

Performance And Its Documents:  
Revisiting Debates In Performance Art Documentation

by

Michael JH Woolley

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

History of Art, Design and Visual Culture

Department of Art and Design

University of Alberta

© Michael JH Woolley 2018

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines issues of performance art documentation. An art historical survey contextualizes performance art practice and theory, situating the contradicting nature of performance art as a medium that both requires documentation while also denying its possibility. A detailed case study of the work of contemporary performance artist Cassils provides a point of entry for reconsidering documentation itself as a mode of doing performance art, rather than being ancillary to the work of performance. Finally, the research culminates in a research-creation project that puts into practice the ideas explored earlier in the thesis; this final chapter of the thesis is realized in both writing and as a gallery exhibition which explore and enfold the research produced through a month-long daily practice performance work engaged in by the author.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to Dr. Natalie Loveless for your mentorship, enthusiasm, and patience throughout this thesis process. Thank you also to both Dr. Lianne McTavish, my departmental reader, and Dr. Carrie Smith-Prei, my external reader, for your guidance and constructive advice. To Blair Brennan, and his gallery assistants Phoebe Todd-Parrish and Josh Wade, thank you for your support, without which I would never have been able to sanely hang my research-creation exhibition. I am grateful as well to my colleagues, Julie-Ann Mercer, Kyle Terrence, and Laura Porter, for your encouragement and feedback, and to the staff and designers at Mr. S Leather for working with me to construct a custom harness for my research-creation.

My research was financially supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Queen Elizabeth II Graduate Scholarship, a Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research Graduate Travel Award, and a Department of Art and Design Conference Travel Award.

Thank you to my family and friends for your unconditional support, and in particular to my former partner, Darcy Macdonald, for his ceaseless support, understanding, and critical eye.

## Table of Contents

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>IV</b>
<hr/>	
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>VII</b>
<hr/>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<hr/>	
BUT WHAT OF PERFORMANCE ART DOCUMENTATION?	5
<hr/>	
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	<b>9</b>
<hr/>	
ARGUING FROM ANECDOTE	9
ANECDOTAL PROLOGUE	9
<i>First Words</i>	9
<i>Performance Myth: Pollock and Namuth</i>	13
ANECDOTAL PERFORMANCE	19
<i>Coda/Prologue</i>	19
<i>Bodies</i>	23
<i>Interlude: Performativity, iteration, recursion</i>	29
<i>Addendum: Spaces in Time</i>	33
DENOUEMENT	38
<hr/>	
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	<b>41</b>
<hr/>	
MATERIAL DOCUMENTS	41
REQUIEM IN FLESH AND CLAY	42
CUTS	47
<i>A traditional sculpture</i>	47
<i>And its derivatives</i>	52

BECOMING	61
<i>An image</i>	61
<i>Derivative residues</i>	63
POWERS	68
<i>That be</i>	68
MATERIAL AGENTS	71
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>ANECDOTAL APOLOGIA</b>	<b>78</b>
AM I SUPPOSED TO BE ABLE TO SEE MY PULSE IN MY NECK?	78
UNDERSTANDING AND KNOWING IN THEORY AND PRACTICE	80
THE SOUND OF THINGS TO COME	87
DOCUMENTING PERAMBULATIONS	92
DOCUMENTING DOCUMENTING	98
<i>The apocryphal metaphysics of thinking and doing</i>	98
<i>Performative documents: a prelude</i>	100
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>104</b>
ON FAILURE	104
ON INTERPRETATION	108
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: ORIGINAL CONCLUSION</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: PERFORMANCE SCRIPT</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: DIDACTIC TEXT</b>	<b>139</b>

**APPENDIX D: GALLERY MAP AND LIST OF WORKS** **140**

**APPENDIX E: INSTALLATION DOCUMENTATION** **141**

**APPENDIX F: VIDEO STILLS AND DETAILS** **146**

## List of Figures

- Figure 1- Cassils, pre-performance still from *Becoming an Image*, performance at “Rhubarb Festival,” (Buddies In Bad Times Theater, Toronto) 2014. Reproduced from:  
<http://www.cassils.net> ..... 41
- Figure 2- Cassils, performance still from *Becoming an Image*, performance at “SPILL International Festival of Performance” (National Theater Studio, London), 2013.  
 Reproduced from: <http://www.cassils.net> ..... 42
- Figure 3- Cassils, performance still from *Becoming an Image*, performance at “SPILL International Festival of Performance” (National Theater Studio, London), 2013.  
 Reproduced from: <http://www.cassils.net> ..... 43
- Figure 4- Cassils, performance still from *Becoming an Image*, performance at “Pacific Standard Time” (ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles,), 2012. Reproduced from:  
<http://www.cassils.net> ..... 44
- Figure 5- Eleanor Antin, detail of *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, 148 silver gelatin prints, 1972. Photograph by Hermann Feldhaus. Reproduced from <https://www.henry-moore.org/whats-on/2016/09/28/eleanor-antin-carving-a-traditional-sculpture> ..... 48
- Figure 6- Cassils, documentation from *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture: Time Lapse (Front)*, (40” X 60”), and *Time Lapse (Left)*, (40 X 60), silver gelatin prints, 2011. Reproduced from  
<http://www.cassils.net> ..... 49
- Figure 7- Cassils, documentation from *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture: Time Lapse (Front)*, (40” X 60”), and *Time Lapse (Left)*, (40 X 60), silver gelatin prints, 2011. Reproduced from  
<http://www.cassils.net> ..... 51

- Figure 8-Cassils, installation view of *Fast Twitch/Slow Twitch*, Projected, large scale, two channel video installation, at “Cassils Compositions” (Trinity Square Video, Toronto) 2013. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net>..... 54
- Figure 9-Cassils, detail of *Fast Twitch/Slow Twitch*, Projected, large scale, two channel video installation, at “Cassils Compositions” (Trinity Square Video, Toronto) 2013. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net> ..... 54
- Figure 10-Cassils, detail of *Fast Twitch/Slow Twitch*, Projected, large scale, two channel video installation, at “Cassils Compositions” (Trinity Square Video, Toronto) 2013. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net> ..... 55
- Figure 11- Cassils and Robin Black, *Lady Face//Man Body, Pin Up 5*), chromogenic print, (11 x 17 in.), 2011. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net> ..... 57
- Figure 12-Cassils and Robin Black, *Advertisement (Homage to Benglis)*, chromogenic print, (30 x 40 in.), 2011. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net> ..... 57
- Figure 13-Cassils; *Disfigured Image: Anatomically Correct*; collage: photo paper, marker, gouache, razor etching; (11 x 17 in.); 2013. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net>..... 59
- Figure 14- Cassils, post-performance still from *Becoming an Image*, performance at “Rhubarb Festival,” (Buddies In Bad Times Theater, Toronto) 2014. Reproduced from: <http://www.cassils.net>..... 62
- Figure 15-Cassils; *The Resilience of the 20%*; poured black concrete, cast clay bash; (36 x 48 x 24 in.); 2013..... 66
- Figure 16-Cassils, performance still from *Powers that Be*, performance at the "ANTI Contemporary Art Festival" (Kuopio, Finland), 2015. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net>..... 69



Figure 17 <i>Blood Vessel</i> , 2017, photodocuments.....	106
Figure 20 "Performative Documents and the Labouring Body" gallery layout and list of works .....	140
Figure 21 "Performative Documents and the Labouring Body," 2017; installation view of <i>Restless Sleep</i> , 2017, time lapse photodocument; and title wall.....	141
Figure 22 "Performative Documents and the Labouring Body," 2017; installation view of <i>Restless Sleep</i> , 2017, time lapse photodocument; and title wall.....	141
Figure 23 "Performative Documents and the Labouring Body," 2017, installation view of east and south exterior walls .....	142
Figure 24 "Performative Documents and the Labouring Body," 2017, installation view of <i>Blood Vessel</i> , 2017, photodocuments.....	142
Figure 25 "Performative Documents and the Labouring Body," 2017, installation view of south exterior and west walls with various videodocuments and <i>Restless Sleep</i> , 2017, time lapse photodocument.....	143
Figure 26 "Performative Documents and the Labouring Body," 2017, installation view south exterior wall with various videodocuments .....	143
Figure 27 "Performative Documents and the Labouring Body," 2017, installation view of various videodocuments .....	144
Figure 28 "Performative Documents and the Labouring Body," 2017, installation view of <i>Performance Remains</i> , 2017.....	144
Figure 29 "Performative Documents and the Labouring Body," 2017, installation view of south interior wall and videodocument plinths.....	145

Figure 30 “Performative Documents and the Labouring Body,” 2017, installation view of subwoofer for <i>Chest Sound</i> , 2017, audiodocument .....	145
Figure 31 video still from <i>Beard Pluck</i> , 2017, videodocument.....	146
Figure 32 detail of <i>Blood Vessel</i> , 2017, photodocuments.....	147
Figure 33 detail of <i>Blood Vessel</i> , 2017, photodocuments.....	148
Figure 34 detail of <i>Blood Vessel</i> , 2017, photodocuments.....	149
Figure 35 detail of <i>Blood Vessel</i> , 2017, photodocuments.....	150
Figure 36 detail of <i>Blood Vessel</i> , 2017, photodocuments.....	151
Figure 37 video still from <i>Morning Coffee</i> , 2017, videodocument .....	152
Figure 38 video still from <i>Computer Work</i> , 2017, videodocument .....	152
Figure 39 video still from <i>Elliptical Run</i> , 2017, videodocument .....	153
Figure 40 video still from <i>Eye Saccade</i> , 2017, videodocument .....	153
Figure 41 video still from <i>Face Study</i> , 2017, videodocument.....	154
Figure 42 video still from <i>Fingers Tap</i> , 2017, videodocument .....	154
Figure 43 video still from <i>Food Digest</i> , 2017, videodocument.....	155
Figure 44 video still from <i>Idle Stroke</i> , 2017, videodocument .....	155
Figure 45 video still from <i>Jaw Grind</i> , 2017, videodocument.....	156
Figure 46 video still from <i>Knuckles Crack</i> , 2017, videodocument .....	156
Figure 47 video still from <i>Lips Lick</i> , 2017, videodocument.....	157
Figure 48 video still from <i>Morning Shower</i> , 2017, videodocument.....	157
Figure 49 video still from <i>Nail Bite</i> , 2017, videodocument .....	158
Figure 50 video still from <i>Neck Throb</i> , 2017, videodocument.....	158
Figure 51 video still from <i>Performance Remains</i> , 2017, videodocument .....	159

Figure 52 detail of <i>Performance Remains</i> , 2017, performance residues and relics .....	159
Figure 53 detail of <i>Performance Remains</i> , 2017, performance residues and relics .....	160
Figure 54 video still from <i>Pili Erect</i> , 2017, videodocument .....	160
Figure 55 video still from <i>Restless Sleep</i> , 2017, time lapse photodocument.....	161
Figure 56 video still from <i>Snooze Wake</i> , 2017, videodocument.....	161
Figure 57 video still from <i>Stimulant Respond</i> , 2017, videodocument.....	162

## Introduction

The first visceral reaction I had with art occurred in the autumn of 2009. During my first trip to New York City with my partner at the time we decided to undertake the—in retrospect—too-monumental task of visiting every ‘significant’ museum in the city in a day and a half: the Met, the Museum of Natural History, the Guggenheim, and MoMA, were all visited within what was probably thirty-six hours. Needless to say my memories of each are generally non-specific, and owing to the complete exhaustion arising from our overly ambitious endeavour, I now harbour irrational resentment toward the Guggenheim’s slightly angled, spiral ramp floors. My calves still seem to ache whenever I think of Kandinsky.

One moment does stand out in particular, however. While visiting MoMA, we made sure to visit the ‘usual suspects,’ those works with which I was familiar in the sense that they simply permeate popular culture’s conception of what ‘art’ is: works by late nineteenth-century European luminaries whom I have now come to appreciate within the greater context of the history of art. This was before I had even considered the notion of studying art in any capacity, let alone conceived of embarking upon a professional academic trajectory. It was during this period of my life that I found myself working as a commercial photographer, and I was as such intrigued to learn that there was a small Richard Avedon retrospective on display.

After having checked *Starry Night* off of my list of ‘art things’ to see, I found myself in a room I remember being not much larger than the living space of my current bachelor apartment. Glazed within pristine black frames hung on the interior of this white cube were a series of black and white portraits, the style of which (if not the particularities) I recalled from the all-too-brief ‘history of photography’ class I took while studying at the local technical college in my hometown. Now, in my mind’s eye I see myself confronting a portrait of a man whose uncertain

gaze is preternatural and penetrating. The blackened silver on the glossy white paper is impossibly lush, inky velvet, richly textured and flawlessly gradated. Avedon's technical prowess—and that of whichever technician made the print—is palpable.

My throat clenched tightly onto itself, as though it was trying to swallow its own tongue, and my sinuses throbbed indecisively, ambivalent about the tears I could feel welling up in them.

I do not know why my body responded like this. I am not so sentimental nor rapt with nostalgia that I can pretend the image unlocked some hidden affect deep within the metaphysics of my being. Neither am I wont to believe that it was some higher power calling out to me, impelling me to recognize something within myself. Nevertheless (I have decided retrospectively so as to better fit the cohesive narrative of my life that I tell myself and others) I was changed in that moment. Within a year I had ambitions to pursue a master's degree in photographic preservation, and was enrolled in first-year English, philosophy, and French classes at a community college.

I neither understand, nor am I concerned with the 'why' of how I was moved to tears by a material thing. Perhaps the craftsmanship of the image resonated with the part of me that recalls with measured ambivalence spending entire days bathed in the sodium light and carcinogenic vapours of the darkroom, struggling for but never quite achieving the kind of mastery so effortlessly present in Avedon's images. It may have been some unanticipated resentment, admiration, awe, or envy, or a peculiar combination thereof. Those particularities are not the important details of this story, and I self-consciously leave those narrative spaces open for interpretation. Rather, I am concerned with the fact that this uncanny *frisson* emerged in that moment of encounter at all. That queasy sense of rising bile, which makes knots in your esophagus and arouses a strange sense of the sublime or profound, seems worth paying attention

to. I call it uncanny because it is both a familiar and a strange sensation: familiar, in that it is not unlike the queasy sickness I feel when I recognize myself falling in love, or when I begin to grasp a new concept on a fundamental level; strange in the recognition that these *are* similar bodily affects, flavoured by context and tinted by my psyche in the present moment. It is like the feeling of my viscera necessarily reorganizing themselves so as to accommodate a shift of my perception of the world.

This thesis plots a course toward problems in the history and historicizing of performance art that tacks between the anecdotal and the canonical.<sup>1</sup> I wish neither to establish these concepts as necessarily opposed binary ideals, nor do I believe that these stories *need* my personal voice injected into them to be properly told; rather, the anecdote and the canon represent poles in the field of narrative and storytelling that provide useful and distinct bollards and buoys to which I seek to moor my voice when appropriate. The anecdote, rooted in the Greek ἀΝΕΚΔΟΤΑ that conjoins the notion of the privative (ἀΝ) with that of being published (ἔΚΛΟΤ-ΟΣ), speaks from the “[s]ecret, private, or hitherto unpublished details of history;” it is a “narrative of a detached incident, or of a single event, told as being in itself interesting or striking;” and in the context of art, it can refer to “a painting [or another art object] that depicts a small incident.”<sup>2</sup> Anecdotes are narratives that establish value in relation to and speak from the authority of the individual and the

---

<sup>1</sup> The invocation of the anecdote arouses also its contrast with theory, on which Jane Gallop—psychoanalytic and feminist theorist, and professor of English and comparative literature at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee—wrote her 2002 volume of collected essays, *Anecdotal Theory*. In conversation with Derridean and Lacanian psychoanalysis, as well as the second wave feminist thought championed by Catherine MacKinnon, Gallop proposes anecdotal theory as a feminist resolution to the overly phallogocentric nature of critical theory endemic to the era. Most importantly, anecdotal theory “tell[s] stories of how theory is lived by the theorizing subject, how theory takes place as the passions and dramas of that life” (11). See: Jane Gallop, “Anecdotal Theory,” in *Anecdotal Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 1–11.

<sup>2</sup> “Anecdote, N.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/7367>.

particular. Canon, on another hand, speaks from a place of codified law: in the ecclesiastical sense, it refers to laws, rules, or edicts “laid down in the decrees of the Pope and statutes of councils;” more generally, canon is “[a] general rule, fundamental principle, aphorism or axiom governing the systematic [...] treatment of a subject;” and in the context of the history of art, canon “refers to a group or set of works [...] celebrated not just for satisfying standards that are abstracted from particular objects, but for their particular embodiment of the kind of value quintessentially achievable in their art.”<sup>3</sup> Art historical canons are narratives that establish value in relation to and speak from the authority of the hegemonic.<sup>4</sup> In traversing the space between anecdote and canon a hybrid narrative emerges. This narrative gives particular and embodied voice to the relation between the discourse of artistic practice and the meta-discourse that is art history. This thesis takes the anecdote as one of its multi-vocal forms to make real the practice of writing about and within the canons of contemporary art history.

My first proper introduction to contemporary art was in the winter of 2013. At this time my ambitions toward becoming a photographic archivist and conservator were abating in favour of my newfound (and naïve) passion for the history of art; photography still held steady sway over my core interests, but I was then at the point in the parabola of learning where I felt I already had nothing more to learn about it. Predicating the recognition of my own failure to fully master the subject, I took a second-year survey of “Twentieth-Century and Contemporary Art” alongside a fourth-year seminar on “Art, Research, and the Pedagogical Turn.” Both classes were

---

<sup>3</sup> “Canon, n.1,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/27148>; Richard Tristman, Anita Silvers, and Keith Moxey, “Canon,” in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly, Oxford Art Online (Oxford University Press), accessed August 1, 2017, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t234/e0100>.

<sup>4</sup> For a more thorough and in-depth analysis of canons, canonicity, and canon formation in the context of the history of art, see: Anna Brzyski, *Partisan Canons* (Duke University Press, 2007).

taught by Natalie Loveless, Assistant Professor of the History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture, in the Department of Art and Design at the University of Alberta, and at the time of this writing, my thesis advisor. Loveless was, and continues to be, committed to radical feminist pedagogy in the classroom, and she structures her syllabi around narratives of the history of contemporary art that place emphasis on performance art, its links to critical feminist theory, and its potential as a research methodology in and of itself. These are the anecdotal particulars that preface my current academic career.<sup>5</sup>

### **But what of performance art documentation?**

This thesis is about performance art and its documentation; it is about artists who make use of documentation in the realization of their performance works; and it is (about) the process of documenting within the context of performance practice.

In chapter one, I rehearse well-known debates in performance art documentation, while at the same time situating myself and my understanding in relation to it. ‘Performance’ is a complicated term in respect of visual culture: while it can refer to works of art rooted in both visual art and the performing arts (theatre, dance, music, *et cetera*), I was inducted into my understanding of the term in the context of the former. In this chapter, I strategically reproduce

---

<sup>5</sup> As a contextual aside: it was also in these moments that I was first seriously brought to confront my own insufficiencies as a student. Prior to this time (I have come to understand in retrospect) my ability to perform well academically was predicated upon being proficient at reading between the lines as opposed to actually reading, or listening. I have deeply planted in my sense of self a memory: I intently watch Loveless’ lips as she explicates a text by Donna Haraway, but I feel her words slip past me refusing to adhere. I slowly came to the self-realization that mental focus was a skill I had not well-cultivated, and that slippery ideas and notions which do not come easily to rest in my mind flow through me without imparting a meaningful impression. And thus, without allowing this parenthetical footnote to transcend the humorously long to onerous: I have since, in conjunction with managed chemical augmentation to my neurophysiology and the ceaseless support and understanding of my supervisors and colleagues, learned to learn at least somewhat effectively.



partial narratives of the twentieth-century art historical canon, both to locate my own understanding of what constitutes ‘performance art’ as well as to uncover the apparently contradictory relationship it shares with its own documentation. The *why* of this thesis is as such embedded in my own personal history and how that has come to inform my own relationship with performance art. In accordance with this, I collect in this chapter narrative strands tangent to its history as I have come to know it (through the writings of such theorists in the field as Amelia Jones, Peggy Phelan, and Philip Auslander): an artistic medium with its roots embedded primarily in the post-war landscape of modernist painting and sculpture; a performative system of signification which makes use of subjective human bodies; a mode of representation that is necessarily ephemeral, extended for limited moments in space and time. Woven together, these narrative threads reveal something about performance art that seems contradictory: unlike a painting, performance art disappears; it asks to be documented or recorded in some way, but its ontology resists the very notion that it can be. This chapter explicates this apparent contradiction and suggests a potential resolution to be explored further in the next section.

Chapter two tracks the performance art practice of Cassils, a contemporary visual artist originally from Montréal, QC, currently living and working in Los Angeles, CA. Cassils is a trans masculine, gender non-conforming artist whose work circulates around themes of trans and queer identity, bodily materiality and endurance, and violence—physical, societal, and psychic.<sup>6</sup> Their work often fundamentally incorporates forms of documentation in both conventional and novel ways that generate interesting questions about the role of documentation in performance art practices. For the purpose of this research, I will be situating three performance works within

---

<sup>6</sup> Cassils uses singular gender neutral they/them pronouns. They address this specifically on their website: Cassils, “About « Cassils,” artist webpage, *Cassils*, accessed March 31, 2017, <http://cassils.net/about-2/>.

Cassils' *oeuvre* in relation to discourses of performance art documentation in the ongoing historicizing of contemporary art, as well as through the lens of my own research-creation practice as an artist-scholar. Specifically, I examine *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture* (2011-2013), *Becoming an Image* (2013-present), and *Powers that Be* (2015-present), including their various iterations and derivative works. Not only do each of these works call upon different vocalities within the history of art and visual culture, they are also structured such that processes of documentation are factored into the very form of the works. Furthermore, as Cassils' work invariably revolves around the issues of identity, representation, and violence faced by marginalized trans and queer individuals on a daily basis, I find it incumbent upon myself to ask in what meaningful way does Cassils' work, replete with the formal decisions they have made in its production, tell stories which otherwise might never have been. More succinctly, what is the generative capacity of Cassils' interventions into the discourses of performance art documentation? Reading Cassils' work alongside analyses arising from the narratives built in chapter one, and in particular the work of Amelia Jones, I also suggest an interpretation that takes into account the posthumanist theories of feminist scholar and particle physicist Karen Barad.

Chapter three sees the formal gesture of the anecdote extended from the written page into artistic practice. Cassils' work produces not only meaningful encounters, but also generates new knowledge and understanding in a way not possible through written text. As such, I examine more closely some of the formal gestures present in Cassils' work, and redeploy them in conversation with my own performance and documentation research-creation practice: as subject, I take my own body and its relationship to the labour of quotidian existence during the course of completing a master's thesis, and as medium the processes of documentation

themselves. Embarking upon a thirty-day daily performance practice, I produced a different document of myself each day in relation to the production of this very text over one of the final months of its writing. These documents ultimately appeared in a gallery exhibition, opening in conjunction with the completion and defense of this thesis, and are intended to be considered alongside the textual document as equivalent if not equivocal.

Ultimately, this thesis seeks to make its contribution to the discourse both in terms of the theory that comes from it in addition to the way it which it enacts the theorizing. While a conventional academic treatise would suffice for this task and would potentially come to similar conclusions, these modes of writing and research-creation which I have opted to perform here and over the following chapters do the work in a way that is lively, responsive, and responsible toward the living breathing bodies doing the theory themselves.

## Chapter One

### Arguing from Anecdote

#### Anecdotal Prologue

##### *First Words*

In the writing of this text, I sat down innumerable times with my computer resting on my thighs staring at its screen and overcome with the foreboding blankness of the page and a word-count reflecting only the place-holder text I use for my headings and subheadings. There was a time when I felt that I knew on an intuitive level what performance art was, and my brain had tricked me into believing I could effortlessly bridge the gap between that understanding and the actual words required to communicate it to my audience. My mind races trying to recount the ways in which I had learned whatever axioms I now hold in my head, and I am overwhelmed with the enormity of selecting a moment in the infinite regress of signification with which to begin. Is the task of transmitting understanding simply one of relaying the most basic meaning? The most evocative? In these moments where I grasp for words, I look to the words themselves to see what stories—*anecdotes*—they have to tell embedded in their own personal histories. The Oxford English dictionary is the self-proclaimed “definitive records of the English language”<sup>7</sup> It defines performance as “[t]he accomplishment or carrying out of something commanded or undertaken; the doing of an action or operation,” and “[t]he quality of execution of such an action, operation, or process,” and somewhat recursively as “[s]omething performed or done; an

---

<sup>7</sup> The banner on the OED website makes this claim. Oxford Dictionaries, “Home: Oxford English Dictionary,” database, *OED: Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed July 6, 2017, <http://www.oed.com>.

action, act, deed, or operation.”<sup>8</sup> The word itself is comprised of three constitutive elements: perform-ance. First, the suffix: ‘-ance,’ from the Latin suffix *-entia*. It transmogrifies the action-laden verb into a conceptual noun.<sup>9</sup> ‘Per-,’ a prefix from the old-French for ‘through or by means of,’ carries with it a sense of ‘throughness,’ in space or time, but also connotes thoroughness, completion.<sup>10</sup> And ‘-form-,’ from the Latin *forma*, shape or configuration.<sup>11</sup> Form is the shape of things that we see, or the act of giving shape to something. It is representation. A person’s form refers to their body. In philosophy, form is irreducible essence, or in Kantian philosophy it is “[t]hat factor of knowledge which gives reality and objectivity to the thing known[.]”<sup>12</sup> It is variously how things manifest. These various etymological breadcrumbs lead down a path that leads me to the articulation of performance as the abstract concept of making manifest in space and in time. Performance is that thing that we do which changes and creates things in the world.

The dictionary, according to the dictionary, “explains [...] the words of a language [...] giving for each word its typical spelling, an explanation of its meaning or meanings, and often other information, such as pronunciation, etymology, [and] synonyms[.]”<sup>13</sup> It is an authoritative record of how words are and have been used by particular people, most often those in positions

---

<sup>8</sup> “Performance, N.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed May 29, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140783>.

<sup>9</sup> “-Aance, Suffix,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed May 26, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/7201#eid4164716>; “-Ence, Suffix,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed May 26, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/61623#eid5566173>.

<sup>10</sup> “Per-, Prefix,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed May 26, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140485#eid31164712>.

<sup>11</sup> “Form, N.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed May 29, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/73421>; “Form, v.1,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed May 29, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/73422>.

<sup>12</sup> “Form, v.1.”

<sup>13</sup> “Dictionary, N. and Adj.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/52325>.

privileged enough to have had their words recorded. The dictionary provides a broad survey of various meanings the word ‘performance’ has accrued, meanings which are canonical, recorded and backed by authority. The assorted etonyms which comprise words are canonical as well: they reflect the authoritative history of the word as determined by experts in the field. These histories are buried in fertile dirt though. In and amongst their bones are the agents of recomposition, gnawing at the fleshy and fibrous sinews that tenuously link modern languages with their ancient antecedents. In rhetoric, an etymological fallacy refers to an argument that “insists that what a word ‘really means’ is whatever it once meant long ago, perhaps even in another language.”<sup>14</sup> But it is not fallacious to push and pull at the various narrative atomic or anatomic bits that comprise a story to see what chimeric meaning an adjustment to its entrails can render. The verb *record*, another word which seems pertinent to the topic at hand, combines the prefix ‘*re-*’ from Latin, connoting generally ‘back’ or ‘again,’ with ‘*-cord,*’ also from Latin, by way of the Greek ‘*καρδία*’ [CARDIA] for ‘heart.’<sup>15</sup> John MacArthur, a biblical scholar, notes that “[i]n most modern cultures, the heart is thought of as the seat of emotions and feelings. But most ancients—Hebrews, Greeks, and many others—considered the heart to be the center of knowledge, understanding, thinking, and wisdom [...] the seat of the mind and will[...]. Emotions and feelings were associated with the intestines, or bowels.” To *record* is to remember—from the Latin *memorate*, to bring to mind—to commit to your heart, again and again. Recording is an hermeneutic process—from the Greek, ἐρμηνευτής

---

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth G. Wilson, *The Columbia Guide to Standard American English* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1993), 178.

<sup>15</sup> “Record, v.1,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed May 26, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/159868>; “Re-, Prefix,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed May 29, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158795>; “† Cordi-, Comb. Form,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed May 29, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/41448>.

[HERMENEUT] or interpret, a word in English that finds its own origins in the Sanskrit root *prath*, or to spread out. Recording, like reading a text, is not merely an act of establishing a one-to-one relationship between marks on a body and something *out there*. Recording, reading, these are palimpsest process of interpretation and reinterpretation, of spreading things out, laying them bare. Before language was made right through orthography, before scripture was committed to scripture, scribbled in codices, or engraved in stone, it was inscribed in, on, and through the heart. Oral traditions maintain and transmit stories through repetitious telling and retelling. And stories are constitutive of reality. That is, they are performative.

In this chapter, I investigate ‘performance’ in the context of contemporary visual art to peel away the anatomy of my relationship to my own understanding of it. I seek to establish a broad, coherent definition that accounts for a particular canonical explication of its history in North America. From these authoritative views seem to arise a latent contradiction in performance’s capacity or willingness to be documented and reproduced that asks whether a performance’s meaning or ontological integrity is depreciated through these processes. In the following chapter, I explore whether this ostensible inconsistency can be resolved through examination of the work of Cassils. I propose that Cassils deploys *documentation as a mode of performance* in a way that is not inherently contradictory, and is in fact generative as opposed to deleterious. Finally, I offer my own anecdotal intervention. I employ innovations I see in Cassils’ work through my own documentation and performance practice, realized both in the writing of this text and as art objects in the context of a gallery exhibition. Ultimately, I intend to excavate the meanings that surround ‘performance,’ pulling some of them apart to explore the different ways its story can be told. While my story of ‘record’ above is anecdotal—privative and particular to the capricious leaps of logic entailed by my own experience in tracing its history—it

nevertheless rings true in a way that makes my bowels (and I hope yours as well) happily churn. I hope to do the same for ‘performance:’ I sink my own voice below the surface of canonical authority and allow it to emerge in those moments when it can enact a rearranging of constitutive elements and recombinant etonyms, nudging and pushing the alleles of meaning into a history hopefully fit to survive retelling.

***Performance Myth: Pollock and Namuth***

Moving beyond the bones of the words themselves, I look toward how others have produced their own stories of performance. Kelly Dennis, Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Connecticut and contributor to the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, describes performance art as a medium that breaks various frames:

1. By substituting the artist's body as the medium or object, the performance work breaks with the traditional, material frame of the canvas or art object.
2. Performance art breaks frame in the theatrical sense by eradicating and/or acknowledging the so-called fourth wall between stage and audience, artist and viewer.
3. Performance art breaks or disrupts the frame or boundary of the body itself as the presumed site for the integrity of the individual and his or her subjective identity.
4. The centrality of the body in performance work breaks down the boundary between public and private, invoking the relation between the individual and state laws or national ideology.<sup>16</sup>

Dennis herself excavates the pioneering work of Rose Lee Goldberg, an art critic, historian, and curator of performance art. In 1978, Goldberg published *Performance: Live Art from 1909 to the*

---

<sup>16</sup> Kelly Dennis, “Performance Art - Historical Overview,” ed. Michael Kelly, *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, Oxford Reference (Oxford University Press, 2008 1998), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195113075.001.0001/acref-9780195113075-e-0397>.



*Present*.<sup>17</sup> In its foreword, Goldberg notes that “[p]erformance has only recently become accepted as a medium of artistic expression in its own right,” and she alludes toward performance’s contradictory nature, whose history “like a history of theatre, can only be constructed from scripts, texts, photographs and descriptions from onlookers. What was once to be seen or to be heard must now be reconstructed in the imagination.”<sup>18</sup> Dennis, by way of Goldberg’s original investigation, locates performance art’s origins at various points in the history of art, including “cabaret, theater, and ‘live art’ in the context of early twentieth-century avant-garde movements such as Dada, Surrealism, Futurism, and the Bauhaus[.]”<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, Dennis suggests that in the work of Jackson Pollock, historicized as the origin of contemporary American art, is found the germinal formal qualities of performance art: “[w]hile Jackson Pollock's Abstract Expressionist ‘drip paintings’ of the postwar era are held to be the origins of contemporary art in the United States, the discourse surrounding his work provides a formal context for early performance art.”<sup>20</sup> Amelia Jones, art critic, historian, and curator specializing in performance art, makes a similar point. In her comprehensive monograph, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, Jones devotes an entire chapter to Pollock’s role in the history of

---

<sup>17</sup> Goldberg has since revised and republished her work several times. For the purposes of this thesis, and to situate Goldberg as a theorist originally working during the period in which performance art was first being seriously historicised, I will refer exclusively to the original 1979 edition: RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art, 1909 to the Present* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1979); The most recent edition at the time of this writing is the 3rd, having been published in 2011 and with a slight adjustment to the title. See: RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, 3rd ed. (London; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Goldberg, *Performance*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Dennis, “Performance Art - Historical Overview”; These categories are reflected in Goldberg’s chapter titles: “Futurist Performance,” “Russian Performance,” “Dada Performance,” “Surrealist Performance,” “Bauhaus Performance,” and “American and European Performance from c. 1933: The Live Art.” Goldberg, *Performance*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Dennis, “Performance Art - Historical Overview.”

performance art, which she begins by describing a series of photographs that helped shape the discourse around his work.<sup>21</sup>

In November of 1950, Hans Namuth captured the action of Jackson Pollock painting on film for *LIFE Magazine*: Namuth situated himself underneath a sheet of glass onto which Pollock dribbled globs of paint. The opaque paint appears black against the featureless blue sky backgrounding Pollock's hovering figure. He develops the surface of the glass into the iconic, seemingly chaotic spider's web of paint splatters for which the abstract expressionist is most well-known. Over several minutes the surface of the glass becomes increasingly covered, and Pollock's image through it becomes increasingly obscured. Soon, he feels like he has "lost contact" with the work and wipes it clean before beginning anew.<sup>22</sup> This documentation appears in a short documentary about Pollock produced by Namuth in conjunction with a series of still images which sought to illuminate the methods and process of one of the most iconic American painters of the mid-twentieth century.

Namuth had already spent months documenting Pollock's painting practice before he "dreamed up a solution: 'the painting would have to be on glass, and [Namuth] would film from underneath.'" <sup>23</sup> He had taken hundreds of still photographs and captured yards of motion film in black and white. But in order to document Pollock at work in full colour, and owing to colour film's lower sensitivity to light, Namuth would have to take his venture outside to benefit from the superior intensity of direct sunlight. (There is certainly something ironic then about the fact

---

<sup>21</sup> Amelia Jones, "The 'Pollockian Performative' and the Revision of the Modernist Subject," in *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 53–102.

<sup>22</sup> "I lost contact with my first painting on glass and I started another one." Jackson Pollock quoted in Hans Namuth, *Pollock Painting*, 1951, 7:19, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNwvUco146c>.

<sup>23</sup> Sarah Boxer, "The Photos That Changed Pollock's Life," *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast)*, December 15, 1998, sec. E, E1.

that his resulting film appears virtually monochromatic, resulting from the paint's opacity and the high contrast of the sun's harsh, unmediated light on a cloudless day.) Immediately following the conclusion of filming, the artists went inside where Lee Krasner had prepared a feast to celebrate. The course of Pollock's and Namuth's relationship had been punctuated by arguments circulating around the tension between the painter's desire for spontaneity and the documenter's propensity to stop and start and stage scenes for his camera. Sarah Boxer, a critic and culture writer, describes how the evening rapidly deteriorated:

When Pollock and Namuth came in from outside, blue from the cold, the first thing Pollock did was pour himself a tumbler of bourbon. It was the beginning of the end. Pollock had been sober (some say) for two years. Soon Namuth and Pollock got into an argument—a volley of “I’m not a phony, you’re a phony.” Then Pollock tore a strap of cowbells and started swinging it around.

With the dinner guests seated and food on the table, Pollock and Namuth continued to argue. Finally Pollock grabbed the end of the table, shouting “Should I do it now?” to Namuth. “Now?” Then he turned over the whole table, plates, glasses, meat, gravy and all. (There is a scholarly disagreement about whether it was turkey or roast beef.) The dogs lapped at the glassy gravy. Krasner said, “Coffee will be served in the living room.”<sup>24</sup>

Thereafter, Pollock once again fell into alcoholism and eschewed the total abstraction for which he was championed; he would be dead within six years, following a collision between his car and a tree. Namuth meanwhile became known for his photographs of Pollock and went on to work with other abstract expressionists like William de Kooning and Mark Rothko.<sup>25</sup> Namuth's film marks a moment about which the careers of both artists pivot and is arguably pivotal as well in

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>25</sup> Namuth writes extensively about this in his autobiography. See: Hans Namuth, *Hans Namuth: Artists 1950-81: A Personal View*. (New York: Pace Gallery Publications, 1981).

the history of the history of art and visual culture. These narratives surrounding the events of the documentary have the lingering taste of anecdote: the details are a little bit too ‘just-so,’ and speculation about the fallout of Namuth’s project errs toward the form of a Greek tragedy. Nevertheless, the documentary and its constitutive dramas have been historicized in the biographies of both artists, and in the canons of Modern and contemporary American art.

It is difficult to make definitive statements about the causal relationship between the production of Namuth’s Pollock documents and the events that followed, but these coinciding circumstances in the history of American art make for a compelling narrative about the art which arose in the wake of the Second World War and the fraught relationship it shares with its own documentation. To speculate on the degree to which Pollock and Namuth’s dealings precipitated the painter’s downfall seems untoward, and whether the encounter irreparably disturbed his sense of artistic identity is moot. However, what can be said is that Namuth’s films and photographs of Pollock at work have been instrumental in the historicizing of the painter beyond the high modernist narrative of abstract expressionism.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Dennis observes, “[t]hat Pollock’s process was as important to postwar art as the paintings themselves is further witnessed by Hans Namuth’s obsessive photographic and filmic documentation [...] which] further fetishized the physicality and the ephemerality of the event of painting and foreshadowed performance art’s reliance on the photographic document.” Dennis, “Performance Art - Historical Overview”; Likewise, Jones notes that “[t]hese images of Pollock in the act of painting presented art as a performance [...] rather than a fixed object[.]” Jones, “The ‘Pollockian Performative’ and the Revision of the Modernist Subject,” 54–55; Also, the exhibition catalogue for “Action/Abstraction: Pollock, De Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976” explores Pollock and his contemporaries as liminal figures between abstract expressionism and what would follow it. See in particular the introduction, as well as the essays by both Irving Sandler and Norman Kleeblatt. Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed., *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Norman L. Kleeblatt, “Introduction: Action, Abstraction, Reaction,” in *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976*, ed. Norman L. Kleeblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1–13; Irving Sandler, “Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg: Convergences and Differences,” in *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976*, ed. Norman L. Kleeblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 119–34; Norman L. Kleeblatt, “Greenberg, Rosenberg, and Postwar American Art,” in *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976*, ed. Norman L. Kleeblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 135–84.

Shortly after Namuth's documents were first published, art critic and writer Harold Rosenberg published his short essay "The American Action Painters" in *ARTnews* magazine. In this essay, Rosenberg describes the work of a group of contemporary painters in terms foreign to the hegemonic mode of art criticism of the time. Critics like Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried championed Pollock's generation of painters and sculptors, heralding their completely abstract works as both the epitome of artistic production and the inevitable telos of painting within the western canon. Contrary to this, Rosenberg describes the works of the 'vanguard' of American painters as indices, records of the action of painting itself, as opposed to autonomous paint-on-canvas that merely presents itself for consideration before a disinterested viewer. The canvas, and what goes on it, is "not a picture but an event."<sup>27</sup> Rosenberg never mentions Pollock—nor any contemporary painter—by name. Nevertheless, he unmistakably refers to Pollock's unconventional style as "The Drip School."<sup>28</sup> And, as the art critic and art historian Barbara Rose posits, "Rosenberg was not talking about painting at all; he was describing Namuth's photographs of Pollock."<sup>29</sup> Rose describes Namuth's photographs as having a profound effect. Namuth's Images of Pollock in action altered the popular conception of the artist; they have an importance for this reason that no previous documentation of an artist has ever had. The focus on the act—the process of art making—instead of on the static object changed the course of art criticism and even art history in a way Namuth himself could never have foreseen or intended.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News* 51, no. 8 (1952): 22.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Barbara Rose, "Namuth's Photographs and the Pollock Myth," in *Pollock Painting*, ed. Barbara Rose (New York: Agrinde Publications, 1980).

<sup>30</sup> Barbara Rose, "Jackson Pollock: The Artist as Culture Hero," in *Pollock Painting*, ed. Barbara Rose (New York: Agrinde Publications, 1980).

In Namuth's documents, we see Pollock's work as the genesis of things to come in the canon of visual art: the art object as encounter between subjects—the choosing subject of artist and the experiencing subject of viewer. Herein lies the germ of performance art: a body generating an encounter through a performative moment, extended in time and space.

## **Anecdotal Performance**

### *Coda/Prologue*

There is something simultaneously reassuring and unnerving when the same actors and the same stories appear again and again in the history of a history. I am at once vindicated to find that other scholars have come to similar conclusions, while I also begin to question whether the path I followed (however well-trodden) was uncovered on my own volition or if my unconscious merely pointed me in this direction upon cathecting half-remembered bibliographies; I worry that my writing devolves into obsequious pedantry, and I am never quite sure at what point my self-conscious repetition crosses the line from performative into tedium. And I wonder too how these other agents of history experienced their own writing as they were writing it. How many discarded sheaves of paper, for instance, hide behind the canonized bravado of Allan Kaprow, an artist, theorist, and younger contemporary of Pollock? Two years after the tragic car accident, Kaprow performed a eulogy on Pollock in the form of an essay and manifesto:

The tragic news of Pollock's death two summers ago was profoundly depressing to many of us. We felt not only a sadness over the death of a great figure, but also a deep loss, as if something of ourselves had died too. We were a piece of him: he was, perhaps, the embodiment of our ambition for absolute liberation and a secretly cherished wish to overturn old tables of crockery and flat champagne. We saw in his example the possibility of an astounding freshness, a sort of ecstatic blindness.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Allen Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *ARTnews* 57 (October 1958): 24.

This piece is published in *ARTNews*, and is illustrated with photographs of Pollock at work (not unlike those images captured by Namuth) alongside advertisements for the New York art scene: “GUTAI GROUP Avant-garde painting from Japan,” “5 MASTER WORKS BY PICASSO,” “From RENOIR to RENAULT,” and “PRIMITIVE ART FOR YOUNG COLLECTORS” are just some of the copy surrounding Kaprow’s essay.<sup>32</sup> The juxtaposition of Kaprow’s prescient text with these images and advertisements produce an intriguing narrative. The New York art market at the time is still thoroughly embedded in a mid-century tradition of painting and sculpture, sprinkled liberally with the allure of ‘primitivism’ and allusion to the exotic ‘oriental’ action painting of the Gutai. Pollock—whom Kaprow describes as “terribly modern,” not only because of the immense impact he had in the world of art, but also because of the sacrificial and tragic quality he imagines that impact to have—is shown at work in his studio.<sup>33</sup> The first page of the essay is more than half covered with a photograph of Pollock taken from above; he crouches amongst dozens of open cans of paint, a large unfinished canvas on his right. The next page shows him working on the same canvas, impossibly balancing over it with his feet planted improbably along a narrow strip of floor exposed at the top of the frame. Kaprow explains the tragedy of Pollock’s death: as opposed to at the zenith of his career, Pollock died approaching the nadir. There is something particular, Kaprow tells us, about Pollock’s work that endeavors to separate itself from the banality of conventional painting, but which Pollock could never fully grasp during his life. It can be seen in these photographs of him at work, and it is inherent to the works themselves. “I am convinced that to grasp a Pollock’s impact properly, one must be

---

<sup>32</sup> The photographs featured in the essay were in fact taken in 1951 by Rudolph Burckhardt, a street photographer and portraitist who was a contemporary of Namuth. The advertisements covered over half the page after the essay is continued. See: *Ibid.*, 24, 55, 57.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

something of an acrobat, constantly vacillating between an identification with the hands and the body that flung the paint and stood ‘in’ the canvas, and allowing the markings to entangle and assault one into submitting to their permanent objective character.”<sup>34</sup> Kaprow exploits the conventional synecdoche that conflates an artist with their own work to intensify the phenomenological relationship between observers—or participants, as he later refers to them—and the action of the artist painting through the painting itself.<sup>35</sup>

Kaprow’s polemic is a coda for Pollock, but a prologue for a New Art, in which Kaprow finds himself substantially invested.<sup>36</sup> “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” “[leaves] us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if need be, the vastness of Forty-Second Street. [...] Objects of every sort are the material for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies[.]”<sup>37</sup> Within a year Kaprow’s own artistic practice would develop into the first recognizable, albeit nascent beginnings of what would become performance art, arising out of a lineage tracing its route through the Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, and the New School for Social Research.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>35</sup> “[W]hat I believe *is* clearly discernable is that the *entire* painting comes out at the participant (I shall call him [sic] that, rather than observer) right into the room.” Ibid., 56.

<sup>36</sup> Kaprow theorizes that the successor to abstract expressionism and other formalist Modern Art practices is something he calls “the New Art,” which he sees Pollock’s work as foreshadowing. Ibid., 24,56.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 56–57.

<sup>38</sup> The Bauhaus was an Avant-garde design collective and school in the Weimar Republic. Albert Schlemmer, a theatre and performance theorist and instructor at the Bauhaus, experimented with forms of performance that incorporated surrealist and Dadaist notions of chance and non-intentionality, experimented with the gestural qualities of painting, and heavily incorporated machines and other technologies. Students were encouraged to use their studios as theatre spaces before the Bauhaus built dedicated experimental theatres. With the onset of a difficult political climate leading up to the Second World War, the Bauhaus was shuttered by 1932, and in 1933, “twenty-two students and nine faculty members moved into a huge white-columned building complex overlooking the town of Black Mountain” in North Carolina. The Black Mountain College would continue the Avant-garde innovations pioneered by the Bauhaus, and attract other artists like



In 1959, Kaprow would instantiate his first series of Happenings open to the public, titled *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*. Kaprow invited participants to the Reuben Gallery in New York City where they found makeshift rooms with walls of plastic sheeting dividing them. “Each visitor was presented with a programme and three small cards stapled together. ‘The performance is divided into six parts,’ the notes explained. ‘Each part contains three happenings which occur at once. The beginning and end of each will be signalled by a bell. At the end of the performance two strokes of the bell will be heard.’”<sup>39</sup> The term ‘Happening’ simply refers to the fact that the performance was meant to facilitate “something spontaneous, something that just happens to happen.”<sup>40</sup> While the Happenings themselves had scores and timings that were to be followed, Kaprow intended the content of the work to be the emergent action which arose between the participants and the environment within the frame of the score. In this way, Kaprow’s Happenings share a similar genealogy and resonate with the works and philosophy of artists in the loosely-defined collective Fluxus, a group of “conceptually based performers who undermined traditional notions of authorship and ownership attached to the art object[.]”<sup>41</sup> Dennis identifies some of Kaprow’s contemporaries as the founding members of Fluxus, if such a group can be said to have founding members, including “George Maciunas [...] George Brecht, Nam Jun Paik, Wolf Vostell and Yoko Ono.”<sup>42</sup> Like Happenings, Fluxus works are

---

John Cage, musician and composer, and Merce Cunningham, a dancer. Kaprow would be one of Cage’s students at the New School who would come to be heavily influenced by the musicians interventions into performance. Goldberg, *Performance*, 79.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Dennis, “Performance Art - Historical Overview.”

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

determined by event scores which stipulate a simple action to be performed with no other ‘stage direction.’<sup>43</sup>

### ***Bodies***

Carolee Schneemann is another contemporary of Kaprow whose name I uncover again and again, both in the canals of my own memories of survey classes and in the annals of canonical art historical texts. Schneemann and Kaprow travelled in similar circles. She cites him and his Happenings as influential within her own artistic practice.<sup>44</sup> Schneemann, in turn, is cited by historians like Jones and Dennis—and by my own professors—as one of the earliest visual artists to deploy her own body, not only as a primary artistic medium but as one that leverages postmodern formulations of subjectivity—and its contingency upon relations between different subjects—to produce meaning. “Schneemann can be seen as having moved from a Fluxus exploration of human experience to a feminist interrogation of the ways in which the human is inscribed within sexual difference.”<sup>45</sup> She “solicit[s] rather than distance[s] the spectator drawing her or him into the work of art as an intersubjective exchange[.]”<sup>46</sup> Schneemann’s body is inscribed with gendered and sexualized meaning—as are all bodies—but its direct encounter

---

<sup>43</sup> A second type of Fluxus art “object” was the FluxKit, a portable art kit containing everyday objects and materials, along with a score. See: Ibid.; Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley : University of California Press, c2002.); Geoffrey Hendricks, *Critical Mass Happenings, Fluxus, Performance, Intermedia and Rutgers University ; 1958-1972 ; [Exhibition Held at the Mead Art Museum, Amherst, MA. Feb. 1 -June 1, 2003* (New Bruswick, NJ: Mason Gross Art Galleries [u.a., 2003).

<sup>44</sup> “It is intimate and intense. Happenings: raw, direct, no intermediate crafting, fabricating. Kaprow’s works strem mythic; [...] Kaprow physically engages them, moeces them in a mass of linear participation.” Carolee Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy: Performance Works and Selected Writings*, 2nd ed. (Kingston, N.Y.: McPherson & Co., 1997), 56.

<sup>45</sup> Dennis, “Performance Art - Historical Overview.”

<sup>46</sup> Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 31.

with an audience questions the way subjectivities form in relation to, and push up against, one another.

In what is effectively a *catalogue raisonné* of her own work up until the point at which it was published, Schneemann's *More Than Meat Joy* is an autobiographical recollection of the artist's career. The introductory section of *More Than Meat Joy* recalls her beginnings as a painter who, like her contemporaries, was keen to incorporate non-conventional media into her works. Schneemann considers the eponymous work *Meat Joy* to be, if not inaugural, then at least profoundly determinative within the scope of her practice.<sup>47</sup> In 1964, this work was realized as one of her first works performed in front of a live audience. Termed 'kinetic theatre,' *Meat Joy* occurred three times, once each in Paris, London, and New York. Photos that document these performances depict Schneemann and her collaborators as writhing masses of appendages in and amongst various bits of detritus. The artist describes it as "a celebration of flesh as material: raw fish, chicken, sausages, wet paint, transparent plastic, rope, brushes, paper scrap."<sup>48</sup> This tangle of flesh, human, non-human, and synthetic alike is a bridge in Schneemann's career—and metonymically within visual art generally. Schneemann's career up until this point had indeed been largely aligned with the neo-dada, historicized as springing from and in reaction to the hegemony of abstract expressionism.<sup>49</sup> Her work of this introductory period is reminiscent of Robert Rauschenberg and Claes Oldenburg. However, *Meat Joy* fully engages with the spirit of Fluxus and Happenings performance scores. *Meat Joy* is a live performance with both semi-

---

<sup>47</sup> Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*.

<sup>48</sup> Carolee Schneemann, *Carolee Schneemann: Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), 61.

<sup>49</sup> Art critic and curator of contemporary art Paul Schimmel expands on this point in his essay: Paul Schimmel, "Leap into the Void: Performance and the Object," in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object: 1949-1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 17–119.

scripted and semi-emergent action, and an audience “seated on the floor as close to the performance area as possible, encircling, resonating.”<sup>50</sup> It has an important place in the history of feminist art history as well. Valie Export, a feminist artist and theorist, positions the work as germinal within the canon of what she terms “feminist actionism.”<sup>51</sup>

The abstract expressionist concept that any material can be content if it is transformed by a sufficiently active and gesticulate style of painting is adapted to the body in Carolee Schneemann's work. She links the equivalence of materials which characterizes Action Painting and early happenings to the idea of an equivalence between images text, music, etc. Again, a certain style, a certain intention, and a future-oriented concept of art and female experience become the sour inspiration: the kinetic theater of Carolee Schneemann. [...] As the title *Meat Joy* suggests with its allusion to "meet joy," the play deals with a conspiracy against the evils of asceticism and develops the feminine dream of a warm, sensual, meaningful, fulfilled life.<sup>52</sup>

*Meat Joy* is a development within—and a response to—a lineage emerging out of Abstract Expressionism, through neo-Dadaist impulses, which necessarily deploys human bodies interacting and ‘resonating’ with each other and a live audience.

In the next decade, Schneemann produced a number of works of ‘kinetic theatre,’ but I would like to draw particular attention to two specific works: *Up to and Including Her Limits* (performed 9 times between 1973 and 1976), and *Interior Scroll*, (performed once each in 1975

---

<sup>50</sup> Schneemann, *Carolee Schneemann*, 61.

<sup>51</sup> Export conceptualizes “actionism” as an intermediary between abstract expressionism, Happenings, and performance art. She translates and quotes Peter Wiebel: “Regression to the material as the general principle for the development of the graphic arts during the last decades signals a method of perception that aims through one body to another body and takes place in this world rather than in the realm of the fine arts’ false semblances. Centered in the body and in this world, the body is the artistic medium. The human body itself is the work of art, the material.” See: Valie Export, “Aspects of Feminist Actionism,” *New German Critique*, no. 47 (1989): 69, doi:10.2307/488108.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

and 1977).<sup>53</sup> These works are significant because they see Schneemann, and her body, engaging with the politically charged, sexist discourses surrounding art and art production of the time. *Up To and Including Her Limits* sees Schneemann naked, suspended from an arborist's harness, dangling precariously in the corner of a room. The walls and floor are covered with paper on which she uses crayons to inscribe the movement of her body in erratic, multi-coloured arcs, scribbles, and text. In this ongoing and iterative action, Schneemann creates these drawings both in gallery spaces and in front of video cameras, suspending herself from the ceiling for hours at a time. The drawings, harness, and recordings remain as records of her ritualistic action, and allow viewers to imagine the twisting, struggling movement of her body, like the traces left by a multiply articulated pendulum.<sup>54</sup> Schneemann herself sees this work in conversation with Pollock, "to vitalize the whole body as stroke and gesture in [the] dimensional space [of the work]," and while she is frequently historicized as a progenitor of performance and body art, Schneemann sees herself, still, as a painter.<sup>55</sup>

For each iteration of *Interior Scroll*, Schneemann goes through "a ritual preparation for the action, a gradual inhabitation of the space, increasing in concentration."<sup>56</sup> In 1975, at the "Women Here and Now" festival in New York City, she stood naked in front of the audience, painting the contours of her face and body before posing on a table, "taking a series of life model

---

<sup>53</sup> See Schneeman's "Performance Chronology" in Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 282.

<sup>54</sup> This can be seen in MoMA's documentation of the installed artwork: "Carolee Schneemann. Up to and Including Her Limits. 1973–76 | MoMA," *The Museum of Modern Art*, accessed June 3, 2017, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/156834>.

<sup>55</sup> Schneemann makes in claim in a relatively recent interview: The Museum of Modern Art, *Behind the Scenes: On Line: Carolee Schneemann*, On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century, accessed June 3, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smo4OR3Gvq8>.

<sup>56</sup> Schneemann, *Carolee Schneemann*, 154.

‘action poses,’” and reading from Cézanne’s *She Was a Great Painter*.<sup>57</sup> She then stood on the table, and slowly pulled a scroll from her vagina. She read from it:

BE PREPARED: / to have your brain picked / to have the pickings misunderstood / to be mistreated whether your success / increases or decreases [...] / to be USED and MISUED / to be “copy” and to be copied to want to cope out / cop out pull in and away / if you are a woman (and thing are not utterly changed) / they will almost never believe you really did it [...]<sup>58</sup>

In both the introduction to her book *Body Art: Performing the Subject* and her essay “‘Presence’ in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation,” Jones selects Schneemann’s *Interior Scroll* as the first ‘case study’ around which she builds a definitive account of Body Art within the broader scope of performance art. Jones describes *Interior Scroll*, from the 1977 Telluride Film Festival:

Schneemann extended her sexualized negotiation of the normative (masculine) subjectivity authorizing the modernist artist, performing herself in an erotically charged narrative of pleasure that challenged the fetishistic and scopophilic “male gaze.” [...] Schneemann projects herself as fully embodied subject, who is also (but not only) object in relation to the audience (her “others”). The female subject is not simply a “picture” in Schneemann’s scenario, but a deeply constituted (and never fully coherent) subjectivity in the phenomenological sense, dialectically articulated in relation to others in a continually negotiated exchange of desires and identifications.<sup>59</sup>

Schneemann’s body, in Jones’ reading, is not a vehicle for meaning or artistic value according to the standards of Greenbergian formalism; rather it is a pole of intersubjective exchange between two (or more) necessarily insufficient and incoherent, but nevertheless already realized post-

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>59</sup> Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, 3.

modern subjects.<sup>60</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, when it was still a nascent artistic medium, theories of performance art circulated around the notion of the body as a vehicle for conveying unambiguous meaning from artist to viewer. Direct encounters with the artist's body in performance art were thought to bridge mediating and distancing effects of media like painting and sculpture. For instance, the feminist and conceptual artist "Rosemary Mayer[,] claimed body art to be a direct reflection of the artist's life experiences. Cindy Nemser [art historian and founder and editor of the *Feminist Art Journal*] described the 'primary goal of body art' as 'bring[ing] the subjective and objective self together as an integrated entity,' which is then presumably experienced directly by the audience."<sup>61</sup> Instead, Jones postulates that bodies (the artist's and the viewers') interpolate meaning between each other through a mutual recognition of the lack inherent in the postmodern subject.<sup>62</sup> This lack is inscribed on the performing, signifying body as gender and sexual desire, pulling at and making legible the vicissitude of sexist inequity. In other words, body art, the term Jones gives these particular kinds of work, makes use of the signifying capacity of human bodies to performatively generate meaning. If this

---

<sup>60</sup> Jones' project, as she decisively states, is to establish an ontology of body art performances "as enacting the dispersed, multiplied, specific subjectivities of the late capitalist, postcolonial, postmodern era: subjectivities that are acknowledged to exist always already in relation to the world of other objects and subjects; subjectivities that are always already intersubjective as well as interobjective." See: Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal*, no. 4 (1997): 12.

<sup>61</sup> Cindy Nemser, cited in: *Ibid.*, 13; See also: Cindy Nemser, "Subject-Object: Body Art," *Arts Magazine* 46, no. 1 (1971): 42.

<sup>62</sup> The "postmodern" subject is largely derived from psychoanalytic discourse, namely that which arises out of Jacques Lacan's lectures and writing on psychoanalysis from the 1940s-1970s. One of Lacan's earliest and most cogent accounts of subject formation is his description of the "mirror stage" by which, briefly, a subject comes into being through their recognition of their own lack and insufficiency (in terms of their ability to influence world as mediated by language and vision) in contrast with other subjects which they perceives as being "whole." See: Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as a Formative of the I Function, as Revealed in the Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), 3-9.

term in particular refers only to this certain subset of performance works, what meaning is produced—and how?—in a broader understanding of the medium of performance?

***Interlude: Performativity, iteration, recursion***


In addition to involving bodies, performance art is also performative to varying degrees. The concept of the ‘performative’ is often conflated with the quality of being-performed, something which I would more often call theatricality.<sup>63</sup> These developments in artistic practice which I have outlined here thus far also go hand in hand with a series of turns in philosophy, literary analysis, and linguistics. Just as Goldberg begins the story of performance in the visual arts in early twentieth century by way of Futurism, Dada, and surrealist theatre, so too do these developments in intellectual history find their genesis in a similar epoch. By way of a generative analogy, I would like to compare the process of meaning making and transmission in the realm of semiotics to that entailed by performativity. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Ferdinand de Saussure founded the science of semiology to describe the formal, structured relationship between words and concepts.<sup>64</sup> ‘Semiology,’ now usually referred to as semiotics,

---

<sup>63</sup> I must acknowledge here that I am not the first, nor will I be the last theorist to use terms relating to theatre and theatricality when speaking about works within a lineage of visual art. Michael Fried, a staunchly modernist art critic and theorist, criticised minimalist art for being too “theatrical.” That is, he found it to be a detriment of works of minimalism that they required of their viewers to be impressed, in one way or another, by the relation of their own body in space to the mass of the work, as opposed to being disinterested observers of the works. See: Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” *Art Forum* 5, no. 10 (1967): 12–23; Philip Auslander, a theorist of performance studies, describes the theatrical mode of performance documentation, which I will discuss in further detail at the end of this chapter. Briefly, however, theatrical documentation is documentation for which the work was specifically performed (e.g., Yves Klein’s Leap into the Void). In addition to my own discussion below, see: Philip Auslander, “The Performativity of Performance Documentation,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 28, no. 3 (2006): 1–10; Diana Baker Smith discusses theatricality in terms of re-performance of performance art works in her recent dissertation. See: Diana Baker Smith, “Re-Doing the Histories of Performance: Re-Enactment and the Historiographies of Live Art” (Dissertation, University of New South Wales, 2017).

<sup>64</sup> The degree to which Saussure is actually the “father” of semiotics is still up for debate. Contemporary scholarship acknowledges that he was likely building upon work previously done by medieval and greek scholars. Regardless, this apochrypha is sufficient for this project. See: Eugen Munteanu, “On the Object-Language/Metalanguage Distinction in St. Augustine’s Works De Dialectica and De Magistro,” in *History of Linguistics 1996 : Selected Papers From the Seventh International Conference on the History of the*



comes from the Greek ‘σημεῖον’ [SIMEÍON], or sign. ‘Semiotics’ entered the English Language in the seventeenth century, and originally referred to the study or analysis of symptoms in a medical context.<sup>65</sup> Saussure’s contribution to the study of language was the formalization of the linguistic ‘sign’ that describes the relationship between concepts (signifieds) and the words associated with them (signifiers). Meaning in language is arbitrary, derived from difference rather than innately found within words. For instance, the sign  /òrənʃ/ is a concept comprised of a set of conceptual associations—a round, reddish-yellow fruit with a stippled rind and juicy pulp-flesh that grows from trees in tropical climes—and the vocalization of the English word ‘orange.’ The word signifies the concept. There is nothing particularly orangey about oranges, and the word itself only came to signify that particular fruit relatively recently. Oranges can be called as such because the word conjures the image of something that is demonstratively *different* from things not called oranges. In semiotics, meaning lives in the spaces between difference. Performativity is generative in a similar capacity: it produces meaning out of the interstices around performative acts.

J. L. Austin’s *How to Do Things With Words*, derived from a lecture the philosopher of language gave at Harvard in 1952, describes linguistic structures to meant understand the different kinds of speech acts found in language. In his text, Ausitn establishes the now well-known concept of the performative. Whereas some utterances describe things—Austin calls theses constative utterances—and as such have truth value, other utterances *do* things. That is,

---

*Language Sciences (ICHOLS VII) Oxford, 12-17 September 1996: Vol. 2, From Classical to Contemporary Linguistics*, ed. Elke Nowak, Andrew Robert Linn, and David Cram, Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science. Series 3, Studies in the History of the Language Sciences (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co, 1999), 65; “Semiotics, N.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/175724>.

<sup>65</sup> “Semiology, N.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/175715>; “Semiotics, N.”

rather than simply describe reality as it is, these performative utterances contribute to its constitution. The statement ‘oranges are orange’ is constative. It is demonstratively true or false. It describes something that *is*. A performative utterance produces something that was not hitherto present in reality. Austin’s primary example is that of the wedding ceremony: the spouses-to-be are recognized as being married following their utterance of the performative ‘I do.’ This marriage, the one produced through the performative utterance, is different from that legal entity produced as a consequence of the signing of the marriage contract. The legal marriage is that which is recognized by the government for purposes of property ownership, transfer, and dispersal. The performative marriage is that which is created through its mutual acknowledgement within society by those who witness it.<sup>66</sup> The ‘meaning’ of the act of marriage—that these two individuals are now recognized as constituting a social entity different than two cohabitating individuals—is produced by the tensile cause and effect, before and after, of the moment of the act itself. Calling upon the canonical utterance of ‘I do,’ the couple produces a marriage out of the ether through the mutual understanding of the difference in their relation to each other, and society as a whole.

I relate my own understanding of the performative to the phenomenological experience of it, a tightness I feel in the base of my skull or along that peculiar nerve extending between my

---

<sup>66</sup> The legal and the performative marriages work in tandem to produce what Austin calls a “happy” performative, which he defines as the following: “(A. 1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further, / (A. 2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked. / (B. 1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and / (B. 2) completely. (C. 1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further / (C. 2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.” J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, William James Lectures. 1955 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 14–15.

navel and my groin. It is a tug that resituates my understanding of reality through its experience. The meaning performance produces comes forth from—or pulls me into—those vacuous recesses on either side of the moment of the performative act; it is born out of a mutual recognition of lack, difference, and insufficiency. I and my body are necessarily insufficient. You and your body recognize that as a phenomenological pull—a dull ache, normally unacknowledged deep somewhere in that space between your heart and your guts.

Schneemann's work is variously constituted by performative elements. Of the three that I have discussed so far, I would like to draw particular attention to *Up To and Including Her Limits*. Both *Meat Joy* and *Interior Scroll* generate meaning through performative moments: the former, like a Happening, has an event score that dictates how and when the action of the work should occur, and meaning arises in those surprising moments of contrast when expectations are subverted.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, *Interior Scroll* is a work with pre-determined, repeatable elements, namely the book passages read and the recitation of Schneemann's poems extracted from her vagina. Again, meaning is produced performatively in the relation between the artist's body and those of her audience. *Up To and Including Her Limits*, however, is performative in a different way: as part of its formal structure, it necessarily leaves something behind, extending it—and Schneemann's—presence future-wards. She suspends herself from an arborist's harness and draws on paper up to the limits of her range of motion. It is structured such that the form that the work takes is only nominally pre-determined, and largely emerges in the act of doing it. Schneemann herself notes that is way of working is similar to Pollock's; what differentiates the two is that, unlike Pollock, Schneemann foregrounds her body in the creation of the work

---

<sup>67</sup> Schneemann reproduces the script in its entirety, along with photographic documentation of several performances in Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 63–87.

through her video documentation, which is then displayed as a part of the work itself. Viewers of the work are enabled to experience it in different ways: they can witness it in the moments when the artist's body is physically present before them; they can watch recordings of it installed in the gallery; and they can examine the marks Schneemann made on the paper, trails of graphite and coloured pencil, scuffs and nearly-imperceptible folds in the paper, imagining her suspended body writhing and pushing itself to exhaustion. Documents of both *Meat Joy* and *Interior Scroll* do exist (how else would we learn about them in surveys of contemporary art?), but of these works only *Up To and Including Her Limits* produces its own documentation as a consequence of its performative gestures.

***Addendum: Spaces in Time***

In these anecdotes I wind together with bits of canon, there is a particular quality of performance art which seems to emerge and which it has in common with other kinds of art produced in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Kaprow observes that “[w]hat we have then, is a type of art which tends to lose itself out of bounds[.]”<sup>68</sup> During this period in history, art finds itself at the precipice of something otherwise unstructured and unknown, and we are frantically weaving metaphors and giving things new names that already were but are spoken in different ways. This is reflected in the writing of theorists from the time, like Goldberg and Nemser, who struggled to define and describe what was happening from the midst of it all.

In 2006, with the privilege of intervening time to interpret, to spread things out, Anna Dezeuze, writer, theorist, and lecturer in art history at the Ecole Supérieure d’Art et de Design Marseille Méditerranée, drafts yet another narrative of these changes to the landscape of visual art. With a nod to Kaprow, “The 1960s: A Decade Out-of-Bounds” describes this period in terms

---

<sup>68</sup> Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” 56.

of “a systematic dismantling of modernist media such as sculpture and painting and the explosion of hybrid forms of art drawing on, and often combining, photographs, texts, performances, industrial and natural materials, and everyday objects.”<sup>69</sup> Dezeuze notes that mere descriptions of the new kinds of art being made during this period—earth works, installation, conceptual art, minimalism, Happenings, and so on—don’t account for the sudden polysemy enjoyed by ‘art.’ She describes the status of art works as “indissociable from the social and political concerns of the time.”<sup>70</sup> The revolutions in art and the sudden proliferation of wide and varied art-making practices can be described as a reconsideration and redeployment of ‘materials’ beyond just paint on canvas or cast bronze: everyday objects, language, bodies, and the context of the social and political in society at large are those categories which Dezeuze identifies as suddenly being open to and opened by artists.

Indeed, not only were artists of the era using their bodies as artistic media, they were deploying themselves in and amongst space and time like never before. Performance art is consanguineous with these other revolutions in visual art, and incidentally shares with them the property of being extended in space and time in a way foreign to painting and sculpture during the twentieth century up to that point. Whereas modernist media is nominally static, works that fall under the mantle of Kaprow’s New Art are subject to entropy on timescales appreciable by humans and necessitate a kind of phenomenological engagement by the viewer that is substantially different than that required by works of painting and sculpture from the preceding era.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Anna Dezeuze, “The 1960s: A Decade out-of-Bounds,” in *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones, Blackwell Companions in Art History (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 38.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> My cursory summary has blind spots obvious to those with knowledge of artistic practices outside of these times and places. The ways in which people engage with art are a particular consequence of a host of

Twenty-seven years before Deuze, and similarly to Goldberg—without the benefit of hindsight and from the midst of these ‘new’ practices—Rosalind Krauss, art critic, theorist, and professor of art history at the University of Columbia, writes narratives from the perspective of a scholar confronted with new and varied forms of art without the words to describe them. To what extent can a path trodden through an open field be considered sculptural? Or a gallery whose empty space itself is an art object, bounded by the architectural forms of the room? Or, what about a maze constructed in an open field? In her “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” Krauss posits that traditional forms of three-dimensional work actually comprise only one vertex on a quadrangular ‘expanded field’ which can describe all three-dimensional works. Each vertex represents the intersection of two of four conceptual axioms derived from the oppositional binary relationship between landscape and architecture. Traditional and modernist sculpture is the intersection of not-landscape and not-architecture. Site construction, the realm of labyrinths, mazes, and the like, are landscape and architecture. Marked sites, or earth works, are landscape and not-landscape. Axiomatic structures, installation art, and minimalist sculpture are architecture and not-architecture.<sup>72</sup> In attempting to provide a rigorous, comprehensive definition of the totality of three-dimensional art works, Krauss develops the tools and language necessary to think about and analyze these new media.

---

determining factors which are not easily translatable between historical periods, cultures, geographic regions, and class structures. I must self-consciously elide these differences in the interest of concision, and to emphasize that the focus of this project is limited to artistic practices in North America during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Thanks for Dr. Lianne McTavish for highlighting my omission on a previous iteration of this text.

<sup>72</sup> Krauss defines her terms in opposition to one another: landscape is not-architecture and architecture is not-landscape. Calling sculpture not-landscape and not-architecture, while site construction is landscape and architecture might seem like a contradiction; Krauss’ schema is better thought of as defining sculpture as neither landscape nor architecture, and site construction as both landscape and architecture. Similarly, axiomatic structures are architecture plus the absence of architecture (i.e., the non-architectural spaces are as important as the built spaces). Marked sites are likewise landscape—literally part of it—with non-landscape features (i.e., having been built up or manipulated). See: Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *October* 9, no. Spring (1979): 30–44.

These works in the expanded field are not—at least in any immediately discernable way—performance art. Neither bodies nor performativity are in any obvious way incorporated into their formal structure. As noted above, however, they do share in common their extension in time-space, which necessitates phenomenological engagement above and beyond the disinterested observation of the modernist critic.<sup>73</sup> This commonality can be distilled down to one particular common feature: ephemerality. Conventional modernist media is autonomous and self-contained. While conventional painting or sculpture will, given enough time, succumb to the steady progression of entropy, it is explicitly intended *not to*. Modernist works *do* occupy space and time, but the particular bits of space and time which they are currently in are incidental to the experience of the works themselves. They are bounded by frames or plinths, and their existence is such that they can be hung on this wall, or that, put into storage, and shipped across the world without losing any change in ontological fidelity. So-called New Art is not like that. It is ephemeral and extant within particular instantiations of space-time. Unbounded by frames or plinths, it exists here with and alongside us. It disappears.

Krauss took note of this ephemerality by way of the sudden proliferation of new artistic media. “But what, really, are we to think of that notion of multiplicity?”<sup>74</sup> Much of contemporary art refuses symbolic signification, she tells us. Instead, it tends towards the index:

as distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are the marks or traces of a *particular cause*, and that

---

<sup>73</sup> Critics like Clement Greenberg saw modernist painting and sculpture (like that produced by Pollock) as the telos of Western art production. It was putatively “about” nothing more than the materiality of the media involved in its creation, and was optimally engaged with in such a way that the viewer disengaged from the context in which the work was created and displayed. In this critical idiom, the work is intended to exist autonomously, independent of anything “outside” of it. Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism (Modernism with a Vengeance 1957-1969)*, ed. John O’Brian, vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85–94.

<sup>74</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America,” *October* 3 (Spring 1977): 68.

cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify. Into the category of the index, we would place physical traces (like footprints), medical symptoms, or the actual referents of the shifter. Cast shadows could also serve as the indexical signs of objects.<sup>75</sup>

Photographs are indices as well. They translate, Krauss argues, presence—from a specific iteration of something extended in time and space—in perpetuity. “This condition of the having-been-there satisfies questions of verifiability at the level of document. Truth is understood as a matter of evidence, rather than a function of logic.”<sup>76</sup> Henry Sayre, art theorist and a professor of art history at Oregon State University, addresses ephemerality as well. Art, he claims, “is no longer that thing in which full-fledged aesthetic experience is held perpetually present; art no longer transcends history; instead, it admits its historicity, its implication in time.”<sup>77</sup> Like Krauss, Sayre argues that photographic documents are imbued with the ‘presence’ of an event. He notes that Robert Morris, an artist known for his earthworks and minimalist sculpture, eschews on one hand photographic documentation, while also admitting “[a] further irony is that some of this kind of work is temporary and situational, made for a time and place and later dismantled. Its future existence in the culture will be strictly photographic.”<sup>78</sup> By virtue of their ontology Earth works, minimalist sculpture, conceptual art, and performance, both deny and ask to be documented. Unlike modernist works of painting and sculpture, they are not bound off from the logics of the time and space in which we exist. Their indexical traces—those things left behind or captured—are the testaments that persist outside of human experience and memory.

---

<sup>75</sup> Emphasis mine. *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>76</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America. Part 2,” *October* 4 (October 1, 1977): 66, doi:10.2307/778480.

<sup>77</sup> Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>78</sup> Robert Morris, quoted in *ibid.*, 244.



## Denouement

Performance art, as I have outlined here, contains what appears to be a fundamental contradiction. It is, at its core, an ephemeral phenomena. Bodies, engaged in performative acts, are necessarily limited within particular instances of space and time. Performance art disappears. Yet, it leaves things behind. Fingerprints, foot impressions or shoe scuffs, stray hairs and epithelia. Remnants, remains, and residues. Photons. Memories. Which of these, if any, contain, preserve, conserve, or transmit anything of the original performance?

Peggy Phelan, performance artist and theorist, has famously and controversially suggested that performance art exists only in the moment of its creation. “[T]he interaction between the art object and the spectator is, essentially, performative—and therefore resistant to the claims of validity and accuracy endemic to the discourse of reproduction.”<sup>79</sup> Phelan argues that performative acts are unique and non-reproducible in their ephemerality. In the logic by which I have hereto been adhering: reproduction elides the recursive potential of the performative by which meaning is generated. “The document of a performance then is only to spur a memory, an encouragement of memory to become present.”<sup>80</sup> For Phelan, performance necessarily disappears. Its presence is contingent upon experience, and denies reproduction.

Jones contradicts this to a certain degree. She begins by countering Sayre’s insistence that a photograph entails presence, and the importance he places upon this notion. In Jones’ schema, the artist is never ‘present’ in a meaningful way. The encounter the viewer has with the body of the artist does not deliver an unmediated experience of the artist; rather, the body of the artist is representative of the artist’s subjectivity, which itself is insufficient and incoherent.

---

<sup>79</sup> Peggy Phelan, “The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction,” in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 147.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

The ‘unique’ body of the artist in the body artwork only has meaning by virtue of its contextualization within the codes of identity that accrue to the artist’s body and name. Thus, this body is not self-sufficient in its meaningfulness but relies not only on an authorial context of ‘signature’ but on a receptive context in which the interpreter or viewer may interact with this body.<sup>81</sup>

The body supplements the artist-as-subject, telling us that it is indeed extant, while the subjectivity imbues the body with “significance.” Likewise, a performance art document confirms the existence of the event of performance, and the performance anchors the document to something material.<sup>82</sup>

The story of performance art and its relationship to its own documentation I have laid out thus far is clearly not untrodden territory. In addition to the theorists I have dealt with thus far, Phillip Auslander, a theorist in performance studies and professor in the School of Literature, Media, and Communication at Georgia Tech adds his voice to the fray as well with his work on performance documentation. In his 2006 essay “The Performativity of Performance Art Documentation,” Auslander describes two different kinds of performance documents: documentary and theatrical.<sup>83</sup> Auslander posits that documentary documentation exists as evidence of a performance having taken place (i.e., what is considered the normative mode of documentation), while theatrical documentation refers to an image of a performance that was staged explicitly for the production of that image.<sup>84</sup> Auslander’s position is not at odds with what

---

<sup>81</sup> Jones, “‘Presence’ in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation,” 14.

<sup>82</sup> Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, 37.

<sup>83</sup> Auslander, “The Performativity of Performance Documentation.”

<sup>84</sup> As his example of a documentary image, Auslander points to a photograph of Chris Burden’s *Shoot* (1971): the image conveys, in some sense, what happened during the performance. More importantly, the performance would have ostensibly occurred with or without the presence of the documenting camera. As emblematic of theatrical documentation, Auslander refers to Yves Klein’s *Leap Into the Void* (1960). This image portrays an action which never actually took place, and is in fact the product of a photo manipulation by

I have developed here; rather, it productively contributes to the idea that performance and its documents are necessarily interrelated, and potentially mutually contingent upon one another. Furthermore, both Jones and Phelan are strong voices within the field, and it must be noted that they have staked their territory decisively and strategically. Jones lays out a rubric for discussing ‘body art,’ a medium by which artists activate—often with political ends—the signifying capacity of their own bodies. Phelan is concerned with performance more broadly, encompassing all those artistic forms which necessarily disappear—defying both reproduction and commodification—including dance and theatre, as well as performance within visual art. For both theorists, the stakes are political and internally coherent within the conceptual and semantic territory they have laid out.<sup>85</sup> My interest in this project lies in telling a story of performance art in which these frameworks are not mutually exclusive, and in so doing I turn my attention more fully to Cassils and their artistic practice.

---

which Klein made it appear as though he had leaped elegantly from a wall. Auslander’s use of the term “theatrical” is different from my own in this thesis, but it is nevertheless related: both uses imply a degree of predetermination and scripting of a putatively “live” event. Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Goldberg (in her original 1979 publication) discusses the phenomenon of ‘performance’ within visual art, and also establishes the category of ‘live art,’ which bridges Avant-garde theatre (cabaret, Bauhaus theatre, surrealist theatre, Dada, etc), kinetic theatre, Happenings, and Fluxus events. In later editions, she adopts a broad definition of ‘performance art’ as an umbrella term. Dennis, in service of her encyclopedic survey of the genre and citing Goldberg, likewise has a broad, encompassing definition of performance art that spans performance interventions into visual art throughout the twentieth century.

## Chapter Two

### Material Documents



Figure 1- Cassils, pre-performance still from *Becoming an Image*, performance at “Rhubarb Festival,” (Buddies In Bad Times Theater, Toronto) 2014. Reproduced from: <http://www.cassils.net>

## Requiem in flesh and clay



Figure 2- Cassils, performance still from *Becoming an Image*, performance at “SPILL International Festival of Performance” (National Theater Studio, London), 2013. Reproduced from: <http://www.cassils.net>

*Flesh and clay. Bone, tendon, cartilage, muscle, and fat wrapped up in skin layers. Blood. Breath. Sweat. Spit. And some other fluids, plasms, in cellular interstices, intervening in, standing in between ducts, bladders, and glands, excreted, lubricating, dissolving, regulating. Marrow, hematopoietic bone pulp, spongy and docile. Keratinous hair and nails, extruding continuously and imperceptibly, marking time embedded with impurities. Unseen, viscera keep relentless, asynchronous tempo. Fibres, twitchy/nervous: contract, react, relay, pulse, and pull, full of potential. Tense, in the present but with future prescience, intercessory ganglions and animal hindbrain act be/fore/thought. Assemblage of senses conspire—breathe in—together making reconnaissance of the world outside, to reconnoiter, recognize, and know once again, a*

*body oriented—rising—out of, against, in, and in spite of space and time’s flow. Cells, uncountable but finite, indifferent and differentiated interdependent, hanging onto, in, and comprising a somatic vessel, ship of Theseus. Flesh.*

*And clay.*



Figure 3- Cassils, performance still from *Becoming an Image*, performance at “SPILL International Festival of Performance” (National Theater Studio, London), 2013. Reproduced from: <http://www.cassils.net>

*The first impressing upon the other an imperative. Relent. Capitulate. Force full impact pressing compact fist (pact of fingers, carpals, metacarpals, knuckles, nails) leaving in low relief skin's impression and skin itself, sweat, hair. Impact. Impression. Kneecap, capless elbow, foot like a Gregorian meditation: metatarsalia ossa tarsi phalanges distales mediae et proximales talus calcaneus os naviculare cuneiforme (primum, secundum, tertium) et cuboideum, amen. Flesh.*

*And clay.*



Figure 4-Cassils, performance still from *Becoming an Image*, performance at “Pacific Standard Time” (ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles,), 2012. Reproduced from: <http://www.cassils.net>

*The latter, a monolith resolute in spite of onslaught. Singular, not-yet stone, yet of the earth. Unmetamorphised slate slated for communion with and of the flesh. Stationary. Standing with resolve, but resolving nevertheless into something other than what it is. Immobile but not relentless, giving way and giving away its flesh in exchange for flesh. Skin, sweat, hair. Reformed and informed by violence—a notion old enough that it simply refers to itself in ancient*

*tongues. In a moment of anticipatory stillness, it stands geometric in form awaiting the first punctuation. Exhalation, contraction, tension. Cutting through air and silence. Impact of flesh on flesh, through flesh, exchanging flesh. Impelled by bone, tendon, and muscle, skin leaves its residue, a trace of presence, and takes with it too a veneer of the other. Monolith deformed, gaining new form . Succumbing to—or maybe rising out of?—entropy.*

\*\*\*

The work is *Becoming an Image*. The artist is Cassils, a Canadian-born, trans-masculine performance and visual artist living and working in Los Angeles, California. In the first iteration of this work, a 1500-pound block of clay, equal in height to the artist themselves, is situated in the centre of a gallery space in the ONE LGBT Archives in Los Angeles, California. The lights are kept off while viewers are ushered in by attendants prior to the ‘beginning’ of the performance. They are gathered to stand or sit around the clay monolith, creating an encircling ring set several paces back. For the duration of the performance, there are in fact two active human performers. Cassils is the artist whose name is ascribed authorship for *Becoming an Image*, but there is always also a second performer: a male photographer. In darkness, Cassils maneuvers around the block of clay without regard for the photographer; he is there—and he is always a cisgender man, a symbolic gesture toward the hegemonic masculinity embodied by the camera’s gaze—to document the event as best he is able. Trained in mixed martial arts, Cassils strikes at the clay repeatedly with every bodily appendage available until they are completely physically exhausted, which typically takes 20-30 minutes. Throughout this time, the photographer documents Cassils, using off-camera strobes to illuminate the space for fractions of a second, all the while avoiding being struck by an errant fist, foot, elbow, or knee. At the end of the performance, Cassils and the photographer leave the space, the lights lift, and the audience



sees in full, continuous illumination for the first time: a battered block of clay, to which Cassils refers as a ‘bash.’

These bashes remain as sculptures in and of themselves, but also as material documents of the performances that can be placed in galleries alongside still photodocuments as well as audio recordings. *Becoming an Image* is ostensibly about violence faced by people of gender and sexual minorities—and in particular, trans persons—on an ongoing basis. Cassils recreates, re-enacts violence, followed by a documenter and surrounded by silent witnesses. Each kick and punch is act of outrage toward the society that stands by while its vulnerable constituents are beaten and killed at an alarmingly disproportionate rate.<sup>86</sup> As a visual artist, and as a queer person, Cassils and their work occupy multiple boundary categories simultaneously: sculpture/performance, masculine/feminine, passive/active, subject/object, document/documenter. This persistent ambivalence is both calculated and generative, manifesting directly as a result of the formal structure of their work. In this chapter, I will examine three of Cassils’ works, bearing in mind those qualities that I have insofar laid out as endemic to performance art: the presence of bodies, moments of performativity, and the ephemerality which arises from its particular extension in space and time. Cassils’ work is significant because, similar to Schneemann’s *Limits*, it is productive of its own documentation. Moreover, I will demonstrate that it is purposefully structured such that Cassils takes up documentation as a mode of artistic production in and of itself. In so doing, Cassils bridges the

---

<sup>86</sup> Trans people, and trans women of colour, are disproportionately represented in the statistics of hate violence against LGBT people from year to year. In 2016, of the 28 hate violence homicides of LGBT people (a number which does not include the 79 homicides from the Pulse Nightclub shooting), 19 (68%) were transgender or gender non-conforming; 17 were trans women of colour. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs releases yearly reports on hate violence crimes against LGBT people. See: National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, “Reports,” *Anti-Violence Project*, accessed July 9, 2017, <https://avp.org/resources/reports/>.

theoretical divide between frameworks that contest the capacity for works of performance to be documented.

## Cuts

### *A traditional sculpture*

In 2011, four years before first performing *Becoming an Image*, Cassils (then known as Heather Cassils) attained international recognition for a work commissioned by Los Angeles Contemporary Events (LACE) as part of a series of commissions intended to “re-stag[e] and re-imagin[e] [...] historic performances in Los Angeles from the 1970s.”<sup>87</sup> For this commission, Cassils produced *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture*, a re-imagining of Eleanor Antin’s *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972). In Antin’s original work, the artist documented her body as she crash-dieted over the course of thirty-seven days; Cassils’ response to this was to document their body over the course of twenty-three weeks as they developed an increasingly masculine physique through a strict regimen of diet and exercise. They have neither had gender confirmation surgery, nor do they normally take male hormones. In *Cuts*, they push their body to its physical peak through an intense bodybuilding regime. This process—like the action of *Becoming an Image*—is documented in various ways and produces a number of other works derived from the documentation.

*Cuts*’ formal structure is appropriated from Eleanor Antin’s performance methodologies in *Carving*, which could be summarized with the performative statement: *lose 10lbs of body weight as quickly as possible by consuming less food; photograph your body each day*. It took thirty-seven days for Antin to reduce her body weight by approximately 4.5kg (10 lbs.) through a

---

<sup>87</sup> Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), “Los Angeles Goes Live: Performance Art in Southern California 1970-1983,” [welcometolace.org](http://welcometolace.org), accessed July 8, 2017, [welcometolace.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/20110927\\_OneSheet\\_2pg.pdf](http://welcometolace.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/20110927_OneSheet_2pg.pdf).

‘crash’ diet that was in vogue for women at the time; every day for the duration of her performance, Antin photographed herself in black and white, from four different angles (front, back, left, right), standing nude in front of a relatively featureless white door and wall (Fig. 5). This documentation is displayed chronologically as a series of 148 photographic prints in gallery settings. The photos of Antin’s performance document her body as it stands not quite relaxed—her arms hang down at her sides, but do not rest against her hips—but with a relatively neutral affect that lends an air of ‘objective’ or ‘scientific’ distance; informed viewers cannot help but recall the anthropometric work done in the name of scientific racism throughout the latter third

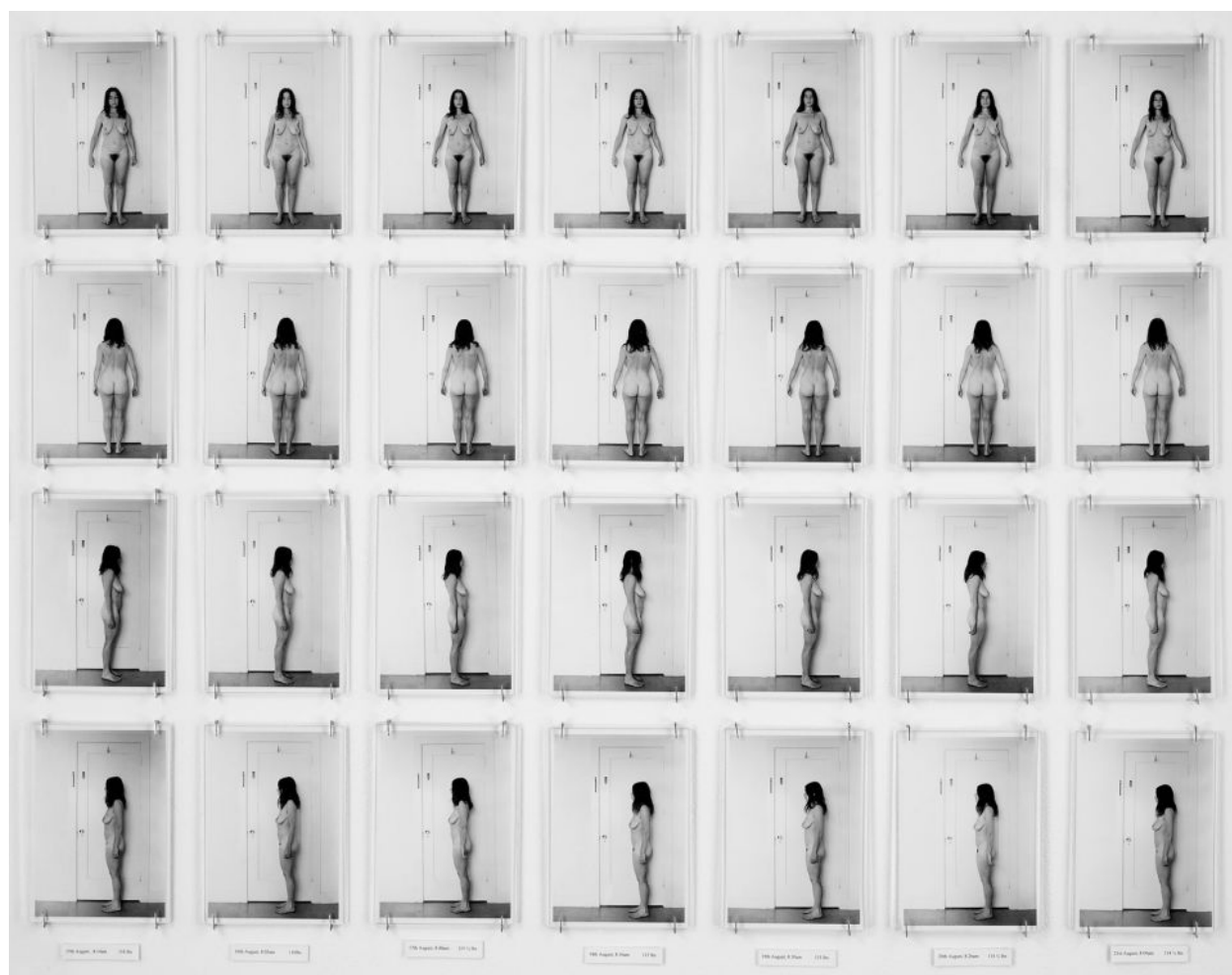


Figure 5-Eleanor Antin, detail of *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, 148 silver gelatin prints, 1972. Photograph by Hermann Feldhaus. Reproduced from <https://www.henry-moore.org/whats-on/2016/09/28/eleanor-antin-carving-a-traditional-sculpture>

of the nineteenth century. As Antin's series progresses, viewers are witness to a body slowly consuming itself, starved for adequate nutrition in the name of achieving and maintaining contemporary standards of feminine beauty.

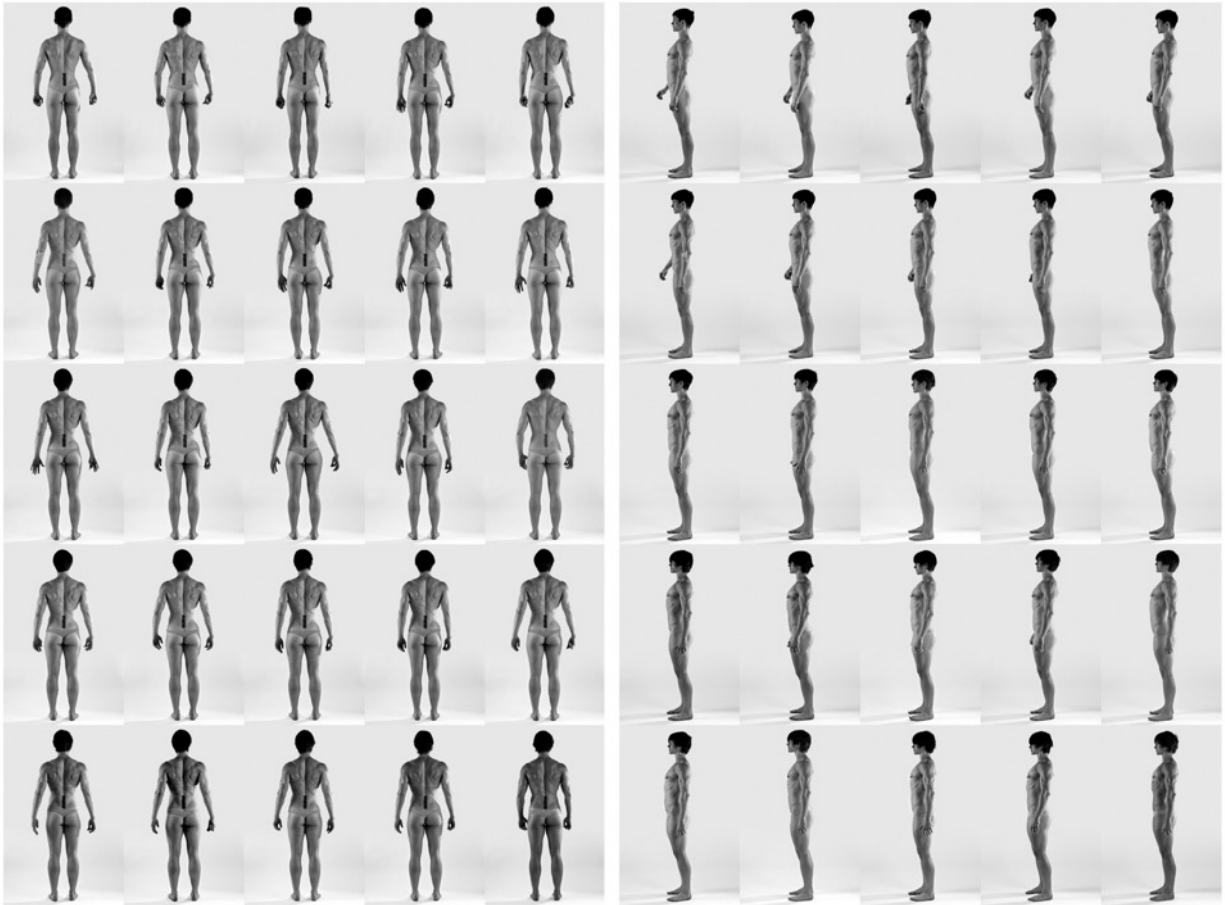


Figure 6- Cassils, documentation from *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture: Time Lapse (Front)*, (40" X 60"), and *Time Lapse (Left)*, (40 X 60), silver gelatin prints, 2011. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net>

*Cuts* appears at first to have a similar performative directive as *Carving*. In the work, Cassils gains a pound of muscle mass each week over the course of twenty-three weeks; whereas Antin crash-dieted, Cassils consumed the equivalent daily caloric intake of an 86kg bodybuilder while also adhering to a strict regimen of bodybuilding exercises in order to accumulate this extraordinary amount of muscle mass. The serial photographs which comprise the documentation of *Cuts* similarly demonstrate the transformation of Cassils' body: they stand nude—save for a

pair of flesh-coloured briefs—on a paper-white photographic background, neutral expression, arms hanging down with the slightest hint of tension in their shoulders. The course of the days and weeks traced by these images maps out Cassils' transformation, similarly as radical as Antin's but to different ends. For viewers who follow the changing topology that is Cassils' body from start to ostensible finish as delimited by the first and last photos in the series, they see a body change from relatively androgynous to decidedly masculine. Their slim, albeit toned physique gives way to taut, bulging musculature that appears perpetually flexed. Short-cropped hair is gradually extruded into a mousy brown mop. These photos are slices of time extracted at regular intervals over twenty-three weeks. These are muscles increasing in mass by twenty-three pounds.

By the end of the series, Cassils faces the viewer dead on, from one side, and the other, and with their back turned, maximizing the circumspensive quality of the photographic gaze. Their dour expression, a small tuft of hair near the base of their abdomen, and the briefs that obfuscate their genitals are signifiers which remain relatively stable from the first images to the last. Cassils' mammary tissue still rests upon their chest, but is pushed up by bulging pectorals and pulled in by taut skin. Their arms, though at rest, do not lay against their hips and are instead pulled away by an impossibly tight combination of back and shoulder muscles. Each protruding fibre and vein is present for inspection from every angle, lit by hard side lighting and in stark contrast to the textureless background. *Develop a pound of muscle every week; photograph your body each day.* This would be the performative script structuring Cassils' work had they decided to stop at the end of twenty-three weeks. But, Cassils did not stop there.

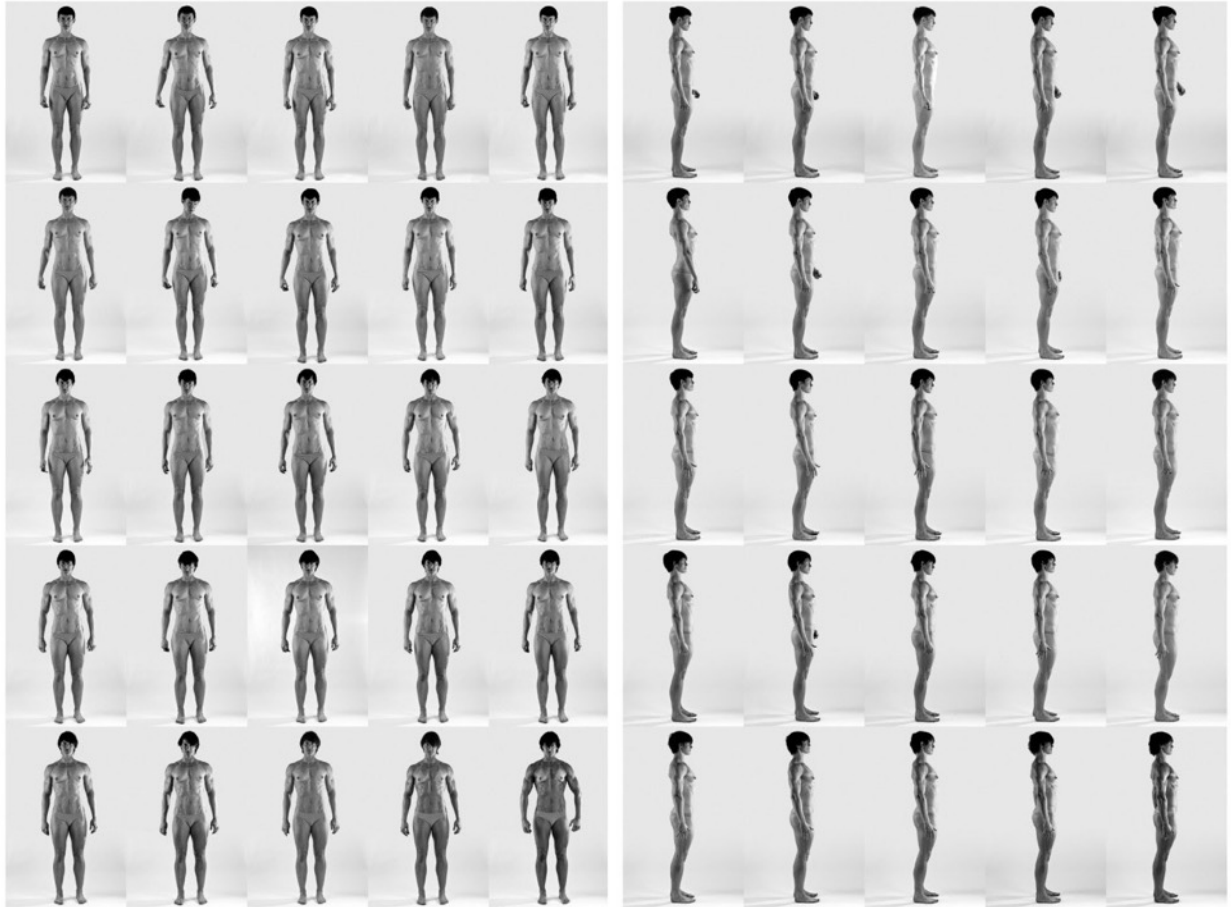


Figure 7-Cassils, documentation from *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture: Time Lapse (Front)*, (40" X 60"), and *Time Lapse (Left)*, (40 X 60), silver gelatin prints, 2011. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net>

Like Antin's work, the images of Cassils show a body radically reconfigured by the tactical manipulation and repurposing of metabolic processes. But also like Antin's work, the series hints at but ultimately belies the necessary labours—mental, physical, emotional—entailed by such transformative change. Viewed as still images in a serial grid on the wall of a gallery (or as a slideshow on a screen), these photos capture slices—several tenths, hundredths, or thousandths of a second—from the weeks and months of these artist's performances. In the case of Antin, we see a woman who is literally starving herself. She allows her body and its various co-constituents to consume bodily reserves. But in these fractional images, which effectively represent the indivisible quanta of daily existence, she holds still long enough for the shutter of

the camera to capture a clear image. In that stillness of the single image, there is no change, no metabolism, no progression of entropy. But there *is change between the images*, hidden from view and left to the viewer's imagination. It is in these intervening moments that Antin performs the labour of wasting away. Likewise, Cassils' own labour of bodily transformation is absent from the still images that document their performance. They stand still, composed, bearing a look of determination. From one image to a next their body changes and grows, and the viewer can only intuit what transpires in the intervening twenty-three hours, fifty-nine minutes, fifty-nine seconds and ninety-nine hundredths of a second.

***And its derivatives***

Cassils rectifies, in part, this absence through a work derivative of *Cuts*.<sup>88</sup> *Fast Twitch/Slow Twitch* (2011) is a dual-channel video installation in which Cassils animates the serial photographic images of their transformation in a stop motion effect, juxtaposed alongside a theatrical re-enactment of the various labours involved in building massive amounts of muscle over a short period of time. On the right, viewers witness the uncanny juttering progression of Cassils' body over the course of the twenty-three weeks. Like a figure carefully built from clay and then given life through late nineteenth-century parlour tricks, Cassils' form twitches in sporadic syncopation with the passing days. Their hair grows out in an uncanny way—perceptibly slow and uncomfortably quick—that acts as a reminder of the insistent biological

---

<sup>88</sup> The adjective “derivative” has two primary sets meanings. First those which come from the (now obsolete) notion of being “[c]haracterized by transmission, or passing from one to another.” Secondly, those which connote “a thing flowing, proceeding, or originating from another.” My use here is related to both these meanings, but is more so embodied by the latter. My use of “derivative” entails a work that incorporates elements which proceed or originate from another previous work, and does not connote any value-based judgement about the quality of the work. See: “Derivative, Adj. and N.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/50609>.

processes going on within and underneath the skin.<sup>89</sup> Cassils' muscles plump and grow turgid, but in a rolling ebb and flow that only becomes apparent in the animation. Briefly, one frame appears and disappears just as quickly: Cassils is completely naked for a brief instant. Another reminder, but this time of the artifice that is their stuffed jockstrap. The animations cycle, first all of the front images, then all the ones from the left, right and back. Opposite them, on the left channel, Cassils performs theatricalized, slow motion renditions of various acts which they necessarily do on a daily basis to build and maintain their body. In one vignette, a raw egg is dropped into the artist's mouth. In another, they pull apart raw meat with their teeth. Another sees Cassils' face at the excruciating moment of muscle failure, that point beyond which bodybuilders push their bodies to produce bulging (as opposed to lean) muscle forms. Sweat drips and spittle is flung as viewers are brought face to face with a hyperreal grotesque that makes palpable a labouring suffering body. Sisyphean is this march against the tide of entropy though: Cassils maintains their masculine form exclusively through exercise and diet, and any sabbatical allows room for a slip back toward an androgyn form.

---

<sup>89</sup> It is worth drawing attention to the formal similarities between this work and the work of Tehching Hsieh. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Hsieh performed a series of five "Lifeworks One Year Performances." The first two in the series involve daily photodocumentation that draws the viewer's attention to changes in the artist's body over time: at the beginning of both performances, Hsieh shaved his head; over the course of the proceeding year, he allows his hair to grow out. The serial images that contribute to the documentation of these performances show the uncanny effect of his hair growing over this period of time, similarly to the way Cassils' work shows their body transform. Cassils' formal choice to begin the performance with short-cropped hair can be read clearly as a reference to Hsieh's work. For discussion about these "On Year Performances," as well as reproductions of the various documentation that he produced, see: Adrian Heathfield, *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh* (London; Cambridge, Mass.: Live Art Development Agency; MIT Press, 2009); To see documentation from the second piece, *One Year Performance: 1980-1981, (Time Clock Piece)* and hear Hsieh talk about his work, see: Foundation for Art and Creative Technology FACT, *Tehching Hsieh - One Year Performance 1980-1981 (Time Clock Piece)*, 2010, <https://vimeo.com/16280427>.





Figure 8-Cassils, installation view of *Fast Twitch/Slow Twitch*, Projected, large scale, two channel video installation, at “Cassils Compositions” (Trinity Square Video, Toronto) 2013. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net>



Figure 9-Cassils, detail of *Fast Twitch/Slow Twitch*, Projected, large scale, two channel video installation, at “Cassils Compositions” (Trinity Square Video, Toronto) 2013. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net>



Figure 10-Cassils, detail of *Fast Twitch/Slow Twitch*, Projected, large scale, two channel video installation, at “Cassils Compositions” (Trinity Square Video, Toronto) 2013. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net>

The contrast present between the two channels of video pulls upon various tensions: performativity/theatricality, presence/absence, objectivity/subjectivity. The still images are performative. They make real the making real of gender. The video, on the other hand, theatricalizes, and makes surreal, the labours involved in the maintenance of Cassils’ body. Both are present where the other is absent, and *vice versa*. The animated stills show the ‘real’ presence of a body that labours, while completely eliding the actual labour. The video on the left re-performs an ersatz pastiche of labour to fill in the day-long voids made apparent in Cassils’ jittery figure on the right. Where the still, documentary images are clinical, purposely devoid of emotional affect, the video sequences are theatrical and walk a fine line between satire and earnest emotion. The piece as a whole is a hyperbolic display of masculinity that is both vaguely erotic and anthropometric.

Cassils collaborated with Robin Black, a photographer known for gay erotica, to produce a number of other derivative works proceeding from *Cuts*, including *Advertisement (Homage to Benglis)* (2011), from which itself is derived the glossy ‘zine’ *Lady Face // Man Body* (2011). From the photos in *Lady Face // Man Body* are derived a series: “Disfigured Pinups,” which include *Disfigured Image: Anatomically Correct* (2013), *Disfigured Image: Cut Up: Comments From Huffington Post Article* (2013), and *Disfigured Image: The Resilient 20%* (2013). Standing in stark contrast to the daily documentation photos, *Advertisement* projects a celebratory affect and exhibits a wry sense of humor. In the cited *Advertisement* (1974)—and in resonance with Schneemann’s *Interior Scroll*, particularly the 1977 performance—Lynda Benglis, (an artist historicised as a painter, sculptor, and conceptual and performance artist) responds explicitly to the continual and systematic exclusion from the contemporary art scene experienced by women artists.<sup>90</sup> The work gets its name from the fact that Benglis was not able to have her work featured in *Artforum* magazine in a way comparable to male artists; her ability to participate in the contemporary art scene had been curtailed on the basis of her gender.<sup>91</sup> Instead, she paid to have *Advertisement* printed as a full-page advertisement in the magazine. Posing nude (save a

---

<sup>90</sup> For more information on Benglis and her career, see especially the bibliography in: Clair Joy, “Benglis, Lynda,” *Grove Art Online*, Oxford Art Online (Web.: Oxford University Press), accessed July 8, 2017, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T007881>.

<sup>91</sup> Benglis had six-page spread in the 1974 November issue of *Artforum* promoting an exhibition of installation works at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York City. Benglis originally wanted to reproduce the promotional poster for the show alongside the article, but the editors of *Artforum* deemed that the image was too obscene for publication. Another image of Benglis was printed in its place: she appears topless and with her pants pulled down around her high-heeled boots, standing with her butt facing the camera and looking back towards the viewer under her arm raised over her head. Benglis felt that the exclusion of her poster was discriminatory, considering the fact that the magazine had printed only two months prior an image of Robert Morris in which he appears in leather S&M gear. As an act of protest, Benglis produced the photograph now historicized as *Advertisement* (1974), and had the Paula Cooper Gallery purchase ad space to have it printed, full-page, on the inside cover of the November issue. Interestingly, in the copy of *Artforum* that the University of Alberta has in its archive, this image is completely censored, and only the copyright and photo credit information remains. See: Robert Pincus-Witten, “Lynda Benglis: The Frozen Gesture,” *Artforum* 13, no. 3 (November 1974): 54–59.

pair of sunglasses and a slick of oil), gingerly holding a large, flesh-coloured, double-ended dildo partially inserted into her vagina, Benglis facetiously mimics and entangles the visual languages of commercial photography and pornography. In the Cassils' *Advertisement*, the artist strikes poses on a white background, reminiscent of commercial underwear ads.



Figure 12-Cassils and Robin Black, *Advertisement (Homage to Benglis)*, chromogenic print, (30 x 40 in.), 2011. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net>



Figure 11- Cassils and Robin Black, *Lady Face//Man Body, Pin Up 5*), chromogenic print, (11 x 17 in.), 2011. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net>

Other photos from the same photoshoot became the images in *Lady Face // Man Body*, and *its* derivatives. In these images, Cassils wear bright red lipstick and the hair on their head is cropped to a gender-indeterminate length: too short to be femme, too long to be butch or masc. While Cassils' photos lack Benglis' dildo, they eroticize their body in different ways: in one image they wear a white jockstrap, replete with a bulging prosthetic package; in another they wear a black leather half harness and a matching black leather jockstrap (similarly bulging);

another variation sees them unbuttoning bleached denim cutoff shorts (sans lipstick). In addition to the zine, these images were also circulated online: “[w]hen Cassils circulated these trans positive self-determined images on the Huffington Post – in the Gay Voices section – they were met with a litany of hatred, confusion, and phobic comments.”<sup>92</sup> The ‘disfigured’ images are each derived from a single photo in which Cassils clasps their hands over their crotch and regards the viewer with what could be wary suspicion. Each is printed on photo paper and has been altered with markers and gouache, and etched into with razors or effaced with gold paint. In *Anatomically Correct*, Cassils’ lips—dull-red in the photograph itself—are etched over with a zig-zag white line making them appear to have been stitched shut. An amalgamation of reproductive organs and genitals have been imposed in cross-section upon their abdomen, pelvis, and thighs: two dull-red ovaries hang just below their ribs on either side of their navel; one dull-red testicle rests over each thigh; a penis-like structure appears to dangle between their legs; and a dull-red tube connects everything together, from the urethra into a prostate/vagina structure, and continuing up through a uterus—into the flesh of which is etched “HATE”—before splitting off into fallopian tubes, which terminate slightly above each ovary. The other two ‘disfigured’ images are comparably disturbing. The series, taken as a whole, etches into Cassils’ flesh—figuratively, yes, but by way of the literal defacement of a photo-realistic reproduction of that flesh—representations of the ignorant and hateful rhetoric that makes Cassils’ ongoing project

---

<sup>92</sup> This is how Cassils describes the genesis of the “Disfigured Series” on their webpage: Cassils, “Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture « Cassils,” artist webpage, *Cassils.net*, accessed July 10, 2017, <http://cassils.net/portfolio/cuts-a-traditional-sculpture/>; The blogpost to which Cassils refers has since been moved from the Huffington Post’s now-defunct “Gay Voices” section into the “Queer Voices” section. The comments no longer appear on the site, but an archived version of the post shows an assortment of variously ignorant and phobic remarks, several of which have apparently been removed: Cassils, “Heather Cassils: A Traditional Sculpture (VIDEO),” archive, *The Wayback Machine*, (May 5, 2012), [https://web.archive.org/web/20120505061310/http://www.huffingtonpost.com:80/heather/a-traditional-sculpture\\_b\\_983384.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20120505061310/http://www.huffingtonpost.com:80/heather/a-traditional-sculpture_b_983384.html).

necessary. Produced two years after the original work—of which they are derivatives of a derivative, of a derivative—the “Disfigured Pin Ups” close the parenthesis on *Cuts*’ 2011-2013 date of production.



Figure 13-Cassils; *Disfigured Image: Anatomically Correct*; collage: photo paper, marker, gouache, razor etching; (11 x 17 in.); 2013. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net>

Because *Cuts* includes these derivative works as smaller constituents of an encompassing whole, the work does not have a straightforward structure like Antin’s *Carving*. Both works involve bodies doing performative acts in spaces over time; Antin’s formal structure, from which Cassils derives the basis of their own work, is non-recursive though. Distilled down into a simple performative utterance—*lose this much weight in this manner; document it in this particular way*—*Carving* falls on the theatrical end of this spectrum which I have detailed in the previous

chapter (not unlike *Interior Scroll* or *Meat Joy*). However, not only does *Cuts*, encompassing its derivative works as it does, have a less pre-determined terminal point, its structure is dynamically resolved in the process of its own making as well. Like Antin, Cassils uses their own body as material, documenting its transformation over a period of time. Unlike Antin, Cassils' use of documentation is recursively performative: the form that Antin's documentation takes is determined by the script that structures the work; the form of Cassils' documentation is determined in response to the context in which the work is made and exists, at first lodging itself in a historical mode and then folding back upon itself, intervening into the overall structure of the work. *Cuts* could thus be distilled down into this performative utterance: *document the labour of transforming and maintaining your body*. The structure of the work is determined recursively over the course of its two-year realization. *Cuts* exists encoded in each successive form of derivative documentation, as well as in the muscle, sinew, and bone of Cassils themselves. This iterative, recursive mode of working opens up different points of access to the work and generates different ways to know and understand the particular instance of life as a trans person that is Cassils: first, by dramatizing and making real the laborious process of quotidian existence in *Fast Twitch/Slow Twitch*; *Advertisement* and *Lady Face//Man Body* pay homage to feminist and queer histories of resistance, while at the same time reminding us that fleshy bodies are always enmeshed in sensual and erotic webs of signification and political affect; finally, the "Disfigured Pin Ups" cathect, in a way that makes your own viscera itch, the abundant vitriol and ignorance that LGBT people can face when they make themselves visible. *Cuts* and its derivative documents re-imagine the process of documentation as a performative act.

## **Becoming**

### *An image*

In a dark space, an audience, ushered in by attendants, gathers together around an unseen monolith. An indeterminate amount of time passes before the first strike. The fleshy smack of skin impacting something firm but forgiving. A grunt. Breath quickly exhaled through a pair of nostrils. Smack. Thwack. Flash. A bright white light illuminates the space for a few thousandths of a second before the darkness reinvades an instant later. But on the retinas of those present, the effect of the flash ebbs more slowly. Fading from bright white through a dull red as their unprepared biomechanical eyes struggle to compensate for the sudden change in conditions. Inscribed into this biochemical retinal residue is an afterimage: a vaguely anthropomorphic character lashing out at an immense block of clay. This image fades in time, despite slight renewals with each desperate saccade in the darkness. But even as it fades, the figure continues on in the darkness, striking, beating, battling their foe. One fading moment suspended in time within the insufficient photo-chemical receptors trying to make sense out of overwhelming nothingness. The unmistakable sounds of violence nevertheless permeate the darkness. Again, another flash, another afterimage. And another, and another. Palimpsest inscriptions, never quite completely erasing the one before.

Some time later, the violence ceases. A few moments of silence and the lights come on to fully illuminate the space for the first time. The human body is gone, but its battered foe remains: a pulverized mound of clay, pitted imprints layered and layered one on top of the other. Fists, feet, elbows, and knees—as well as some other less-well-defined body parts—remain in as cathartic impression upon its surface. Skin pressed into clay, leaving its trace, and taking with it perhaps minute traces as well.





Figure 14- Cassils, post-performance still from *Becoming an Image*, performance at “Rhubarb Festival,” (Buddies In Bad Times Theater, Toronto) 2014. Reproduced from: <http://www.cassils.net>

*Becoming an Image* draws on many of the methodological and formal innovations Cassils established through *Cuts*. While the works are on the surface very different from one another in terms of content, Cassils maintains a formal tether from *Cuts* to *Becoming*, embodied and realized through the artist’s flesh as well as through the recursively performative structure of documentation. In *Becoming* Cassils establishes an approximate theatre-in-the-round in a gallery space. The lights are lowered. The encircling audience remains still and quiet, abiding by the

precepts entailed by attending the theatre. The performance has clear temporal-spatial boundaries, delimited on one side by an initial punch, kick, or other bodily impact into the clay mound; and on the other by the complete exhaustion of the artist; and on the other by the circumspective ring of the audience. Each participating element seems to have a performative script. Cassils: *beat the clay block with every ounce of energy you can muster, with everything you know about violence, with every bodily appendage you have available.* The photographer: *photograph Cassils as best you can in the dark. Don't get hit!* The clay: *resist.* The audience: *witness. Passively.* These performative directives are not stated outright (except, probably, Cassils' directions for the photographer), and yet they manifest as a result of the doing of the performance. What superseding performative structure could these individual derivative scripts emerge from? Perhaps: *document the labours of violence.* Each instantiation of the work as a whole is an apparatus by which violence is created and recorded: it is inscribed in Cassils' flesh, in the structure of the clay, in the digital memory card of the photographer's camera, and in the retinas, memories, hearts of everyone present. The roles of each participating element are determined by the formal structure of the work, which is itself determined dynamically, in process, emerging from the interminable and recursive performative: *document.*

### ***Derivative residues***

Like *Cuts, Becoming* generates a number of derivative documents. The first iteration took place in the ONE Archives in Los Angeles, the site of the largest LGBT archives in North America, resulting in a clay bash: a site specific sculpture/monument to commemorate/memorialize trans victims of violence. Each subsequent performance iteration since has produced another clay bash. The performances are further documented through the photographs produced by the male photographer co-performers. Further, the audience co-

performers take with them latent impressions upon their retinas—which fade into nothing over time—and encoded memory engrams—which re-combine and re-produce with each subsequent recollection.<sup>93</sup> Cassils own body invariably accrues scuffs, bruises, tears and strains in muscles and tendons, as well as the reinforcement/reinscription of muscle memory. These residues persist, to varying degrees, outside the original parameters of the performance, and continue to generate meaning well after the artist succumbs to exhaustion and the lights lift.

The clay bashes fossilize the impacts of skin impelled by bone and tendon. Embedded within and upon their surfaces are traces of the various agents that co-constitute the performance iterations: in negative relief, four fingers and their respective knuckles and the tip of a thumb, or maybe the ball of a left foot, or perhaps the radial styloid process; droplets of sweat and spit, which invariably evaporate, leaving behind dried up biofilms and salt; epithelial cells, dead for several days but sluffed off only at the moment of contact between flesh and clay; residual heat from the performers' bodies and the several trillion photos released in each six-thousand degree flash of the photographic strobes, which will dissipate in time but will nevertheless change the clay in some unfathomable way. The photographs—transmuted photons reflected off the surfaces of the clay, Cassils' body, the floors and walls and ceiling of the gallery space—reside as numbers abstracted into electrical potentials within the solid-state memory of the photographer's camera. They are read into a black box transmogrifier and eventually reproduced as flattened 3D

---

<sup>93</sup> Recent research in neuroscience indicates that memory storage and recollection are iterative processes by which memories are modified with each recollection. “Retrieval (generating information about prior events) may improve memory storage because it entails reactivation. Alternatively, retrieval may promote storage of retrieved information, and, if retrieval is inaccurate, subsequent recall could be distorted by the retrieved information. [...] These findings demonstrate unique neurocognitive processing whereby memories are updated with information produced during retrieval.” You never recall an “original” memory; rather, you recall your last recollection and any other affective contaminants that may have been re-encoded with it. See: Donna J. Bridge and Ken A. Paller, “Neural Correlates of Reactivation and Retrieval-Induced Distortion,” *Journal of Neuroscience* 32, no. 35 (August 29, 2012): 12144, doi:10.1523/JNEUROSCI.1378-12.2012.

space-time through a matrix of liquid crystals or as inkjet ejaculate on glossy photo paper. They are ready for either transmission through the internet or framing, glazing, and hanging on the white walls in a gallery cube.

These various documentary derivatives, inscriptions into various permutations of matter, carry on into the future a record of the violence that was. Cassils' performance is structured in such a way that its modes of documentation are not only fully imbricated in its realization, but also performatively ambiguate the presumed natural distinction between their forms. The work takes place in the dark, illuminated only at those moments when the photographer activates his strobes. The very same action that releases his shutter fills the room momentarily with light. Just as he opens up the innards of his camera to a flood of light onto the surface of its sensor, the eyes of the spectators—dilated in the groping darkness—are inundated with light that overwhelms their ability to process images. Then both the camera and the peoples' eyes transmute the photos—the former by way of transistors and logic gates, the later through biochemistry—into electrical potentials, to be rapidly encoded into the abstraction of memory. The camera recovers nearly instantly, whereas the eye does not; unprepared for the abrupt change in light intensity, the human retina becomes momentarily depleted of its chemical constituents, leaving in negative relief an impression of the image which persists after the light has dissipated. An insufficiency in the human body points at the similarities in the processes of seeing and of capturing photographic images. The camera and the eye, bio/mechanical analogues of one another, see the same thing oriented differently in space, a photovisual isomer of labouring bodies.



Figure 15-Cassils; *The Resilience of the 20%*; poured black concrete, cast clay bash; (36 x 48 x 24 in.); 2013.

The clay bash and the artist's body remember as well. On the clay is inscribed moments of impact, smudges of movement, and all the tell-tale signs of the presence of another body. However, where the clay records particular instances of change upon its surface, palimpsest slices of time imposed onto its form, Cassils' body records the continuity of events leading up to, through, and beyond those moments of impact. Through various bodily processes, Cassils' body works to efface the marks left on it by the clay: bruises fade as ruptured capillaries mend and damaged muscle fibres knit themselves back together. Cassils' body and the way it moves in space is a record, not of particular moments, but rather of the ongoing processes which maintain its form. Some of the bashes are cast in concrete to further cement their permanence. *The*

*Resilience of the 20%* (2013) is a bash cast in poured black concrete. It sits in a gallery space surrounding by glazed photographs of its own creation, immersed in the sounds “of sharp breaths and wet punches” poured out by multi-channel speakers; it is a funerary sculpture, named for the 20% worldwide increase in the rate of homicide against trans men and women in 2012.<sup>94</sup> The 2013 sound installation, *Ghost*, is a collaboration between Cassils and the sound artists Kadet Kunne and Richard Barley: a bash, ideally in a small blacked-out room, is encircled by a set of four speakers that “recreates the sounds of the artist’s breath, blows, grunts, and pulse rate during one performance of *Becoming*.”<sup>95</sup> By incorporating sonic documents into further iterations of the work, Cassils further extends the modes by which it can be experienced, and invites viewers to engage with it in an increasingly multi-sensorial way: the finely textured surface of the bash is reflected in the richly textured sonic documentation of the bash’s production. Most recently, *Resilience of the 20%* (2016), another bash, this time cast in bronze, was pushed through the streets of Omaha, Nebraska, in a Sisyphean performance called *Monument Push* (2017).<sup>96</sup> These bashes, derivatives of derivatives, are monuments in memory of unjust violence, created through processes whereby literal violence is wielded like a cudgel at the intersection of metaphor and metonymy. They are documents of their own genesis, objects generated by and in order to produce the labours of violence, performatively extending the formal structure of the original work beyond its putative conclusion.

---

<sup>94</sup> Cassils, “Becoming An Image « Cassils,” artist webpage, *Cassils.net*, accessed July 10, 2017, <http://cassils.net/portfolio/becoming-an-image-2/>.

<sup>95</sup> Cassils, “Becoming An Image « Cassils,” artist webpage, *Cassils.net*, accessed July 10, 2017, <http://cassils.net/portfolio/becoming-an-image-2/>.

<sup>96</sup> Karen Emenhiser-Harris, “A 1,900-Pound Sculpture Pushed Through the Streets of Omaha, in Tribute to Its LGBTQ History,” blog, *Hyperallergic*, (May 5, 2017), <https://hyperallergic.com/377494/a-1900-pound-sculpture-pushed-through-the-streets-of-omaha-in-tribute-to-its-lgbtq-history/>.

*Becoming* is structured such that its manifold layers of documentation and record-keeping are inseparable from the bodies, space, and time of the performance itself. Through the performance and its derivative documents, Cassils generates an ambivalence that calls into question the roles of every participant in acts of violence against trans people. To what extent are they there to watch the performance, and to what extent are they necessarily imbricated in its instantiation? Like willfully indifferent passersby on the street or apathetic viewers of news media, viewers are confronted with the proposition that equivocates the witness of violence with its doing. The performative moments of the work render real the structures of recording, which are mutually and productively conflated with each other during the course of the performance, and extended into the future through its derivative documents. The clay bashes and Cassils' physical body, photographic images and residual retinal artifacts glowing in the dark, and the multilayered sonic documents all carry forward a particular imprint of violence, articulated, recalled, and extended differently in time and space.

## **Powers**

### ***That be***

Writhing on the concrete surface of a parking garage, the artist's body performs a choreographed fight against something unseen. They are surrounded by cars—whose headlights provide the illumination of the space and whose radios provide the score—and people, whose phones capture photos and video of the tumult. In *Powers that Be*, Cassils' actions are choreographed, the scene is staged with an obvious sense of theatricality, and the soundtrack is pre-composed. The work, taking with it one of *Becoming*'s conceptual thrusts, seeks to

“[explore] the radical unrepresentability of certain forms of trauma and violence.”<sup>97</sup> It seems to toe the nebulous divide between performance art and Avant-garde theatre. Upon first inspection, the work seems more reminiscent of Schneemann’s Fluxus- and Happenings-inspired works. The choreography, staging, and aural scoring of the event are more scripted and less dynamically performative compared with Cassils’ other work I have examined here. The fight itself is pre-planned, the product of a collaboration between Cassils and Mark Steger, a fight choreographer for film and television. It is designed to be performed and re-performed for an audience, citing itself in a non-iterative fashion, referring back to an originary script as opposed to a previous instantiation. The staging itself is diegetic, contrived such that it recalls and retells familiar tropes of violent street brawls, and the score is a pre-composed loop “of static noise and



Figure 16-Cassils, performance still from *Powers that Be*, performance at the "ANTI Contemporary Art Festival" (Kuopio, Finland), 2015. Reproduced from <http://www.cassils.net>

---

<sup>97</sup> Cassils, “Powers That Be « Cassils,” *Cassils*, accessed March 31, 2017, <http://cassils.net/portfolio/powers-that-be/>.



radio samples [... that simulate] a local radio dial to illuminate oppressive and oppressed forces in contemporary US culture.”<sup>98</sup> The work still differentiates itself however, because its moments of performativity arise almost entirely out of the way in which it is documented. Like their other works, *Powers that Be* incorporates into its formal structure, documentation as a performative imperative that co-determines the structure of the work.

While the case can be made that those elements which I have called ‘theatrical’ here are in fact performative, Cassils’ inclusion of documentation as a primary conceit of the work—it is *intended* to be documented by participant-observers—dominates the performative aspects and meaning generated by the work. Rather than watch passively (as the audience of *Becoming* is impelled to through the performance’s formal structure) viewers of *Powers* are directed to document. And so they do, on a multitude of camera phones and whatever other recording devices they might be carrying in their pockets. That this is not considered to be an absurd directive (barely a decade prior, very few people had high quality recording devices at their disposal, let alone ready at a moment’s notice) highlights the ubiquity not only of cellphone cameras, but the practice of capturing photos and video of every slightly interesting happenstance. Cassils invites their viewers to actively participate in the performance, an invitation that they readily accept. Whereas the viewers of *Becoming* have their implication in the violence they watch foisted upon them, viewers of *Powers* actively engage with it, creating the primary documents and records of the event. Again, another set of ambivalences: the work itself teeters subtly on the edge of performance art and theatre, while viewers are also participants, and the metaphor of violence is made all too real through its choreographed

---

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

enactment. *Powers* is at its core a work of performance where the primary performative element is that of documentation-as-medium.

### **Material agents**

Jones, in her 2015 essay “Material Traces: Performativity, Artistic ‘Work,’ and New Concepts of Agency” engages with Cassils’ work similarly. She writes about an encounter with derivatives of *Becoming* in a gallery:

Impressed with the efforts of the sweating boxer, the huge lump of manipulated clay stands as a record of the past action, marked by the material traces of artistic labour. [...] The pictures [...] are glossy, beautiful, gleaming windows onto the past action. These elements all together are evocative in a phenomenological sense of what I want to call the feeling of their “having been made,” affecting my physicality, my sense of scale and (through identification) my desire to act or react in return. I have a particularly visceral relationship to this hunk of clay-flesh. Surely it smells of sweat? It has the texture of skin. It is a body to me. It reanimates Cassils’s actions.<sup>99</sup>

Jones identifies *Becoming* as typical of what she considers to be “a new approach in contemporary art that merges aspects of performance with aspects of the visual arts [... which] beg for new hybrid modes of analysis.”<sup>100</sup> Jones’ hybrid analysis seeks to adjoin the methodologies of art history and performance theory with Marxist theories of labour and new materialist ontologies. On my reading, this mode of analysis runs up against a wall with its account of the new materialist theories of Karen Barad, and Bruno Latour, however. While Jones does acknowledge that these performance works are doing *something* different from conventional performance and body art, her emphasis on the postmodern subject and the

---

<sup>99</sup> Amelia Jones, “Material Traces: Performativity, Artistic ‘Work,’ and New Concepts of Agency,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 59, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 19–20.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

signifying capacity of that subject's body—the terms by which she has previously oriented her discussion of body art around—misses the performative capacity of the 'inert' materials of the performance. Jones does describe these works as “hybrid performative-material assemblages,” but she does not describe the material components of performance—what I have hitherto been calling documents—as anything more than “overtly inscribed and *performatively manipulated materialities*.”<sup>101</sup> Jones differentiates between the clay—something that is acted upon—and the bodies Cassils, the photographer, and the audience—active postmodern subjects that act. While the clay bashes are no doubt products of the performative elements of *Becoming*, Jones' analysis does not recognize in them any material agency, through and by which the performance is recursively structured. She engages with and incorporates new materialist rhetoric into her hybrid methodology, but deems it limited because she is unconvinced of the agential force of material *qua* material.

In her 2007 book, *Meeting The Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and The Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Karen Barad, feminist theorist, particle physicist, philosopher of science, and professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, describes an 'agential-realism' arising from her understanding of quantum physics and her reading of Niels Bohr, one of the most influential thinkers in twentieth-century particle physics. Barad explains that when engaging with the material world on the level of individual quanta of particles and electromagnetic energy, our intuitive understandings of cause and effect fail to adequately explain how and why things function as they do. A single particle or photon of light behaves and is measurable in one particular way given a certain experimental apparatus. A differently configured apparatus results in—or results from—a different set of properties exhibited by the

---

<sup>101</sup> Emphasis mine. Ibid., 24.

particle or photon. In Barad's idiom, boundaries of a certain apparatus delimit individual phenomena, and the relations of material agents within a phenomenon are referred to as 'intra-activity.' The material configuration of phenomena intra-actively determine cause and effect along axes Barad terms 'agential cuts.' An apparatus—or phenomenon—designed to determine the speed of a single particle can only determine the speed of a single particle, and not its position in space. This is not because the particle's speed is indeterminate; rather, the concept of 'speed' has no legible meaning within the phenomena such as it exists. The material intra-activity of the phenomena determine and are determined by what is knowable within that phenomena.<sup>102</sup>

In her essay, Jones makes reference to certain aspects of Barad's posthumanist framework, but is demonstratively skeptical of Barad's epistemontological project on the whole:

I am not, however, in agreement with Barad and other new materialists from Latour onward in their claim that the rejection of "representationalism" and the related embrace of materialities somehow establishes a fully "posthuman" situation, nor that new materialism places us "beyond" (in opposition to) the evils of social constructivism, as some of this discourse can tend to imply. [...] We do not, in fact, have to claim that the status of human consciousness is nil—that the "human" is ontologically the same as the "non-human"—just because we have a new understanding of ourselves as materialities interrelated with other materialities, and a new concept of our agency as intra-actively determined in continual engagements with the stuff of the world, of which we ourselves are constituted. The very attempts to articulate variations of this argument indicate that we still have a stake in our own consciousness, intellect, or whatever we want to call the force of our thought, as agential.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> Karen M. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>103</sup> Jones, "Material Traces: Performativity, Artistic 'Work,' and New Concepts of Agency," 30–31; It should be noted that in the bibliography for this essay Jones only cites the 2003 essay which Barad published

The claim that a posthumanist performativity renders “the status of human consciousness [as] nil” is an apocryphal reading I would prefer to emend. Recognizing human consciousness as arising out of material intra-activity is an opening up of possibilities, rather than closing them off. To say that humans are fundamentally material does not subordinate human consciousness to the agency of rocks or any other seemingly ‘inert’ material stuff; instead, it expands upon the ways by which we can recognize relations in manifold ways.

In Barad’s worldview, on the scale of humans and clay blocks, subjectivity is not something inherent to a particular fleshy assemblage of bones and organs that happens to witness itself in a mirror one day; rather, subjectivity is generated performatively through an agential cut within a particular apparatus at a particular time.<sup>104</sup> Jones contradicts this, taking Marcel Duchamp as an example, and contending that “the gesture of the readymade *referred back inexorably to the materiality of the choosing subject, the artist.*”<sup>105</sup> Duchamp, as a pre-existing subject, chose a urinal and designated it as art, an encounter which foregrounds his human consciousness and defers the material agency of the urinal itself. Taking seriously Barad’s claims about the posthuman performativity of material agency, however, we would be impelled to argue that Duchamp’s subjectivity is actually co-constituted intra-actively within the phenomenon of choosing the urinal; it is not something pre-existing, but something emergent consequent to the material relationality between his fleshy-bony-being and the shiny-porceliny-being of the urinal.

---

on her posthumanist performativity. This essay is the germ of what was later developed into her book, and as such is neither as clear nor convincing in its argument. See: Karen M. Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801–31; Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*.

<sup>104</sup> This is not to say that I disavow the psychoanalytic framework of identity formation. Rather, I think that psychoanalysis and Barad’s posthumanism offer complementary models through which to consider the problem of human subjectivity. Neither is mutually exclusive, and both provide different insights. Establishing a unifying theory of subjectivity is beyond the scope of this thesis, however.

<sup>105</sup> Jones, “Material Traces: Performativity, Artistic ‘Work,’ and New Concepts of Agency,” 31.

Subjectivity isn't a pre-given property which enables us to act upon the world; it is not a theatrical script with the performative imperatives by which things are done. Subjectivity is determined recursively, in the process of its being, emerging performatively within the intra-active iterative phenomena of various material agents.

Returning to Cassils' work, Jones leverages new materialism only insofar as it allows her to make the claim that "the materialities of these works as we encounter them today could be thought of, precisely, as participating in this developing awareness Latour has explored, an awareness of the 'many entanglements of humans and nonhumans,' showing social and individual meaning to resonate in and through made things[.]"<sup>106</sup> The clay bashes and the photos from performances of *Becoming* resonate with viewers' subjectivity on a level that serves to remind us of the way in which we are interconnected through the materiality of the world we encounter. Fully embracing Barad's agential-realism opens up the whole gamut of material agency, enabling a more finely articulated reading of Cassils' work that acknowledges the degree to which viewers and artist are engaged with each other. Each iteration of a performance constitutes a phenomenon—an experimental apparatus—the agential cuts of which simultaneously productive and products of the subjectivity of those involved. Cassils' body is a material agent acting upon the block of clay, which has its own agency acting upon and in response to Cassils' body. Both are themselves phenomena, comprised of intra-acting assemblages of material agents: skin, muscles, bones, nerves, organelles, kaolinite, serpentine, talc, vermiculite. Phenomena within phenomena, all the way down to stochastic clouds of electrons intra-acting within orbits around atomic nuclei. A shell of photons, several thousandths

---

<sup>106</sup> Jones cites Latour here. See: Ibid., 34; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 84.

of a lightmilisecond thick, expands outward from an electrical arc released in conjunction with the press of a shutter button. The photographer's body, his camera, the light, the viewers, the clay, the room, and Cassils, each a respective material agential assemblage of phenomena intra-acting within the phenomenon of the performance itself. The documents produced by—and productive of—the performance remain after the fact, performatively extending the bodies, space, and time along an axis attenuated by the entropy of those other phenomena of which they are also a part.

In chapter one, I began attempting to provide a definition of performance art by invoking Jones' conceptual framework of body art: bodies imbued with postmodern subjectivity acting in relation with one another to leverage the signifying capacity of said bodies to pluck at and pull apart the inequities arising from identity formation in the postmodern idiom. From there I provided my own interpretation of performativity as a qualifying attribute of performance art: namely, the meaningful performative, a recursive performative utterance that, taken as the formal conceit of a work, dynamically generates the form of the work itself. In this chapter, I examined three works of Cassils, each of which incorporates the meaningful performative into its structural form in such a way that the performative act of documentation is foregrounded, and thus implicated directly as way of doing performance. This brought me back to Jones, her analysis of *Becoming*, and her reading of Barad's posthumanist performativity, by which she foregrounds again the embodied postmodern subject with which I started. And now, I have provided my own reading of Barad's work that foregrounds instead the phenomena by which subjectivities emerge, and I am given cause to emend my original definition of performance art: phenomena in which bodies and other material agents engage in performative intra-activity. In the following chapter, I

will describe my own project in which I employ Cassils' performative imperative to *document* in an exploration of my own theoretical practice as artistic practice.



## Chapter Three

### Anecdotal Apologia

#### Am I supposed to be able to see my pulse in my neck?

Am I supposed to be able to see my pulse in my neck? I do not know the answer to this question. I prefer to remain ignorant for the time being, partially because the answer scares me, and partially because knowing that answer will not change the reality of my present situation: this thesis *must* be completed. I would also like to pretend this is the ‘research question’ that spurred the research creation work I will detail in this chapter, but that would be spurious. This is a question that jumped into my mind while I was staring at myself in my bathroom mirror, as I often do when I am taking a ‘break’ from agonizing over not doing what I should be doing. *Turn around, go back to your computer, just start writing*, I think at the man staring back at me in the mirror. Fastidiously, I examine every pore on his face, search his beard for *pilas multigemini* and I wonder to him whether this is the kind of repetitious neurotic behaviour Freud had in mind when he was theorizing about what lies beyond the pleasure principle.<sup>107</sup> I pluck two or three or four or more hairs, telling him *after this one I will get back to work*, before I become transfixed on his neck. Slightly below his jaw line, on either side of where I presume his *hyoid* bone to be, I can see his neck throbbing. In unison, the carotid arteries pulse. Noticeably.

I have become increasingly aware of my own body, not just throughout the course of this thesis, but over the course of my academic career. The difference between writing several thousand words in a day and sleeping for twelve hours, then lying in bed for four more, then

---

<sup>107</sup> Sigmund Freud theorized that in addition to a “life drive” mediated by the pleasure principle, there was also a “death drive,” evidence for which being repetitious neurotic behaviour that seems to exist in contradiction to the pursuit of sensuous pleasure. See: Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (London; New York: Norton, 1961).

deciding *maybe I'll try again tomorrow* at 5:00pm can come down to the subtle difference between having coffee just slightly too late in the afternoon the day prior. My waking and my non-waking hours are a balancing act of managing stimulants. Caffeine and methylphenidate potentiate nicely: they have a synergistic effect wherein, taken together, they are more effective than the cumulative effects of each. I take methylphenidate to concentrate, and I take caffeine to maintain a level of alertness commensurate to the demands of staring at a computer screen for longer than is most likely healthy. Without these drugs, I would not have the capacity to read a standard page of text before my mind wanders off on a tangent that is ultimately unproductive in that moment. Caffeine has a half-life in an adult man of roughly two-and-a-half to four-and-a-half hours.<sup>108</sup> Methylphenidate is similar.<sup>109</sup> However, through the alchemy of Osmotic controlled-Release Oral delivery System (OROS™), methylphenidate is biologically available within my blood for a window of up to twelve hours.<sup>110</sup> If that twelve-hour window overlaps with when I should be asleep, I toss and turn throughout the night and will be cognitively impaired the following day, doubly so if I misjudge my caffeine dosing.

I can see the blood being pushed through vessels in my neck. If I bring my hand up to my throat to touch the surface of my neckskin with my thumb and forefinger at the softest spot on either side of my trachea right where my beard begins to dissolve, I can feel the rhythm of my

---

<sup>108</sup> Committee on Military Nutrition Research Institute of Medicine Food and Nutrition Board, *Caffeine for the Sustainment of Mental Task Performance: Formulations for Military Operations* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2001), 13, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK223799/>.

<sup>109</sup> “Methylphenidate is a short-acting stimulant with a duration of action of 1 to 4 hours and a pharmacokinetic half-life of 2 to 3 hours.” Hui C. Kimko, James T. Cross, and Darrell R. Abernethy, “Pharmacokinetics and Clinical Effectiveness of Methylphenidate,” *Clinical Pharmacokinetics* 37, no. 6 (December 1, 1999): 547, doi:10.2165/00003088-199937060-00002.

<sup>110</sup> Vincent Malaterre et al., “Oral Osmotically Driven Systems: 30 Years of Development and Clinical Use,” *European Journal of Pharmaceutics and Biopharmaceutics* 73, no. 3 (November 1, 2009): 311–23, doi:10.1016/j.ejpb.2009.07.002.

heart beating. And sometimes I can hear it too, not like an actual sound I perceive through the quiet vibrations of bones deep in my head but like a sound extrapolated through the tips of my fingers. And I am not sure if my pulse is ‘supposed’ to be so easy to resolve and I sit and wonder if I should consider asking a physician. Nevertheless, I will continue to consume these drugs, and continue to get the least amount of sleep that I can before I feel like that tingle gnawing at the back of my throat when I wake up is in danger of turning into off-white ulcers on my tonsils. The question of whether or not I should be able to notice my own pulse remains, but this is not the question whose answer actually interests me. Rather, I find myself focused on the fact that I have noticed it at all.

### **Understanding and knowing in theory and practice**

Cassils’ performance practice uses not only their own material body in relay with other material agents, but also the performative imperative *document*, from which emerges documentation as a primary form of performance. Just as they deploy their body within the phenomena of performance works as productive and products of those same phenomena, they instantiate performative documentation as the structural basis through which the form of the performance is dynamically realized. This recursive, productive capacity of Cassils’ documentary performative works produce in me questions about its possibility for research-creation projects. ‘Research-creation’ is, as of the time of writing this, an actively contested term within the humanities, and is understood differently in various contexts. It is, however, “not so much a ‘new’ method as it is a ‘newly-reorganized’ academic practice that has gained ground in [recent years].”<sup>111</sup> The recognition of research-creation methodologies in the academy as a valid

---

<sup>111</sup> Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuck, assistant professor and professor, respectively, in the Department of Communication Studies at Concordia University, provide a broad overview of research-creation in the Canadian context, and also differentiate between several allied, but different modes of research that

form of research practice and dissemination considered equally alongside conventional research is of vital importance for the future of the institution inside—and in spite—of neoliberal frameworks that have become dominant over the past half-century.<sup>112</sup> While modes of research and research dissemination fall across a very broad field, I use the term ‘conventional’ to refer to those forms of research that rely most heavily upon engagement with and dissemination through the circuits of academic publication typified by written theses and dissertations, journal publications, conference papers, essay anthologies, and monographs. My point here is not to deprecate conventional research, particularly within the frame of a master’s thesis, however unconventional I strive to make it to be. Instead, I desire to see alternative modes of doing and sharing research become considered on par with those on which Western academic institutions have been founded. Furthermore, it would be a spurious claim to make that I have not myself had ample opportunity over the course of both my undergraduate and graduate careers to engage with subjects of interest in interesting and non-conventional ways (adhering to the definition I laid out about); histories of art, design, and visual culture seem to readily lend themselves well to modes and methods that emphasize active engagement, tactility, and a lively responsiveness to interlocutory disciplines. However, in my own experience in approaching the point I am today, I can say with confidence that the institutional frameworks of the larger University—that is the corporation superseding and overseeing my activities as one of its productive units—are not well-adapted toward non-conventional research modes, both in terms of recognizing their utility and valuing them in proportion to their potential for meaningful contribution. Research-creation

---

incorporate creative practices. Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, “Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis And ‘family Resemblances,’” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (March 2012): 6.

<sup>112</sup> Bill Readings discusses the development of universities as both agents of declining nation-states and transnational corporations concerned primarily with maximizing profitability in Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

methods generate and convey knowledge that is otherwise inaccessible or un-relatable through conventional research practice.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, they do so in a way that has the potential to disrupt oppressive, asymmetrical systems of power within the institution and society at large differently than—but nevertheless in conversation with—conventional modes of research.<sup>114</sup> Cassils’ work for instance, while not produced under the auspices of being research-creation, nevertheless performatively generates affective, embodied ways of knowing and understanding violence in ways unrecognizable through the conventional circuits of research and dissemination allowed for by the University today. My arguments here are less about closing down, or declaring outmoded a particular set of practices in favour of another. Rather, I firmly believe that cultivating a greater plurality and diversity in the generation, exchange, and comingling of ideas can only benefit and produce more fruitful discourse.

Murdo Macdonald, a professor in the history of Scottish art at the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, advocates for a research methodology that foregrounds practice: playing on the old adage of ‘look before you leap,’ Macdonald calls upon his reader to instead

---

<sup>113</sup> For instance, Natasha Meyers, associate professor in the Department of Anthropology at York University and director of the Plant Studies Collaboratory, discusses her own research-creation practice in terms of using her own body as a transducer for affect and sensation in ethnographic field research. Drawing upon her background as a dancer, Meyers offers interventions into anthropological practices that are accountable to Indigenous histories, non-human sentience, and knowledges not rooted in Western colonial heteropatriarchal frameworks. See: Natasha Myers, “Becoming Sensor in Sentient Worlds: A More-than-Natural History of a Black Oak Savannah,” in *The B-Side of the Whale*, ed. Gretchen Bakke and Marina Peterson, forthcoming, [https://www.academia.edu/28713793/Becoming\\_Sensor\\_in\\_Sentient\\_Worlds\\_A\\_More-than-natural\\_History\\_of\\_a\\_Black\\_Oak\\_Savannah](https://www.academia.edu/28713793/Becoming_Sensor_in_Sentient_Worlds_A_More-than-natural_History_of_a_Black_Oak_Savannah).

<sup>114</sup> Natalie Loveless, professor of Contemporary Art in the Department of Art and Design at the University of Alberta, likens discursive, hegemonic structures of race, gender, class, nation, and so forth, to stories that are told and retold, and which shape the fabric of our reality. “Alternate (research) stories create alternate (research) worlds. Conversely, different storytelling strategies (methods) emerge from different world-views.” She further emphasizes the need for interdisciplinarity and formal research vocalities that emerge in response to the question being asked, in contrast with the formulation of research questions explicitly within the bounds of existing frameworks and ideologies. See: Natalie S. Loveless, “Haraway’s Dog(s),” in *Haraway’s Dog, or How to Make Art at the End of the World (a Manifesto for Research-Creation)*, Duke University Press, forthcoming.

‘leap before you look.’<sup>115</sup> He notes that in English many of the words we associate with knowing, or coming to know some *thing*, are rooted in the realm of the scopic: to ‘regard’ and to ‘speculate,’ or to put things in ‘perspective,’ these are all notions that connote on some level ‘seeing.’ “‘Theory’ [also] implies the seeing of a problem (Gr. *thea*, a view, horos, seeing). By contrast, ‘practice’ is something that you do, often physically (Gr. *prassein*: to do).” He goes on:

The routine juxtaposition of ‘practice’ and ‘theory’ must lead us to consider these words not just as contrasting but as complementary. ‘Theory’ implies not something done, but a speculative structure. Again, I repeat, a visual notion. Thus to look before you leap, is – literally – to theorise before you practice. However, you can also look back after you have leapt. This retrospective, explanatory phase is also, from an etymological perspective, theory. So ‘theory’ is another word that has its origins in the visual. It helps to make things evident. It is worth noting that if one’s research is practice led, this implies not that you should look before you leap, but rather that you should leap before you look, i.e. the theory aspect should be in large part retrospective rather than predictive.<sup>116</sup>

Of course, research practice is not simply an instance leaping then looking. Research is necessarily iterative as well. Leap, look, leap, look, leap, look, leap, *et cetera ad infinitum/nauseum*. Do, think, do, think, do, think, do. It is an hermeneutic process with no clear beginning, or end. Macdonald suggests that we enter the hermeneutic circle with a do, or a leap, as opposed to a think, or a look.

To approach a problem through theory alone is both to assume something *a priori* as well to forego the haptic.<sup>117</sup> While in reality there are not really any corners in the University where

---

<sup>115</sup> Murdo Macdonald, “Leap before You Look,” *Murdo Macdonald: Interdisciplinary Highland Space, Etc.*, June 2, 2013, <https://murdomacdonald.wordpress.com/leap-before-you-look/>.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Loveless explores the generative capacity opened up through research-creation practices grounded in an acknowledgement of the embodied nature of theory/practice. See: Natalie S. Loveless, “Practice in the

academicians work only with the ideal like some Platonic or Cartesian caricature, it is not always the easiest proposition, in my experience, to temper theory with practice, emphasizing the leap as much as the look. Taking Macdonald's provocation as an invitation to reconceptualise how I consider my own relationship to phenomenal and epistemological frameworks, I can conceive of the difference between knowing and understanding as analogue to the difference between seeing and touching. Sight allows me to perceive an object at a distance, to orient myself towards it in space, to putatively 'know' something about it without having some into direct contact with it. But, sight is necessarily imbricated with a host of other senses. I recognize what the surface texture of an object might be, not through logical deduction of its physical characteristics based upon the play of light across its surface, but through my understanding of texture through previous tactile encounters. I can recognize the particular softness of the heathered cotton in that t-shirt because it is something which I have touched and held and draped over my body before. When I encounter Richard Serra's minimalist sculptures from his "Prop" series, I know the improbable balance of each plate of lead because I understand—I have held and carried lead, I have balanced objects of similar shapes upon one another—the precarious weightiness of the sculpture; even as I am looking, I feel in my own body through proprioception and my vestibular sense the heft of each plate. Seeing and feeling are not meaningfully separate experiences; the former tends to elide the other, just as 'feeling' tends to elide an entire range of sensations. Moreover, one doesn't precede the other; they are iteratively linked, through memory and experience. Acknowledging this interrelatedness opens up non-reductive vital space for thinking while doing and doing while thinking, not because this is a novel way of doing things, but because it is *the* way of doing things. Similar to this notion, Karen Barad reminds us that "[t]o

theorize is not to leave the material world behind, and enter the domain of pure ideas where the lofty space of the mind makes objective reflection possible. *Theorizing, like experimenting, is a material practice.*"<sup>118</sup> Theory and practice are thoroughly imbricated modes of exploration, neither supplementary to one another nor enjoying a strictly linear causal relationship from one to the other.<sup>119</sup>

The realm of the history and historicizing of art has, since even before it became a recognized discipline, been concerned with the sensation of touch and the tactility of the objects with which it finds itself concerned. Breathing in the musty paper of an archive, lifting the heft of a chunk of marble up onto a plinth, or coming within a hair's breadth of the stippled peaks of a canvas heavy with oil paint, these are experiences many historians of art (and those working in related fields) can point toward to attest the degree to which direct phenomenological engagement is already emphasized within these research practices. These are the practices from which I have been privileged enough to leap in pursuit of my own investigative processes that

---

<sup>118</sup> Emphasis mine. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, 55.

<sup>119</sup> There is a Haraway-sized hole in this thesis, one to which I was blind until it was explicitly pointed out to me days before I intended to submit the final draft to my committee. "Not that you have time for more writing, but it does seem odd (given the references to Haraway and Barad) odd to not have Situated Knowledges at least referenced." (Natalie S. Loveless, e-mail message to the author, August 15, 2017). This observation is both apt and true: it is odd. The only explanation I can give is that the first time I read this text was in my undergrad, right around the time I was discovering my latent difficulties with focus. In fact, the text at stake in the memory I have of watching Loveless speak to me without understanding is "Situated Knowledges," (see footnote 5). And, while I have since learned to love and appreciate Haraway's writing, that text in particular has always been one I overlook and resist revisiting in order to more fully internalize its lesson. Now, on the (literal) eve of submitting my master's thesis, I am unable to explain why it is absent from my theory beyond the fact that I have bad memories of the first time I encountered it. Nevertheless, for a project which seeks to pull at questions of purported objectivity and make fuzzy the lines between passive objects of study and active rational observers, Haraway's insight would have made a welcome addition: "Boundaries are drawn by mapping practices; 'objects' do not preexist as such. Objects are boundary projects. But boundaries shift from within; boundaries are very tricky. What boundaries provisionally contain remains generative, productive of meanings and bodies," (595). See: Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99, doi:10.2307/3178066.



entail opening up the possibilities of theory and practice, practice and theory, such that not only do I come to know and understand through looking, thinking, touching, and feeling, but also doing and creating.

In my own research-creation practice, I have experimented with different modes of sensorial attunement in conversation with documentation and performance. Sitting with my computer on my lap and with a pair of headphones pressing into my ears, forty-eight thousand pulses of sound are pumped into my head every second. This sound, a sufficiently perceptible vibration in the air, is produced through the alchemy of integrated circuitry transmogrifying a cypher of discrete binary voltage potentials; a matrix of machines (with no moving parts in the classical sense) extrudes these voltages into a continuous gradient, which travels along the surface of strands of copper to their terminus; tiny rare earth magnets attached to tiny petrochemical membranes vibrate, constructing in the air waves of pressure that build upon and interfere with each other, forming waves of pressure approximate to other waves that exist somewhere else at some time in the past. I can hear the sound of my own heart beating, my lungs pulled full of air in response to a tensing of my diaphragm, and the crisp sound of conditioned air swirling around the room I sat in when these sounds were recorded. These sounds—tiny, sufficiently perceptible vibrations in the air, transcoded by my own biomechanical apparatus and integrated circuits—produce in me a familiar and strange affect straddling the boundary of perception between soma and psyche.

This recording was produced as an experiment, a sketch or figure drawing, the wireframe lattice of something yet to be realized. I had taken a brief walk around campus with binaural microphones plugged in my ears and a digital stethoscope strapped to my chest. I was interested in different modes of doing documentation, ways of mapping spaces and phenomena, both

bodily and constructed, through time. These microphones are sensitive and produce a strange sense of ‘being-there.’ Despite that this recording merely documents my body, its organs, and the spaces it occupies along a path I traced across campus nearly every day for over a year, there is something peculiarly apprehending about it—which is to say it grabs you, or you it. It is sensual, not only in the strictest sense, but also in the sense that connotes a narcissistic erotic pleasure.

This uncanny conceptual and felt resonance arouses questions in me and forms the basis for my further research-creation endeavors in this project. Why is it that these sonic experiences seem to access a different kind of knowing or understanding? How can I put this particular mode of epistemological/phenomenological practice into actual practice? And what is the productive or generative potential to be found in such an epistemology? In this penultimate chapter, I explore: my suspicion that these forms of documentation, novel to my own documentary practice are innately well-suited toward activating different modes of attunement toward our world; and an experimental research-creative methodology I am putting into practice to document and explore my own body’s relationship to the labour entailed through the writing of a master’s thesis.

### **The sound of things to come**

In 2010, New Zealand born sound artist Annea Lockwood created *A Sound Map of the Housatonic River*. The map is realized as four channels of audio accompanied by a canvas cartographic map of the river and a digital clock. Lockwood envelopes listener-viewers of her work by mounting four studio monitor speakers on tall plinths above their heads, in a square roughly ten feet to a side. In the centre are benches on which to sit. Off to one side, mounted on a wall, are the map and clock. The clock marks time throughout the one hour and seven minutes

duration of the audio. Next to it, listener-viewers can cross reference the current time of the recording with various locations marked along the river map.<sup>120</sup>

Sitting amidst the speakers, listener-viewers are completely immersed in Lockwood's aural tracing of the river. One of the work's most striking features is its immediacy: the trickling water of some anonymous brook is just beyond your toes; the walls of the gallery disintegrate into swaths of trees on whose branches roost chirping songbirds and the leaves of which filter the rain and wind; slowly everything in this tiny yet expansive universe is consumed by the building rumble of a passing freight train, which leaves a distinct sense of emptiness in your sternum as it fades amidst the rhythmic clanging of rail crossing signals. All of these sounds are seamlessly woven together by Lockwood such that listener-viewers are unable to pinpoint exact moments of transition from one location to the next along the river's course. Only by referencing the clock and map on the wall are you able to locate yourself approximately in cartographic space. But, while the artist does make it possible for the listener-viewer to locate herself on the map, replete with metadata about the original time of the recording and place name of where it was captured, this information is at most supplementary. The immersive quality of the work is more than sufficient to create a richly detailed and imminent sense of the river itself.

Speaking of a previous river-mapping project wherein Lockwood worked with the Hudson River, she observes that:

People [...] don't generally have any sense of the power of the river, directly experienced through their bodies [...] so their physical experiences of the river are sort of diluted and attenuated. And, I wanted to give people a sense of how powerful it is. And sound is a

---

<sup>120</sup> This description is based on my experience of the installation of *Housatonic* in the FAB Gallery at the University of Alberta, November 1-29, 2016. See Annea Lockwood, "A Sound Map of the Housatonic River," Artist's website, *Annea Lockwood*, (2010), <http://www.annealockwood.com/compositions/housatonic.htm>.

very potent way of doing that. It enters the body so fast, and goes everywhere, so to speak.<sup>121</sup>

Lockwood privileges the experience of sound and implies that a sonic experience of a river isn't simply an ersatz approximation. She argues that sound penetrates deeply, and is perceived—felt—in more than one modality. In my own experience of her work, I find resonance with her argument. The sound of rushing water or blowing wind or a far-off rumbling train is felt as much as it is heard, not like coursing water or a gentle breeze or the low frequency tremor of steel on steel pressing into your skin, but through the sufficiently perceptible movements of air that resonate through your bones and tissues. Lockwood's work is immediate and imminent, not solely because she meticulously textures her compositions across multiple channels of audio but also because the sound is deep and penetrative. It resonates in your flesh materially and semiotically.

Such recorded sound has the capacity to impinge upon the barrier between the material and the semiotic. It is heard and interpreted in the conventional way that we hear and interpret words. Just as the sign **bird** can consist of the concept of “[a]ny feathered vertebrate animal”<sup>122</sup> over the orthographic “bird” or the utterance ‘/bɜrd/’ in American English, so too can it consist of the soprano ‘chirping’ sound such an animal makes along with its concept. However, unlike the linguistic sign  $\frac{\text{bird}}{\text{/bɜrd/}}$ , the sonic sign—whose signified concept rests atop the signifier of ‘actual’ chirping—does not have an arbitrary relationship to the material real. While a sonic sign

---

<sup>121</sup> Lockwood, quoted in Miyuki Jokiranta, *The Sound of the Skies and Earth*, podcast, mp3, Soundproof, accessed December 20, 2016, [@12:56](http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/soundproof/annea-lockwood/6545094).

<sup>122</sup> “Bird, N.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed December 25, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/19327>.

still exists within the same chains of signification that a linguistic sign does, it is still tethered to a material something. The sound I make when I vocalize “orange” has no meaningful connection to the physical fruit or the experience of the colour; it is an arbitrary arrangement of phonemes common in English, sufficiently different from other arbitrary arrangements of phonemes to communicate meaning and concepts. While the sound of chirping itself is arbitrary insofar as it is the product of millions of years of allele migration in response to the capricious evolutionary push and pull of natural and sexual selection, it is nevertheless produced expressly by the passage of air through the assemblage of birdy tissues called syrinx. I have no doubt that particular chirps communicate particular bits of information between and among birds; they signify, in some birdy capacity, birdy concepts particular to birdy thoughts. I, however, am fortunate enough to be free of the burden of interpreting bird semiology. A sonic sign, as I conceive of it, is not mutually excluded from sounds which have linguistic meaning; they are rather more easily noticed or encountered when linguistic meaning has been stripped away. The chirp of a bird enables me to know and understand in some (always partial, incomplete) way something about the fleshy, hollow-boned, feathery thing from which it originates. Just as if I vocalize “orange,” I commit to you some kind of partial, incomplete knowledge and sense of understanding about me as an amalgam of skin, teeth, bones, and other fleshy bits. These knowledges and understandings are predicated upon our physical engagement with the material world, and are indeed facilitated as well by language and theory as well. It is not a matter of privileging immediate, affective experience over the written text; it is about carving away spaces amidst the text (as an already-privileged vehicle of communication) to create space where these ideas can live and flourish. This sticky, fleshy material residue that clings to the sonic sign is that non-linguistic thing which we know in our bones when we *hear* the Housatonic river and *feel* it

just beyond our physical sense of touch. Lockwood's document, crisp and luscious as it is, resolves into an uncanny sense of being-there, activating a different mode of sensorial attunement: something felt, yes, but imprecise, overwhelming, and highly affective.<sup>123</sup>

This imprecise but affective mode of attunement is in line with what Natasha Myers, an associate professor of anthropology at York University, refers to as "an ethic of not knowing."

What matters to this land? Incredulous readers will insist: To whom would we even address this question? And how, if there was a response, would we be able to sense or make sense of it? Our response: we don't know. But that does mean we should not get curious. Perhaps it is time that we find ways to reach toward the unknowable, the imperceptible, the ineffable and the numinous. Not with the desire to capture some truth, but rather to learn how to step into not knowing as an ethic and a practice.<sup>124</sup>

Myers' project is concerned with "experimenting with techniques drawn from the arts, anthropology, and ecology [...] and learning to expand our all-too-human sensoria so that we might find ways to pay attention to what happens here."<sup>125</sup> By engaging with and activating these disparate disciplinary literacies, Myers seeks to tune into alternate ways of knowing founded not upon mastery within pre-given, cultivated, and naturalized frameworks, but rather upon allowing for a messy intermingling of knowledges derived from both indigenous oral histories and sensorial fleshy experiences.

---

<sup>123</sup> And while I privilege her engagement with one particular sense for the purpose of bolstering my own research-creation engagement with it, I must articulate that I believe any mode of perception has the potential to be activated in this way. Just as Lockwood's installations overwhelm you with sounds that vibrate your bones, I can imagine similar experiences with vision, smell, or proprioception as well. I have stared into the sun as it approaches the horizon until my eyes ache and I am temporarily blinded, and I have encountered smells that cause my body to convulse or make me light headed. These phenomenological experiences have similar capacities for activating different modes of knowing and understanding, but will have to be explored elsewhere.

<sup>124</sup> Myers, "Becoming Sensor in Sentient Worlds: A More-than-Natural History of a Black Oak Savannah," 2.

<sup>125</sup> Myers, "Becoming Sensor in Sentient Worlds: A More-than-Natural History of a Black Oak Savannah."

Myers suggests that there is something powerful and productive in the ambiguity of not-knowing. Lockwood's sound documents, likewise pressing upon the membrane dividing the material and the semiotic, activate a similar attunement. Listener-viewers are asked to be sensual with a place, not in the interest of coming to know it through totality, but rather to know it imperfectly and resonantly with their body. What emerges from these kinds of alternative modes of attention is the call to give space and time for questions to bubble to the surface, questions which prompt us to theorize how things could be otherwise.

### **Documenting perambulations**

Stemming from my background in commercial photography, I now have a creative practice of documentation. My engagement with documentation through the act of doing documentation has propelled me to consider ways in which I can reorganize my own relationship to the document, including incorporating sound and video alongside and in conversation with still images. While these developments in my practice are novel and exciting for me to explore, it has always had its roots in still photography, which remains a practice intrinsic to my experience of the world. I have had the luxury to come to know and understand an assortment of photographic processes on a fundamental level through the vacillation between the doing and thinking about recording photographic images.

Photographs capture three dimensions of space and a finite expanse of time, compressing all four into an abstracted rectilinear form extended in only two spatial dimensions. Because photographic technology approximates human vision to varying degrees, we are able to make sense of what we see in photographic images: a cone of perception, with its vertex resting in the middle of the vitreous humor of my eyeball and extending out into infinity perpendicular to that eyeball's lens, projects a two dimensional image onto the non-Cartesian semi-spherical surface

of my retina, which is interpreted and reconciled by my brain such that I am able to make some sort of sense of the world directly in front of me; likewise I am also able to project the two-dimensional Cartesian surface of a photograph into an imaginary three dimensional space. Scale, location, and movement are inferred through the layering, relative size, and clarity of objects within the frame. The reality effect created by the photograph is powerful enough that images discordant with my experience of reality are taken at face value (i.e., optical illusions). Furthermore, the absence of the entirety of existence not captured within the frame of the photograph entails an implied presence on either ‘side’ of its capture. The moments leading up to and away from a photograph, and the world just outside of its frame can be induced through what seems like our intuitive relationship with causality.

The presence that a photograph projects is contingent upon the way in which it has been crafted, however. There are narratives to be read embedded within a photograph of a featureless white wall, or a still frame arbitrarily chosen from some remote security camera footage, or an out of focus and motion-blurred camera-phone image shot from the hip. But artists and professionals trained in the craft of photography, and thereby inculcated into the well-established systems and frameworks of representation, are able to create and select images more fully imbricated with a sense of meaningful presence, irrespective of their relationship to the experienced reality of circumstances surrounding the capture. They can capture and select that proverbial ‘decisive moment.’

Cindy Sherman’s well-known series “Untitled Film Stills” (1977-80) embody this effect. The series of sixty-nine black and white images feature Sherman masquerading as almost as



many unnamed, anonymous female cinematic characters.<sup>126</sup> The photographs are cleverly constructed such that they emulate the visual tropes of narrative cinema. In addition to building a commentary on women as objects of scopical pleasure per Laura Mulvey's articulation of the psychoanalytic male gaze, Sherman's film stills create the sense of having been arbitrarily plucked from a series of thousands of images intended to be viewed at a rate of twenty-four per second. Each image is instilled with a sense of motion: Sherman's character is often captured such that she appears in the middle of a movement or gesture; the camera itself seems to be frozen in the middle of a pan or zoom; and each moment, while never quite at the apex of the putative narrative, nevertheless feels as though it has the heft of diegetic inertia acting upon it. But this is all fictive: the presence imbued into each image is the result of careful consideration, planning, and skill upon Sherman's part.

The strategy of this mode is to use the apparent veracity of photography against itself, creating one's fictions through the appearance of a seamless reality into which has been woven a narrative dimension. [...] For though Sherman is literally self-created in these works, she is created in the image of already-known feminine stereotypes; her self is therefore understood as contingent upon the possibilities provided by the culture in which Sherman participates[.]<sup>127</sup>

Sherman's work is effective precisely because the implied presence of a whole is made possible by its marked absence. Her apocrypha speaks truth to the ways in which dominant forms of representation are structured within our culture.

---

<sup>126</sup> The Museum of Modern Art in New York purchased an entire set of the series in 1995. See: MoMA, "Cindy Sherman: The Complete Untitled Film Stills," *The Museum of Modern Art*, accessed June 22, 2017, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/253>.

<sup>127</sup> Douglas Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," *October* 15 (1980): pp.

However, where Sherman's stills exploit photography's apparent veracity, performance art photodocuments suffer from it. As established in chapter 1, the ontological fidelity of performance art and its documents is still a contested issue. Nevertheless, performance art often *is* documented. As a commercial photographer who became an historian of contemporary art and eventually an artist with a performance practice circling around the practice of performance art documentation, I take photographs of works of performance art, from time to time. Unlike Sherman's practice, which is methodically staged, performance art documentation is more like reportage than anything else. However, like Sherman's practice, there is a large degree of telling lies which speak truth.

Depending upon a performance's structure, duration, rhythm, and content, I can produce anywhere from a single image to literally thousands in an attempt to document it.<sup>128</sup> Thousands of images, however, are necessarily whittled down into hundreds, dozens, and eventually only one or two or three photographs are selected to become representational of that performance. This is consonant with the limitations of the medium, which entail that the maximally optimal images are those which most effectively and concisely communicate the greatest amount of relevant information. A single photographic image is merely the projection of a cone of space extending into infinity over a few tenth or hundredths of a second onto a two-dimensional surface, from which a viewer is expected to induce the presence of an entire performance, in spite of—and consequent to—its notable absence. Students surveying the history of contemporary art train themselves to recall in an instant the form and content of Yoko Ono's *Cut*

---

<sup>128</sup> In my undergraduate career, I grappled with some of these issues in my nascent research-creative practice through various performance art documentation "experiments." See: Michael J H Woolley, "Documenting Performance Art: Documentation in Practice," *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 10, no. 1 (2014): 48–66, doi:10.1080/14794713.2014.912501.

*Piece* of Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 0* upon recognition of one of a handful images documenting these works that have become iconic—literally, signifiers of their performance-signifieds circulated because of their putative semblance to the original. The function of the photodocument is contingent upon this interplay between presence and absence—it creates an illusion of knowing built upon not knowing. This semiotic trap is what has driven me to explore different ways of creating documents with the potential to challenge or otherwise interrupt this paradigm, including incorporating both motion video and various audio recording techniques into my documentation practice.

The combination of binaural microphones and a digital stethoscope is equal parts arbitrary and strategic—borne out of experimental curiosity and intuition. First, I began experimenting with the idea of documenting the process of documentation by recording an approximation of my perspective as photographer with a head-mounted video camera. The stethoscope came next: I was curious about the somewhat trite conceptual dichotomy of recording my insides while documenting the external world. The binaural microphones came later, mostly due to my frustration toward the inadequacy of the single, low-fidelity microphone on my head-mounted video camera. To realize that they capture a distinct sense of spatiality—owing to the capability of recording two channels of audio with stereo separation mirroring human physiology—was a welcome surprise.

The synchronization of the two streams of audio produces an affective contrast: the sounds from my chest are deep, muted, and vaguely aquatic. The exterior sounds are crisp and richly textured. In combination, they produce an acutely situated representation of a particular space. Rather than just listening to a recording of the sounds produced in a certain place, you hear them from, and through, an actual body—my body—located within and moving about that

space: deeply embodied in a very literal way. It is like being there—but not exactly. Through the recording, you can perceive with a much higher degree of, bordering on overwhelming, attunement to the machinations of the world in and around my body. Each footfall is experienced simultaneously as the sharp clap of sole on terrazzo, linoleum, concrete, or tile, in conjunction with the muted shuddering of my body's weight reverberating through my skeleton and into my chest. An inhaling breath is captured as both the quick rush of air through my nostrils as well as the turbulence within my spongy inflating lungs. Plant- and petroleum-based fibres drag themselves across my skin and fold against one another, whispering in response to both gross and fine motor movement of my body. All the while peristaltic contractions squish semi-digested food matter and assorted fluids through my abdomen.

This affective, sensual interplay produces in me a curiosity about the experience of so many phenomena present in the background of daily existence, but which are otherwise unexperienced by myself, whether because of their relative imperceptibility or the psychological and physical necessity of tuning out latent background noise. I should however emphasize that my experience of my own body moving in the world and in relation to other experiencing bodies is not something to which I have until this moment been completely oblivious. I am a person who walks though the world relatively unimpeded by the structures and objects which have been designed for people that share my approximate body schema; my day-to-day engagement with my own culture is as a man who was, based on the appearance of his genitals, assigned that nascent identity at birth and socialized accordingly; I enjoy the privilege of appearing to be descended from one of the groups of people who colonized the land on which I live; and I am fortunate enough to be a man who enjoys fucking other men who was born late enough, both to have escaped the ravages of plague and to be considered by most people an actual human being.

My experience of my own body is contingent upon these factors, in addition to others too multitudinous to list. My arousal toward these multisensorial documents which I seek to produce is particular—anecdotal—with regard to my own situated experience of the world. They impel me to ask different questions which themselves require different ways of being answered: to what degree is my own material agency folded into the syncopated rhythms of these other material agents that I am not normally prompted to perceive? What anecdotes does my own body have to share about its experience? Are they even worth sharing at all? By turning my body into a cyborg antenna of sorts—or, more accurately, coming to realize its capacity for acting as a locus of sensual documentation—my attention is unexpectedly turned toward a variety of phenomena, seemingly mundane but necessary to quotidian existence, for which I have a newfound curiosity.<sup>129</sup>

## **Documenting documenting**

### *The apocryphal metaphysics of thinking and doing*

The process of writing is more than the act of drawing a pen across paper to leave a trace of ink, or of tapping squares of plastic to register in solid-state machinery a collection of ones and zeros. Writing is a process of thinking, which is of course also a process of doing. “Did you get much writing done today?” is a familiar refrain for anyone who has taken on even a moderately ambitious academic project. Irrespective of how many marks I may have put down on paper over the course of the last several hours, I will invariably give an answer that is at least

---

<sup>129</sup> Out of these initial experiments, I began to produce a research-creation methodology to explore what I could, and in the fall of 2016 I had the pleasure of participating in “Ephemerality and Sustainability in Contemporary Art,” an upper level seminar in the History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture at the University of Alberta with my thesis advisor, Natalie Loveless. We were encouraged to use research-creative methods to investigate what it means to make and historicize the making of art in the Anthropocene, the putative end of the world as we know it. This proved to be the ideal opportunity and impetus to further investigate the experience and documentation of these phenomena, leading me to create sound maps of my common perambulations around campus.

nominally affirmative. After all, thinking is a part of the writing process. And this is the story of which I have convinced myself.

At some point, however, thinking about doing is insufficient, and I have to commit something—*anything at all*—to paper. This seems like a simple prospect. *Turn around, go back to your computer, just start writing.* To write is to think, to think is to do. I think therefore I write, right? Writing is an embodied process. It is a doing, above and beyond the repetitious physical movements I impel my fingers to make as they move across the keyboard registering something that resembles my thoughts as marks on a screen. Writing, like thinking—as thinking—is embodied insofar as everything I do, as a biomechanical assemblage, is embodied. Whatever the seat of my own consciousness and intellect may be—whether it is my brain or my heart or my guts or my liver—it is emergent through an amalgamation of productive and destructive patterns of interference, arising out a finite but uncountable number of biological bits. As waves on an ocean result from a temporary arrangement of particles, which ultimately do not themselves move in any meaningful way, thoughts are patterns produced on and which move across the surface of my being. This evocative and spurious metaphor is not meant to be a metaphysical account of consciousness; rather it is meant to point to the doing that I do which underlies each moment of thought. How are these micro-phenomena—discrete performance apparatuses—suspended within the greater daily, weekly, monthly, and annual phenomena of my life?

As I find myself thinking about writing (which, as I lie to myself, is as good as doing writing), I also notice myself doing various things. I stand in front of the mirror and inspect my skin and my beard. I run my fingers across and through the stubble of my hair on the top and the back of my head. I purse and bite my lips, and gnaw on my nails, and I become acutely aware of

my own heart beating and I cannot help but wonder if it always beats this loud or if it is the combination of stress hormones and the drugs I ingest. I notice that I have trouble writing, thinking, doing, if I do not sleep well. I notice that I do not sleep well if any number of a multitude of factors are not *just so*: if I drink coffee too late in the afternoon, or drink too much alcohol too late into the evening, or if my orientation toward someone I love is abruptly changed, I will toss and turn and wake up eventually feeling like I cannot do anything worthwhile or productive. I notice that if I exercise and work out, my capacity for insight and motivation are temporarily increased. And I notice that when I stand on my balcony in my underwear to get a breath of fresh air the hairs on my skin on my belly become erect, and it is somehow pleasurable and refreshing. To what degree are the words on this page an emergent property of the cumulated perturbations produced in and by my body, which I notice, both in process and in introspective retrospection? I theorize in writing about performance art and its documentation. To theorize is to think about, but also to do. To know about it entails an understanding; to see it, is to apprehend it, grab, touch, and feel it. Thus to write about performance and documentation, I necessarily do performance and documentation.

***Performative documents: a prelude***

The word ‘document’ has in its own genealogy and obsolete meaning that hints at its latent performativity. Today we understand it as “[s]omething written, inscribed, etc., which furnishes evidence or information upon any subject,” but up until the eighteenth century documents were instructions, or lessons, things that taught, things that *did*.<sup>130</sup> To document was to teach or instruct, and today to document is to record the having-had-happened of something—

---

<sup>130</sup> “Document, N.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/56328>.

to prove its existence.<sup>131</sup> The process of documentation is the inscription of a doing, such that that inscription does its own doing, such that it teaches and produces meaning beyond simply what it represents.

In the process of writing—thinking, theorizing, doing, touching, feeling—about documentation, I have devised a methodology by which I am documenting the process of writing—*et al*—about documentation. The project is intrinsically iterative and recursive, but I nevertheless must find a point at which to inject myself into this hermeneutic cycle. A project about documenting performance art—which holds as axiomatic that to-think is to-do—is necessarily a project wherein performance documentation becomes a means by which the project itself comes to fruition; the mere details of this are emergent from and entailed by the propagation of events that precede them. And so, over the course of thirty days during which I am attempting to complete the writing of this thesis, I will—have already—embarked on an iterative daily performance practice by which I will (already have) document(ed) the process of writing about documentation. Each day, I create(d) a simple instruction compelling myself to produce a document pertaining to phenomena that I notice to be in some tangential way constitutive of the labour of writing.

One of the first of these such documents produced is a video capturing myself making a cup of coffee. Chemical stimulants are intrinsic to my writing process, and so it seems like an intuitive point at which to begin documentation. The kettle gurgles rapidly before turning itself off with a definitive *click*. The sound of water being poured into an intermediary vessel can be heard out of frame before the first few barely-brown drops filter through the fine grounds in the

---

<sup>131</sup> “Document, v.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/56329>.



press. The inside of the cup steams up and fills slowly with the liquid which now seems black and opaque. My body makes an appearance for the first time in the background as I go to the fridge to grab the cream. It pours in from the top, resonating brightly with the glass and rendering its contents a pale, roiling brown. Subtending it all, the sounds of my chest maintain a steady rhythm that I now find particularly soothing to listen to.

In another, I capture my compulsion to stroke the stubble on the back of my head while I idly read something on my computer. My heart thumps deeply in the background, occasionally speeding up and slowing down, perhaps in response to whatever I am digesting on the screen? My stomach gurgles, and the sound of my hand working its way across the bristles of my hair stands out in sharp contrast to the sounds of my internal organs. Another document of compulsive behaviour records my proclivity towards gnawing off my finger nails. The lower half of my face is tightly framed enabling you to see each movement of my lips and the gyration of my jaw as I masticate the keratin extruded from the tips of my fingers. Each movement is punctuated with a crisp sound: my teeth coming together through my right thumbnail, my lips pulling apart, and my tongue moving bits of nail around my mouth before I pluck them off its tip. In yet another, this time a document of what I consider to be bodily maintenance, I spend roughly half an hour running on an elliptical machine at the gym. Over the course of the document, I self-consciously avoid making eye contact with the viewer. I focus my gaze off into the distance or at the screen above and behind camera, struggling to maintain that meditative state where I am able to ignore my disdain for running. The rhythm of my running bounces the stethoscope against my chest, and it is impossible to differentiate the sound of my heartbeat from the beat of my gait. Roughly twenty-five minutes into my run, the stethoscope begins to fail; it was never designed to be worn like this. Over the next several minutes its sound pulses out of

existence entirely, and the ambient sounds of the gym—my laboured breathing, the clanging of weights, the hiss of circulating air—are all that remain. The angle is unflattering, and it is difficult to watch, and I cannot help but be wary of the judgement of others who will invariably find themselves watching it as well.

Each document exists in a constellation with the others. The form they take and moments they attempt to capture are codetermined by the very processes of making, writing, and thinking about them. I am wary of engaging in any overly overt attempts toward exegesis. It is my hope that they function in concert with my writing here, and that whatever purpose or meaning they generate resonates productively with my prose.

## Conclusion

### On Failure

On May 24, 2017, at about 7:30pm, I stood in front of fifty or sixty people—friends, family, colleagues, and strangers—as I unbuttoned my shirt to plug a small audio cable into the stethoscope strapped to my chest. I mantled the other components of my documentation apparatus (binaural microphones in my ears and a GoPro on my forehead) before turning the stethoscope on and flooding the space with my own chestsounds. The overruling sound was that of my heart pounding more than 120 times per minute. It caught me—and the audience as well, I think—off guard. I re-buttoned my shirt, took a deep breath, and launched into a half-hour lecture on this thesis project, all the while documenting the whole process from my own perspective. My script that evening was composed of excerpts from this written thesis, in addition to new material meant to stitch everything together and make it more comprehensible to a general audience. As my eyes fell on the last page and I crumpled up the proceeding one in my hands, I felt and heard my heart slow down and I was able to breathe again without the weight of month of anticipation pressing on my chest.

Unfortunately, the first-person video from that lecture never materialized. The GoPro had some kind of critical failure, and despite successful tests only hours prior it failed to capture even a single frame of video. Several days later my own body would fail me as well: I write these words on the tail-end of more than a week of convalescing, having become ill with what is probably just a common cold, but which nevertheless depleted my abilities to write—think—clearly. With the clarity of retrospect, I can make guesses as to why these failures occurred. While documenting myself lifting weights in the gym, the camera was grazed by a barbell as I completed a set of standing chest presses. It was not until I thought back upon this incident after

my performance that I realized the camera had been having intermittent problems ever since. As for my own body, I can only imagine that for a period of several months the functionality of its immune system was attenuated to varying degrees by the elevated levels of certain hormones circulating in its blood. Once again, upon reflection of these events, I find myself drawn to those things that are elevated to the level of noticeability through their coinciding happenstance.

Failure is a perennial phenomenon. It has generative capacity, but it is often elided as well, cleaved away from a complete whole so as to produce the illusion of totality or mastery. Failure is tied to the material and the conceptual. It occurs when physical things, machine or bodies, are pushed ever so slightly beyond their capacities; it occurs when knowledges or understandings are not quite sufficient, or do not do the work you expect them to. Schneemann's *Limits* speak directly to the limited capacity of the artist's body, both in the title of the work itself as well as in the way it is realized. In Cassils' work, they push their body up to and past the point of failure in several productive ways: muscle failure is intrinsic to bodybuilding practices, and the temporal limits of *Becoming* are determined on one end by the point at which Cassils reaches exhaustion.<sup>132</sup> In the course of this producing thesis, writing about and documenting documenting practices, failure became an increasingly obvious component of my own process. My equipment fails me, my methods and ideas fail me, my own body fails me. These perturbations are inscribed in the texts that constitute this thesis, as much in the written words as the photo-, video-, and audiodocuments. In some instances, it is self-consciously foregrounded, and in others it slips beneath layers of editing and revision.

---

<sup>132</sup>Building muscle mass requires pushing your existing muscle beyond its capabilities; tears in the muscle fibers spur on the development of new muscle growth. Bodybuilders purposefully push their muscles past the point of failure to an extreme degree. This practice helps produce the iconic bulging musculature required for the sport. McTavish addresses this specifically in relation to Cassils' work in Lianne McTavish, "Embodiment and the Event of Muscle Failure," in *Feminist Figure Girl: Look Hot While You Fight the Patriarchy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015), 29–46.

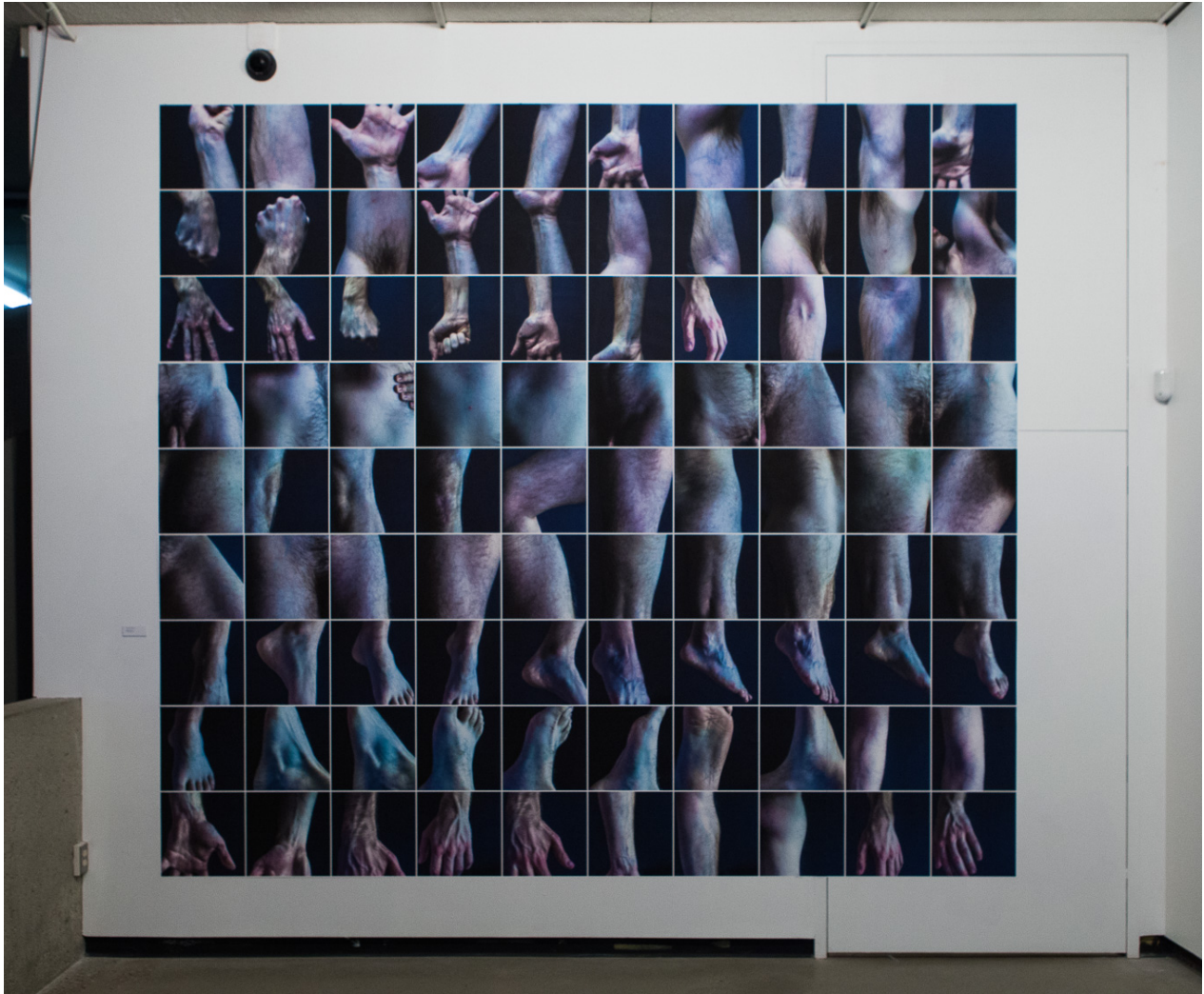


Figure 17 *Blood Vessel*, 2017, photodocuments

Failure is central to this thesis, as it is any project, as something built upon compounding (and confounding) layers of oscillating process and revision. Each successive document made and word written builds upon and grows out of failures that came before. Sometimes failures are generative and sometimes they merely point back to the processes by which they came to be. The large-scale grid comprised by the ninety photodocuments in the *Blood Vessel* series (fig. 17) elides successive, repetitive instances of failure that arose as I contorted my own body to photograph the veins beneath its skin. It shows a body in bits and pieces, like meat hanging in a

freezer; it does not show me balancing precariously on a stack of books in my apartment trying to align my foot, pelvis, shoulder, or knee with the camera's plane of focus. The repetitive moments of failure are present in the work insofar as they contribute to the evocative and uncanny nature of the images that I could neither have predicated nor planned for in its inception. Similarly, the naming convention I chose for the works themselves points to an iterative process that while at times is generative, also fails. The general formulation of noun + verb produces titles that can be evocative and produce interesting questions about the ways we used these words. *Chest Sound*, is generative. To sound is "to make or emit a sound."<sup>133</sup> But, it can also mean "[t]o sink in, penetrate, pierce," "[t]o make inquiry or investigation," or "[t]o go down; to touch bottom," and in surgical terms it refers to the use of a steel rod to probe internal organs.<sup>134</sup> *Stimulant Respond*, in contrast, seems to fall flat. It points to my own failure to find words more apt within the limits I laid out for myself, but it points to those limits themselves, demarcating these rules I laid out. When my equipment fails me, the audio clips or the video cuts out, and these failures are often folded into the finished works as punctuation, acting as parentheses, full stops, or exclamations. I do not expect that these various failures will be interpreted by each viewer in the same way that I see them; I do believe that they nevertheless produce interesting moments that serve to draw the viewer in to ask their own questions about the works themselves.

---

<sup>133</sup> "Sound, v.1," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/185129>.

<sup>134</sup> "Sound, v.2," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/185130>.

## On Interpretation

This thesis is about performance art and its documentation; it is about artists who make use of documentation in the realization of their performance works; and it is (about) the process of documenting within the context of performance practice. Documenting, recording, writing, are hermeneutic processes. They are processes of interpretation, of spreading things out. Documents, as I have come to use the term, are not merely reproductions of knowledge or understanding, nor do they simply create differently mediated experiences of an event. Documents have the capacity to generate new knowledge, understanding, and experience, not beyond the ‘original’ event but as a protracted part of it. A document—as a doing or a thing done—extends and expands the ineffable moments of an event into future spaces and times.

Schneemann’s *Limits* works are notable because—as an intrinsic part of the works themselves—they produce their own documentation. *Limits* is structured such that it extends itself futureward, beyond the confines of the originating moments of the performance. Schneemann’s body and its motions in space are inscribed on the paper in coloured arcs and encoded in video. The work is as much the performance itself as it is what the performance produces. Likewise, Cassils’ works are ephemeral performances that incorporate the means by which they are extended in time beyond their original happening. Cassils’ body and life experiences over a period of time are inscribed in the metaphorical and literal surfaces of the works which comprise *Cuts* and its derivatives. Similarly, *Becoming* makes material the processes of violence, fixing their shadow in the pummeled surface of a monumental block of clay that is displayed in galleries and dragged through streets. And *Powers* takes seriously questions around what it means to experience violence, encoding in its formal structure the generative mode by which it itself is documented and promulgated beyond its initial moments of

performance. It asks its participants and other viewers to question their own roles in the production and reproduction of violence. And my own work—both in the form of this written thesis and its research-creation components as part of the accompanying gallery exhibition—produces and suggests answers to questions about documentation in performance by incorporating modes of documentation into its formal structure. Through self-reflexive and anecdotal writing/documenting practices, I have produced a work (or body of works) which begins to suggest something about the processes of documentation as they relate to performance practice.

This thesis suggests there are different ways of conceptualizing performance art that work in tandem with canonical understandings of the medium. Documents produced out of, rather than in spite of works of performance are as much a part of the works themselves as the actions which produced them. And, if we are to take Barad's propositions seriously, these documents are as much 'cause' as they are 'effect' in the phenomenon of a performance. Just as Jones' scholarship entails its own sub-genre of performance art practice, this thesis suggests another complementary genre of its own which has hitherto not fully been explored. Performance works that necessarily produce their own documents, works that extend themselves in time and space beyond their own happening as a result of their formal material and conceptual precepts, seem to fit a different set of criteria not well-established in the literature. While this thesis does not seek to formally establish such a genre on its own, it nevertheless asks questions that point toward its possibility. Further scholarship, both in writing and by other means, will be required.



## Bibliography

- “-Ance, Suffix.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed May 26, 2017.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/7201#eid4164716>.
- Auslander, Philip. “The Performativity of Performance Documentation.” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 28, no. 3 (2006): 1–10.
- Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. William James Lectures. 1955. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.
- Barad, Karen M. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
- . “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801–31.
- “Bird, N.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed December 25, 2016.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/19327>.
- Boxer, Sarah. “The Photos That Changed Pollock’s Life.” *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast)*. December 15, 1998, sec. E.
- Bridge, Donna J., and Ken A. Paller. “Neural Correlates of Reactivation and Retrieval-Induced Distortion.” *Journal of Neuroscience* 32, no. 35 (August 29, 2012): 12144–51.  
 doi:10.1523/JNEUROSCI.1378-12.2012.
- “Carolee Schneemann. Up to and Including Her Limits. 1973–76 | MoMA.” *The Museum of Modern Art*. Accessed June 3, 2017. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/156834>.
- Cassils. “Becoming An Image « Cassils.” Artist webpage. *Cassils.net*. Accessed July 10, 2017.  
<http://cassils.net/portfolio/becoming-an-image-2/>.
- . “Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture « Cassils.” Artist webpage. *Cassils.net*. Accessed July 10, 2017. <http://cassils.net/portfolio/cuts-a-traditional-sculpture/>.
- . “Heather Cassils: A Traditional Sculpture (VIDEO).” Archive. *The Wayback Machine*, May 5, 2012.  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20120505061310/http://www.huffingtonpost.com:80/heather/a-traditional-sculpture\\_b\\_983384.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20120505061310/http://www.huffingtonpost.com:80/heather/a-traditional-sculpture_b_983384.html).
- . “Powers That Be « Cassils.” *Cassils*. Accessed March 31, 2017.  
<http://cassils.net/portfolio/powers-that-be/>.
- Chapman, Owen, and Kim Sawchuk. “Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis And ‘family Resemblances.’” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (March 2012): 5–26.

- “† Cordi-, Comb. Form.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed May 29, 2017.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/41448>.
- Crimp, Douglas. “The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism.” *October* 15 (1980): 91–101.
- Dennis, Kelly. “Performance Art - Historical Overview.” Edited by Michael Kelly. *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. Oxford Reference. Oxford University Press, 2008 1998.  
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195113075.001.0001/acref-9780195113075-e-0397>.
- “Derivative, Adj. and N.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, n.d.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/50609>.
- Dezeuze, Anna. “The 1960s: A Decade out-of-Bounds.” In *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, edited by Amelia Jones, 38–59. Blackwell Companions in Art History. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.
- “Document, N.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, n.d.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/56328>.
- “Document, v.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, n.d.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/56329>.
- Emenhiser-Harris, Karen. “A 1,900-Pound Sculpture Pushed Through the Streets of Omaha, in Tribute to Its LGBTQ History.” Blog. *Hyperallergic*, May 5, 2017.  
<https://hyperallergic.com/377494/a-1900-pound-sculpture-pushed-through-the-streets-of-omaha-in-tribute-to-its-lgbtq-history/>.
- “-Ence, Suffix.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed May 26, 2017.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/61623#eid5566173>.
- Export, Valie. “Aspects of Feminist Actionism.” *New German Critique*, no. 47 (1989): 69–92.  
doi:10.2307/488108.
- FACT, Foundation for Art and Creative Technology. *Tehching Hsieh - One Year Performance 1980-1981 (Time Clock Piece)*, 2010. <https://vimeo.com/16280427>.
- “Form, N.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed May 29, 2017.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/73421>.
- “Form, v.1.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed May 29, 2017.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/73422>.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Translated by James Strachey. London; New York: Norton, 1961.
- Fried, Michael. “Art and Objecthood.” *Art Forum* 5, no. 10 (1967): 12–23.

- Goldberg, RoseLee. *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. 3rd ed. London; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011.
- . *Performance: Live Art, 1909 to the Present*. New York: H. N. Abrams, 1979.
- Greenberg, Clement. "Modernist Painting." In *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism (Modernism with a Vengeance 1957-1969)*, edited by John O'Brian, 4:85–94. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Heathfield, Adrian. *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh*. London; Cambridge, Mass.: Live Art Development Agency; MIT Press, 2009.
- Hendricks, Geoffrey. *Critical Mass Happenings, Fluxus, Performance, Intermedia and Rutgers University; 1958-1972; [Exhibition Held at the Mead Art Museum, Amherst, MA. Feb. 1 -June 1, 2003]*. New Brunswick, NJ: Mason Gross Art Galleries [u.a., 2003.
- Higgins, Hannah. *Fluxus Experience*. Berkeley : University of California Press, c2002.
- Institute of Medicine, Committee on Military Nutrition Research, Food and Nutrition Board. *Caffeine for the Sustainment of Mental Task Performance: Formulations for Military Operations*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2001.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK223799/>.
- Jokiranta, Miyuki. *The Sound of the Skies and Earth*. Podcast, mp3. Soundproof. Accessed December 20, 2016. <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/soundproof/annealockwood/6545094>.
- Jones, Amelia. *Body Art: Performing the Subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- . "Material Traces: Performativity, Artistic 'Work,' and New Concepts of Agency." *TDR: The Drama Review* 59, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 18–35.
- . "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation." *Art Journal*, no. 4 (1997): 11–18.
- . "The 'Pollockian Performative' and the Revision of the Modernist Subject." In *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, 53–102. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- Joy, Clair. "Benglis, Lynda." *Grove Art Online*. Oxford Art Online. Web.: Oxford University Press. Accessed July 8, 2017.  
<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T007881>.
- Kaprow, Allen. "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock." *ARTnews* 57 (October 1958): 24–26, 55–57.
- Kimko, Hui C., James T. Cross, and Darrell R. Abernethy. "Pharmacokinetics and Clinical Effectiveness of Methylphenidate." *Clinical Pharmacokinetics* 37, no. 6 (December 1, 1999): 457–70. doi:10.2165/00003088-199937060-00002.

- Kleeblatt, Norman L., ed. *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- . “Greenberg, Rosenberg, and Postwar American Art.” In *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976*, edited by Norman L. Kleeblatt, 135–84. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- . “Introduction: Action, Abstraction, Reaction.” In *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976*, edited by Norman L. Kleeblatt, 1–13. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Krauss, Rosalind. “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America.” *October* 3 (Spring 1977): 68–81.
- . “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America. Part 2.” *October* 4 (October 1, 1977): 58–67. doi:10.2307/778480.
- . “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.” *October* 9, no. Spring (1979): 30–44.
- Lacan, Jacques. “The Mirror Stage as a Formative of the I Function, as Revealed in the Psychoanalytic Experience.” In *Ecrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan, 3–9. London: Tavistock, 1977.
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Lockwood, Annea. “A Sound Map of the Housatonic River.” Artist’s website. *Annea Lockwood*, 2010. <http://www.annealockwood.com/compositions/housatonic.htm>.
- Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE). “Los Angeles Goes Live: Performance Art in Southern California 1970-1983.” [Welcometolace.org](http://welcometolace.org). Accessed July 8, 2017. [welcometolace.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/20110927\\_OneSheet\\_2pg.pdf](http://welcometolace.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/20110927_OneSheet_2pg.pdf).
- Loveless, Natalie S. “Haraway’s Dog(s).” In *Haraway’s Dog, or How to Make Art at the End of the World (a Manifesto for Research-Creation)*, Duke University Press, forthcoming.
- . “Practice in the Flesh of Theory: Art, Research, and the Fine Arts PhD.” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (March 2012): 93–108.
- Macdonald, Murdo. “Leap before You Look.” *Murdo Macdonald: Interdisciplinary Highland Space, Etc.*, June 2, 2013. <https://murdomacdonald.wordpress.com/leap-before-you-look/>.
- Malaterre, Vincent, Joerg Ogorka, Nicoletta Loggia, and Robert Gurny. “Oral Osmotically Driven Systems: 30 Years of Development and Clinical Use.” *European Journal of Pharmaceutics and Biopharmaceutics* 73, no. 3 (November 1, 2009): 311–23. doi:10.1016/j.ejpb.2009.07.002.

- McTavish, Lianne. *Feminist Figure Girl: Look Hot While You Fight the Patriarchy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015.
- MoMA. "Cindy Sherman: The Complete Untitled Film Stills." *The Museum of Modern Art*. Accessed June 22, 2017. <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/253>.
- Munteanu, Eugen. "On the Object-Language/Metalanguage Distinction in St. Augustine's Works De Dialectica and De Magistro." In *History of Linguistics 1996 : Selected Papers From the Seventh International Conference on the History of the Language Sciences (ICHOLS VII) Oxford, 12-17 September 1996: Vol. 2, From Classical to Contemporary Linguistics*, edited by Elke Nowak, Andrew Robert Linn, and David Cram, 65–78. Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science. Series 3, Studies in the History of the Language Sciences. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co, 1999.
- Myers, Natasha. "Becoming Sensor in Sentient Worlds: A More-than-Natural History of a Black Oak Savannah." In *The B-Side of the Whale*, edited by Gretchen Bakke and Marina Peterson, forthcoming. [https://www.academia.edu/28713793/Becoming\\_Sensor\\_in\\_Sentient\\_Worlds\\_A\\_More-than-natural\\_History\\_of\\_a\\_Black\\_Oak\\_Savannah](https://www.academia.edu/28713793/Becoming_Sensor_in_Sentient_Worlds_A_More-than-natural_History_of_a_Black_Oak_Savannah).
- Namuth, Hans. *Hans Namuth: Artists 1950-81: A Personal View*. New York: Pace Gallery Publications, 1981.
- . *Pollock Painting*, 1951. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNwvUco146c>.
- National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs. "Reports." *Anti-Violence Project*. Accessed July 9, 2017. <https://avp.org/resources/reports/>.
- Nemser, Cindy. "Subject-Object: Body Art." *Arts Magazine* 46, no. 1 (1971): 38–42.
- Oxford Dictionaries. "Home: Oxford English Dictionary." Database. *OED: Oxford English Dictionary*. Accessed July 6, 2017. <http://www.oed.com>.
- "Per-, Prefix." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed May 26, 2017. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140485#eid31164712>.
- "Performance, N." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed May 29, 2017. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140783>.
- Phelan, Peggy. "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction." In *Unmarked : The Politics of Performance*, 146–66. London: Routledge, 1993.
- "Re-, Prefix." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed May 29, 2017. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158795>.
- Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

- “Record, v.1.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed May 26, 2017.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/159868>.
- Rose, Barbara. “Jackson Pollock: The Artist as Culture Hero.” In *Pollock Painting*, edited by Barbara Rose. New York: Agrinde Publications, 1980.
- . “Namuth’s Photographs and the Pollock Myth.” In *Pollock Painting*, edited by Barbara Rose. New York: Agrinde Publications, 1980.
- Rosenberg, Harold. “The American Action Painters.” *Art News* 51, no. 8 (1952): 22.
- Sandler, Irving. “Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg: Convergences and Differences.” In *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976*, edited by Norman L. Kleeblatt, 119–34. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Sayre, Henry M. *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Schimmel, Paul. “Leap into the Void: Performance and the Object.” In *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object: 1949-1979*, edited by Paul Schimmel, 17–119. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998.
- Schneemann, Carolee. *Carolee Schneemann: Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002.
- . *More than Meat Joy: Performance Works and Selected Writings*. 2nd ed. Kingston, N.Y.: McPherson & Co., 1997.
- “Semiology, N.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, n.d.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/175715>.
- “Semiotics, N.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, n.d.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/175724>.
- Smith, Diana Baker. “Re-Doing the Histories of Performance: Re-Enactment and the Historiographies of Live Art.” Dissertation, University of New South Wales, 2017.
- The Museum of Modern Art. *Behind the Scenes: On Line: Carolee Schneemann*. On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century. Accessed June 3, 2017.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smo4OR3Gvq8>.
- Wilson, Kenneth G. *The Columbia Guide to Standard American English*. New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Woolley, Michael J H. “Documenting Performance Art: Documentation in Practice.” *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 10, no. 1 (2014): 48–66.  
 doi:10.1080/14794713.2014.912501.

## Appendix A: Original Conclusion

*The draft of this thesis originally submitted to the committee had a temporary ‘conclusion’ prior to the opening reception of “Performative Documents and the Labouring Body.” The full text of that original conclusion is as below:*

The conclusion of this project as a whole (i.e., this thesis and its written and research-creation components) is realized in two parts: the standard oral defense of the written thesis and the exhibition of a selection of the documents produced in its writing. Although they activate wildly different vocalities, I take the documents themselves to be of equal importance with the words written here. I therefore consider their exhibition to be the ultimate chapter of this thesis. These words are meant to be an approximation of my own thoughts intended to disambiguate and produce thoughts similar to my own in the minds of those who read it. The exhibition is meant to disambiguate and produce phenomenal experiences similar to my own in the minds and bodies of those who experience it. This is an inherently recursive project, and its successes and failures will be revisited and evaluated in a *post hoc* amendment to this written document: following the opening of the exhibition and its coinciding performance lecture, I will revisit this conclusion in a way that reflects upon the research-creation documentation portion of this thesis.<sup>135</sup> This amended conclusion will consider the process by which these documents were produced, examine how they function as art objects in a gallery, and speculate on the future

---

<sup>135</sup> The exhibition, “Performative Documents and the Labouring Body” appeared in the Fine Arts Building (FAB) Gallery, at the University of Alberta, from August 22 to September 16, 2017. An opening reception was held on the evening of August 24, where I gave a self-reflective performative lecture on performance art documentation and this research-creation project. The remnants from the lecture stayed in the gallery space for the duration of the exhibition, and documentation from it was displayed on a wall-mounted television.

prospects for similar research-creation projects. The amended thesis will be supplied to the committee within a week following the exhibition opening.



## **Appendix B: Performance Script**

*In conjunction with the opening reception of “Performative Documents and the Labouring Body,” I gave a performative lecture. The script of that lecture ended up as crumpled balls of paper left in the performance space (see appendix VI) and is reproduced on the following pages.*

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 1 -

**The Viscera and Vicissitudes of Performance Art Documentation**

The first visceral reaction I had with art occurred in the autumn of 2009.

During my first trip to New York City with my partner at the time we decided to undertake the—in retrospect—too-monumental task of visiting every ‘significant’ museum in the city in a day and a half: the Met, the Museum of Natural History, the Guggenheim, and MoMA, were all visited within what was probably thirty-six hours. Needless to say my memories of each are generally non-specific, and owing to the complete exhaustion arising from our overly ambitious endeavour, I now harbour irrational resentment toward the Guggenheim’s slightly angled, spiral ramp floors. My calves still seem to ache whenever I think of Kandinsky.

One moment does stand out in particular, however. While visiting MoMA, we made sure to see the ‘usual suspects,’ those works with which I was familiar in the sense that they simply permeate popular culture’s conception of what ‘art’ is: works by late nineteenth-century European luminaries whom I have now come to appreciate within the greater context of the history of art. This was before I had even considered the notion of studying art in any capacity, let alone conceived of embarking upon a professional academic trajectory. It was during this period of my life that I found myself working as a commercial photographer, and I was as such intrigued to learn that there was a small Richard Avedon retrospective on display.

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 2 -

After having checked *Starry Night* off of my list of ‘art things’ to see, I found myself in a room I remember being not much larger than the living space of my current bachelor apartment. Glazed within pristine black frames hung on the interior of this white cube were a series of black and white portraits, the style of which (if not the particularities) I recalled from the all-too-brief ‘history of photography’ class I took while studying at the local technical college in my hometown. Now, in my mind’s eye I see myself confronting a portrait of a man whose uncertain gaze is preternatural and penetrating. The blackened silver on the glossy white paper is impossibly lush, inky velvet, richly textured and flawlessly gradated. Avedon’s technical prowess—and that of whichever technician made the print—is palpable.

My throat clenched tightly onto itself, as though it was trying to swallow its own tongue, and my sinuses throbbed indecisively, ambivalent about the tears I could feel welling up in them.

I do not know why my body responded like this. I am not so sentimental nor rapt with nostalgia that I can pretend the image unlocked some hidden affect deep within the metaphysics of my being. Neither am I wont to believe that it was some higher power calling out to me, impelling me to recognize something within myself. Nevertheless (I have decided retrospectively so as to better fit the cohesive narrative of my life that I tell myself and others) I was changed in that moment. Within a year I had ambitions to pursue a master’s degree in photographic preservation, and was enrolled in first-year English, philosophy, and French classes at MacEwan.

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 3 -

I neither understand, nor am I concerned with the ‘why’ of how I was moved nearly to tears by a material thing. Perhaps the craftsmanship of the image resonated with the part of me that recalls with measured ambivalence spending entire days bathed in the sodium light and carcinogenic vapours of the darkroom, struggling for but never quite achieving the kind of mastery so effortlessly present in Avedon’s images. It may have been some unanticipated resentment, admiration, awe, or envy, or a peculiar combination thereof. Those particularities are not the important details of this story, and I self-consciously leave those narrative spaces open for interpretation. Rather, I am concerned with the fact that this uncanny *frisson* emerged in that moment of encounter at all. That queasy sense of rising bile, which makes knots in your esophagus and arouses a strange sense of the sublime or profound, seems worth paying attention to. I call it uncanny because it is both a familiar and a strange sensation: familiar, in that it is not unlike the queasy sickness I feel when I recognize myself falling in love, or when I begin to grasp a new concept on a fundamental level; strange in the recognition that these *are* similar bodily affects, flavoured by context and tinted by my psyche in the present moment. It is like the feeling of my viscera necessarily reorganizing themselves so as to accommodate a shift of my perception of the world.

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 4 -

This thesis is about performance art and its documentation; it is about artists who make use of documentation in the realization of their performance works; and it is (about) the process of documenting within the context of performance practice.

In the writing of this text, I sat down innumerable times with my computer resting on my thighs staring at its screen and overcome with the foreboding blankness of the page and a word-count reflecting only the place-holder text I use for my headings and subheadings. There was a time when I felt that I knew on an intuitive level what performance art was, and my brain had tricked me into believing I could effortlessly bridge the gap between that understanding and the actual words required to communicate it to my audience. My mind races trying to recount the ways in which I had learned whatever axioms I now hold in my head, and I am overwhelmed with the enormity of selecting a moment in the infinite regress of signification with which to begin. Is the task of transmitting understanding simply one of relaying the most basic meaning? The most evocative? In these moments where I grasp for words, I look to the words themselves to see what stories— anecdotes—they have to tell embedded in their own personal histories. The Oxford English dictionary is the self-proclaimed “definitive record of the English language”<sup>1</sup> It defines performance as “[t]he accomplishment or carrying out of something commanded or undertaken; the doing of an action or operation,” and “[t]he quality of execution of such an action, operation, or process,” and somewhat recursively as “[s]omething performed or done; an action, act, deed, or operation.”<sup>2</sup>

The word itself is comprised of three constitutive elements: per-form-ance. First, the suffix: ‘-ance,’ from the Latin suffix *-entia*. It transmogrifies the action-laden verb into a conceptual noun.<sup>3</sup> ‘Per-,’ a prefix from the old-French for ‘through or by means of,’ carries with it a sense of ‘throughness,’ in space or time, but also connotes thoroughness, completion.<sup>4</sup> And ‘-form-,’ from the Latin *forma*, shape or configuration.<sup>5</sup> Form is the shape of things that we see, or the act of giving shape to something. It is representation. A person’s form refers to their body. In philosophy, form is irreducible essence, or in Kantian philosophy it is “[t]hat factor of knowledge which gives reality and objectivity to the thing known[.]”<sup>6</sup> It is variously how things manifest. These various etymological breadcrumbs lead down a path that leads me to the articulation of performance as the abstract concept of making manifest in space and in time. Performance is that thing that we do which changes and creates things in the world.

The dictionary, according to the dictionary, “explains [...] the words of a language [...] giving for each word its typical spelling, an explanation of its meaning or meanings, and often other information, such as pronunciation, etymology, [and] synonyms[.]”<sup>7</sup> It is an authoritative record of how words are and have been used by particular people, most often those in positions privileged enough to have had their words recorded. The dictionary provides a broad survey of various meanings the word ‘performance’ has accrued, meanings which are canonical, recorded and backed by authority. The assorted etonyms which comprise words are canonical as well: they reflect the authoritative history of the word as determined by experts in the field. These histories are buried in fertile dirt though. In and amongst their bones are the agents of recomposition, gnawing at the fleshy and fibrous sinews that tenuously link modern languages with their ancient antecedents. In rhetoric, an etymological fallacy refers to an argument that “insists that what a word ‘really means’ is whatever it once meant long ago, perhaps even in another language.”<sup>8</sup> But it is not fallacious to push and pull at the various narrative atomic or anatomic bits that comprise a story to see what chimeric meaning an adjustment to its entrails can render.

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 7 -

The verb *record*, another word which seems pertinent to the topic at hand, combines the prefix ‘*re-*’ from Latin, connoting generally ‘back’ or ‘again,’ with ‘*-cord,*’ also from Latin, by way of the Greek ‘καρδία’ [CARDIA] for ‘heart.’<sup>9</sup> John MacArthur, a biblical scholar, notes that “[i]n most modern cultures, the heart is thought of as the seat of emotions and feelings. But most ancients—Hebrews, Greeks, and many others—considered the heart to be the center of knowledge, understanding, thinking, and wisdom [...] the seat of the mind and will[...]. Emotions and feelings were associated with the intestines, or bowels.” To *record* is to remember—from the Latin *memorate*, to bring to mind—to commit to your heart, again and again and again. Recording is an hermeneutic process—from the Greek, ἐρμηνευτής [HERMENEUT] or interpret, a word in English that finds its own origins in the Sanskrit root *prath*, or to spread out. Recording, like reading a text, is not merely an act of establishing a one-to-one relationship between marks on a body and something *out there*. Recording, reading, these are palimpsest process of interpretation and reinterpretation, of spreading things out, laying them bare. Before language was made right through orthography, before scripture was committed to scripture, scribbled in codices, or engraved in stone, it was inscribed in, on, and through the heart. Oral traditions maintain and transmit stories through repetitious telling and retelling. And stories are constitutive of reality. That is, they are performative.



August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 8 -

Performance art, however, is something beyond the dictionary meaning of ‘performance’ agglutinated to that of ‘art.’ Prominent scholars in the field correlate it to our experience of ourselves and others as human subjects, and particularly that subjectivity entailed through the postmodern intellectual tradition. In this idiom, a human subject is forged in a crucible moment when an infant comes into the sudden awareness that it is in fact a discrete entity, fundamentally separate from the world which it inhabits as well as from those Others out there, which it now recognizes as subjects too. This subjectivity is founded on a recognition of the lack and desire inherent in each of us. This lack is that of control over the world around us and the lack of control over signification, over the ability to give names to describe the world. This desire is the misrecognition of a greater degree of mastery and control which other subjects seem to possess.

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 9 -

With this understanding, performance art can be thought of as fundamentally being the interaction of human subjectivities—those of the artist and viewers—articulated and framed such that it suggests, pulls at, or prods a different understanding between you and that which is not you. For scholars such as Peggy Phelan, a feminist and queer theorist and artist herself, the direct encounter between two subjects is that necessary element without which performance art cannot otherwise be called performance art. That moment of encounter is ephemeral and fleeting. It cannot be captured or reproduced without degrading the ontology of performance art itself. Other scholars, like Amelia Jones, an art historian, critic, and professor of art and design at the University of Southern California, work with the understanding that the constitutive element of these works is that of the signifying capacity of the subjective human body. That is, the capacity of a human body, inscribed with various markers of sex, sexuality, gender, race, class, and so forth, to communicate something about its relation to you and the world based on its inherent difference from you and the world. For Jones, the experience of performance art *is* possible through records and reproduction, but only within a particular subset to which she explicitly refers as Body Art.

And so, there seems to be a contradiction in the very constitution of performance art. It is something that necessarily fade away, and as such seems to *want* to be documented. But depending on your understanding of what performance art is supposed to *do* and the degree to which recording, capturing, or reproducing it mediates your experience of it, it may or may not be possible to document performance art. And these conjectures ring true to me, on an intellectual level. Is it why I find this topic engaging. But they do not really resonate with my own *understanding of my experience* of myself and the world; they do not vibrate in my bones or twist at my innards in a way that I recognize as being tied to my *experience of understanding*. And so, I would like to turn to a slightly differently articulated understanding of human subjectivity, that proposed by Karen Barad, a particle physicist, philosopher, and feminist scholar. Barad suggests a posthuman understanding of subjectivity.

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 11 -

She looks toward the writings and scientific research of Niels Bohr, a scientist perhaps most well-known for his work in quantum physics, but also a philosopher in his own right concerned with the ontological and epistemological implications of an empirical understanding of the physical world that calls into question our intuitive understanding of causality. Barad's conjecture is that the world is constituted through manifold moments of interaction within discrete phenomena, which she terms 'intra-activity.' Bohr's work, which was later confirmed through empirical research, predicts that the fundamental properties of individual quanta of matter and energy cannot be determined through observation within experimental apparatuses; rather, they are determined by the particular configurations of those apparatuses themselves. The fundamental properties of the world are not pre-extant. They are emergent through intra-action within the phenomena that constitute the world.

A logical extension of this (in the explication of which Barad takes great care to avoid the fallacies typified by Schroedinger's thought experiments regarding cats and cesium atoms) is that subjectivity is in fact not a property adhered to ourselves and which we carry with us through life. Our subjectivity is in fact emergent, determined in the doing of the phenomena of life, whether that is shopping for groceries, writing a thesis, or engaging in a work of performance art.

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 12 -

Am I supposed to be able to see my pulse in my neck? I do not know the answer to this question, but it is a question that jumped into my mind while I was staring at myself in my bathroom mirror, as I often do when I am taking a 'break' from agonizing over not doing what I should be doing. *Turn around, go back to your computer, just start writing*, I think at the man staring back at me in the mirror. Fastidiously, I examine every pore on his face, search his beard for *pilas multigemini* and I wonder to him whether this is the kind of repetitious neurotic behaviour Freud had in mind when he was theorizing about what lies beyond the pleasure principle.<sup>10</sup> I pluck two or three or four or more hairs, telling him *after this one I will get back to work*, before I become transfixed on his neck. Slightly below his jaw line, on either side of where I presume his *hyoid* bone to be, I can see his neck throbbing. In unison, the carotid arteries pulse. Noticeably.

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 13 -

I have become increasingly aware of my own body, not just throughout the course of this thesis, but over the course of my academic career. The difference between writing several thousand words in a day and sleeping for twelve hours, then lying in bed for four more, then deciding at 5:0pm *maybe I'll try again tomorrow* can come down to the subtle difference between having coffee just slightly too late in the afternoon the day prior. My waking and my non-waking hours are a balancing act of managing stimulants. Caffeine and methylphenidate—which goes by the brand name Concerta—potentiate nicely: they have a synergistic effect wherein, taken together, they are more effective than the cumulative effects of each. I take methylphenidate to concentrate, and I take caffeine to maintain a level of alertness commensurate to the demands of staring at a computer screen for longer than is most likely healthy. Without these drugs, I would not have the capacity to read a standard page of text before my mind wanders off on a tangent that is ultimately unproductive in that moment. Caffeine has a half-life in an adult man of roughly two-and-a-half to four-and-a-half hours.<sup>11</sup> Methylphenidate is similar.<sup>12</sup> However, through the alchemy of Osmotic controlled-Release Oral delivery System (OROS™), methylphenidate is biologically available within my blood for a window of up to twelve hours.<sup>13</sup> If that twelve-hour window overlaps with when I should be asleep, I toss and turn throughout the night and will be cognitively impaired the following day, doubly so if I misjudge my caffeine dosing.

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 14 -

I can see the blood being pushed through vessels in my neck. If I bring my hand up to my throat to touch the surface of my neckskin with my thumb and forefinger at the softest spot on either side of my trachea right where my beard begins to dissolve, I can feel the rhythm of my heart beating. And sometimes I can hear it too, not like an actual sound I perceive through the quiet vibrations of bones deep in my head but like a sound extrapolated through the tips of my fingers. And I am not sure if my pulse is 'supposed' to be so easy to resolve and I sit and wonder if I should consider asking a physician. Nevertheless, I will continue to consume these drugs, and continue to get the least amount of sleep that I can before I feel like that tingle gnawing at the back of my throat when I wake up is in danger of turning into off-white ulcers on my tonsils. The question of whether or not I should be able to notice my own pulse remains, but this is not the question whose answer actually interests me. Rather, I find myself focused on the fact that I have noticed it at all.

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 15 -

These are the co-extant phenomena which I have come to think of as intra-active agents within the phenomena of my own daily existence, and for the past year my daily existence has been dominated by writing about performance art and its documentation. But, the process of writing is more than the act of drawing a pen across paper to leave a trace of ink, or of tapping squares of plastic to register in solid-state machinery a collection of ones and zeros. Writing is a process of thinking, which is of course also a process of doing. “Did you get much writing done today?” is a familiar refrain for anyone who has taken on even a moderately ambitious writing project. Irrespective of how many marks I may have put down on paper over the course of the last several hours, I will invariably give an answer that is at least nominally affirmative. After all, thinking is a part of the writing process.

At some point, however, thinking about doing is insufficient, and I have to commit something—*anything at all*—to paper. This seems like a simple prospect. *Turn around, go back to your computer, just start writing.* To write is to think, to think is to do. I think therefore I write, right? Writing is an embodied process. It is a doing, above and beyond the repetitious physical movements I impel my fingers to make as they move across the keyboard registering something that resembles my thoughts as marks on a screen. Writing, like thinking—as thinking—is embodied insofar as everything I do is embodied, as the biomechanical assemblage that I am.



August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 16 -

Whatever the seat of my own consciousness and intellect may be—whether it is my brain or my heart or my guts or my liver—it is emergent through an amalgamation of productive and destructive patterns of interference, arising out a finite but uncountable number of biological bits. As waves on an ocean result from a temporary arrangement of particles, which ultimately do not themselves move in any meaningful way, thoughts are patterns produced on and which move across the surface of my being. This evocative and spurious metaphor is not meant to be a metaphysical account of consciousness; rather it is meant to point to the doing that I do which underlies each moment of thought. How are these micro-phenomena—discrete performance apparatuses—suspended within the greater daily, weekly, monthly, and annual phenomena of my life?

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 17 -

As I find myself thinking about writing (which, as I lie to myself, is as good as doing writing), I also notice myself doing various things. I stand in front of the mirror and inspect my skin and my beard. I run my fingers across and through the stubble of my hair on the top and the back of my head. I purse and bite my lips, and gnaw on my nails, and I become acutely aware of my own heart beating and I cannot help but wonder if it always beats this loud or if it is the combination of stress hormones and the drugs I ingest. I notice that I have trouble writing, thinking, doing, if I do not sleep well. I notice that I do not sleep well if any number of a multitude of factors are not *just so*: if I drink coffee too late in the afternoon, or drink too much alcohol too late into the evening, or if my orientation toward someone I love is abruptly changed, I will toss and turn and wake up eventually feeling like I cannot do anything worthwhile or productive. I notice that if I exercise and work out, my capacity for insight and motivation are temporarily increased. And I notice that when I stand on my balcony in my underwear to get a breath of fresh air the hairs on my skin on my belly become erect, and it is somehow pleasurable and refreshing. To what degree are the words on these pages and which I speak now an emergent property of the cumulated perturbations produced in and by my body, which I notice, both in process and in introspective retrospection? I theorize in writing about performance art and its documentation. To theorize is to think about, but also to do. To know about it entails an understanding; to see it, is to apprehend it, grab, touch, and feel it. Thus to write about performance and documentation, I necessarily do performance and documentation.

The word ‘document’ has in its own genealogy and obsolete meaning that hints at its latent agency. Today we understand it as “[s]omething written, inscribed, etc., which furnishes evidence or information upon any subject,” but up until the eighteenth century documents were instructions, or lessons, things that taught, things that *did*.<sup>14</sup> To document was to teach or instruct, and today to document is to record the having-had-happened of something—to prove its existence.<sup>15</sup> The process of documentation is the inscription of a doing, such that that inscription does its own doing, such that it teaches and produces meaning beyond simply what it represents.

In the process of writing—thinking, theorizing, doing, touching, feeling—about documentation, I have produced these writings in text and light and sound that document the process of writing about documentation. A project about documenting performance art—which holds as axiomatic that to-think is to-do—is necessarily a project wherein performance documentation becomes a means by which the project itself comes to fruition; the mere details of this are emergent from and entailed by the propagation of events that precede them and proceed from them.

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 19 -

And I do recognize the station from which I speak. I am a person who walks though the world relatively unimpeded by the structures and objects which have been designed for people that share my approximate body schema; my day-to-day engagement with my own culture is as a man who was, based on the appearance of his genitals, assigned that nascent identity at birth and socialized accordingly; I enjoy the privilege of appearing to be descended from one of the groups of people who colonized the land on which I live; and I am fortunate enough to be a man who enjoys fucking other men who was born late enough, both to have escaped the ravages of plague and to be considered by most people an actual human being. My experience of my own body is contingent upon these factors, in addition to others too multitudinous to list. My arousal toward these documents—these texts—is particular with regard to my own situated experience of the world. They impel me to ask different questions which themselves require different ways of being answered: to what degree is my own material agency folded into the syncopated rhythms of these other material agents that I am not normally prompted to perceive? What anecdotes does my own body have to share about its experience? Are they even worth sharing at all? By turning my body into a cyborg antenna of sorts—or, more accurately, coming to realize its capacity for acting as a locus of sensual documentation—my attention is unexpectedly turned toward a variety of phenomena, seemingly mundane but necessary to quotidian existence, for which I have a newfound curiosity.<sup>16</sup>

August 24, 2017

Woolley performance script

- 20 -

This thesis is subtended by my own beating heart, both as a trite metaphor and as something real that pumps life into me and my thoughts, making me and them palpable. I, as a fleshy assemblage of meat and bone imbued with subjectivity, emerge in the writing, thinking, doing, feeling, speaking, and beating of these words in the phenomena of this thesis, this space. Documents are not simply things that seek to reproduce the ineffable, nor are they simply differently mediated experiences of an event. A document—as a doing—extends and protracts the ineffable beyond the happening of the event that instantiated it, and which it itself retroflexively instantiated. Each document, each video, photograph, sound, and word on these pages and in this air, exists in a constellation embedded in the viscera and vicissitudes of my life, and yours as well.

## Appendix C: Didactic Text

# performative documents and the labouring body

august 22 - september 16

opening august 24 7:00-10:00pm

performative lecture @ 7:30

These images and sounds were captured during one of the final months of writing my master's thesis in the History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture. As I wrote on the practices of performance art documentation and documentation as mode of artistic production, I engaged in a month-long research-creation daily performance practice.

Each day as I neared the completion of the written portion of my thesis, I produced a document intended to record my body in relation to the labour of academic writing and research. Utilising a variety of tools, including binaural microphones, a digital stethoscope, a DSLR camera, a GoPro, and my own cellphone, I generated recordings that are reflective of my experience of my bodies in the mental and physical spaces of writing. In one, the hairs on my torso stand erect as I take a breath of fresh air; in another I track my breathing, heartbeat, and pupillary reflex after my first cup of coffee in the morning; and in another, I record the compulsive way I stroke my hair while idly reading.

In conjunction with the opening of the exhibition on August 24, I presented a performative lecture of performance art documentation. Documents and other remains from this performance inhabit the lecture space throughout the course of the exhibition.

-michael jh woolley

Michael Woolley is a Master of Arts candidate in the History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture. His research in contemporary art practices focuses on the debates in performance art documentation. This exhibition comprises the research-creation component of his master's thesis.

## Appendix D: Gallery Map and List of Works

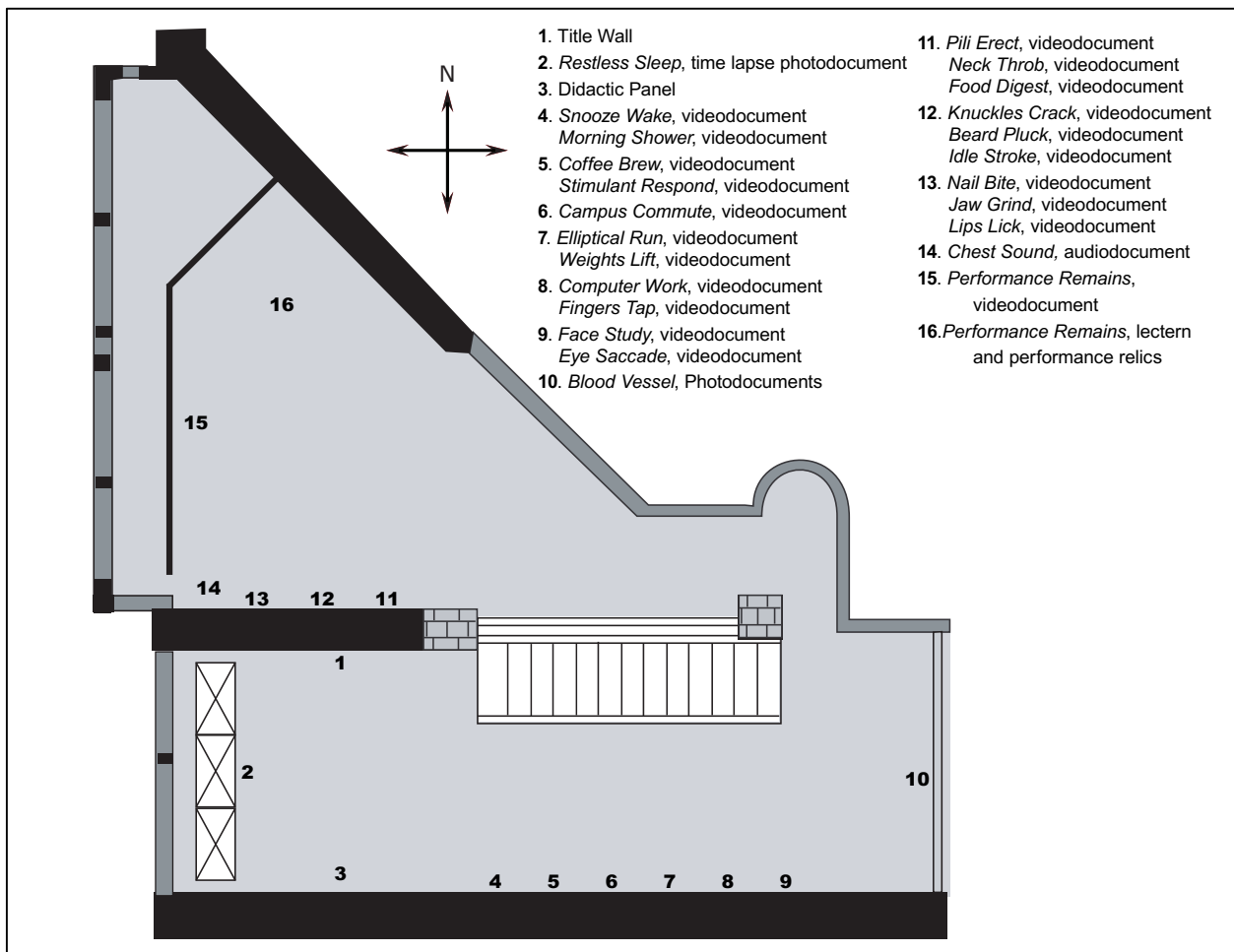


Figure 18 "Performative Documents and the Labouring Body" gallery layout and list of works

## Appendix E: Installation Documentation



Figure 19 “Performative Documents and the Labouring Body,” 2017; installation view of *Restless Sleep*, 2017, time lapse photodocument; and title wall



Figure 20 “Performative Documents and the Labouring Body,” 2017; installation view of *Restless Sleep*, 2017, time lapse photodocument; and title wall





Figure 21 “Performative Documents and the Labouring Body,” 2017, installation view of east and south exterior walls

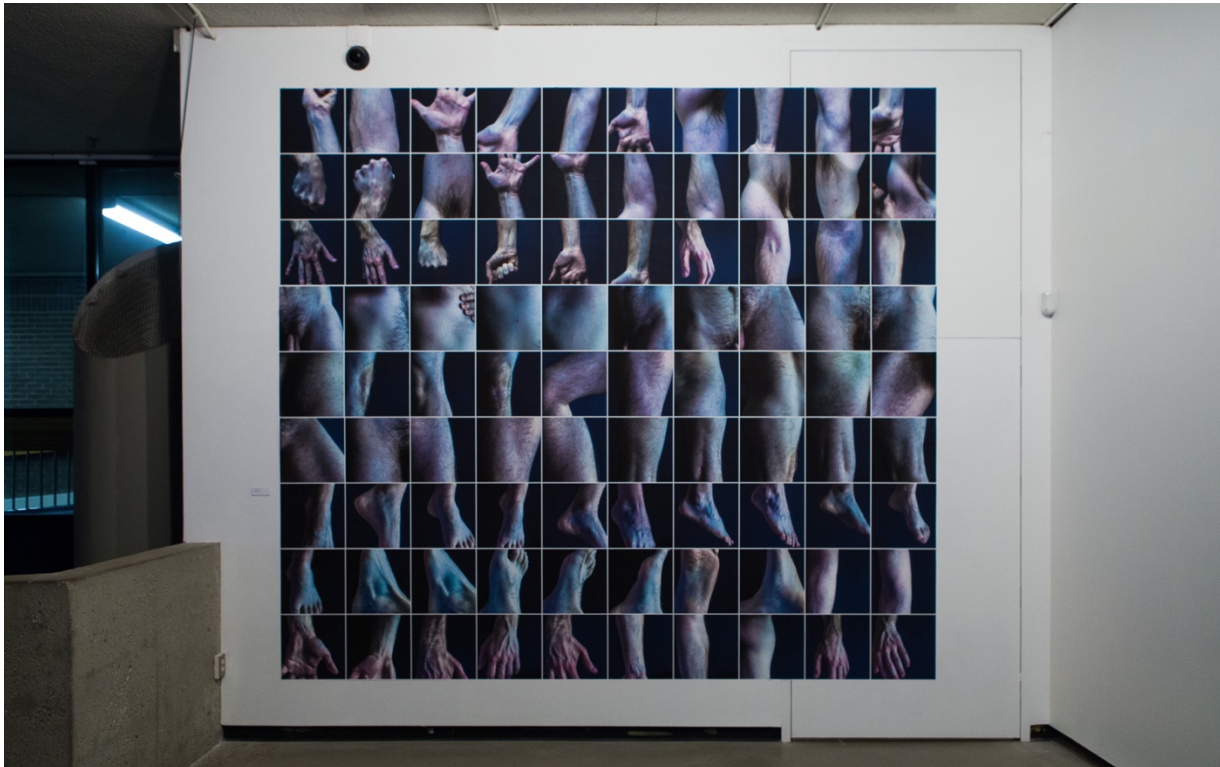


Figure 22 “Performative Documents and the Labouring Body,” 2017, installation view of *Blood Vessel*, 2017, photodocuments



Figure 23 “Performative Documents and the Labouring Body,” 2017, installation view of south exterior and west walls with various videodocuments and *Restless Sleep*, 2017, time lapse photodocument



Figure 24 “Performative Documents and the Labouring Body,” 2017, installation view south exterior wall with various videodocuments



Figure 25 "Performative Documents and the Labouring Body," 2017, installation view of various videodocuments



Figure 26 "Performative Documents and the Labouring Body," 2017, installation view of *Performance Remains*, 2017



Figure 27 “Performative Documents and the Labouring Body,” 2017, installation view of south interior wall and videodocument plinths



Figure 28 “Performative Documents and the Labouring Body,” 2017, installation view of subwoofer for *Chest Sound*, 2017, audiodocument

## Appendix F: Video Stills and Details



Figure 29 video still from *Beard Pluck*, 2017, videodocument

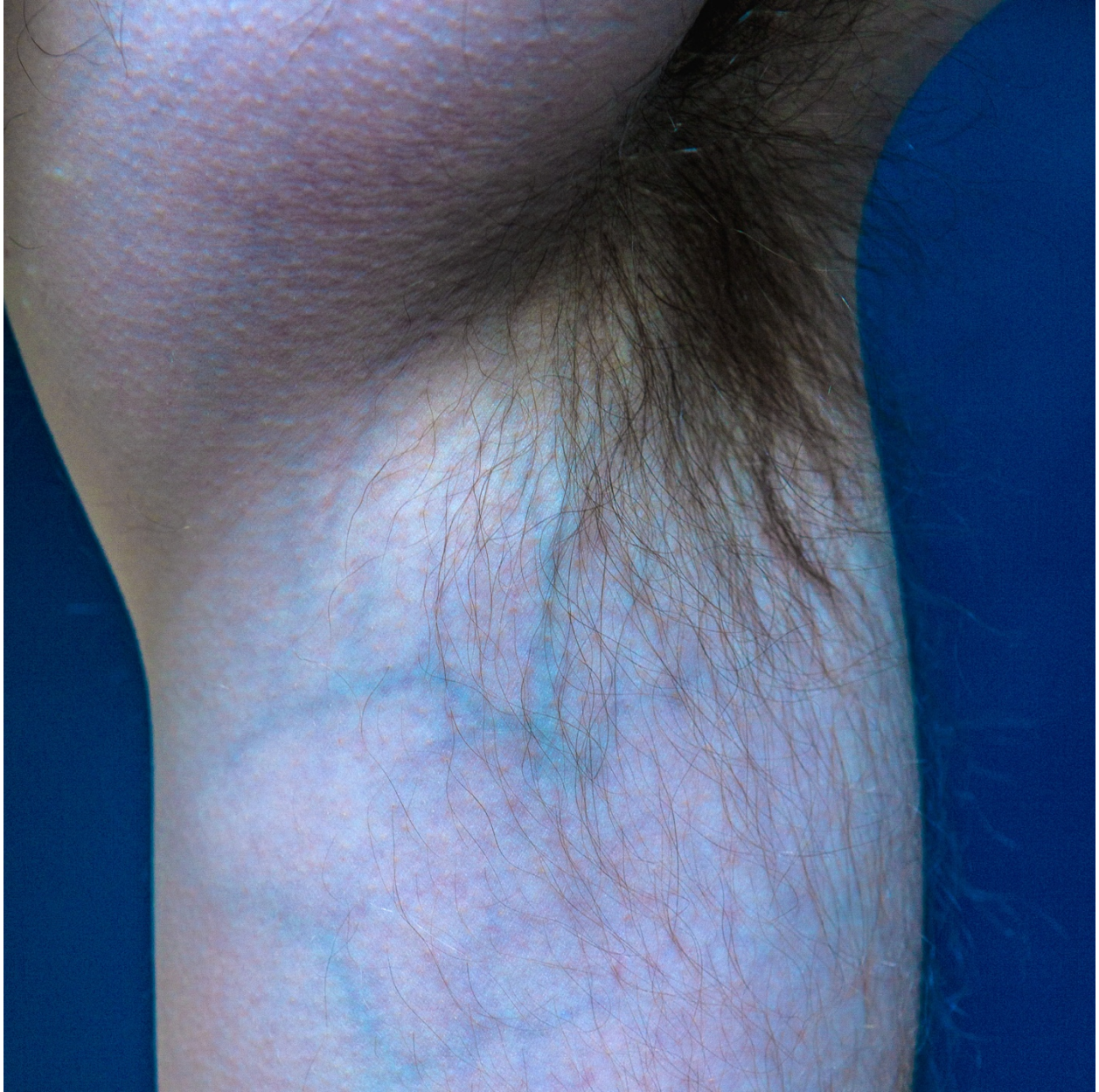


Figure 30 detail of *Blood Vessel*, 2017, photodocuments



Figure 31 detail of *Blood Vessel*, 2017, photodocuments



Figure 32 detail of *Blood Vessel*, 2017, photodocuments



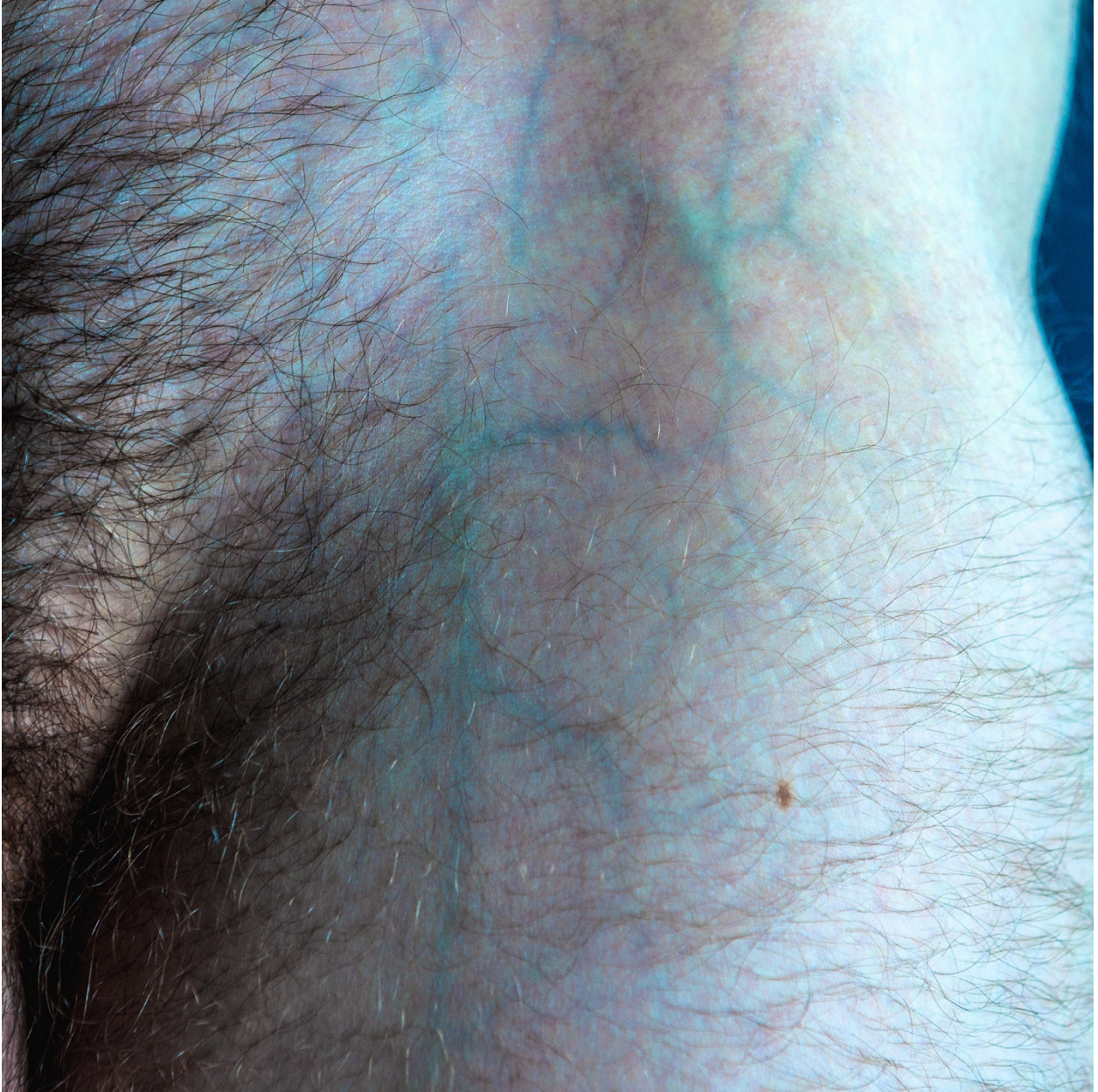


Figure 33 detail of *Blood Vessel*, 2017, photodocuments



Figure 34 detail of *Blood Vessel*, 2017, photodocuments



Figure 35 video still from *Morning Coffee*, 2017, videodocument



Figure 36 video still from *Computer Work*, 2017, videodocument



Figure 37 video still from *Elliptical Run*, 2017, videodocument



Figure 38 video still from *Eye Saccade*, 2017, videodocument



Figure 39 video still from *Face Study*, 2017, videodocument



Figure 40 video still from *Fingers Tap*, 2017, videodocument



Figure 41 video still from *Food Digest*, 2017, videodocument

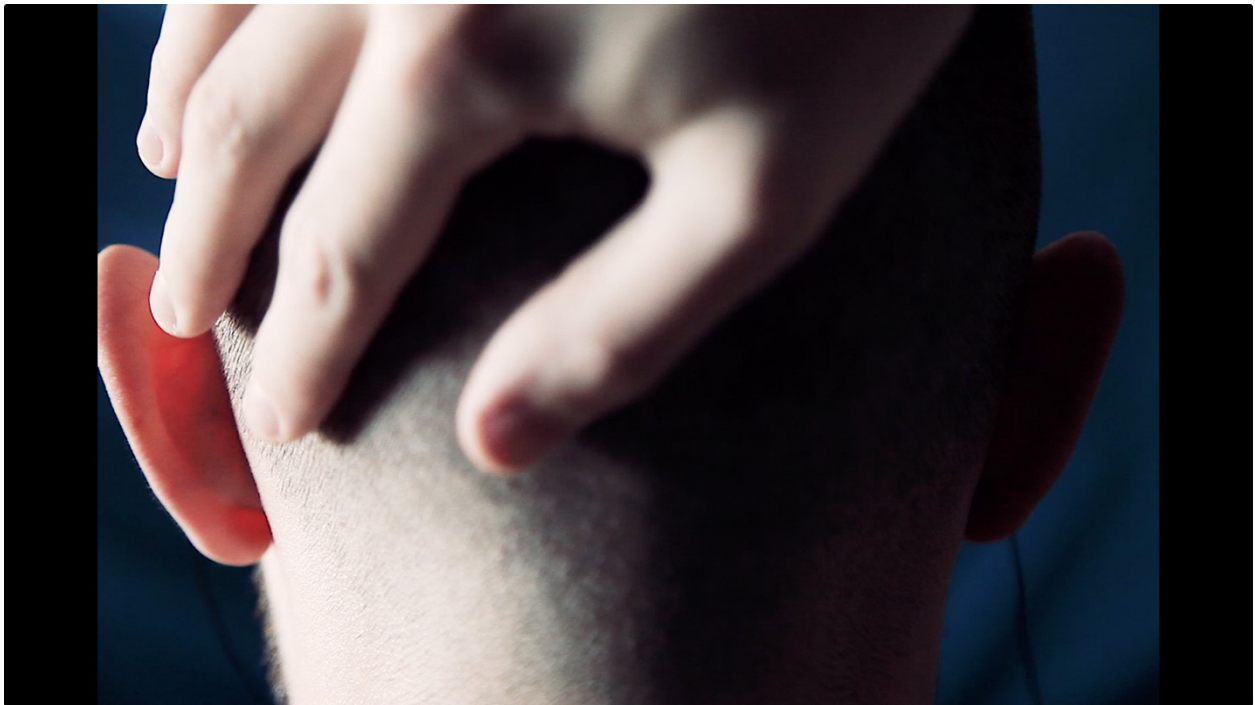


Figure 42 video still from *Idle Stroke*, 2017, videodocument



Figure 43 video still from *Jaw Grind*, 2017, videodocument



Figure 44 video still from *Knuckles Crack*, 2017, videodocument



Figure 45 video still from *Lips Lick*, 2017, videodocument

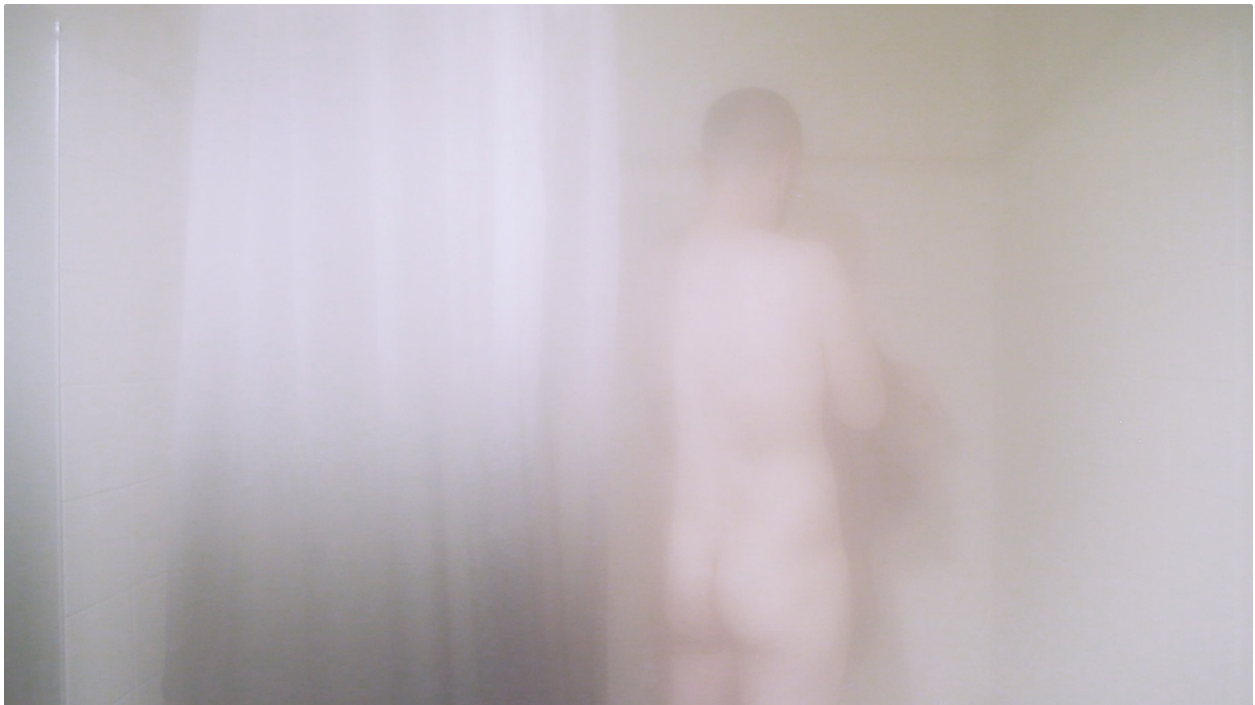


Figure 46 video still from *Morning Shower*, 2017, videodocument





Figure 47 video still from *Nail Bite*, 2017, videodocument



Figure 48 video still from *Neck Throb*, 2017, videodocument



Figure 49 video still from *Performance Remains*, 2017, videodocument



Figure 50 detail of *Performance Remains*, 2017, performance residues and relics



Figure 51 detail of *Performance Remains*, 2017, performance residues and relics



Figure 52 video still from *Pili Erect*, 2017, videodocument

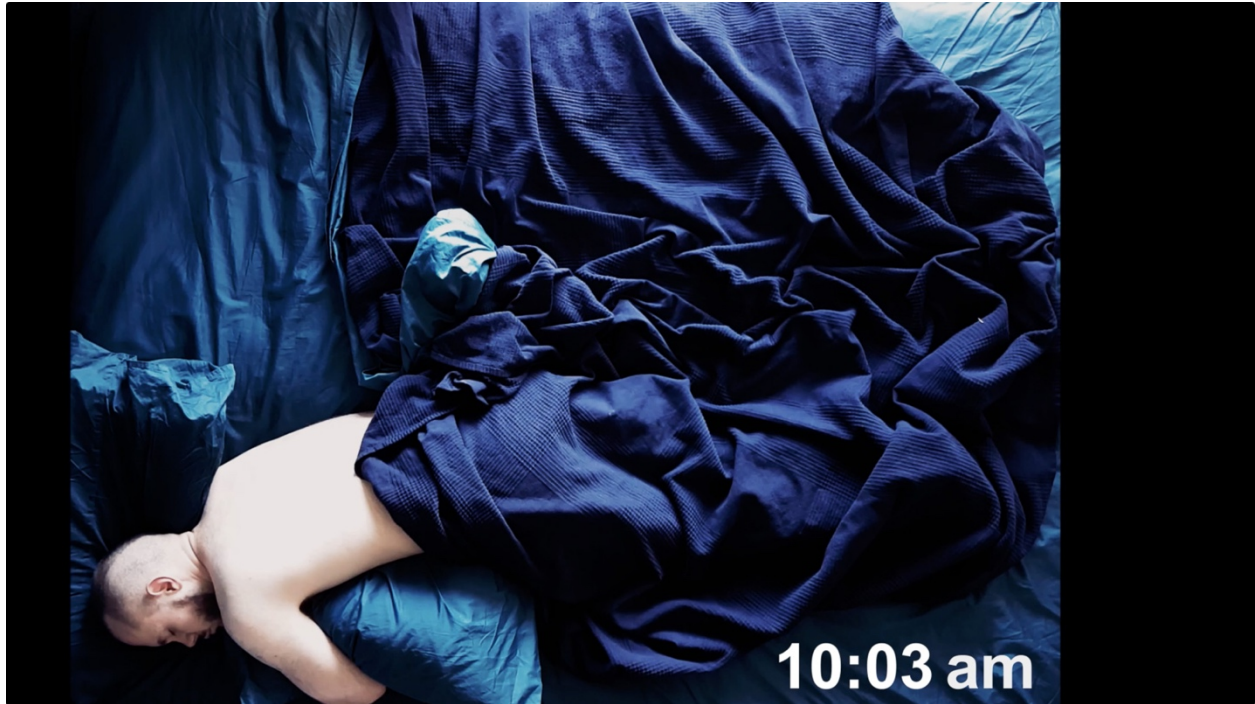


Figure 53 video still from *Restless Sleep*, 2017, time lapse photodocument

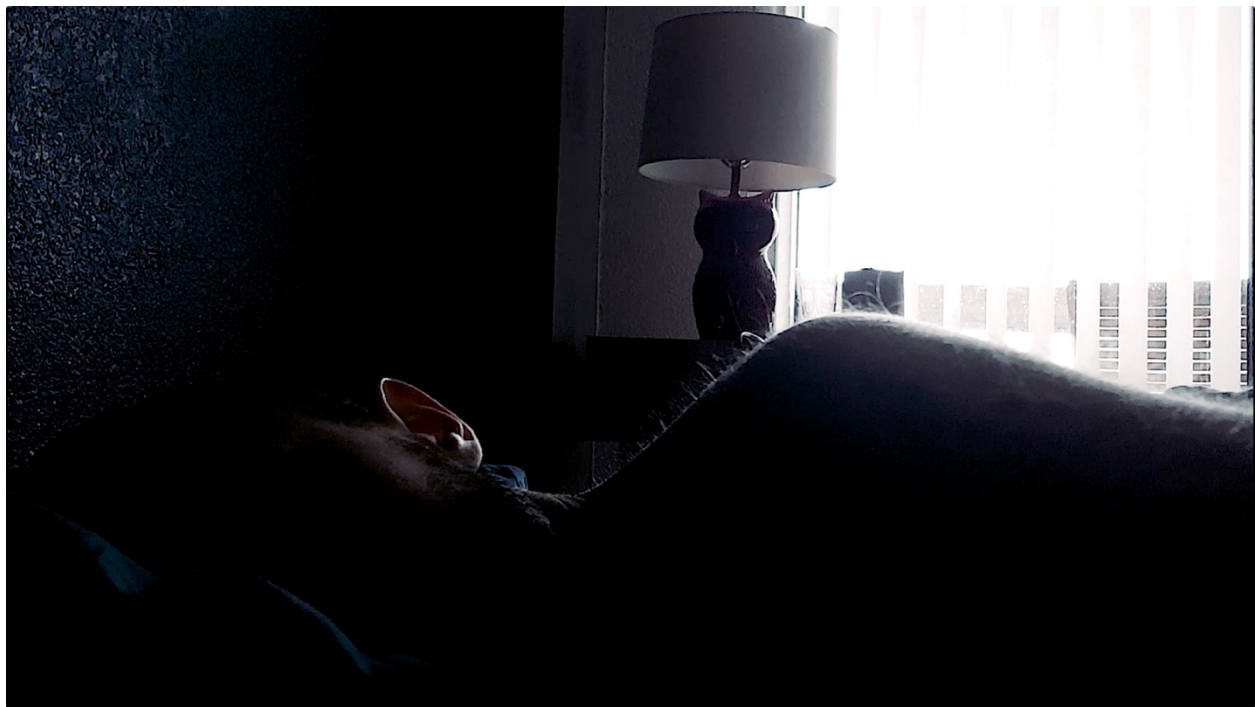


Figure 54 video still from *Snooze Wake*, 2017, videodocument



Figure 55 video still from *Stimulant Respond*, 2017, videodocument