

Trembling in the archive

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1

A body contains within it, its other.

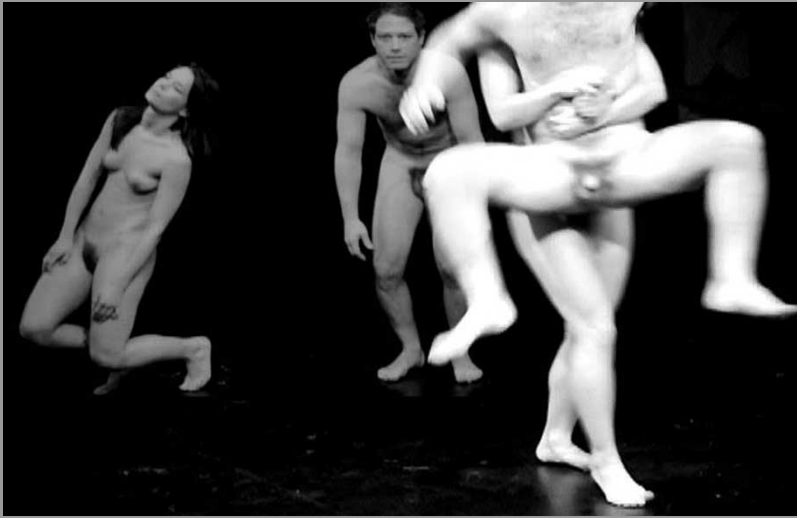


2

Performance longs for a volatile encounter with the other - as it is both a response, and a resistance to a call from the other. The traces performance leaves in the form of pictures made by witnesses, are volatile actors in this tension. This encounter is disturbed by the stillness and vibration of the other's image - both its circulation and its eventual burial. The images in these pages, scraps of events, acts, portraits, desires - receive a body's call, and yet transmit another, as emissaries of fragmented organs and flesh. Our body contains within it its 'other' and this other articulates the archive of desire, haunting and memory through vibration in performance. This is where I begin the exploration of the call to perform - as an articulation of the tensions between the imagined self and the interior other, and the self and Other, within the context of a vault of vibrating pictures, films, and memories.

3

There is no picture of my birth.
Enter between feces and urine, washed quickly out
of fear of contamination, a birth as a force against
life. Lost in memory. The first becoming other.



In learning to walk upon feet, mutilating being
with slumping verticality, putting the mind to
sleep against mortality, death, being. Shall my
head not also touch the earth, another body, the
mouth of death? In looking for a warm place to
insert my hands I fail. I want to be eaten, to be
confirmed. But I am only given things to eat.



4

Looking has failed in the extreme,
so I eat myself in supplication.

5



They meet on a silent border, taking up residence in each other's bodies without leave.

6

They pass bones between them in trade, laughing.



If we live and are born again, I have passed my own buried bones on a highway. Perhaps I live on top of them. I have walked over them.

7

It is possible that there is no action made after the invention of photography that happens outside the gaze of the archive. The gaze of the camera remembers what it has seen, that memory is also our memory, and it informs our actions, and our stillness. Images are imbued with the ghostly presence of actions grafted, like skin, onto a surface - frozen in a moment become memory - bodies, desires and scenes mapped out and coveted in the form of a portrait, a treasure, a record. The call to perform, the performer's call to action is, in the context of a history of forbidden and unrepeatable actions, a call deeply invested in the traces of the past. Past as a palpable surface, a virtual unconscious - as the image data banks in our visual and visceral training as social beings. One stitched with trauma, and a craving to become or covet the other after death.



9

Hanging, dangling, silent in space
- she is an airless void, a vacuum,
no breath or sound.



8

The presence of the document presents a challenge to performance: the possibility to document the presence of a third term in the dialogic relationship of performer - spectator. This third term is the archive and its gaze. The document gives me the opportunity to see my own face, looking at itself, looking for/through the other. The ability to be looked at by the dead, to be seen after death. Rooted always in the archive, we are looking at time, looking through death - and the other is both an interior and exterior force. The photographed face, in performance, becomes a surface that circulates long after the action has decayed. This surface moves - it circulates, it ambulates, and it is touched, kissed, coveted, re-patterned. It is appropriated, and embodied. It is a still body, whose matter may lie already in the earth - but with eyes glistening and vibrating in the now. This challenge of the archive to performance comes in the form of a call - 'enter me, feed me, I am your becoming, your charge, your crimes, your failures'.

If the call to perform is a hunger call from the archive: imagine the grafted faces, bodies, of its contents which move us, stirring up in their stillness the potential for movement, through us the performer bodies, through breath. Yet in order for the gift of flesh, the gift of death to be received by the other, we must enter the archive ourselves. Our performances with and for the archive happen in the vestibule of 'captured time', seemingly still memories exposed to light, with the undead hiding in shadow - waiting to enter into the archive. The force of performing bodies, a nexus where spectator, photographer, and performer meet in the interior moment of a still action: Is this movement? Is it stillness? Is it presence? In performing for the other, we are always negotiating our allegiance to documentation - this is no mystery. So my actions, my body, my faces have an unconscious awareness of their effect on their own traces, and the impossibility of knowing what the other will receive or make out of watching. In observing ourselves, as we relate to and even become the other, in performance, we are making being watched, making being remembered, as much as we are watching, are remembering. The place, indeed, where the spectator and performer potentially make contact, may be the space of the archive. The trembling vault of otherness-as-object, otherness-as-surface, our language of shared signs - this is where the spectator and performer agree to go together in performance: to enter memory.

11

She wears his naked image like a remedy. Animal skin.



10

Our potential object-hood, or object-ness is always on the horizon - my face, a surface always in tension with the spectators' memory and the camera. This becoming object in relation to the archive is a making or self-fashioning that happens in performance where our shared collection of images vibrate off each other. This tension is fed inevitably the possibility of its own documentation, a becoming surface - of my own body in the presence of the spectator. My performance is made in the context of a hungry archive, one I must speak to, plug into, vibrate with, and in my own process of encountering the Other, join and resist. This alterity exists as a force, a nexus, within me and outside of me - always right beyond my reach. It is the vibration of the gaze of history, the archive - perhaps, also, the unconscious - palpating me as pure desire, as flesh in the present, the possibility of death. It is the eruption of private viscera become public - mortality grafted out of the surface and reinscribed as surface, etched back into the archive. The spectator and I make contact with the historical and forbidden other as we meet in fire, in wetness, there. We relate through flesh to death and its timeless unrest. This is the technology of performance's colonization and rediscovery; as it creates its own archive amidst the stock of history. While not simply an arbitrary relation to technology, but an expression of it, performance is the expressive technology of memory and the flesh as it receives the connective call from the Other.



12

Through laughter and trembling my performer body emerges as field through which I become and wage war against, the other, I potentialize the interior landscape of memory. I invoke the presence of many bodies, gazes, responding to a call from imperceptible vibration, felt in stillness. This call from the archive is only an aspect of the call to perform - only an aspect of the consequences and experience of action and encounter. Yet, it is an essential presence because it is an aspect that deeply informs the constitution of the performer's and public's trembling bodies - in that the actions of the performer are articulating within the technology of several gazes. I find it interesting to imagine this gaze mapped in the action itself - not simply as a dialogic formation between subject and object, but as a force acting within and against the performer's desire, that evokes the presence of many. It is a haunted gaze. Imagine the archive as the place where performer and spectator meet - the where the objects and faces in performance arrive and take hold in the spectator's body. The archive, a vault, - surfaces carried within each of us unlocked by the presence of the other. Responding to the call to be witnessed, to the call to act, initiates a journey of becoming that is always deeply informed by the archive. This process, fed by the technological/divine gaze of the past (Camera) knows the performer as a body responsible for producing surfaces grafted off its own dying skin, textures in non-edible, non-organic, virtual form that leave the trace of its labor. The photo or video image. Who, or what, then, is the archive? What is its desire? And what kinds of objects, bodies or performances does it crave? There is, in the history of photography, a mystery - a haunting, stirred up in some of the first images made with the technology of marks made by light exposure. The archive is lined with trauma, animality and a hungry war in



search of alterity. We remember Charcot's theatrical images of the 'hysteric' Augustine; deeply visceral and disturbingly eroticized images of the abuse and slaughter of Native Americans; the beginning of pornography in a repressed Victorian era; and the coal filthy child laborers of industrial revolution. These ghostly stills line the heart of the archive as the birth of the truly portable faces and bodies of a tradable, timeless other in the surface of a photograph. And these bodies, these vibrating faces, organs and labors emit a call - one steeped in colonization, fragmentation, trauma, and the constant evolution of desire. The body of the archive is a corpse, yet one never permitted to exhale its last breath, still burning with the fuel of its own immortality. This body, in a perpetual dream, perpetual night, is also a circulatory system - a bloodstream that pumps images in and out of its ventricles, in and out of our visual field. Like the vibration and call of memory moving in the performer as she responds to desire with performance - the negotiations of memory in the archive are deeper and broader than the personal, yet always marked in terms of the immediate experience of NOW in the performative act. Performance and its traces are constantly being shaken by this hysteria, it is the nervous system of the gaze, technology's corporeal memory. Stimuli.

Performance pulses like an umbilicus of desire emerging out of a wound - the wounds of the self, and of the other - the trembling call of the still image. It is the tremor in stillness - the moving body of history emerging into and out of the archive - as the performer emerges in and out of darkness. The call to perform is, perhaps, a desire to merge with, feed, heal, resist or embody this turbulent archive - as performance's history is steeped in the history of trauma, memory and the photograph. In this, we receive the other in a picture, the still document, as a volatile and active alterity. An uncanny moving figure.



13

My body separates from itself like a wound, slippery
in my hands, organs, skin that is both of me, and other.
Desacralizing my body, it is offered for consumption.

Before and after the archive, there is only sleep.

Photo content and credits (numbers correspond to names of image files)

- 1 *M'other body*. Photo composite by Karmenlara B. Seidman, New York, 2003
- 2 Matthew Seidman as Doc and Stacia French as eWoman. *Shivah/Proper*, Theater Volcofsky, New York. 2003. Photo by Augustine Kim
- 3 *Holy Wa(te)r*. Tiny Volcofsky, New York. 2003. Still from video by Aya Ogawa
- 4 *Contractures*. Karmenlara B. Seidman. New York. 2001. Still from video by Camilla Eeg
- 5 *Holy Wa(te)r*. Tiny Volcofsky, New York, 2003. Still from video by Aya Ogawa
- 6 *Holy Wa(te)r*. Tiny Volcofsky, New York, 2003. Still from video by Aya Ogawa
- 7 *Holy Wa(te)r*. Tiny Volcofsky, New York, 2003. Still from video by Aya Ogawa
- 8 *Holy Wa(te)r*. Tiny Volcofsky, New York, 2003. Still from video by Aya Ogawa
- 9 *Contractures*. Karmenlara B. Seidman. New York, 2001. Still from video by Camilla Eeg
- 10 Matthew Seidman as The Mezuzah Thief. *Sap*, Theater Volcofsky, New York, 1998.
Photo by Theater Volcofsky
- 11 *Holy Wa(te)r*. Tiny Volcofsky, New York, 2003. Still from video by Aya Ogawa
- 12 *Holy Wa(te)r*. Tiny Volcofsky, New York, 2003. Still from video by Aya Ogawa
- 13 *Sheets*. Photo by Matthew Seidman, New York, 2001.

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