Key Strategies in Contemporary Stage Photography," in *Role Models: Feminine Identity in Contemporary American Photography*, ed. Susan Fisher Sterling (London: Scala Publishers, 2008).
- Smith, Valerie. "Abundant Evidence: Black Women Artists of the 1960s and 70s," in *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, eds. Cornelia Butler & Lisa Mark (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).
- Smith, Kathy. "Abject Bodies: Beckett, Orlan, Stelarc and the Politics of Contemporary Performance." *Performance Research*, 12 ,1. (2007), 66-76.
- Smith, Shawn. *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. DuBois, Race and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
- Steiler, Dana. "Queer Physiognomies; Or, How Many Ways Can We Do the History of Sexuality," *Criticism* 46 (2004), 71- 102.
- Stern, Daniel. "Intersubjectivity," in *The American Psychiatric Textbook of Psychoanalysis*, eds. Ethel Person, Arnold Cooper & Glen Gannard (Arlington: American Psychiatric Publishing Inc, 2005).
- Struken, Marita and Cartwright, Lisa. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- Sekula, Allan. "The Body and the Archive," *October*, 39 (1986), 12.
- Taylor, Diana. *Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americans* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
- Terry, Jennifer. "The Seductive Power of Science in the Making of Deviant Subjectivity," in *Posthuman Bodies*, eds. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995), 135-161.
- Ursprung, Philip. "Viennese Actionism in the 1960s," in *Performing the Body, Performing the Text*, eds. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London: Routledge, 1999).
- van der Kolk, Bassel . "The Body Keeps the Score: Memory and the Evolving Psychobiology of Posttraumatic Stress," *Harvard Review Psychiatry*, 15 (1994), 253-263.
- Vergine, Lea. *Body art and Performance* (Milano: Palazzo Casati Stampa, 2000).

- Voss, Paul J. and Werner, Marta J. "Towards a Poetics of the Archive: Introduction," *Studies in Literary Imagination*, 32 (1999), i-viii;
- Wark, Jayne. *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America* (Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).
- Warner, Michael. *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- Warr, Tracy. "Preface," in *The Artists Body*, eds. Amelia Jones and Tracy Warr (London: Phadion Press, 2000).
- Webster, Merriam. Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>