

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### In the Event of a Wound: Vi(r)t(u)al Archives of Flesh-and- Blood

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**In the Event of a Wound: Vi(r)t(u)al Archives of Flesh-  
and-Blood**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Abstract

This thesis addresses and analyses the ‘virtual,’ unsighted potentials of the artistic and critical practice of performance through abstraction, deconstruction and remediation of its ‘body.’ It argues that the ontological distinction between material and immaterial representation can be dislodged by the proposition of an *ontogenesis* of emergence of the dynamic dimension of *affect*. Such self-organising, recursive system of forces and energies elicits change and transformation expanding the sensual and aesthetic practice of performance as *alive* art.

These arguments connect concepts from affect and political theory with philosophical ideas of virtual multiplicity, relationality, counter/intuition and (dis)individuation passing via the work of Brian Massumi, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Jacques Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy and Emmanuel Levinas, as well as other theorists. The thesis also intersects methodologies and epistemologies from philosophy, science and art with the radical contingencies implicit in performance (art) as a ‘technology of existence’ (in)formed by tendencies of distribution of affective intensities and temporal (re)modulation of shared perception.

The point of reference for exploring the parameters of affective distribution and emergent aesthetics is the epistemological gap opened by the ‘wounded body’ as it figures in the folds of representation. Regarding the wound as a state of ‘emergency’ of an ungraspable reality, and as a sensitised and sensitising condition of being-with and doing-without, I pay attention to the demands this figure makes on the timely dimension of (in)human being. This disruptive and interruptive presence expresses the singularity of the experience of openness in the ways that life comes into being exposed to the plurality of its (im)possibilities. Exercising a kind of pressure on the body, this critical point ruptures temporality itself in the way that the (in)human becomes effective/affective beyond its finality.

Key works such as *Trio A* and *MURDER and murder* by Yvonne Rainer, *Self Unfinished* by

Xavier Le Roy, and the performance series *Resonate/Obliterate* by Julie Tolentino and Ron Athey will be parsed as singularities revelatory of the intuitive type of creative experience that transduces the lived experience of the synesthetic dimension of affect, and the parameters of processual and emergent aesthetics. Ultimately, I propose to imagine these instances of performance as a vital archive of (perceptive) experience that enables a bodily state of intensity and emergency to flesh out an experiential, visceral field of affective modes of becoming and becoming-other in related mo(ve)ments of *aliveness* traversed by the ungrasped pulse of a past yet to be/come.

## Acknowledgements

This work was created not *for* but *with* others, so I dedicate it entirely to 'we.'

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# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Foresight and Sideshadowing</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1. No-thing Here...</b>	<b>23</b>
<i>It's the Atmosphere</i>	23
<i>Cry/iptic Analogies</i>	29
<i>Ghosts in the Mirror</i>	33
<i>No-thing, What of That?</i>	40
<i>I Feel It</i>	52
<i>Mind the Crack</i>	61
<i>In the Cut</i>	77
<i>Flesh-and-Blood</i>	87
<b>2. Where's the Passion? Where's the Minimalism? Or, How Yvonne Rainer Turns on the Facts of Her Feelings by Impersonating, Approximating and End Running Around Her Selves and Others.' Or, Why Are We Still Looking at <i>Trio A</i>?</b>	<b>92</b>
<i>Despoiled Views</i>	92
<i>Unseemly Underbelly</i>	97
<i>Still Moving</i>	104
<i>Where's the Passion?</i>	108
<i>Hiding in Plain Sight</i>	114
<i>The One Next Door</i>	121
<i>Geist Out of the Closet</i>	126
<i>Feeling Exposed</i>	132
<i>Once More, With Feelings</i>	138
<b>3. Crabface, Wounded Woman and Buttman – Refiguring Moving, Infecting Temporalities</b>	<b>146</b>
<i>Crabface</i>	146
<i>Murderous Sensibilities</i>	150
<i>Wounded Woman</i>	155
<i>Vis-à-Vis Ethics</i>	160
<i>(Thou Shalt Not) Kill Your Darlings</i>	166
<i>Giving Face to Face</i>	170
<i>The Monstrance of Time</i>	182
<i>Rites of Passing</i>	187
<i>Self Unfinished Business</i>	192
<i>Headlessly Human</i>	195
<i>Buttman</i>	202
<i>Crab Times</i>	212
<b>4. Transform Boundaries: Julie Tolentino's and Ron Athey's Unsettling Fresh-and-Blood Archives</b>	<b>219</b>
<i>Plates and Planes: Unsettled Grounds and Transform Boundary</i>	219
<i>Panes and Pains: Unsettled Boundaries and Transformative Grounds</i>	222
<i>Suspect Terranes</i>	227
<i>Open Corpus</i>	235
<i>Disturbing Grounds</i>	238
<i>Born(e) Again Backwards</i>	241

<i>(G)Hosting the Other</i>	252
<i>Monstrous Affinities</i>	259
<i>Faulty Bloodlines</i>	263
<i>Willfully (Un)Bound</i>	272
<i>Sharing No-thing</i>	286
<i>Enraptured</i>	293
<b>Becoming Grounds</b>	<b>294</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>308</b>

## Foresight and Sideshadows

“[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.]”<sup>1</sup>

In this staggering bracketed segment of “Time Passes,” the third chapter of Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, the narrator abruptly introduces the first deeply dramatic event of the novel. The square brackets, rhetorically the splicing form that relays some missing ‘piece’ or that aids the perception of it, stretch out for a long clause and two phrases before Mr. Ramsay and readers alike stumble into the void of Mrs. Ramsay’s death, suddenly losing the order of the(ir) physical world. Together, we are thrown in the midst of a critical juncture that collapses the body’s sense of its bearings, inclining our orientations and dispositions, pulled as we are into refiguring our relative geographies.

In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Sigmund Freud draws the analogy of irrecoverable grief – melancholia – with the “open wound” of the ego’s bleeding out through its pierced margins.<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Rickels, on the other hand, notes the etymological association of mourning – in the German *trauer* – with “falling, dropping or casting down.”<sup>3</sup> Hence, perhaps, we can refigure the affective dimension of loss as: the wound whose bleeding falls into the space of a void. What rebounds from the point of impact are the *revenants* or phantoms of the experience; projectiles of what possibilities may arise out of and beyond grief. Call these “cathectic energies”<sup>4</sup> or call them simply “affects,” they will later return to be addressed.

These writings shape and gather around a marginal void, a phenomenal wound that opens at

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, 1989), 128.

<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1957), 253.

<sup>3</sup> Laurence A. Rickels, *Aberrations of Mourning: Writing on German Crypts* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1998), 13.

<sup>4</sup> This is Freud’s term.



the edge of the already known as an abyssal sign, appeal and demand for attention.

Wandering off through the stretched space and time of this expanse, ideas, thoughts and substance do not (trans)fix themselves but merely accept their limits and take them in. This acceptance comes through the critical practice of lingering on and *with* the mixed feelings of impending peril, loss, disorientation, but also hope, enjoyment and surprise of an extremely vivid and overwhelming incommensurability and ungraspability.

Following these sensible threads, then, I seek to understand something more of the nature of what might lie beyond, or unconsciously within, these 'critical' mo(ve)ments.<sup>5</sup> I seek to give articulation, which is to say a form, and give sense, which is to say a substance, to that which by virtue of being de-void – fantasmal – has no recognized shape or consistency. I seek to balance out that which can be described in language and that which cannot. I seek to find the capacity to figure, to imagine, to desire, and thus to travel from this void into the world of life and death – and life *with* death. Not surprisingly then, the resulting collection of stories is distilled and approximated from personal and social *events* that bring with them the foresight – or foreshadow – of this latter extremity.

The narratives relaying the 'particular' experience of the private *and* cultural event of the wound – the mark of injury, trauma or illness *in* and *of* the body – begin with a disturbance of life, with an interruption, one that is *felt* as a shock that preeminently seems to anticipate death. Yet, when we come to the heart of these experiences they also foreground the potential *feelings* of bodies operating in the face of disaster. Going beyond the biomedical framework for wounded bodies, sociologist Arthur W. Frank sees the condition of the ill body as an extreme event – or set of events – that becomes the *foreground* to express the singularity of its (hi)story. He writes: “[t]he body-self whose foreground is dominated by threat is unmade, but unmaking can be a generative process; what is unmade stands to be

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<sup>5</sup> I will be using this bracketed form throughout to figure the continuous encroachment of the space of the moment with the time of movement.

remade.”<sup>6</sup>

The wound concerns what we have partial, but not complete, foresight over: it foreshadows the depth of finitude; a measure we cannot fully estimate as it registers an uncanny event that lies on a *degree* of difference which exceeds our powers. Yet, by casting the intensity of this shadow *aside* we can make a more open view of the use of time possible. Gary Saul Morson's concept of time shadows becomes useful here. Morson explains how in narrative “[t]he term foreshadowing indicates backward causation. A spatial metaphor for a temporal phenomenon, it is a shadow cast in front of an object; the temporal analog is an event that indicates (is the ‘shadow’ of) another event to come.”<sup>7</sup> This shady figuration throws into evidence a predestined event where time becomes foreclosed:

When a storm foreshadows a catastrophe, the storm is there *because* the catastrophe follows; it is an effect of that future catastrophe visible in temporal advance much as the shadow of an object may be visible in spatial advance. Because the future is already there – is substantial enough to cause earlier events and to send signs backwards – foreshadowing ensures a temporality of inevitability.<sup>8</sup>

However, Morson recognises how the genuinely eventful time of life does not indulge in this narrative symmetry but is instead set in open time with “loose ends.” These more capacious and extendable endings consist of alternative courses of events and possibilities foregrounded by what Morson calls “*sideshadowing*” – the co-emergence of shadows cast on the present from the sides adding an excess to the story that divaricates time:

Alternatives always abound, and, more often than not, what exists need not

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Ethics, and Illness* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), 172.

<sup>7</sup> Gary Saul Morson, “Sideshadowing and Tempics,” *New Literary History* 29.4 (Autumn 1998): 601.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 601, original emphasis.

have existed. Something else was possible, and sideshadowing is used to create a sense of that 'something else.' Instead of casting a shadow from the future, it casts a shadow 'from the side,' that is, from the other possibilities. Along with an event, we see its alternatives; with each present, another possible present. Sideshadows conjure the ghostly presence of might-have-beens or might-bes.<sup>9</sup>

The consequences for time are concrete: "[i]n sideshadowing [...] the actual and the possible, are made simultaneously visible. This is not a simultaneity *in* time but *of* times; we do not see contradictory actualities, but one possibility that was actualized and another that could have been but was not. Time itself acquires a double and, often, many doubles. A haze of possibilities surrounds each actuality."<sup>10</sup> Hence, whereas the wound's *foreshadowing* reveals the shape of an impending (no)future, *sideshadowing* conjures the weather, the atmosphere of actual events that might indeed have happened differently, that are 'present' as other possibilities, or that are yet to be/come possible, alternative futures.

Both these time shadows gain significance in the narrative of this thesis in the way their emergence can make temporalities (be)come open and loose in the space of experience. By letting these registers exist 'together' and 'beside' each other, I intend to propose an *ecstatic model* of reaccessing, relaying, and relating the *event* whose "foreshadowings" convey the *sense* of the on-going experience of being *alive* in the gap opened by the inevitability of death, and whose "sideshadowing" cast its possibilities beside themselves, dragging it into the vortex of time,<sup>11</sup> toward and away from catastrophe, and beyond our foresight or foreshadow of it.

These com-possibilities are invested with *affects* expressed as the virtual, ghostly co-presence of potentials emerging from the 'open wound.' Before returning to the concerns of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 601-2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 602, original emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> This is another concept advanced by Morson that regards time as a whirlpool or as a black hole that converges several different reasons and events into one single point; the point of a catastrophe, here conceived as the wound that radicalizes and disseminates disturbances.

this thesis, I here wish to sketch something of a context for the critical workings of the affective dimension.

The term affect has been broadly<sup>12</sup> used in critical theory to designate the sensible forces of life that either enhance or diminish the body's power to act, engage and connect.<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze contends that this energetic investment is the very basis of embodied organisation. He writes: "[b]odies are not defined by their genus or species, by their organs and functions, but by what they can do, by the affects of which they are capable – in passion as well as action."<sup>14</sup> Partly inspired by Deleuze, Brian Massumi expands on these ideas defining affect as a physical energy transferred between individuals vis-à-vis communicative processes making them more and less energised. Notably, for Massumi affects are "inhuman," "pre-subjective," "visceral" forces and intensities that influence thinking and judgment but that are separate from these. In fact, he notes: "the primacy of the affective is marked by a gap between *content* and *effect*."<sup>15</sup>

Massumi also emphatically sets *emotion* – that is the "subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience, which is from that point onward defined as personal"<sup>16</sup> – apart from *affect* as "unqualified intensity"<sup>17</sup> inasmuch as it is "a suspension of action-reaction

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<sup>12</sup> Different theoretical trajectories fly under the makeshift flag of affect studies. Notably, whilst the work of Gilles Deleuze, with and without Félix Guattari, sets the post/anti-psychoanalytical tract of affective criticism, the writings of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Lauren Berlant gesture towards the contributions of psychoanalysis and psychology to reshape political critique in terms of affect. See Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Duke University Press, 2008). Also see Patricia Ticineto Clough's famous title *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007) for an overview of the increasing investment of critical theory in affect, and Jonathan Flatley's study *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2008) for a lucid distinction between affect, emotion, feeling, and mood in current criticism.

<sup>13</sup> See Clough, *The Affective Turn*, 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Pernet, *Dialogues*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 60.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 24.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that Massumi's understanding of affect as intensity or potential connectedness is deeply invested with the works of Henri Bergson, Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and William James and their having been read together with recent theories of complexity and chaos.

circuits and linear temporality in a sink of what might be called ‘passion.’”<sup>18</sup> Massumi explains this as a difference between “quality” – the enunciation through which emotion is linked to cognition – and “the expressive event” – an intensity that is experienced on the body without or before cognition affirms the feeling. Ultimately, affect resonates, it spreads itself; it is uncertain, open, while emotion is feeling that becomes channelled and codified into cognitive and discursive practices.

These theories are upheld by other theorists such as Teresa Brennan,<sup>19</sup> who similarly relays affect as an always present and surging circuit of life energies and conjectures that travel between people in the face of communicative exchanges tying them together through a “process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect.”<sup>20</sup> For Brennan, this force, sensed as intuitions, gut feelings, ideas, and beliefs that grip us regardless of precise facts, moves through our bodies and helps constitute our socially constructed life practices mapping out connections, disjunctures and habit behaviours. Like Massumi, she argues that affective energy precedes conscious decisions, cajoling us into habituated – Butler would use the word sedimented – movements that are valorised through repetition and that are separate from our “slower linguistic consciousness, which formulates the reasons for our actions, [and] claims intentionality after the fact.”<sup>21</sup> Specifically, for Brennan the distinction is between affect and feeling which she defines as “sensations that have found the right match in words.”<sup>22</sup> Feelings are thus expressive of the function of discernment; they are thoughtful, while affects are thoughtless.

Whatever else may be meant by the terms *affect*, *feeling*, *emotion*, it seems that affects express a tendency not towards language but a continuity and singularity of *bodily performances* as noncognitive, corporeal processes or states. Affect is, in Massumi’s words,

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>19</sup> But also Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, and Kathleen Stewart.

<sup>20</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 5.

“irreducibly bodily and autonomic.”<sup>23</sup> In these writings, I will rely on these theorists and their ideas whilst making no attempt at marking these nominal distinctions in the belief that the charge of these terms lies only in the thick *affective* atmosphere of the *feeling* together of their *emotional* differences. However, the argument that I find most persuasive and that will inform the mood of my work is Massumi’s move to think of affect as the relationality inherent in every living process, in his formulation as:

a two-sidedness *as seen from the side of the actual thing*, as couched in its perceptions and cognitions. Affect is *the virtual as point of view*, provided the visual metaphor is used guardedly. For affect is synesthetic, implying a participation of the senses in each other: the measure of a living thing’s potential interactions is its ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into those of another.<sup>24</sup>

The very concrete motion of positing affects as “virtual synesthetic perspectives”<sup>25</sup> effectively helps letting go of the formal opposition between the concrete and the abstract and putting away the whole opposites’ family. Furthermore, Paula Caspão draws out the political potential of these dispositions:

affect brings about a multitude of openings for more senses, more thought, more action, more whatever, that leads perception to its becoming critical of what is right now, of what was or has just been, or of what will possibly be. In a register closer to Rancière, this also means it is through these operations that affect can render perceptible new networks of sensing. Affect functions as a ‘critical point’ insofar as it can dismantle legitimate orders of discourse as well as definite

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<sup>23</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 28.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 35, original emphasis.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

relations between words, bodies, minds, actions, and objects.<sup>26</sup>

In this study, I recognise how similar affective movements and potentials find their 'ends,' without finalisation, in particular bodily experiences that surge within the frame of artistic, critical and aesthetic events that I here gather under the loose and slippery term *performance*. I argue that this technology of synesthetic 'spacing' and 'timing' of affectivity situates a (re)mediated encounter that places its intuitive fulcrum in the relationality of its *eventness* and its movements of continuous (re)making.

Creating a scene that is mimetic and citational of life but whose disruptive scale and intensity operate like a fissure – a wound – in the ordinary and the everyday, performance can be thought of within the frame of a French philosophical tradition that takes the event as an encounter with the unassimilable and the instantiation of a new truth; at once as an irruption and unexpected arrivant,<sup>27</sup> an event surprising and unpredictable,<sup>28</sup> and an emergence at "the edge of the void."<sup>29</sup> Within this ruptured – and rapturous – frame, the body(self) of experience is acted, moved, displaced, carefully designed and constructed in a continuous referential deferral. Like the void formed by the cut in the flesh, this extra-ordinary event divaricates the interstitial space from which subjects are called into being.

The creative instances here investigated embrace the epistemological gap opened by the wounded body as it figures – and indeed disfigures – the systems of representation pushing beyond the vulnerable surface of visibility and individuation to embrace the emergence of

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<sup>26</sup> Paula Caspão, "Stroboscopic Stutter: on the not-yet-captured ontological condition of limit-attractions," *TDR: The Drama Review* 51.2 (Summer 2007): 144.

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Derrida can be said to have inaugurated the French poststructuralist theory of the event with the essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1978), in which he conceives of the event as that which decenters structure and structuration. In a much later publication, "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Winter 2007), he writes: "[o]bviously, if there is an event, it must never be something that is predicted or planned, or even really decided upon" (441).

<sup>28</sup> See Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Surprise of the Event," in *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 175. Badiou's post-structuralist configuration of the event suggests that the indiscernibility is an essential trait of any event. He also characterizes the truth that the event instantiates as a "ruptur[e] with the order which supports it, never as an effect of that order" (xii).

singularities that are relational, transindividual and intersensory. The emergence of the wound mobilises powerful perceptive and affective mechanisms activated on the basis of intensity, temporality, spatiality – embodied processes through which one can attend to the minutiae of a (hi)story in isolation from the material nature of its finality. Exercising a kind of pressure on the body, this critical point of rupture posits perception as aesthetics, or as a wonderfully painful force-effect (re)appearing as intensity that explodes temporality beyond the human limit. This somaticised effect emerges as the already codified trace of a self-disjunctive event, an affective imprint of literality and metaphoricity that pushes to the surface.

To discuss the stories foreshadowing and the representations sideshadowing this poignant aperture of experience beside one another necessarily implies a tropological inflection. Frank responding to Emmanuel Levinas' ethical principle of sharing the wound of an 'other' notes how: "any person's suffering is irreducible: being nothing more than what it is, suffering can have no meaning. Irreducible suffering can never be compared. But here the argument turns on itself. Once it is understood that suffering cannot be compared, then it *is* possible to speak of different sufferings in the same story, because there is no comparison."<sup>30</sup> Hence, "the disease that sets the body apart from others becomes, in the story, the common bond of suffering that joins bodies in their shared vulnerability."<sup>31</sup>

In what follows, I will process the unstable morphological and ideological figurations of this irreducible share-ability mainly via an analogical method. This approach works through an embodied tropism that allows a practice of theorizing that relates different entities by establishing a 'semblance'<sup>32</sup> of some kind between them without assimilating their forms, functions or effects. The use of metaphor in relation to wounding events remands to Susan Sontag's critical meditations on the bearings of cultural tropes on the pain of illness and

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<sup>30</sup> Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, 179, original emphasis.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, xi

<sup>32</sup> The implication of this term, here used to name a virtuality through which an actual reality appears, will become more apparent in the following chapter.



disease. In her 1978 essay *Illness as Metaphor*, Sontag, herself a cancer patient, vehemently declared: “[m]y point is that illness is *not* a metaphor, and that the most truthful way of regarding illness – and the healthiest way of being ill – is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking.”<sup>33</sup>

However, tropological mechanisms make up the flesh of the human lifeworld as much as our bodies and their surroundings do. What Sontag defines as the rhetoric and ideological ill of metaphor – the aesthetic and cultural imagination that violently rewrites a ‘sense’ of the body – can indeed skip the stage of transcription and reappear as a kind of ‘semblomatic’ affect. In her writing, Sontag recognises the persistence of particular metaphors as “validating so many possible subversive longings and turning them into cultural pieties.”<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, Massumi notes that piety (or pity) can completely ‘undermine’ the ‘potential’ of the other’s suffering:

having pity for someone who occupies a category that is not socially valorised, or expressing moral outrage on their behalf, is not necessarily helpful in the long run, because it maintains the category and simply inverts its value sign, from negative to positive. It’s a kind of piety, a moralizing approach. It’s not affectively pragmatic. It doesn’t challenge identity-based divisions.<sup>35</sup>

The way cultural practice and theory reflect (on) the wound, I argue, must figure out the tropes fleshing out the “subversive longings” that can enact a kind of resistance to moralising pieties via their autonomous potential for affective/effective action. By weaving together a material and imaginative grammar of carnal metaphors, I will follow those impulses that move toward recognizing, refiguring, and remediating some ‘thing’– an infectious quality, some perilous

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<sup>33</sup> Susan Sontag, “Illness as Metaphor,” in *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 3.

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

<sup>35</sup> Brian Massumi, “Navigating Movements: An Interview with Brian Massumi,” interview by Mary Zournazi, *21•C Magazine*, 2002. <<http://www.brianmassumi.com/interviews/NAVIGATING%20MOVEMENTS.pdf>>.

potency, and sometimes just a (bad) feeling – that arising from the wound begs for cultural, social and political attention.

In her intellectual trajectory ‘towards Levinas,’ Butler offers a turn (away) from ethics that articulates the trope of the wound as that which stands for the splitting of the subject but also for the rupture the other is the result of:

This subject is, moreover, from the start split by the wound of the Other (not simply the wounds that the other performs, but a wound that the other somehow is, prior to any action). The task of this fundamentally wounded subject is to take responsibility for the very other who, in Lévinas’ terms, ‘persecutes’ that self. [...] In effect, I do not take responsibility for the other who wounds me after the wound has appeared. My openness to the other is what allows for the wound and what also at the same time commands that I take responsibility for that Other.<sup>36</sup>

An ethical relation of responsibility to others seems also to bear a violent mark that for Butler lays at the heart of any ethical demand. Whilst rejecting ethics as a ground for moral practices that ignore their own violence and righteousness, she pushes for an (en)active sensibility that remains alert and resistant to this peril via continuous *acts* of self-effacing critique that challenge its very value and responsibility, even without a guarantee of its positive fulfilment. This kind of ethics can only persist ‘in the face’ of violence; it can only be *performed* (as well as, inevitably, mis-performed).<sup>37</sup> The critical positions elaborated in the following writings are indebted to this ethical susceptibility. In my account of artistic and creative negotiations of perceptive and aesthetic procedures, it is precisely the active involvement of what Deleuze

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<sup>36</sup> Judith Butler, “Ethical Ambivalence,” in *The Turn to Ethics*, eds. Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hansson, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Routledge 2000), 18-9.

<sup>37</sup> These last reflections are critically indebted to the review work of Joanna Zylinska, “On the Impossibility of Finding One’s Way to Ethics,” in *Culture Machine*, <<http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/226/207>>.

referred to as “the violence of sensation”<sup>38</sup> that can be enacted and performed ethically.

Hence, I depart, again and again, time after time, from the wound – the nexus of violent forces – to question how to negotiate and navigate the ethical encounter with incommensurable ‘otherness’ and inscrutability. What is ethically crucial in the interface with this irreducible vulnerability is that its uncertain and enigmatic aspects cannot either be eliminated or subsumed within a homogeneous moral universe. Butler suggests how: “[i]t may be that the question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of the schemes of intelligibility, the sight where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed, where one is, as it were, at the limits of what one knows and still under the demand to offer and receive recognition.”<sup>39</sup> Butler positions the parameters of livable and viable lives within the very conditions of their impossibility, where no commonality or unitary foundation can be postulated. This ‘uncommon ground,’ I argue, creates the space and distance necessary for an ethics of unassimilable and irreducible co-attention that the challenge of violence demands.

Mapping the ways in which the opening of such critical fissure tropes towards a relation with the other, and what some of the consequences of this turn are, I will be looking at scenes of life abstracted from performance events that I consider to be exemplary of how aesth-ethical acts should not just orbit around the material and common-sense urgencies they respond to. Rather, the contingencies, as well as complicities and complexities, of their affective discharge must be regarded with a particular attention to the time and space of interconnectedness – of response- and sense- ability. Through these connective channels the wound can be perceived not in terms of an excessive empathy *as* pathology, but rather as a result of contagion due to a removed proximity – what following Lacan I will call *extimacy* – to

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<sup>38</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

<sup>39</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (Fordham University Press, New York, 2005), 21-2.

the other. These (im)possible intimacies exist across boundaries and limits despite the fact that they cannot always be crossed.

No body can escape the gravity of the void, which can be described again as an entanglement with others in a state of perpetual falling that flips our orientations. This thesis tries to *feel* its way about different notions of being, and being-with this collective rupture that offers an alternative understanding or different notion of co-presence and attention. Massumi conceives this as “caring for belonging,” which is “a *caring* for the relating of things *as such* – a politics of *belonging* instead of a politics of identity, of correlated emergence instead of separate domains of interest attracting each other or colliding in predictable ways.”<sup>40</sup>

To rethink the ‘becoming’ aesthetics and technics of artistic performance through the com-possibilities of affect – *as* the com-passions of ‘belonging’ – can resist the processes that (re)produce us as individuals in personal and social ways. This critical movement can instead address us toward attending deeply to the potentialities, traumatic as well as ethical, of co-affectivity and trans-subjective transmission of processing life, and more:

Because it’s all about being in *this* world, warts and all, and not some perfect world beyond or a better world of the future, it’s an empirical kind of belief.

Ethical, empirical – and creative, because your participation in this world is part of a global becoming. So it’s about taking joy in that process, wherever it leads, and I guess it’s about having a kind of faith in the world which is simply the *hope* that it *continue* ... But again it is not a hope that has a particular content or end point – it’s a desire for more life, or for more to life.<sup>41</sup>

The stories I tell here are not my own, but they come from the shared void of not knowing and having to tell what hurts, and finding no place in the body for this pain and no words to exact it.

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<sup>40</sup> Massumi, “Navigating Movements,” original emphasis.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., original emphasis.

As this sharp realisation reverberated along my spine and in my knees, across both of my wrists, I found again and again the desire to re-articulate its feelings with other stories, with other voices through which the wound can create a passage, and a passing on. Some of these passages I remember by heart, however I try to burden this lump of flesh (and blood) as little as possible. So it is my gut and my lungs that take the breath of the first chapter condensing the figure of an alternative agent – the phantom limb – the “dark precursor,” to say it with Deleuze, that:

by virtue of its own power [...] is the in-itself of difference of the ‘differently different’ – in other words, difference in the second degree, the self-different which relates different to different by itself. Because the path it traces is invisible and becomes visible only in reverse, to the extent that it is traveled over and covered by the phenomenon it induces within the system, it has no place other than that from which it is ‘missing,’ no identity other than that which it lacks: it is precisely the object = x, the one which is ‘lacking in its place’ as it lacks its own identity.<sup>42</sup>

This figurative element is the *differenciator* which makes ‘different’ more apparent, the space between dissimilars that connects them through their difference. Its inherent abstraction – virtuality – is here posed as the ‘ends’ of communication within the operative systems of artistic performance as the invisible, affective force that puts bodies into immediate relation to one another; it is, in other words, the (visceral) gap that designates the space of thinking and feeling.

I store the following chapter in the sack of the liver where Yvonne Rainer’s self-effacing gestures dwell in agonistic interaction with my own small daily abashments. Shame disrupts

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<sup>42</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 119.

and reconfigures everyday life. Rainer's choreographies evoke the force of a 'common' feeling that re-arranges formal relations as uncertain at best. The manifestation of this uneasy togetherness in the artist's signature work, I propose, is best described as an entanglement with the other that results, by a paradoxical turn, in a relational ethics of cohabitation and co-assistance that makes mutuality an ordinary feature of social life. This is an active relation that reverses and transforms the compulsion to 'look away' into the possibility of multiple movements and turns that assume the form of a more comfortable disposition. Through the contact afforded by shame, I suggest, we might begin to re-conceptualize 'some' formal configurations of the postmodern avant-garde in terms of interactive moments of rupture within the operations of a shared structure of feelings.

The third chapter keeps reappearing behind my eyes; a place before tears and behind the shock of light. Here, in a similar vein, Yvonne Rainer and Xavier Le Roy figure violent sensation vis-à-vis an ethics of relations. Their movements and catachrestic figurations present the disturbing potential for deviance there where difference is most expressive: in your face. Whereas Rainer bares the wound of multifaceted personal, social and political (attempted) murders, Le Roy presents us with alternative morphologies to address how to re(as)semble the figure of the (in)human. Their separate images and visions, I propose, communicate across temporal and spatial gaps a shared 'sense' of politics. Between them, we cannot immediately detect a precursory function of one over the other; instead we can map a trajectory that communicates via a peripheral condition of being beside each other in syncopated moments of contact. Dramatically, what we experience is not a set of figurations of bodies but a new sense of politics emerging at the edge of their visibility, power and function. The sensual remediation of the coming face-to-face with incommensurable difference as a democratic event, which is key to what is ethically at stake in my analogical reasoning in this section and further, implies a temporalisation of politics in the function of its relationality.

I take the last chapter where it comes, for there is no organ that alone can carry the charge of its 'willfulness.' Deposited in bodies and under the skin, this inflected and infecting force will emerge as a document of the wayward, the wandering, and the deviant blood histories that materialise in the 'live transmissions' of Ron Athey and Julie Tolentino's radical acts. Reaching the grounds of disagreement, disturbance and resistance, these artists' perverse vision points to an active ethics of reciprocal hosting. However, I argue, this relationality does not involve the kind of conjunctions or affiliations of merging – marrying – and communion of blood through which the other is subsumed. Instead, it provides alternative routes for the past of the flesh to project the future, and for new possibilities – through renewed blood – to prompt the self to engage the time of life and death *beside* the other.

Ultimately, these analogical dispositions may appear counter-intuitive, perverse and anachronistic, however their encounter provides the necessary, albeit insufficient, conditions for attending to the vibrations of past wounds that can extend, from a remove, into resonating potential returns, of something new and different. The effect, I wish, is a kind of a "half-opening" through which the reader can project the breath of a life, and the desire for more. Hence I begin by encouraging you to share the pains and joys, the promise and responsibility, the calamity and dignity of *being-with* the shadows of other lives as they cast vital meaning on our own. I hope you can and will (to) stay the course.

# 1. No-thing Here...

## It's the Atmosphere

In her posthumous volume, *The Transmission of Affect*, Teresa Brennan argues that affect moves between (and into and out of) bodies in a literal, physical sense:

Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and “felt the atmosphere”? [...] The “atmosphere” or the environment literally gets into the individual. Physically and biologically, something is there that was not there before, but it did not originate *sui generis*: it was not generated solely or sometimes even in part by the individual organism or its genes. In a time when the popularity of genetic explanations for social behavior is increasing, the transmission of affect is a conceptual oddity. If transmission takes place and has effects on behavior, it is not genes that determine social life; it is the socially induced affect that changes our biology.<sup>1</sup>

Brennan theorizes affect as the vessel of energies that have a physiological impact more profound and immediate than that of genes. Its material substance permeates and radiates through the atmosphere, penetrates bodies and is transferred between them expanding their possibilities for contact and change. However, there is no biological determinism (reductionism) at play in these transactions; on the contrary, her argument is that transmission is socially and psychologically ‘felt’ and physically and biologically incorporated.

About a year and a half before the final labour of these writings, Brennan, already in her mature years, had adopted a daughter, Sangi, whom she loved “with a fierce, unguarded love.” In the foreword to the publication, Woden Teachout charts the intensity of this

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<sup>1</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (op. cit.), 1-2.



relationship via an anecdote:

When Sangi was caught in Australia waiting for the proper immigration papers, Teresa went wild with anxiety. She would not do her scholarly work until she had exhausted every avenue of possibility for the day. She spoke to Australians, Americans, Nepalis, diplomats, senators, and minor officials of all kinds; she wooed, she cajoled, she threatened. She called Sangi every night, oblivious to the expense. She spoke eloquently of how interconnected the two of them were and of how much a part of herself she felt Sangi to be. “I feel like I’m missing a limb,” she told me.<sup>2</sup>

Brennan here embodies the same relation that she intellectually excavated in her work between bodies and signification – a relation that hinges on affects. Their energy and intensity changes our very physiology as a force that gets under the skin and influences our bodily workings. The transmission and escalation of this emotional energy depend on a (shared) focus of attention, presence, distance and proximity, as well as absence. Her “language of the flesh”<sup>3</sup> finds expression in the naming of a symptom, of a syndrome that describes the actual sensation of feeling dispossessed in one’s own body. The affliction that Brennan laments – the physical sensation of the presence of something missing, that does not let her rest – is consistent in a figurative sense with a pathological condition commonly known as ‘phantom-limb syndrome.’<sup>4</sup>

Phantom-limb syndrome registers an uncanny and somewhat mysterious corporeal

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<sup>2</sup> Both quotes *ibid.*, ix. On December 9, 2002, Brennan was struck by a car as she was crossing a street, just as she had almost finished editing the manuscript. She never regained consciousness and died on the following February. Woden Teachout was her long-time assistant and literary executrix, together with Brennan’s research assistant Sandy Hart, she reviewed the final manuscript for posthumous publication.

<sup>3</sup> This is the phrase that Brennan uses to refer to the ‘intelligence’ of corporeal expression.

<sup>4</sup> I am not suggesting here that the figural expression can substitute the physical experience of missing an actual part of the body. However, I will examine later how the resources of metaphoric language can provide a valuable element in the task of foregrounding an interconnective understanding of carnal affects, their ‘lived’ and ‘felt’ consequences on the body, and the modes of expressing such conditions.

phenomenon – that is, the persistence of sensation or pain in a missing part of the body.<sup>5</sup>

People affected retain the ‘felt’ consciousness of still possessing that which is no longer there – the lost ‘thing’ – which in return(ing) itches, sends spasms or cramps. Often the phantom recurs as a painful state that can fade in time or persist for long periods; the pain can be subdued or become crippling. The phenomenon is commonly associated with limbs, but ghost feelings can also be felt in the breast, parts of the face, and internal viscera. There are also known cases of phantom erections, and menstrual cramps after hysterectomy. If to some extent somatic and psychological affections of absence or connective memories can account for these manifestations, the syndrome remains a medical and epistemological oddity that alters the neurologic make up of the living body. Following Brennan’s logic, we can say that the affects and meanings of phantom limbs remain up in the air!

Beyond scientific and ontological explanation, phantom limbs (chronically) appear, and reappear, as affective experiences of such (in)corporeal intensity that literally escape grasp. The abstraction of theory and the organising principles of science cannot fully apprehend the body’s aching desire to touch – and to be touched – as it yearns for its missing pieces. Our practices of understanding can only figure lines of juncture reaching past what is already known and visible, into the diffuse atmosphere of transporting affects. My argument here is that the void that phantoms represent allows an opening into the nature of the sensible, also in terms of consideration and regard for the body as a practised and ‘felt’ (f)act of being that holds the ability to transcend itself. This insight allows our bodies and ideas to move away from the (mainly Western) fantasy of the subject’s integrity and self-possession. Daniel Heller-Roazen supplants these delusional projections with one veritable solution about the perception of organic existence as such: “the ultimate delusion may be that sentient beings, in

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<sup>5</sup> Scientific research demonstrates that the condition is present in up to 20% of those congenitally missing one or more limbs, and is considered a common sequel to amputation recurring in over 80% of the cases. The sensation can be painful or non-painful in different degrees. See Joel Katz, “Individual Differences in the Consciousness of Phantom Limbs,” in *Individual Differences in Conscious Experience*, eds. Robert G. Kunzendorf and Benjamin Wallace (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2000), and Ronald Melzack and Patrick D. Wall, *The Challenge of Pain* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

sickness or in health, could perceive their bodies to be wholes composed of anything but ghostly parts.”<sup>6</sup> These particles of inconsistency, I propose, carry and sustain what Brennan calls the “living logic” of attention and affective transmission.

This thesis explores ways of opening up the body – its practices and discourses – to an affective archive that wants to ‘make sense’ of its substance. With this emphasis, what I intend to develop is a method of sensing or intuiting, as well as creating a kind of intelligence about ways of feeling and re-membering ‘with’ the body. Evoking the force of these creative tensions, the following discussions will attempt to establish a connection between two distinct experiential and conceptual domains that may first appear wide apart. Processing an unstable morphological arrangement, I will place the ontological thread linking the ‘wounded body’ to its affective residue alongside the conceptual ligament binding the ‘live event’ to its immaterial<sup>7</sup> remain(der)s. More specifically, in this chapter I will trace the figure of bodily appearance and disappearance in phantom syndrome in the ways it is lived through and processed as the carnal blueprint for regarding the emergence and dissolution of embodiment in the context of cultural performance (art) and its modes of historicity.

These parallel narratives incite us to admit the sensual remediations or aesthetic adaptations of the on-going event of history in consideration of the affective charge that is embedded in the excorporation and recirculation of these same histories. The sensuous reality of feeling oneself in physical contact with a ‘piece’ of the body whilst becoming aware of its disappearance calls for a refiguration of the body’s temporal and spatial dimensions. In order to survive this condition in the (historical) present, one can only regard the whiplash coming from the past as a continuous presence; as the singular experience of an on-going, recurrent mo(ve)ment of affective duration. The parable of phantom sensations will here provide the

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of Sensation* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 270.

<sup>7</sup> This is that which has concrete existence away from the authority of the gaze and the centrality of visual systems of apprehension met by the reach of political economic capture. These terms of tension will be treated extensively in the third chapter.

main archive for tracking the unrelenting sense of 'presentness' in the scene of a crisis that affects the ordinary and the everyday. These documents are derived from stories of bodies made up and being shaped by an incipient state – and sense – of being in passing.

Similarly, the event of performance can be said to be enacting the crisis of representing something fleeting and phantasmatic that persistently proliferates outside of its frame.<sup>8</sup> As an aesthetic project, it foregrounds the work and the world of the (un)conscious on real and imaginary times and spaces, curating a sustained on-goingness that unfolds an affective experience in presence, and *as present*; in the 'here and now.' But also, it works on the present as a-historical anachronism communicating the you-are-there-ness of any *then* present *now* already-past moment that Rebecca Schneider calls "fugitive." Fugitive time regains the charge of past moments on the run in the present. These leaky, syncopated, errant moments playing in the crossfire of time can make things feel "a little uncanny, or dislocated, or unsettling, or queer."<sup>9</sup> It is these 'particular' feelings that I will be pursuing for their unrelenting force and potential to reflect alternative versions of the future.

Phantoms can tell a story about the ways in which reworked intensities and attachments can potentially affect the material world. Re-telling these ghost stories can help process history amidst the resonances of fugitive instances whose sense becomes transmitted in the necessary re-organization of forces and desires. From these aleatory archives, what emerges is a phenomenon and way of knowing, and creating knowledge, that makes sense of things lacking formal or structural guarantees by making – marking – out the figure of a willfulness<sup>10</sup> to behold and be held, to move and be moved, to see and hear the fleeting substance, the fleshy haze of being. These thick and spacious registers of mo(ve)ments lived and stretched out can produce personal, political, and cultural ambits that provide a context to attend and

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<sup>8</sup> I will return to these arguments later in this section.

<sup>9</sup> Schneider, Rebecca, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011), 180. Notably, Schneider follows on: "[t]hey can also feel like downright bad art," but what matters perhaps is that they feel differently.

<sup>10</sup> This term will be amply regarded in Chapter 4.

respond to the alternately traumatic and exhilarating matter of embodiment.<sup>11</sup>

Tracking these shifts enables us to think about being in history as a densely corporeal, experientially felt thing, that figures not the whole, consistent knowledge of *the* subject, *the* body, but a way to work with partial and inconsistent epistemologies immanent to 'being with' and 'living through' different states of embodiment. I will focus on these vitally affective mo(ve)ments of sensation that arise and emanate from the invisible to posit the demands of what I provisionally call, drawing from Drew Leder, an 'ethics of (*dys*)appearance,'<sup>12</sup> which grows out of the body's immediacy and unrepresentability. An ethics of this sort requires theory and practice to sustain and endure rather than suppress or capture the figures of life enmeshed in a – more or less ordinary – crisis. Confronting the presence of these ghostly, critical appearances in social and cultural life demands a change in the practices of knowledge production and transmission. Indeed, the tendency I will follow is to develop a "language of the flesh" sensitive to what Katie Stewart calls "speculation, curiosity, and the concrete [...] the forces that come into view as habit or shock, resonance or impact. Something throws itself together in a moment as an event and a sensation. A something both animated and inhabitable."<sup>13</sup> This *something* that is *no-thing* at all is like an atmosphere that we shall move through, be embedded in, and *feel out*.

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<sup>11</sup> See Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> The use of this terminology will become apparent in the following segments.

<sup>13</sup> Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 4.

## Cryptic Analogies

Phantom limbs are expression of the spectral qualities of experiences that engage in practices, ideas, images and feelings – in history – that despite their singularity embody a mode of existence most generally assumed under the “strange label” of *disability*.<sup>14</sup> Petra Kuppers notes: “[d]isability and (non-italicized, non-slanted) disability are both lyrical: individuating, parsing, a cut in the word, in the flesh, a cut in the social field.”<sup>15</sup> For Kuppers, disability is a touchy/ing concept that adheres to individual bodies and to a social scene, to a structural position as well as an embodied, lived condition. This signifier of ‘embodied difference’ comes to signal the incompleteness and fragmentation of the body in relation not only to physical and functional norms, but also in (dis)respect of social and political codes of appearance and visibility. The social figure – and figuration – of the visibly wounded becomes marked with the disadvantages of being seen, or the threat of becoming invisible, in a system fixated on preventing anomalies in the structures that ensure stability. These banished identities become the ciphers of the dislocation and disfiguration of what constitutes the ‘(in)human.’

This phenomenon is examined at large by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, who describe how the disabled body, in its literal deformations, has historically been used as a way of marking (out) forms of physical deviance, but also as a site for social panic about unruly bodies in general, thus diverting the public gaze from one stigmatised identity to another.<sup>16</sup>

Queer disability theorist Robert McRuer forcefully delineates how “able-bodiedness, even more than heterosexuality, still largely masquerades as a nonidentity, as the natural order of

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<sup>14</sup> Petra Kuppers writes: “[d]isability is a strange label (like most words in identity politics: woman, black, queer, etc),” “Toward a Rhizomatic Model of Disability: Poetry, Performance, and Touch,” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* Volume 3.3 (2009): 228.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 228.

<sup>16</sup> See David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, eds., *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

things,”<sup>17</sup> pointing to how unmarked categories continue to produce their own forms of political erasure. Abandoning all over-sensitivity, McRuer reappropriates the term ‘crip’ – standing for the cripple, the handicapped, the ill, the problem child, or more simply, the human being – to delineate perspectives and practices that intersect the power of both queer and disability culture in the effort to reimagine and reshape “the limited forms of embodiment and desire proffered by the systems that would contain us.”<sup>18</sup>

Such intersectional analysis becomes an invaluable tool to reconsider and re-emerge the figure and figuration of singularities that remain undetectable under the radar of systematic ideologies policing subjectivities, and that can be consistently rendered as ‘queer.’ This term in fact can aggregate panoply of radical and resistantly non-normative modes of being, feeling, desiring and imagining the body. As H. N. Lukes notes “[q]ueer subjectivities mark those whose bodies and longings do not immediately read, those whose pleasures and desires disrupt not just historical norms but also trans-historical tropes.”<sup>19</sup> Remaining alert to the risks of rearranging anomalies and analogies into new vectors of normalizing convergences, and vigilant to the danger of deploying real conditions of living uniquely as tools of discursive abstractions, I will here follow Lukes’s advance to “productively reorient the means and ends of critical theories concerned with how desire, pleasure and embodiment inform projects concerned with performance, in its broader sense, as a site to study dynamic aesthetics, liveness and cultural politics.”<sup>20</sup> Through these pages, I will then ask how crippling queer theory and intersectional analysis might transmit a sense of how performance ‘feels’ about its remain(der)s.

These vital lines of enquiry will attempt to articulate the haunted and haunting ground of the

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<sup>17</sup> Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 88-9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>19</sup> H. N. Lukes, “Causalgia of the Heart: Phantom Limb Syndrome, Disability and Queer Feeling,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19.2 (2009): 228.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 228. Luke’s investigations of phantom-limb phenomena have provided a clear route for interpreting the ethical, intersubjective relationships that will emerge later in this chapter.

'body in pieces' challenging cultural theory – and practice – to face the “disruptive return of the excluded.”<sup>21</sup> Disturbing the peace, these figures outside the 'human' seek to recuperate and reconnect different parts and components – of the social and cultural – that, through laboriously acquired misconditionings, have been erroneously considered detached from each other. This ontological organization integrates and instigates 'spaces of coexistence' in the common grounds of difference that affect, incorporate and transform all things human, and non. In a similar vein, I want to demonstrate the unusual convergence of bodies and phantoms in a discourse rooted in a hauntology of difference that foregrounds an ontology of defiance and resistance, through an ethics of attention and attendance to the life in all its (de)formations.

I here use the term *haunting* following the distinctive and vivid recognition that sociologist Avery F. Gordon gives to “those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what’s been in your blind spot comes into view.”<sup>22</sup> The experience of phantom limb, I propose, is the literal, and sometimes painful, corporeal manifestation of the uncanny dissonance of the body becoming unseated by its own distressing spectres. This reopening of perception, however, does not accommodate vision but the re-emergence of a more pervasive and energetic sense of spatial and temporal contingencies. As Lauren Berlant exposes: “the sensorium created by chronic crisis produces the present as a constant pressure on consciousness that forces consciousness to apprehend its moment as emergently historic.”<sup>23</sup>

The figure of recurrent 'disorder'<sup>24</sup> pre-empts the diffusion of sensation. This sensitised

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<sup>21</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 12.

<sup>22</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xvi.

<sup>23</sup> Lauren Berlant, “Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event,” *American Literary History* 20.4 (Winter 2008): 848.

<sup>24</sup> With this term I refer both to a particular medical condition and a more general state of disruption of the (presumptive) order of things.



condition of existence can bring about an increased effort to adapt and transform – in non-normative ways – and a desiring force to transpose this charge onto the scene of history as ever-present moments – even the past ones – of alertness to the density of experience. These spectral, sensuous textures are felt as an enervating, *seething presence*: “[s]eething, it makes a striking impression; seething, it makes everything we do see just as it is, charged with the occluded and forgotten past. [To perceive haunting is to] comprehend the living effects, seething and lingering, of what seems over and done with, the endings that are not over.”<sup>25</sup> These undead, unfinished, unsighted histories pervade the atmosphere of the present with ‘living affects’ that become transformed, circulated and transmitted. Moving in and out of the shadow, these particles of inconsistency can crucially figure as the substance and evidence of things unseen – a paradoxical and enigmatic archive in ‘flesh-and-blood.’

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 195.

## Ghosts in the Mirror

The question of disability relates to broader socio-cultural conditions that 'disappear' the wounded bodies of the less than whole citizens in favour of the preservation of a model of constitutive integrity. Within this context, I propose that the emblematic *(re)appearance* of phantom-limb syndrome can become the key to unravel how bodies are socially constituted and inhabited within the terms of (dis)integrating bodily schemas. Hence, I wish to extract these figures from the margins of pathological discourses in which they are constrained by stringent normative regimes. This timely removal performs a reconfiguration of the 'wound' of fragmentation as the extension of the possibilities of (dis)embodiment in the cultural, social, and political spheres of existence and interaction. These moves recognise disintegration as a 'lived performance' of being and as the condition of all (in)human becoming.

The body's registers of self-perception, in the relation between seeing, self-seeing and being-seen (from an other's perspective), are intrinsically linked to historically acquired habits and dispositions that converge into sets of schemata, sensibilities and techniques accrued through social disciplines, rituals and performances. It is upon these schemas that the organisation of bodily experience relies for the (simultaneously enabling and constraining) formulation and articulation of itself. These forms of stratified meanings are not necessarily contiguous with the 'appearance' of the physical body but are embedded in the vast field of images which measure its articulations in terms of adequacy to historical practices, uses, and (mis)conceptions. In the midst of these figurations, projections and reflections, corporeal presence itself becomes something that must be continuously figured out, worked through, and re-made.

Phenomenologist Edmund Husserl and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, invoking the notion of

“habitus,”<sup>26</sup> have pointed to the ways in which these cultural agglomerates of corporeal cognitions have, in time, become infused with a certain memory, an idea(l) or ‘image’ that becomes sedimented into its function and structure. What immediately emerges from these ideas is that ‘body image’ (or schema)<sup>27</sup> is less a static outline of the body in a typifying posture than a cumulative *afterimage* of its successive displacements and projections. The discussions about culture, subjectivity, identity and bodies begun in cultural criticism under the influence of post-structuralism and deconstruction have shown how the body – and its constituent parts – cannot be thought as a wholesome biologically given but as an accretionary assemblage of condition(ing)s that render the body, otherwise chaotic and incoherent, recognisable and accessible through recurring patterns.

In particular, gender theorist Judith Butler, extending the phenomenological notion of sedimentation of norms, from any number of prevalent and compelling social functions (fictions), explains how over time this stratification has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into categories – and sexes – which are formulated in a binary relation to one another. Furthermore, she exposes how this sedimented grid of signifying conventions that align physiognomy with a bodily schema are grounded in the semiotic imagery that renders bodies as intelligible. This visual production – or “imaginary formation” – “can be sustained in its phantasmatic integrity only

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<sup>26</sup> Husserl initially used the term *habitus* in his phenomenological explorations of how habits are acquired and become customary. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, ed. Rudolf Bernet, trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 118. However, the term has entered social theory primarily via Pierre Bourdieu (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977]) who describes as *habitus* the sedimented histories of the body that, as “systems of durable, transposable, dispositions,” integrate past experiences through the “matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions” (83). See also Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Marcel Mauss’s classic essay “Techniques of the Body,” in *Economy and Society* 2.1 (February 1973).

<sup>27</sup> Indeed, there is not one single system of representation of the body, both in figure and figuration. The body has historically been classified from many different perspectives (e.g. semantic, emotional, spatial, motor, tactile, visual, proprioceptive, etc.) and described prevalently in terms of opposing sets of properties (e.g. conscious/unconscious, conceptual/non conceptual, dynamic/ static, innate/acquired). Whilst more generally, the term ‘body image’ retains an emphasis on vision and identification, ‘body schema’ reflects aspects of proprioception and action. However, I will here use the terms interchangeably in recognition of their mutuality and for coherence with the sources cited.

through submitting to language and to a marking by sexual difference.”<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, the subject is made possible and is continuously constituted through a process of symbolic citationality and a corporeal language of performatives.<sup>29</sup>

Butler's philosophical enquiry into the psychoanalytic notion of morphology is primary inspired by Jacques Lacan's concept of the body image as a transcendental-phenomenological morphological scheme based on a set of specular relations and (idealised) kinships. The “mirror stage,” as is well known, is Lacan's fundamental paradigm for the genesis of self-perception by and as the projection of a surface.<sup>30</sup> Prior to this emblematic phase, the infant experiences itself only as a body in “bits and pieces;”<sup>31</sup> as fragmentary and discontinuous. At this time, Lacan claims, the infant is exposed in the imaginary to a series of startling “images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body, in short [...] ‘*imagos of the fragmented body*.’”<sup>32</sup> This form of disfigured anatomy is what Lacan calls “*le corps morcelé*,” a body no more or less real than the conceptually unified corpus that will eventually take its place.

Furthermore, the child's initial “motor incapacity and nursling dependency”<sup>33</sup> determines its ‘attachment’ to other (foreign) bodies holding and supporting it, which are subsumed as identical to, and constitutive of, its own image. At the epiphanic moment before the mirror, the infant comes to identify with the visual image of an autonomous whole, the idealised version

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<sup>28</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 41. The implication I sense here is that the body is always already a phantasm.

<sup>29</sup> It must be noted that for Judith Butler it is precisely this social phenomenology that exposes how the sedimentation of history in the body is effected by repeated and ritualised actions and performatives. This very argument has provided a useful tool for the feminist critique of origin histories and bodily essentialism. See Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, and Judith Butler “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (December 1988).

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 1-7.

<sup>31</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 85. These forms of anxiety resonate with socio-cultural fantasies that have always surrounded disabled bodies and disability, particularly in connection with historical representations of the monstrous, see Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: Sage, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 2.

of a 'willed' futurity,<sup>34</sup> in the attempt to disavow its actual inability and disarticulation. This primary identification reveals the formation of the ego as a moment of *méconnaissance* – misperception, misrecognition – a self-determining fantasy summoned in order to assuage the aggressive tension derived from the infant's psychic disconnect between its fragmentary, dependent existence and the perceived elements of external wholeness.

The child's mis-identification of the (whole and coherent) image of the self in the mirror with the (incomplete and insufficient) self who gazes into the mirror is amplified, in an uncanny way, by the adults' persistent confusion of identities in the face of 'things' inhuman upon reflecting on the "mirror." In fact, Lacan's fantastic *mise-en-scène* stages the baby, who has not yet mastered walking or standing, hanging suspended in some kind of mechanical contraption, a 'rig' – a "*trotte-bébé*"<sup>35</sup> – and not, as a remarkable number of accounts speculate, in the m/other's arms (and certainly not the father's). This particular and indeed peculiar *méconnaissance* of seeing the word *mère* – 'mother' – when it isn't there, or mistaking a woman for an object, resonates with an array of historical and cultural mystifications and projections. Via a series of conjuring acts, the bodily self/ego emerges as a recurring figure of misconception that appears precisely at the juncture of the material and the phantasmatic.

The experience of the mirror image is the emblem of a 'virtuality,' which already by itself bears the seeds of alienation and abjection. In fact, the 'sense' of body/self is a constant and complex oscillation between narcissistic investment in one's own flesh and "a necessary self-division and self-estrangement;"<sup>36</sup> a 'missed' identification with an exteriority that is the very means by which our bodies are articulated. The body that one 'has' and the abilities that one

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<sup>34</sup> The temporal dislocation that attends the act is crucial: the infant feels itself to have a bodily coherence and mastery that it does not in fact possess at this stage of development but that it wills eventually to achieve in the future by a present (symbolic) investment in the body that occurs after self-images. These time disorganizations can be explained with what Lacan calls retroaction – the temporality of the future anterior. Such temporal inversions will receive further attention in Chapter 4.

<sup>35</sup> This term is so obscure that the translator leaves the phrase in French. See Lacan *Écrits*, 76.

<sup>36</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 71.

assumes are always the result of a relational *act* through which the transcendence (infinite distance) and the immanence (closest proximity) of the other are sensibly negotiated. Lacan dubs this situation of paradoxical and displaced relatedness as one of *extimité*.<sup>37</sup> The dimension of extimacy<sup>38</sup> blurs the lines between the interior and the exterior by figuring simultaneously the intimate kernel and the foreign body. In this sense, the extimate can be perceived as the *unheimlich* – the uncanny locus where the familiar becomes threatening and anxiety provoking.

This evocation of radical displacement resonates with philosopher Emmanuel Levinas's insights on the ethical significance of embodiment as elaborated in conversation with Lacan's mirror stage. In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas argues that prior to the identification with the image, the constitution of the "lived body" is dependent on exposure to and contact with exteriority, he writes: "[t]o be in one's skin is an extreme way of being exposed."<sup>39</sup> For Levinas, this exposure of the body reveals an ethical 'sense' – or sensibility. In contrast to the epistemological function of (mainly visual) perception, ethical sensibility signifies the vulnerability of the body, its capacity for being affected by others. Objectifying identifications, the radical imaginary of the body inscribes the difference within the body as the other 'without' the self. Here, Levinas's ethical sense can be thought in terms of extimacy in the way that the other intrudes upon identity in an affective way.

The reality of phantom parts manifests itself as an exemplary re-presentation of the threat of an intimacy that comes from 'without' and that makes us literally and metaphorically 'beside ourselves' with the presence of an exteriorised familiarity; an other, phantomatic image of

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<sup>37</sup> For Lacan this is the external intimacy of the traumatic Thing. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 139. Also, Derrida explored this concept in terms of the elusive, internal-external centre in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978).

<sup>38</sup> This is the English translation of the original French.

<sup>39</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 89.

ourselves that hinders any discrete self-reflection. I take this non-figure as an actual reminder/remainder of both the literal body and the desire/fear to ground its difference by severing it from an earlier fundamental diversity, ousted by the pictures created in order to give the notion of self an anchor in the realm of the idea(l). This fixation on 'light reflection' – vision – misrecognizes the dense opacity of the *corps morcelé* as devoid of presence. Yet, even in their ungraspable invisibility, these voids (of absence) reappear as movement – and movement potential – animated by the affects passing through the living materiality of bodies, and things, encroaching.

The radical re-emergence of phantom events re-creates the surface depth of experiences that through movement and reflection reanimate desire – and fear – from its (un)dead ends.

Another 'image' then can be assembled around the gap; a rapture – in the self – derived not from vision but from an extimate sense of things separate but contiguous, mis(recogni)sed but not extinguished, painful yet vital. This felt sensibility of distance in proximity, of identities confused and then returned in lateral spread – beside *one*-self – allows appearance to come face-to-face with the ambiguity of perception, the obliqueness of desire, the ephemerality of identity. To enter these sensory and relational fields is to enter into an intersubjective relationship with things experienced as unknown, as a bottomless abyss that cannot be fathomed. Once we open the thick membrane of the visible, we can be in contact with this 'other' in the real *sense* of the word, and move and be moved by it. It is only through this openness that one can exit oneself and encounter this condition of 'being-with' other images of the self.

The body as it exists – *le corps propre* – only comes into being as being-with the *corps morcelé*. This kind of reciprocal openness does not seek the closure of integral narratives, for making sense by being-with means to attend to the rearticulations and transformations of a body under the pressure of other bodies – and here I mean social, cultural, political as well as

sensate bodies. My intention here is not to resolve these unassimilable relations but rather to trouble their functioning by rendering apparent their complexities and by revealing how much the “body without an image” is always already involved in these encounters. I will now turn to address how this ‘partial’ figure intersects with socio-political conditions in order to reframe the potential of embodied difference, affect and temporality within performance as a practice-zone for contact; as the event of being-with *as* becoming-other.



## No-thing, What of That?

Phantom conditions instigate a breakdown at the particular conjuncture of *being with* what is unknown. As a silence and absence that returns a past presence, this corporeal revenant figures a kind of inverted haunting, in both the sufferer and the observer, in which the body itself becomes disassociated with its own self-image. This confrontation with an alien self-actuality foregrounds the body as an abject 'thing' that can no longer be predicated upon opposing notions of what is 'given' and what is 'made up' in the natural and social domains. Instead, the inconsistent matter of corporeality emerges as something that is unstably bearing upon perception, upon practice, and upon an uncanny 'sense' that unsettles social systems of apprehension. As a syndrome it affects a 'rupture' of standard ontologies and epistemologies by way of a material dispersal. In this sense, we can say that part of what is erupting into perception is precisely that which threatens the dissolution of implicit schemas by revealing even the essential, naturalised, stable body as a purely constructed one.

Michel Foucault's microphysics of power pokes at the notions of historical body schemata in radically anti-essentialist terms, he writes: "[n]othing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self recognition or for understanding other men"<sup>40</sup> – or women in fact. For the philosopher: "the body becomes the inscribed surface of events (traced by articulation in language and dissolved by the pressure of ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (carrying the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration."<sup>41</sup> Following these and previous ideas, I want to pose phantom limb as an emblematic condition that bears on the body the untraceable, diffused sense of the "stigmata of past experience;" an event that exposes and explodes a body marked by "the processes of

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<sup>40</sup> Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 87-88.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

history's destruction of the body"<sup>42</sup> and traversed by the vivid imagery of war, dismemberment, and catastrophe. Paradoxically, I argue, this destructive and disruptive element can become a model of resistance whereby a 'particular' mechanism of dysfunction presupposes a margin of autonomous action free from the ideological binds of controlling systems.<sup>43</sup>

This logic of 'partial resistance' anchors onto Rancière's reading of the body in terms of the reduction and expansion of the practice zones of individuals as parts of a society as whole. Rancière's notion of democratic politics involves the partaking in a part by those who have no official part to play, and it thus also involves a re-partitioning of the distribution of the sensible – the perceptual operating systems of society. However, such actions and disruptions of the sensible are rare for Rancière, and more often than not the attempt to partake in a new organization of political life, by those who have no part to play, fails and is washed away on the shores of politics.<sup>44</sup>

I partly object to this view by proposing a distinction between a mode of partaking of non-official parts and a mode of being part by officially not partaking. In the first case, if the part is acquiescent to the requirement of becoming part, it maintains the appearance of the social as harmony and synchronicity. This actual 'disappearance' whereby the part implicitly recedes into the background of the general unity – or 'good' – is an ordinary feature in the experience of the distribution of power. However, I argue, the supplement that has apparently no longer a part to play in the empirical construction of the whole (social) body, by coming up against it in disagreement creates the condition – and sometimes the necessity – for all the parts of the organism to find new ways of cooperating and coexisting. The phantasmatic imagery of the banished part that reclaims the space of its estrangement for a new re-articulation of its

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>43</sup> With regards to this potential see Foucault's historical analysis of the panoptic system in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

<sup>44</sup> See Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), 39-42.

functions and relations does exactly that.<sup>45</sup>

Sara Ahmed in her survey of historical willfulness exposes a similar relation in the social context where willful parts are not – or no longer – willing to support and carry the whole. For Ahmed this willfulness can become a style of politics: “[t]he willful part, who comes apart, who does not will the reproduction of the whole, who wills waywardly, who wills wrongly, plays a crucial part in a history of rebellion. For some, willfulness is necessary for an existence to be possible. When willfulness is necessary another world becomes possible.”<sup>46</sup> The partaking of those who have no part is here an event that creates alternative modes of resistance against hard-wired wholesome organizations of the social body. At this level of figuration then, we can assume the unfamiliar, estranged (un)intentionality – or partiality – of the phantom to be the mark of a particular, and particularly deviant and resilient, will or agency of parts. By refusing to “successfully” inhabit the norms of the part, to remain background to what is foreground as generalized – this ‘queer’ body (part) can be felt in disagreement, Ahmed notes:

To imagine willfulness in this way would be to keep open the space for parts that are apart; we would not assume apartness or not partness as a threat to the general, but as a sign of its non-exhaustion and openness to futurity. And indeed, if we take up the part of willful parts, we can hear the voices of collective resistance differently, not as assembling a new general body whose rightness is assumed, but as saying “no” to what has been deemed the general body, as refusing to participate in that very body.<sup>47</sup>

An analogous charge can be found, and I will expand on this in the last chapter, in the “NO” –

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<sup>45</sup> It is worth pointing out that such remediations, in clinical cases, are singular and subjective and necessarily contingent on the experience of the phantom’s presence and actions in accordance with the pains – and less often pleasures – it causes. Paradoxically, the potential of this condition to trigger actual changes in the neurological and physiological *partitioning* of the sensible body (to use Rancière’s poignant terminology) can simply be experienced as a profoundly painful existence.

<sup>46</sup> Sara Ahmed, “A Willfulness Archive,” *Theory & Event* 15.3, (2012), <[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v015/15.3.ahmed.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v015/15.3.ahmed.html)>.

<sup>47</sup> This willfulness will acquire a particularly resilient charge and perverse character in Chapter 4.

or I would call “with-out” – movements of young generations (of women and artists) in the West in the 1960s, who called rather successfully for the destruction of the institutions and structures that advocated for self-validating ‘stability’ in cultured forms.

Indeed, this new ‘dysfunctional’ schema of parts in motion, coming up with and against one another,<sup>48</sup> explodes in the face of things,<sup>49</sup> or, as Deleuze and Guattari have indicated, in a thousand plateaus of multiplicities and differences.<sup>50</sup> The representational and experiential field of a non-part – a non-entity – that emerges from carnality becomes the measure of a reality, and its affects, that connects synchronic and asynchronous reflections of being through time – its ‘images’ traveling back and forth through the history of the body, of sociality, constantly composing and decomposing it. The ‘disembodied’ body materialised by phantom sensations has considerable resonances with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of a ‘body without organs’ or ‘BwO’ – an extensive form of becoming that exceeds the organic form.

The uncanny experience of feeling, holding, moving, hearing<sup>51</sup> and thinking with a shapeless, formless and silent materiality necessarily reconstructs or reconstitutes human space by the splicing or splitting of its boundaries and organisational structures, or we could say, via a disruptions of the (normative) regimes of the sensible. The disfiguration of the discrete outlines of the body (image) represents subjectivity as unbounded by physical form, or visibility. Rather, the schema being represented is one comprised of several different embodied figures, parts, functions, rhythms, abilities (and indeed disabilities) responding to a variety of forces and intensities drawn from different plateaus of existence – the physiological,

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<sup>48</sup> I’m borrowing this expression of relational adherence and abrasion from both Sarah Ahmed and Judith Butler. These differently inflected forms of ‘bonding’ will be analysed at length in Chapter 4.

<sup>49</sup> The sensible pressure exercised by the frontal encounter with what becomes abysmal and disfigured will take over the ambit of Chapter 3.

<sup>50</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

<sup>51</sup> I have already mentioned some of the tangible symptoms of ghostly syndromes. But also, phantoms can become manifest as sonic ghosts as in the case of the medical condition called tinnitus whereby buzzing, ringing, or whistling sensations occur without an external stimulus. A similar counterintuitive aural phenomenon is the case of “acoustic shadows,” whereby, for example the distant sound of gunfire is somehow made near, and the proximate removed with sometimes fatal consequences. See Charles D. Ross, *Civil War Acoustic Shadows*, (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 2001).

the cultural, the social, the historical, the political, the personal, the environmental, and not least, the affective. These elements re-make subjectivity and corporeality as modalities in and of passage, comprised of 'interdigitating'<sup>52</sup> sheaths that, overall, perform a processual thread linking different textures of experience.

Similarly the BwO, posits the body – and thus the individual – as radically open, extensive, interconnected, inherently intersubjective and processual: “it is matter that occupies space to a given degree – to the degree corresponding to the intensities produced [...] defined by axes and vectors, gradients and thresholds, by dynamic tendencies involving energy transformation and kinetic movements.”<sup>53</sup> From this perspective, the 'different' parts of the self/body are understood as inherently interrelated and co-constitutive. The inter-geographies of bod(y)es in constant motion propagating in series of reinventive actualizations are retraced by Massumi who makes of these intensities the indeterminate condition of possibility of the perception of what he calls *the body without an image*.

In “The Bleed,” the second entry to his collection of philosophical virtual parables,<sup>54</sup> Massumi addresses the concrete attempt to formulate an incorporeal materialism that brings to bear the impact of the virtual – the affective – on the actual. To explain precisely how a body/subject is constituted via this amorphous and opaque force, Massumi offers the parable of Ronald Reagan's ability to mobilise the image-based power (of the Ideal) by way of accessing the disjunctive state of the incorporeal (and imageless) body – that is, by “becoming-other.” Massumi conducts a close reading of Reagan's autobiographical account of how, as a young and inexperienced actor, in looking back at the picture of himself in cinematic replays, what he encountered was not a figure of heroic plenitude but rather his plain, old, everyday self. The problem with this resemblance, Massumi explains, is not that it allows the actor to see himself

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<sup>52</sup> Here I favour this term borrowed from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (*Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003]), over the more recurrent Deleuzian use of 'interpenetrating.'

<sup>53</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 153.

<sup>54</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 46-67.

as others see him, but that indeed “it doesn’t take the actor *far enough* outside of himself.”<sup>55</sup>

The fault line of Ragan’s vision is that it is too mirror like. Massumi articulates the actor’s desire to transcend his plain image and see himself from the others’ perspective as the necessity to move from “mirror-vision” – a sight that affords to see from one angle at a time only – to “movement-vision” – a “multiply” partial perspective unassimilable to reflective identity. Maintaining the focus on movement, this exorbital vision allows the subject to see itself as others see it, and occupy the object’s place simultaneously as its own subject position. This space creates the conditions for the self-distancing proper to *becoming* – the transformative continuity of disjunctive relationality where one “leaves the intersubjective world of the other-in-the-self, self and other identity-bound in mutual missed-recognition, for a space of dislocation, the space of movement-as-such, sheer transformation.”<sup>56</sup> But how can such fractured and unhinged vision be maneuvered toward completion of an ideal – ideology – is Massumi’s soaring, and ‘bleeding,’ question.

Massumi attributes the cathexis of this pursuit, for Reagan’s character and, ultimately, for his political role, to a single moment of the film *King’s Row*,<sup>57</sup> where he had to impersonate a young man who after an accident wakes up to find that his legs have been amputated: “Reagan must embody the scene of a man *recognizing himself as irretrievably changed*, as having been transported in total darkness and, unbeknown to himself, from one perspective on life to another that is irreconcilably different.”<sup>58</sup> Hence, we hear of the actor’s chronic rehearsing, his compulsive seeking for clues from people of all kinds (including physicians and amputees), his restless night sleep. But Reagan’s absorption is essentially epistemological; a gathering of knowledge that does not help his becoming consumed by the feeling of being

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>57</sup> Dir. Sam Wood, perf. Ann Sheridan, Robert Cummings, and Ronald Reagan, Warner Bros., 1942.

<sup>58</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 53, original emphasis.

“stumped”<sup>59</sup> in the actualisation of his character.

The final reveal comes from the artifice of a rig that creates the illusion of Reagan lying in bed; his legs disappeared. This virtual amputation, in Massumi’s treatment of the story, forces Reagan’s recognition of being on the cusp of transition, thereby initiating the *event* of his becoming-part-subject as, for *one* fleeting moment, he is able to step outside of his own bodily self and take on a radical difference. What interests me here, in particular, is that Massumi equates the movements that corporeally register these receptive changes with the passing of an *event*. Reagan’s desire to be in a different body and his subsequent self-questioning – “where is the rest of me?”<sup>60</sup> unfold as an event whose virtualities have *actual* ramifications.

Walking an invisible, tight rope between ability and crippledness, Reagan accrues multiplying relative perspectives on the accident of “becoming-other.” The recognition of this radical dys-embodiment, functions, through repetition as “a trace of the transformation, a spectre of an ungraspable, unthinkable *event* than haunts the flesh.”<sup>61</sup> Bleeding into his everyday life, this “exemplary event,” according to Massumi, will catalyse Reagan’s success as a political leader as he seized this jolt of life potential for his ideological means: “[p]olitics will allow him to multiply incalculably the contexts through which he drags his founding event of reality-producing, acted amputation, extending the trajectory of its trace, widening the space it colors. [...] All the world will be a stage, with Reagan in the leading role as carrier of a dehumanizing contagion.”<sup>62</sup>

The far-reaching implications of the event of ‘becoming-other’ is the spreading, the transmission, of ‘inhuman’ – preconscious and visceral – forces and intensities that are submerged in the intractable matter of the virtual – Massumi’s privileged term for affect. This

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>60</sup> This is the line that marks Reagan’s jolting, pivotal scene in the movie. This episode was so formative in his conception of himself that he titled his autobiography “Where is the Rest of Me?,” see Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 62.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 54, emphasis added.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 55.

nonsignifying, autonomic incorporeality takes place below the threshold of (conscious) awareness and meaning and therefore is independent of, and in a sense prior to, firming schemas or ideology.<sup>63</sup> Yet, at the end of its spectrum, lie the most virulent tendencies for realising its invisible challenge by maneuvering it in the direction of stasis and completion. It is here that the virtual is met by the reach of political – and economic – capture, as in the case illustrated above.<sup>64</sup> However, the (im)mobilization of such a becoming force, or the resistance to such attempts, is not Massumi's, or our postulate.<sup>65</sup> Rather, the nexus here is of a process that enables a model for accounting for the body's receptivity, for the corporeal unfolding of inconsistent matter, that provides the unstable surface for articulating and anticipating the event, wet with the blood of incorporeal "suspense." This is the temporality proper of affect – a *mise-en-abyme* that anticipates (or delays) apprehension.

It is at this crux – in the cut of the jolt, on the cusp of suspense, in the mo(ve)ment of incipience – that we can find what Massumi calls "the body without an image" – the infra-empirical space constructed by the movement-image, one in which the self no longer resembles itself:

The body without an image is an accumulation of relative perspectives and the passages between them, an additive space of utter receptivity retaining and combining past movements in intensity, extracted from their actual terms. It is less a space in its empirical sense than a gap in space that is also a suspension of the normal unfolding of time. Still, it can be understood as

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<sup>63</sup> Massumi notes: "[I]deology is construed here in both the commonsense meaning as a structure of belief, and in the cultural-theoretical sense of an interpellative subject positioning" (Ibid., 263).

<sup>64</sup> Patricia T. Clough has noted how the ideology driving capital accumulation is seeking, at an ever-increasing rate, to find new energy resources in the domain of affect and affective labour. Such a discussion cannot be included here, for its complexity and depth exceed the scope of this writing but I remand the reader to Clough's survey of relevant theories in "The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedicine and Bodies," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25.1 (2008).

<sup>65</sup> Massumi notes that "the statement that ideology – like every actual structure – is produced by operations that do not occur at its level and do not follow its logic is simply a reminder that it is necessary to integrate infolding, or [...] 'implicate order,' into the account. This is necessary to avoid capture and closure on the plane of signification" (*Parables for the Virtual*, 263). Some instances of cultural resistance and deviation from tendencies of capture will be examined in Chapter 3.



having a spatiotemporal order of its own.<sup>66</sup>

This non-figure resonates with Deleuze's tracing of a Body-without-Organs: the cultivation of the imageless, organless body filled with the intensity of a moment on the cusp; of an affective jolt that participates in the event of pure receptivity and becomes-other.

With this notion, I want to approach the figureless (and voiceless) address of the wounded, injured body in phantom sensation as the troublesome virtual reality that *fleshes out* "the body without an image" in all its resonating force. This condition is illustrative, in a literal sense, of the disjunctive state that displaces the preconceived notions of bodily appearance, consciousness, and aliveness. And while those who suffer from these sensorial disturbances are indeed 'affected,' their experience nevertheless suggests that our 'sense of sensing' is always already displaced and disfigured. It is displaced in the sense that it cannot be localised in any *one* sense organ; it is disfigured because it cannot be actualised in any *one* form – or image – but rather, like a ghost, it remains nebulous, immeasurable, intangible, inconstant and volatile.

In the shadow of this shrivelled-up nothingness, this shrunken presence of a human form, the body inevitably acquires a non-humanity as it ceases to appear entire and complete. This *absence* dimension of 'difference' (to itself) tends to be literalised as (the half-death) of bodily fragmentation: amputation, castration, defilement. However, these images are the faceless expressions of the body's ontogenetic fullness: they imply the cut that enables reconnection, and thus the creative and adaptive reemergence of the body without an image. Its *presence* dimension is the perception of an "autonomic remainder,"<sup>67</sup> a virtual remainder, an excess of affect that escapes cognition. This *exemplary body* is thus simultaneously empty and full, present and absent: it is present in the emptiness of its propagated appearances, absent in

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>67</sup> Massumi use this expression to define the condition of intensity of embodiment, he writes: "Intensity is [...] a nonconscious, never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder. It is outside expectation and adaptation, as disconnected from meaningful sequencing, from narration, as it is from vital function" (Ibid., 25).

the fullness of the abstract dimension of “quasi-corporeality” from which its embodiments arise. Its advenience yields a nonvisual map of bodily potential, a complex flow of transformative desire that may extend the synesthetic geography of the carnal far beyond the limits of the skin, in Massumi’s words:

Quasi corporeality is an abstract *map* of transformation. Its additive subtraction simultaneously constitutes the spatiality of the body without an image and translates it into another kind of time. For pure relationality extracted from its terms can be understood, at the extreme, as a time out of space, a measureless gap in and between bodies and things, an incorporeal interval of change. Call that substanceless and durationless moment the pure *event*.<sup>68</sup>

Phantoms arise as a “pure event,” a time-form that belongs to the *virtual*; that which is “maximally abstract yet real, whose reality is that of potential,” and that which “does not pass, that only comes to pass.”<sup>69</sup> This unresting resonating effects/affects conserve and autonomically reactivate the trace of a pastness in a process of “incipience” opening directly onto a future, but with no present to speak of. For the present is lost in the moment of intensity without cognition and volition, too inconsistent to be apprehended. The body is thus the carrier of a virtual yet “lived” paradox where different sensibilities coexist and connect. These are the sensibilities that inform the body’s subject-object relations, and that Massumi calls “proprioception” and “visceral sensibility.”

*Proprioception* is the “infolded” tactility that registers the intensities of movement and rest, pressure and resistance of the body’s encounter with the object composing a muscular memory of relationality. Its mode of perception is proper to the spatiality of the “body without an image:” reaching out with a ghost arm to hold a cup of thin air. Its vectors are “perspectives

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 58, original emphasis.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 58.

of the flesh” where movement-vision is turned inward and “the eyes [are] reabsorbed into the flesh through a black hole in the geometry of empirical space and a gash in bodily form.”<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, *viscerality* (or interoception) is the receptivity to “suspense,” the temporality proper to the “body without an image.” Its immediacy anticipates sense perception and “the space into which it jolts the flesh is one of an inability to act or reflect, a spasmodic passivity, so taut a receptivity that the body is paralyzed until it is jolted back into action-reaction by recognition.”<sup>71</sup> as you are sitting at the table, your leg throws a spasm before you consciously step onto the hard floor; as you are typing on your laptop, a wave of heat shoots through your breast before you consciously stroke the flatness of your mastectomised chest; in the middle of the night, you are shaken up by the chirping drone of a cricket before you consciously turn the light on your empty city-apartment bedroom. “Call it the space of passion.”<sup>72</sup>

These (in)tense experiences are exemplary of the relationship between the body and its appearance – its state of emergence – which corresponds to the “coupling of a unit of quasi corporeality with a unit of passion” that Massumi dubs an “affect.” The mesh of its synesthetic sensibilities – that is, sensation (both the ‘feeling’ and the ‘act of feeling’) – constitutes cooperating reflexivities that flinch prior to the understanding of that which we flinch from, that move us with affect before we know where it is taking us, each movement culminated in an everyday context or between-context: an “ordinary event” or “phantasm.”<sup>73</sup> Hence, the phantasmatic comes to coincide with the virtual geographies where sensation precipitates in the everyday harnessing and seeding – cultivating – our receptivity and awareness to the event of becoming, different every moment, and its immanent production through ‘performance.’<sup>74</sup> The invisible wound is the incorporeal flesh of supplementarity of the perpetual (un)folding called *the event*: “call the event, to the extent that it continues to call

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>74</sup> In the case of Reagan this meant the artifice of riding the rig so to speak, but in the case of phantom syndrome it takes no artifice to jolt the body into performing, enacting, the incorporeal language of the wounded flesh.

from across its transposition, defining a compulsion or tendency to fracture the integrity attributed to the body in everyday action-reaction circuits and to shatter the symmetry attributed to subject and object in their mirrored mutuality, a *fractal attractor*.<sup>75</sup>

An attention to the spectres of affected – and affecting – embodied experience can make us receptive and sensible to the on-going multiplicity of a becoming-other rather than the closure of achieving the being-Ideal. Most importantly, by making ‘visible’ the fabric(ation) of cultural, historical, social and political becomings responsible for a being-Ideal, phantoms emphasise the middle over the terminus by privileging the slash between one/other, presence/absence, fullness/emptiness, positive/negative. The slash marks the enabling cut as such, it stands for the movement to infinity; it expresses activity – the reciprocity of (*more than*) two dimensions of being that always make it a becoming; a process. Abject becomings provide us with the metaphors for a radical injunction to be brought to bear upon the singularity of the body: “[r]ethink body, subjectivity, and social change in terms of movement, affect, force, and violence – before code, text, and signification”<sup>76</sup>...

Taking the cue from Massumi, I ask: what is left of us, and of the rests of us, in the face of the (self)arresting and virulent force of (un unattainable) ideal or unity?

No-thing, what of that?<sup>77</sup>...

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>77</sup> I am here paraphrasing William Shakespeare in “Romeo and Juliette,” Act 2 Scene 2: “[s]he speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?,” to be found online in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, <[http://shakespeare.mit.edu/romeo\\_juliet/romeo\\_juliet.2.2.html](http://shakespeare.mit.edu/romeo_juliet/romeo_juliet.2.2.html)>.

## I Feel It

The philosophy of phenomenology has sustained an on-going critical attention to forms of fragmentation and displacement as key conditions that make startlingly evident what normally recedes from consciousness or becomes background. Edmund Husserl considers embodiment as a mode of being that is actually perceived without *itself* being perceived. Only when this “natural attitude” is interrupted, can the body appear and be brought into question, that is, its coming into appearance relies on it being brought into question.<sup>78</sup> In a similar vein, for Merleau-Ponty, the “lived body” – the conduit of experience – is for most part immersed in a state of absorption and remains absent, disappeared from explicit awareness. However, experiences that strip the bodily self of its cloak of familiarity can cause a state of ‘emergency’ that shifts attention from the “phenomenal body” to the “objective body.”<sup>79</sup>

I would argue that phantom syndrome is an event of puncturing inconsistency that traces the movement across the phenomenal and the objective as inseparable moments in an active process of apprehending the body on the edge of a void. It is the condition of possibility for an uncanny encounter with one’s own sense of being, and being different. Such spectral experiences can open up a critical gap for extending the (social and cultural) maps of ‘body’ well beyond its splitting ends. Vivian Sobchack’s autobiographical essay, “Living a ‘Phantom Limb,’” provides a first-hand account of this potential.<sup>80</sup> Reflecting on her own experience of phantom phenomena following amputation of her left leg, Sobchack pushes the meaning and significance of both her ‘phantom’ and her material prosthesis past the local, peripheral

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<sup>78</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 18.

<sup>79</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 106.

<sup>80</sup> Although primarily known as a film scholar, Vivian Sobchack is more expansively committed to interdisciplinary work and thinking on the topic of human embodiment and the influence of its materiality (and immateriality) on critical practice. Particularly, in this essay she combines her own experience of amputation with phenomenological philosophy to reflect on how bodies are not just visible objects but also, and more importantly, sense-making subjects. Vivian Sobchack, “Living a ‘Phantom Limb’: On the Phenomenology of Bodily Integrity” *Body & Society* 16 (September 2010).

breakage of the lived body to reach a radical sphere of morphological imagination that reconfigures vision, movement, thinking, and feeling.

Reshuffling and reassessing the common dictions of real/artificial, presence/absence, objective/subjective, here/there as slippery and chiasmic interfaces, her writing contests the discreet orientations of the body by positing her argument in the experiential gap of her missing limb. In the opening she writes:

During the post-operative period when I was supposedly 'missing' a leg [...] my consciousness of my lived body's dynamism and mutability was intensely heightened – as was my usually transparent sense of non-coincidence (if still co-presence) with 'myself' as both, and at once, a body subject and a body object. In particular, I became fascinated by the ambiguity not only of the reduction of my body's boundaries and articulations of itself but also of its surprising and radical expansion.<sup>81</sup>

Sobchack's body appears subtended in a quasi-corporeal (to use Massumi's word) blend that has no contours, contents or qualities proper to it, but that is nevertheless a full space of expansion. Its potential lies in *between* motions and intensities that become perceptible by being *aside from* each other in co-assistance. In this formation, the wake of the body does not subside nor does its emanations dissipate.

Moving along the lines of existential phenomenology, Sobchack maps a rich, complex, and utterly absorbing process of reassembling her body (parts) as her sense of self is constantly revised and redefined and her "corporeal figuration [is], at once, both new and renewed."<sup>82</sup>

Phantom affects intrude upon the state of corporeal transparency held in place by her habitual absorption and immersion in the lifeworld, and cause the body to suddenly snap out of self-

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 51-2.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 63.

forgetfulness – of normalcy – and come fully to its ‘senses.’ By effect of these virtual waves of sensation her bodily self-consciousness from the background shifts into the foreground of experience. To better explicate the implications of this ‘interference’, I shall elaborate and expand on Sobchack’s own reference to the work of phenomenologist Drew Leder.

Building on Merleau-Ponty’s perspective, Leder conceptualizes the body as a ‘corporeal absence;’<sup>83</sup> a multidimensional phenomenon with “recessive” and “ecstatic” operative modalities. When involved in ecstatic perception and action the body and/or its perceptive organs are largely absent from awareness and thus recede into the corporeal background. Leder writes: “insofar as I perceive through an organ, it necessarily recedes from the perceptual field it discloses. I do not smell my nasal tissue, hear my ear, or taste my taste buds, but perceive with and through such organs.”<sup>84</sup> Within the body’s depths, internal structures too are largely inaccessible; neither organs nor physiological functioning is readily available to observation or control. This recessive state is characterised by “depth disappearance:” “[b]uried within the bodily depths, my viscera resist my reflective gaze and physical manipulation. To be in depth disappearance is ordinarily to recede from the arc of personal involvement as a whole, neither subject nor object of direct engagement.”<sup>85</sup>

These forms of absence maintain a general state of “disappearance.” Yet, when the body demands our direct attention, such as when it fails to perform or when it feels in disagreement with what we expect, or when it experiences pain or intense emotion the body “dys-appears”<sup>86</sup> and reemerges into direct experience. Where *disappearance* is the absence of presence in which the body “conceals itself precisely in the act of revealing what is Other,”<sup>87</sup> *dys-*appearance is the uncanny presence of absence that reveals the body to itself *as* Other. For

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<sup>83</sup> Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-5.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>86</sup> Leder uses the Greek prefix ‘dys’ which generally indicates a dysfunction but that can also point to a state of exceptionality, out of the norm.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

Leder dys-appearance is “that which stands in the way, an obstinate force interfering with our projects.”<sup>88</sup> He mainly underlies the dysfunctional, alienating aspects of this emergence through which the “whole being is forcibly reoriented” towards getting rid of this bodily intrusion by whatever means necessary.<sup>89</sup> Dys-appearance, he sustains, compels us to act in order to re-establish the body’s “absent presence.”<sup>90</sup>

Sobchack’s experience, however, follows more sensible processual lines that ‘feel’ the phantom in the potential gestures/trajectories, which it incarnates and translates into perceptible (e)motions:

Looking at the place from which the ‘thing’ that was my objective leg was absent, ‘no-thing’ was there. And, yet, the ‘dys-appearance’ of my leg, however vague its boundaries, was subjectively experienced as a sense of self-presence now and here. Together, however, this objective absence and subjective ‘dys-appearance’ did not make, to paraphrase Leder, a simple negativity; rather, in their conjunction, doubling and reversals, they constituted a strange positivity: the presence of an absence.<sup>91</sup>

The body here is inducted into new (virtual) kinetic and perceptive geographies that alter, however slightly, spatial and temporal coordinates. Each differentiation is a felt reinvention, Sobchack explains: “I most certainly experienced ‘something’ here – the ‘something’ sort of like my leg, but not exactly coincident with my memory of its subjective weight and length; and the ‘here’ somewhere in the vicinity my leg had previously occupied, but not exactly coincident with what had been its objective form and boundaries.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 84. In Chapter 4, I will investigate the ‘dys-appearance’ of certain deviations that come to stand in the way of a general political project that ‘normally’ recedes into what is ‘whole’ in agreement.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>91</sup> Sobchack “Living a ‘Phantom Limb’”, 58.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 57.



In dys-appearance the body (re)surfaces as an extrinsically undetermined space where *no-thing* 'there' is felt as *some-thing* 'here' in the vicinity of what 'then' is 'now,' again; a particularly 'fugitive time' that is (ir)regularly displaced. Its surfaces stretch and become coextensive, loop back on themselves multiplying temporal layers. Hence, it develops the potential of producing a virtually infinite array of dispositions and practices that cannot be (wholly) circumscribed within the limitation of corporeal norms. The body is indeed stricken by challenging and affective permutations that exercise pressure on the body – sometimes lived as a depression – but in the process it can gain access to the means of extending its ends far beyond the limits of the flesh. It is fractured. It is exemplary. It inhabits most fully the gap between parts that determines their interrelation in a mutual give-and-take that helps making 'sense' of the w/whole: "[m]y leg now has integrity: I sense it (and it makes sense) as muscled, tapered and elongated well beyond the end of the suction socket that is joined by a block to the hydraulic knee, titanium leg and hard (but sprung) rubber foot."<sup>93</sup>

In a paradoxical turn, the 'phantom' leg, by some degree no longer entirely human, detached as it is from the particular mass of human flesh and designating in the visual field a 'lesser body,' continues nonetheless to 'image' her corporeal figuration as the *dys-appearance* of its virtual residues. So the 'real' leg – in an exquisite pun: "the right leg that, now, was left"<sup>94</sup> – emerges as a recessive circuit fundamentally inconspicuous and absent to her conscious awareness; something reflecting an image that is sensibly disappeared, in Sobchack's words: "whereas I subjectively experienced the objective 'no-thing' there of my absent left leg as 'some thing' here, I subjectively experienced the objective 'some thing' there of my 'real' leg as almost 'no-thing' here at all."<sup>95</sup> This assessment of experiences lived primarily in the flesh can bring to the foreground the presumptive epistemology of theories that unwittingly, I would say, *dys-appropriate* them. As Sobchack argues:

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 59.

Indeed, my sense of [the right leg's] lack of specific feeling, its relative 'dumbness' compared to more sensitive and discriminating 'parts' of my body, tended to coincide with Elizabeth Grosz's description of the amputee's residual limb or 'stump' as 'commonly experienced as thinglike, passive, inert, a mere object with no animating or receptive interiority.'<sup>96</sup>

Tracing the when and where of the imagi(ni)ng of affects that determine in what directions, to what ends, the (feeling of) body is circulated, the phantom yields a nonvisual map of corporeal potential, a complex flow of intensities and desires – however historically, socially or individually foregrounded. For Sobchack these ebbing mo(ve)ments are found in a living language of the flesh made insubstantial but corporeal by a differential and differentiated embodied condition that *dis*-appears as a lack at the moment it *dys*-appears in the extended spatial trajectories and temporal vectors emanating from 'the body without an image.' Hence, even when the phantom progressively shrinks and gradually disperses, some 'thing' still lingers; a virtual rem(a)inder or an after-affect. Sobchack writes: "although 'mine', the pain is nonetheless completely alienated to somewhere 'outside' my present lived body in the broad vicinity of my left side and stump that I cannot pin down. In sum, although the pain is nowhere (perhaps 'erewhon' might be a better word), I always feel it 'here' as always nothing here yet speaks<sup>97</sup> again. *I feel it.*"<sup>98</sup>

The phantom is intimately excorporated in the proximity of sideways motions and positions emerging from relational, virtual, potential re-mediations and re-modulations that shift between the "me" and the "not-me." The apparatus of the body without an image is thus actualised in the empty space of a formless feeling that creates the conditions under which the defining

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<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Sobchack "Living a 'Phantom Limb'", 59. Also see Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>97</sup> Sobchack adapts this expression from Shakespeare's line: "[n]othing will come of nothing: speak again!" from Act 1 Scene 1 of "King Lear" in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, <<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/lear/lear.1.1.html>>.

<sup>98</sup> Sobchack "Living a 'Phantom Limb'", 64-5, my emphasis.

constraints of dichotomies may come undone. Within this gap we may lose sight of the presumptive opposition of subjectivity and objectivity suspended across the landscape of the in-between of all bodies and non-bodies. The co-functioning of these in between figures a “technology of lived abstraction”<sup>99</sup> where even from a remove we find ourselves “immediately in the middle;”<sup>100</sup> in the cut, the gap, the open wound of sensation. It is in this interspace or interface that the ‘human’ integrates into ‘inhuman’ autonomic processes offering a metamorphic re-mediation for our all-too-human ‘breakages’ that fill neither ideological nor ontological prescriptions of being but that impregnate the atmosphere with “vitality affects.”<sup>101</sup>

It is this autonomic dehumanization that makes possible the continuity with and the singularity of the “*human* form of life,”<sup>102</sup> where the experience of transparent carnality can be incorporated alongside the sensible phantom into a new concept of ‘self;’ where the physical and social unease of the reduction of (and to) the body’s ends can exist alongside the potential of its extensions; where the discomfort, fatigue, disease or the body’s failure to perform or conform can be considered alongside the inorganic dys-appearance of its vitality affects. The non-objectual sensibility of not wholly human forms, in fact, finds rhythm – and voice – not in the terms of presence or absence, of consciousness or reflection, but in qualities or relations of “directness.”<sup>103</sup> The potential here is for direct movement to veer off in other directions, to become and become different.

The body wounded, disfigured, defaced of its humanity can then be understood as exemplary of Massumi’s conception of the *event*: “this is real movement, because something has happened: the body has been capacitated. It’s been relationally activated. It is alive in the

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<sup>99</sup> I borrow this expression from the MIT Press’ series of publications of which Brian Massumi’s *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011) is the fourth volume.

<sup>100</sup> Massumi *Semblance and Event*, 1.

<sup>101</sup> Massumi derives this term from Daniel Stern.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, original emphasis.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

world, poised for what may come.”<sup>104</sup> Its exemplarity is a technology of ‘attention’ and an expression of singularity, and not a structure of subjectivity. This particular body makes its kinetic geographies coincide with a virtual space introducing a curtailed region of potential. Paradoxically, it is this gaping space that becomes the repository for an excess, the most effective, or even only affective, incarnation of something *actually happening*, and *appearing*, something that Massumi calls a “semblance:” “[s]emblance is another way of saying ‘the experience of a virtual reality.’ Which is to say: ‘the experiential reality of the virtual.’ The virtual is abstract event potential. Semblance is the manner in which the virtual *actually appears*. It is the being of virtual as lived abstraction.”<sup>105</sup>

In what is to come, I will invoke this notion at the intersection of the perceptive and the affective as a critical move to re-elaborate a vital aesthetic-political philosophy of the event as it emerges – only to dissolve – within an artistic milieu. I propose that the exemplary processual lines of the body *appearing* – short of an image – through its open chasms release the potential to explore the ‘critical gap’ in the midst of what constitutes the being of performance; an *happening* whose history and ontology remains marked by the shifting emergence and dissolution of its (in)corporeal traces. Positing this creative event as an intensive duration that registers whirling sensations, affects, and movements, abounding as swarming assemblages of spatial and temporal fragments, I will excavate the relational processes foregrounded by its technological apparatus and its sensory modalities, which resonate with the pulsating remodulations of feeling-with the other, beside the self.

Moving in this trajectory, next I will be asking how we can trace the body in the midst of an event of which we do not know the extremes, and which possibly has none. Attending to critical events that reveal and create different ways of inhabiting the extra-ordinary infusing the everyday, I seek to reconnect with the body opened up, and moved by such experiences.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 15-6, original emphasis.

Searching through the holes and cracks in the geographies – and choreographies – of these self-differentiating mo(ve)ments, I want to access and expand (on) the creative life forms of performance (art)<sup>106</sup> from the critical point of its vanishing. It appears from my perspective that its abstracted potential somehow just remains off to the side, erratically, as a “perpetual remainder,” as a not-yet-exhausted excess, a third or a fourth body; a more-to-come preempting what is yet to become. These occurring, incurring and recurring remediations will eventually resurge as ethics of be-holding and be-longing what is left of the w/whole of us, alter all.

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<sup>106</sup> More recently in the UK, the widely acknowledged strategic term for grouping performance cultures is Live Art. In the pamphlet accompanying the event *Live Culture* at Tate Modern (27-30 March 2003), Lois Keidan and Daniel Brine write: “Live Art has evolved from the Performance Art practices that so radicalised the space of the gallery in the late 20th century. [...] Live Art is not a singular form of art but an umbrella term for intrinsically live practices that are rooted in a diversity of disciplines and discourses involving the body, space and time” (“Fluid Landscapes,” in *Live Culture*, ed. Adrian Heathfield [London: Live Art Development Agency, 2003]: 4).

## Mind the Crack

As an experiential framework and artistic strategy performance has historically drawn much of its energy and intensity from the '60s and '70s incipient tendencies to dissolve the materiality of the art object and expose the 'not-seen' in the frame of a creative and creating event – or “happening.”<sup>107</sup> Catching this page of history one could feel its heat, and for a moment grasp the fragments – the movements – of a strange kind of negative<sup>108</sup> impulse igniting sensibilities until, as the fervour dissipated in the following decades, it melted to ciphers in the hands of chaotic post-(modern)*isms*.

But it is through this dense atmosphere of dissenting movements and transmissions that I seek to recover a sort of conceptual framework – and methodologies of critical engagement – for the potential to re-think and to re-practice the empirical context of embodiment as (un)grasped from the point of view of an *event* that dissolves under the conditions of its exposure – that is, that appears as historically, culturally, and politically embodied ‘dys-appearance.’ To expose here is to submit a sensitized surface-depth to the action/reaction of affect and relationality, to the contingency of an archive of passing rhythms, to the fragility of an appearance, to the unwrittenness of a textuality, to the temporality of changing movements, to the singularity of spatial redistributions, to the incompleteness of defining elements. The concept of the event as a “supplementarity,”<sup>109</sup> an excess, a rupture of Euclidean spaces and history’s straightforward linear times provides an interpretive key for positing the virtuality of an event as dispersed and manifested in forms that do not directly belong to the event, but which bear some trace of their source within its re-mediations.

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<sup>107</sup> I do not intend to begin, or end, with the naiveté of origins or *telos*, but rather right in the middle of a raw topography in which we can collocate some critical mo(ve)ments in the arts.

<sup>108</sup> And of course this negative connotation cannot be conceived as in opposition to some mythical, essential positivity, but as a propagative impetus departing from with-out.

<sup>109</sup> Massumi writes: “call the perpetual future-past doubling ordinary events *supplementarity*. The exemplary event is the transposition of supplementarity into the lure of unity. Transposed supplementarity is the mode of being of the pure event” (*Parables for the Virtual*, 64, original emphasis).

The ‘trouble’ with these archives is the trouble of affect; a trouble of how to register the not-yet-captured heightened moments in which (un)certain experiences become exemplary laboratories for sensing or intuiting ways of attending to the vanishing presence of embodied-ness. Performance, once regarded and many times re-inscribed as something fleeting and phantasmatic – and I will return to that in a moment – because of its aesthetic technologies of communicating the you-are-there-ness and here-and-nowness, can gesture towards a chronic crisis produced by the constant pressure exercised on the present/presence that forces a sensitivity – a sense-ability – towards the moment as an emergently dissolving carnal actuality. As Massumi puts it:

The event is superempirical: it is the crystallization, out the far side of quasi corporeality,<sup>110</sup> of already actualized spatial perspectives and emplacements into a time-form from which the passing present is excluded and which, for that very reason, is as future as it is past, looping directly from one to the other. It is the immediate proximity of before and after. It is nonlinear, moving in two directions at once: out from the actual (as past) into the actual (as future). The actuality it leaves as past is the same actuality to which it no sooner comes as future: from being to becoming.<sup>111</sup>

Let me rephrase this briefly otherwise: the event’s being is itself ‘becoming’ through the vanishing of the present into the past and/as the future. Let me repeat this with a more familiar refrain: “[p]erformance’s being becomes itself through disappearance.”<sup>112</sup> And let me re-enact it differently: the event of performance is itself becoming through disappearance of its

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<sup>110</sup> Perhaps it is worth reminding here that the concept of quasi corporeality is the spatiality proper to “the body without an image:” an abstract map of relational transformation.

<sup>111</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 58.

<sup>112</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146. In the past 15 years, this definition has acquired as many supporters as detractors. However, both sides too often seem to confuse the progressive aspect of this statement with a simple operation that equates performance with self-annihilation. In my view, Phelan’s suggestion is that performance embodies a transformative modality that poses a radical challenge to the reproductive representational economy of the visible by foregrounding an event that *becomes* away from its lines of capture. See also Rebecca Schneider, “Archives: Performance Remains,” *Performance Research* 6.2 (2001).

present/presence. Indeed, all these levels of expression do differ from one another, but they are *other-wise* a *semblance* of one an-other in immediate, relational proximity.<sup>113</sup> Let me now reactivate these analogical positionings by requalifying the relational modalities in which disappearance becomes something other than itself within the event of performance.

If we keep following Massumi into *Semblance and Event*, we will hear the event as something passing, its potential (of change) only fully definite at its culmination: “[a]n experience determinately knows what it’s been only as it peaks – which is also the instant of its ‘perishing.’”<sup>114</sup> But what is effectively passed on by an occasion’s passing? For Massumi, it is a “technique of existence” through which the dynamic form of the event can be nonsensuously experienced by being “*perceptually felt*, not so much ‘in’ vision as *with* vision or *through* vision: as a vision effect. It is a lived abstraction: an effective virtual vision of the shape of the event, including in its arc the unseen dimensions of its immediate past and immediate future.”<sup>115</sup>

These abstractions take form as occasions of experience through what Massumi calls a “semblance.”<sup>116</sup> “the form in which what does not appear effectively expresses itself, in a way that must be counted as real.”<sup>117</sup>

Some twenty years before, Peggy Phelan wrote: “[w]ithout a copy, live performance plunges into visibility – in a maniacally charged present – and disappears into memory, in the realm of invisibility where it eludes regulation and control.”<sup>118</sup> From within a different context,<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> In her brilliant essay “Stroboscopic Stutter” (op. cit.), Paula Caspão remobilises what remains of performance’s vanishing ontology with an acute re-modulation of Phelan’s disappearing charge by noting: “[a]s a historically situated strategic move intended to challenge the politics of visibility and visibility as politically partitioned, this theoretical assertion may sound effective for a while” (145). It would be also fair to note that *Unmarked* was written in the late 1980s and early 90s, more than a decade before the emergence of the developments of neuro and quantum science on which Massumi’s philosophy, and Caspão’s relays, widely draw. However, from her advantage point, Caspão advances: “[c]ould we stop talking of “disappearance” as “becoming something other than performance,” and start talking about “changing” and “becoming something other” within performance as well?” (146). I will borrow henceforth some of her refreshing and assured stuttering maneuverings.

<sup>114</sup> Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 9.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, original emphasis.

<sup>116</sup> Massumi draws this concept in large part from Walter Benjamin’s concepts of “mimesis” and “nonsensuous similarity” and Susanne Langer’s theories of perceptual movement in art.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>118</sup> Phelan, *Unmarked*, 148.



performance emerges as the visible of what cannot be seen, of something that does not appear (visually) but rather that recedes into subjective forms of indeterminacy. Phelan, I understand, proposes the move between matters of visibility and invisibility as the possibility to “value the immaterial,” of *becoming* “unmarked,” through an “active vanishing” that “refus[es] [...] the pay-off of visibility.”<sup>120</sup> In a conversation with Marquard Smith ten years later, she reprises her earlier, and since much debated, motif:

I was trying to delineate a possible ethics of the *invisible* [...]. I wanted to talk about the failure to see oneself fully. This failure is optical, psychoanalytical, and ethical. [...] I was suggesting that this central failure, instead of being constantly repressed by culture, might be something we could acknowledge and even embrace. If this were possible, I thought perhaps a different ethics, a richer encounter between self and other might become actual and actual-izable.<sup>121</sup>

For the theorist, this alternative ethics always encroaches upon the folds of embodiment and disembodiment, appearance and (ultimate) disappearance: “I was trying to make clear that the ephemeral, indeed the mortal, is absolutely fundamental to the experience of embodiment, to the *facticity* of human history itself.”<sup>122</sup> What I sense in Phelan’s and Massumi’s emphasis on phenomena passing out of sight, on the abstract *as* real, is a concomitant call for the need to pragmatically attend to the process of re-actualising the non-visible, the nonsensual – the virtual. Let me replay the (nonsensuous) likenesses or (inter-sensuous) similarities between their different expressions by returning briefly to Massumi’s own previous work.

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<sup>119</sup> In *Unmarked*, Phelan operates a radical critique of commodity culture and the systems of visibility – and visibility – that subtend it.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>121</sup> Peggy Phelan in conversation with Marquard Smith in “Performance, Live Culture and Things of the Heart,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 2.3 (Winter 2003): 296, original emphasis. Perhaps not coincidentally Phelan pursued further the question of (ultimate) disappearance by her successive work (the unpublished book *Death Rehearsals: The Performances of Andy Warhol and Ronald Reagan*) on Ronald Reagan’s biographical and biological events as related to his Alzheimer’s disease to tackle the intersections between ‘consciousness’ or ‘subjectivity’ and the body’s sense of liveness.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

In the eighth chapter of *Parables of the Virtual*,<sup>123</sup> the incorporeal dimension of the body re-emerges in the *biogram*.<sup>124</sup> This notion expresses the mode of being of the intersensory dimension of synesthesia – the ‘abnormal,’ cross-modal perception that links sensory dimensions to each other.<sup>125</sup> Synesthesia is a visible, tangible ‘hinge’ between two different systems of perceptual reference: the visual and the proprioceptive. These two “maps” are generally cooperative but can also become disjuncted. In ‘normalized’ perception, the second system of reference disappears behind the visual, cognitive map. Synesthesia registers a rare moment in which the proprioceptive map comes to the foreground and ‘interrupts’ vision. Massumi describes this experience as the sensual awareness and direct experience of the way vision is always already enmeshed with the other senses. Hence, biograms are: “more-than-visual. They are event-perceptions combining senses, tenses, and dimensions on a single surface [...] They are geometrically strange: a foreground-surround, like a trick center twisting into an all-encompassing periphery. They are uncontainable either in the present moment or in Euclidean space, which they instead encompass: strange horizon.”<sup>126</sup>

Clinical experiences of synesthesia – where sounds are ‘seen’ as colours and colours appear as words<sup>127</sup> – provide Massumi the key for approaching the ‘real abstraction’ of every day life. Synesthesia is an abstract *and* real way of being: not a tropological figure or a cultural, historical or artistic trend, not even a psycho-physiological ‘dysfunction,’ but indeed an actual condition of perception that generally recedes to the background of ocular-centrism (and logocentrism). Once again, the disorienting experiences of corporeality ‘hinge’ on the lived

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<sup>123</sup> The full title is “Strange Horizon Buildings, Biograms, and the Body Topologic,” 177-207.

<sup>124</sup> The biogrammatic concept is an extension of Massumi’s notion of a diagram, evocative of the double articulations between forms of content and forms of expression.

<sup>125</sup> Synesthesia is considered by Massumi in all its three primary conditions: pathological, physiological and metaphorical. In its pathological form, specific sensory modalities are ‘cross-wired’ in the brain resulting in modal fusions such that one can taste a sound or more typically, associate a specific colour with a letter, number or word.

<sup>126</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 187.

<sup>127</sup> Notably, synesthetic conjunctions involve all the senses in various combinations, including smell and hearing.

practice of an abstraction – an *affectivity*<sup>128</sup> – that situates the relationality of the event in the indetermination of intersensory dimensions that allow embodiment to fold back onto itself, for its continuing becoming: “the biogram is a perceptual reliving: a folding back of experience on itself. [...] A biogram doubles back on itself in such a way as to hold all of its potential variations on itself in itself: in its own cumulatively open, self-referential event.”<sup>129</sup>

There is here a co-functioning of the event and memory: “[i]n synesthesia, remembering is a perceptual event.<sup>130</sup> It is a reactivation of a biogram for purposes of reaccess. If an event-perception is faced, then when a biogram is reaccessed isn't the synesthete facing a previous facing?”<sup>131</sup> Hence, the biogram takes shape as the synesthetic ‘spacing’ of affectivity that situates a ‘temporally’ re-mediated performance at the intuitive centre between the relationality of being in the event and the movement of continuous re-sur-facing, where we keep “*looking forward to our own past and looking past into the future*, in a seeing so intense that it falls out of sight.”<sup>132</sup> Ultimately, “synesthetic perception is always an event or performance.”<sup>133</sup>

In this synesthetic gamut – in (and out of) view of the lived conditions of embodied abstraction, and in the echo of Phelan’s riff of performance plunging into visibility as it disappears into memory, and in the vibration of Massumi’s synesthetic re-remembering of the event in passing –

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<sup>128</sup> For Massumi writes: “affect is synesthetic, implying a participation of the senses in each other: the measure of a living thing’s potential interactions is its ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into those of another” (ibid., 35).

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>130</sup> How can we forget here Proust’s cookie taste for soggy crumbs activating the forgotten sight of a little madeleine: “[n]o sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory – this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me it *was* me. [...] Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I sensed that it was connected with the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could, no, indeed, be of the same nature. Whence did it come? What did it mean? How could I seize and apprehend it? [...] And suddenly the memory revealed itself. The taste was that of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray [...]. The sight of the little madeleine had recalled nothing to my mind before I tasted it. And all from my cup of tea” (“Swann’s Way: Within a Budding Grove,” in *Remembrance of Things Past*, ed. and trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin [New York: Vintage 1913-27], 48-51). Or what about the synesthetic shock of Camillo’s legendary “Theatre of Memory”?

<sup>131</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 193.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 194, original emphasis.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

can then the event of performance 're-appear' as a practice of perception – an *ontogenetic*<sup>134</sup> (rather than ontological) process of becoming through movement, intuition, transduction, composition, improvisation? Can it represent a 'new' form of distributed perspective that considers complex, modulated multiplicities, reflects the diachronic emergence of unpredictable elements, interrogates the unknown in the known, tackles the interrelation of relations as the focal points of creative processes that appear, porously accessible to anyone with access to affectivity, at any time, and again, through the gap of sensation?

This model of virtual *and* actual 'working,' where the appearance of the body as semblance – as capacitated abstraction – constitutes an event, can help reframe what remains of its ontology – a gap between experience and consciousness. On the basis of Benjamin Libet's neurological experiments, Massumi reports in fact that there is a *half-second delay* between the operations of the body-brain and the emergence of consciousness, he then concludes that the "half second is *missed* not because it is empty, but because it is overfull, in excess of the *actually-performed* action and of its ascribed meaning."<sup>135</sup> Can this *force*-fully charged 'missing' and 'split' part help us reconstruct what actually 'happens' in the event? Can it reflect the multiple and fluctuating latencies of its biogram – its synesthetic (dis)organisations? What occurs in the differential emergence of its "relational time-smudge"?<sup>136</sup> How does it resonate the nonlinear metrics of its potential? How does it become actualised?

By intersecting Massumi's intuitions and Phelan's implications at the point of a dissolve I want to resituate the discourse on (the indeterminacy of) performance as the knowledge surging from the void through which the event *re-appears* – or *dys-appears* – as a virtual, biogrammatic "body without an image." This epistemology can recognise the quasi-corporeal potential both internal and external to the event, it can acknowledge both the matter of 'fact'

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<sup>134</sup> Massumi defines *ontogenesis* as "the self-production of being in becoming" (*Semblance and Event*, 84).

<sup>135</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 29, my emphasis.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

and the matter of 'felt' as they shape shift and interdigitate; it can posit itself in the in-between and at the two-sidedness of affective relations, in the intervals that bleed through sensory dimensions. In short, I take performance to be an experiential loop, a recursive "topology" of a memory future and past, moving in a nonlinear temporality and in non-Euclidean space. The creative processes it instigates, I argue, can push beyond the vulnerable scaffolding of the subjective to embrace the production of singularities, where each time the event is accessed variations and re-modulations occur, in and out of sight, all appearing beside themselves. The meeting of these 'visions' is indeed a "strange horizon."

Within these premises, I approach performance not as a disciplinary category, an art form, or an objective frame, but rather as the *technological body* of a re-emergent experiential dispersal. I regard it as a strategy of 'being becoming' that constructs a situation and opens it into a perceptual pool for drops of experience to fall in, splash out, or evaporate. I relay it as a sensuous *archive* of relational experience stilling mo(ve)ments and fragments extracted from the life passing, in-between bodies, opening onto the world beyond its seeming seams.

Suspended from what appears to be the sheer fabric of the material artwork, its vibrating and quivering force – which I shall call *aliveness* – reconstitutes its milieu in the fugitive image of a *semblance* that "takes the abstraction inherent to object perception and carries it to a higher power."<sup>137</sup>

To access this intensified forms of *re*-presentation of life means to experience visually imperceptible ways of seeing and knowing that are yet to happen, inferred virtually as an "uncanny sense of feeling sight see the invisible,"<sup>138</sup> making felt-thinking of perception in perception, in the immediacy of its occurrence – a "*thinking-feeling*, in visual form."<sup>139</sup>

According to Massumi, such emergences occur in so-called "natural" perception, but they

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<sup>137</sup> Massumi, *Seamless and Event*, 43.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

remain recessive, they 'disappear' into the background of active experience: "[w]e let the vitality affect, the 'uncanny' apprehension of the qualitative dimension, pass unnoticed. Instead, we orient toward the instrumental aspect of the actions and reactions that the perception affords. The self-reflexivity of the experience is backgrounded."<sup>140</sup> The 'semblomatic,'<sup>141</sup> aleatory mode of vision that I propose as the event of performance occurring can alter the ways the perception of perception of *something happening* is made felt by rendering viewing a pulsating *seeing-with and through* actual form in a play of appearance-disappearance, where what is foregrounded is not the image but its *sideshadowing* appearances – its ghostly perceptual doubles.

As I previously narrated in the introductory remarks, Morson's trope of sideshadowing conveys the sense of "something else:" the intensity and pressure of temporalities continually competing for actuality. In this figuration, the present 'here and now' splits to the sides of unrealised past potentials and realisable future actualisations. These multiple and simultaneous directionalities, I suggest, are expressed in performance as mo(ve)ments of body thinking traversing mind feeling. Massumi speaks of art as "the technique of living life *in* – experiencing the virtuality of it more fully, living it more intensely. Technique of existence."<sup>142</sup> I would argue then that performance (*as*)art *qua* life technology can be actualized as a pragmatic, inventive strategy of *dys*-appearance where nonvisible reality is made to appear in vision. It can be activated as an apparatus of relational forces based on the purposive disposition of elements constituted relationally, collectively and transductively – with regard to its specific objects, people, rhythms, sensations – distributing the visible and the invisible, generating or eliminating signification, always virtually pregnant with 'potentialities.'

The implication of these elements, then, is an affective economy grounded in the process of

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>141</sup> This is a term that I coin to address performance as emblematic of the workings of the "semblance."

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 45.

adaptation and disarticulation of kinaesthetic and synesthetic processes that involve non-conscious, visceral and proprioceptive, virtual movements connecting bodies, exposing to view the (in)human aspect of the historical and material dimension of processual and relational becoming. This very empirical experience arises in the 'present' of an existent world; that is, in the 'socialized' scene of historically, culturally, and politically embodied matter calling for the emergence of an abstract-virtual spatiotemporal sphere of the 'sensible' that can only be conceived as a non-consecutive re-enactment. In other words, experiencing visually and comprehending conceptually that which is visually imperceptible and conceptually incomprehensible constitutes the *event* of art as an immanent force of becoming-human, becoming-other, becoming-political; a moment of unbinding that can disrupt, disarticulate, and deface the 'present' state of the body politic.

I then propose the practice of performance to be foregrounded as a technological and social part-body – or quasi corporeality – that redistributes the *vitality* of relationality and contingency in the production of the aesthetic event of *being becoming*. In this context, Massumi's rendering of "vitality affects" returns useful. In consideration of Stern's articulation of this dynamic and kinetic quality of life-vibrations as a primary layer of shared affectivity,<sup>143</sup> Massumi redirects this non-conscious level of corporeal communication in terms of "affective attunement," or of a "feeling-with."<sup>144</sup> Crucially, processual forms of being-with-others are always at play in the relational milieu of performance in the (conscious *and* unconscious) ways in which individuals differently partake in the event, and by the forms through which (typical *and* non-habitual) responses emerge and are circulated.

Massumi explains this activity as: "[a] relational sharing of what comes between, from different angles of intersection into a single unfolding. A crossed-embodied *attunement* of immediately

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<sup>143</sup> Curiously, in his analysis of infant development, Stern cites dance as a form expressing this affective quality: "[l]ike dance for the adult, the social world experienced by the infant is primarily one of vitality affects before it is a world of formal facts" (Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* [London: Karnac, 1985], 57).

<sup>144</sup> See Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 111-116.

linked activations orchestrating a nondecomposable in-between.”<sup>145</sup> This dynamic relationality carries a qualitative flavour that Massumi calls “*affective tonality*.”<sup>146</sup> “an embracing atmosphere that is also at the very heart of what happens because it qualifies the overall feel. Affective tonality is what we normally call a ‘mood.’”<sup>147</sup> Together vitality affects and affective tonality account for the *liveness* of the event: “[t]he vitality affect contributes a *singular* quality of liveness to this event. The affective tonality expresses the *kind* of liveness that is this event’s: its *generic* quality.”<sup>148</sup> This relational merging creates a transduction of life energies (vitality affects) around new affective contours (tonalities) whose qualities are infinitely variable, their palette expanding according to the participating forms of life. Inside this milieu, we become immersed and enmeshed in the *liveness* of tuning into each other. Ultimately: “[a]ffective attunement is *transindividual*.”<sup>149</sup>

Massumi’s concept of “attunement” bears an uncanny (re)semblance with Brennan’s notion of “entrainment.” Brennan mobilises this term from biochemistry and neurology studies to articulate the process “whereby one person’s or one group’s nervous and hormonal systems are brought into alignment with another’s.”<sup>150</sup> Brennan brings together evidence on molecular flux, body language and shared rhythms in order to trace the transmissions between bodies – understood in a broad sense – through the ways they “feel the atmosphere” or they pick up on the “mood” in the room.<sup>151</sup> This affective climate is not simply ‘caught’ or transmitted between subjects, rather: “[t]he ‘atmosphere’ or the environment literally gets into the individual.”<sup>152</sup>

Brennan’s work pays close attention to both biological and cultural factors that contribute to

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 112, original emphasis.

<sup>147</sup> Massumi here is drawing on the work of philosopher Alfred North Whitehead.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 112, original emphasis.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 113, original emphasis. Massumi derives his term from Gilbert Simondon.

<sup>150</sup> Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 9. For her descriptions of the medical, scientific evidence for affective entrainment, see especially pages 68–75.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.



such disseminations, however she emphasises how affect is a “profoundly social thing.”<sup>153</sup> She carefully maps out the power relationships that subtend energetic exchanges through which certain rhythms are subsumed by some-body, or blocked by others. Since affects evoke thoughts, individuals may become emotionally “entrained,” or attuned, even though the particular meanings one attaches to those affects will vary: “[t]he point is that even if I am picking upon your affect, the linguistic and visual content, meaning the thoughts I attach to that affect, remain my own: they remain the product of the particular historical conjunction of words and experiences I represent.”<sup>154</sup>

Hence, affect is impersonal – transpersonal – in *infection* and personal in situated, individual effect – in the movement to emotion, thought, and action. The transmission and escalation of energetic blueprints depend on a shared focus of “living attention”<sup>155</sup> on the basis of physical proximity, distance, or contact. Brennan likens bodies to transducers or conversion channels: far from being self-contained, they are porous and permeable; they are affected and affecting: “understanding the influences to which we are subject in terms of passions and emotions, as well as living attention, means lifting off the burden of the ego’s belief that it is self-contained in terms of the affects it experiences.”<sup>156</sup> In the choreography of the I-Other relation, and in the concrete, experiential forms of non-conscious and proprioceptive transfers that take place through touch, smell, sight, movement, sound, taste occurring directly between bodies, the ‘sensed’ tacit knowledge of oneself – and the relational milieu (the world) – doubles as an embodied way of being-with-others. Along such vectors and intensities, assimilations and blockages, contacts and separations, affects come to change the body’s biology through a kind of “social contagion.”<sup>157</sup>

The metaphorical model of contagion as expressed through the idea of transmission is

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 53.

something I would like to reprise here in relation to the conception of performance as, with a slight spin on Massumi, a 'technology of *alive* abstraction;' the ghost doubling of a semblance that tunes in the affective force-field of events and resonates with the possibility of vir(tu)al transference. This situation can express a form of practiced relationality that Massumi calls relational "architecture:"<sup>158</sup>

I'm talking about [...] the technical staging of aesthetic events that speculate on life, emanating a lived quality that might resonate elsewhere, to unpredictable affect and effect. Stagings that might lend themselves to analogical encounter and contagion. That might get involved in inventive accidents of history. I'm talking about architectures of the social and political unforeseen that enact a relation of non-relation with an absolute outside, in a way that is carefully, technically limited *and* unbounded."<sup>159</sup>

Through mimesis or a 'contagion' of sorts the techné of performance can express an ontogenic rather than representational activity by producing a reality in excess of its (material) object that conceives and generates accidents, responses; new perceptual events that resonate with the potential to affect the social and the political body. This, dare I propose, is the 'live' – or *alive* – condition of performance: not the "immediate" and "transitory present moment,"<sup>160</sup> not the "here and now" of being "there and then," not the image without a cut, not the record without a trace, not the memory without the flesh. But say, the brooding sense of a practice of living attention (living-a-tension), the durational intensity of the fore-echo of a return,<sup>161</sup> the ungrasped pulse of a past yet to come, the hiccup of a chasm jumping into the

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<sup>158</sup> Massumi clarifies that he doesn't intend architecture in the narrow disciplinary sense, "although of course architecture may itself be practiced relationally" (*Semblance and Event*, 80).

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>160</sup> See Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance In A Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>161</sup> See Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 113.

apex of being; the ecstasy of feeling always “more-than-one,”<sup>162</sup> except, once again, not-one time, not even-space, already suspended – “[v]itality affect afloat: animateness untethered. Semblance of pure aliveness in play:”

“Aliveness”: not the same as “live.” Aliveness is the relational *quality* of life. It is a semblance: a nonsensuous similarity. Like all nonsensuous similarity, it self-detaches from the objective combinations of things that go into a live performance, doubling them with an order of lived abstraction. A priori, there is no reason to believe that a dance or music recording deanimates the expressive event. Since the aliveness of the performance detaches itself from the performance even as it happens, there is no reason it cannot survive a second remove. What is certain is that it cannot survive a second remove – or even a repeat live performance – unchanged.<sup>163</sup>

The *event* of aliveness – sensations, affects, movements – animates vital oscillations that resonate from the pulsating re-occurrence of a remove. These contingent (per)mutations emerge smack in the midst of the unrest of relations. In-the-flesh relatedness here cannot be experienced as something separate from one’s own and others’ imperfect re-assemblages of in-between, incorporeal dynamics. The still moving and challenging new (or newly recognised) crossings between forms of here-and-now relatedness and the bloodlettings of detached forms of sociality bring to the fore an “uncanny moreness” of a self-erupting presentness potentially continued, stretched further beyond the individual: “[t]he lesson of the semblance is that lived reality of what is happening is so much more, qualitatively. It includes an uncanny moreness to life as an unfolding lived relation in a world whose every moment is intensely

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<sup>162</sup> Massumi draws this definition of being from Gilbert Simondon. Also see Erin Manning, “Always More than One: The Collectivity of a Life,” *Body & Society* 16.1 (March 2010).

<sup>163</sup> Both quotes Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 146.

suffused with virtuality – an abstractly felt “backside,” of voluminousness, of life itself.”<sup>164</sup>

It is from this unguarded expanse that a crack may lapse into the political. The creative and inventive practice of the incipient *event* of art can manifest the “likeness” of a politics of imperceptible socialisation that has at its heart a *revi(r)(u)alization*; that is, a re-transmission of the rupturing force of the event away from the territorialising pull of apprehensive logics of arrest. This unbinding movement refers to the ‘particular’ potential individuated by Rancière to disrupt, disarticulate and disfigure the ‘present’ state of affairs of a body politic with an ‘uncommon’ aesthetic sense of part-taking. The odd sensation of that which has no part imperceptibility emerges through immanence enabling seeing and knowing in ways that are yet unseen and unknown: “[f]or critical art is not so much a type of art that reveals the forms and contradictions of domination as it is an art that questions its own limits and powers, that refuses to anticipate its own effects.”<sup>165</sup>

Rancière refers to this agonistic process of art as *dissensus*, the relation-of-nonrelation that is experienced in-between the artwork’s dynamic form and its re-presentation. This disjunctive quality, I suggest, constitutes the making of a semblance whose substance is involved in nonsensual *and* dissensual ways of ‘being-with’ in relational co-presence (with intimate others and extimate selves) without coalescence. This ‘unassuming’ relationality can disarticulate the power of stringent forms and aggregational norms via a (syn)aesthetic politics of *aliveness* that sets off the self-differing and self-perpetuating momentum of unforeseen potential. As Massumi prompts: “[t]his is precisely what makes art political, in its own way. It can push further to the indeterminate but relationally potentialized fringes of existing situations, beyond the limits of current framings or regulatory principles. Aesthetic politics is an exploratory

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 46. This rear view will be engaged further in Chapter 4.

<sup>165</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), 149.

politics of invention, unbound, unsubordinated to external finalities.”<sup>166</sup>

For Massumi, this politicality of process lies in the potential of the event of change within any active process. But in what way does the envelope of art shape the swarming potential, the inventive qualities of the actual and virtual, of semblance and event? What form does a “technique of existence” – a performance practice – have to take to produce actual novelty rather than its reified form? In what way can an aesthetic practice pragmatically diagram its procedures of abstraction to eventuate effective revitalisations that expose (if not resist) the regimes of power? The philosopher’s take is: “you have to leave creative outs. You have to build in escapes. Drop sinkholes. And I mean build them *in* – make them immanent to the experience. [...] Make a vanishing point appear, where the interaction turns back in on its own potential, and where that potential appears for itself. That could be a definition of producing an aesthetic effect.”<sup>167</sup> And here is the echo of a sonic affect: “Ring the bells that still can ring / Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack, a crack in everything / That’s how the light gets in / That’s how the light gets in / That’s how the light gets in.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 49, original emphasis.

<sup>168</sup> Leonard Cohen, “Anthem,” in *On The Future* (New York: Columbia Records, 1992).

## In the Cut

Tuning in with the latter expressions, I intend to conceptualise and mobilise the 'aesthetic affect' of a creative blind spot in and around the research and practice of performance.

Keeping with the promise advanced in the opening, I seek to return, again and again, to what might appear as the least hospitable place, but one that I feel offers the most critical and vital access route to the inventive charge of the event: the middle of the crack as a fathomless aperture governed by a radically different logic than that of the representational norm of visibility – ocular-centrism. Cracks abound on the maps of existence, in the exploration of space and the reconstruction of time. Pursuing the incipient gaps in knowledge and experience in the folds of the aesthetic, I approach the event/performance as an abstract device for thinking about, generating and re-imagining relational practices. Unlike the direct images we obtain from more obvious vantage points, breaks and holes offer an inflected sense of something unanticipated, something that broods from under the grounds of our cognition eliciting further attention.

These zones of divarication and deformation are generative of variations that extract from the realm of the aesthetic the very abstraction that allows the cut to be open, elastic and resonant across practices and modalities of perceiving, and perceiving differently. Massumi recalls: "Deleuze would always say that to really perceive, to fully perceive which is to say to perceive artfully, you have to 'cleave things asunder.' You have to open them back up. You have to make their semblance appear as forcefully as possible. You have to give the thing its distances back."<sup>169</sup> From this sundering a making-'sense' of events emerges as the residual force of the semblance, whose unpredictable appearance disrupts, challenges and resists attempts of representational capture; that is, it 'appears' in the suspension of all preconceived logics of (explicit) representation.

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<sup>169</sup> Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 49.

According to Massumi, in the photographic arts, this residue potential is what Roland Barthes called the “punctum:” “the punctum is the appearance through the photo of an affective after-life. It is the strike of a life as a force, beyond an actual life. In other words, as abstracted from it, as a real but abstract force of life-likeness.”<sup>170</sup> My intention is to trace in the (biogrammatic) topography of performance the likeness of the striking force that cuts across the unique figure of a life where/when it wells on the cusp of its perishing. I gather up in the following pages a collection composed of (more and less literal and figurative) wounds, cuts, gaps that connect in affective ways, folding and unfolding, to bare the incipient (phantom) traces of a semblance within the fabric of performance. I will turn my attention to the animate but hauntingly suspended figure of an uncertain, ruptured, or simply nonexistent corporeality, ungrasped at a distinctly immaterial impasse of embodied exposure and vulnerability, whose critical *dys*-appearance however represents nothing less than a lure for feeling-with others.

In the deep psychic, physical and social cut of a wounding by which the human becomes non-human – under the circumstances of received or enacted suffering – we encounter a kind of fleshy visceral quality of existence that elicits sensible dispositions of (syn)aesthetic attention responsive to singular expressions of human injury. This kind of “living attention” happens in a moment of interruption of the habitual terms of exchange and reciprocity – and assertion of one’s own will – escalating the responsibility to regard the precariousness of embodied sociality, and for doing so from a position other than that of anxious self-interest and defensiveness. It is uncanny how these breaches conjure the lingering, face-to-face actuality of invisible flows of violent affectivity – even in the lack of palpable violence – passing between bodies. There is nowhere to hide in sight of these vagrant, erratic mo(ve)ments. But how do we attend the very impossibility to be-hold or with-hold the experience of acute, imminent (and immanent) vulnerability? Who wants to face the image of one’s own inescapable psychic and bodily exposure? Once again, how do we bear or indeed regard the pain of others, as well as

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 57.

our own? Whose precariousness are any of us, in fact, looking at? In looking at it, how do any of us face up to what remains to be seen and to be done?

I am gaping into the affective cloud that hovers around the attempts to think or conceptualise the possibilities and impediments posed by these questions with the overwhelming urge to keep things animated – *alive*. There is much attentiveness to bear before abjection and woundedness, on the circumstancing of fear and aggression, of projection and dissociation, of frail and errant attachments, perhaps most of all, of the sheer incapability to face one's own vulnerability. This precariousness belongs to the flesh that pulls and tears and can barely hold itself steady for the catastrophes to come, and to the other bodies to which we hold ourselves close to or that we push ourselves away from, for all the sublimely loving *and* barbaric purposes that trespass and transport us and make us neither human nor inhuman but only incomparably akin to each and both.

We can attempt to engage with such exposures in terms of what Jean-Luc Nancy calls *partagé*, in a sense of both dividing and sharing-out, a mode of being-with that depends upon disposition – the spacing of singularities. For Nancy, “a singular being *appears*, as finitude itself: at the end (or at the beginning), with the contact of the skin (or the heart) of another singular being, at the confines of the *same* singularity that is, as such, always *other*, always shared, always exposed.”<sup>171</sup> The anomalous, incommensurable opening of the wound constitutes a singularity that figures as both a traumatic rupture and as the site where finite beings are exposed to one another at the limit attraction of community. This limit occurs where/when the community that gathers individuals into an immanent totality – an arresting ‘whole’ – is interrupted. The wound is the interruption of this totality.

According to Nancy, “the break or the wound is not an accident, and neither is it a property

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<sup>171</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 28.



that the subject could relate to himself. For the break is a break in his self-possession as subject; it is, essentially, an interruption of the process of relating oneself to oneself outside of oneself. From then on, *I is constituted broken*.<sup>172</sup> This self-shattering logic implicates a relation that “tears and forces open, from within and from without at the same time, and from an outside that is nothing other than the rejection of an impossible interiority, the ‘without relation.’”<sup>173</sup> The wound cuts into the community of the subject to itself – as a whole – announcing only its singularity exposed as the openness of all singularities. For Nancy, “[o]nly in this communication [our sharing of finitude] are singular beings given – without a bond *and* without communion, equally distant from any notion of connection or joining from the outside and from any notion of a common and fusional interiority.”<sup>174</sup>

Open wounds suggest a vertiginous tension, the inclination toward others made manifest in the exposure of singularity and the withdrawal of its exemplarity as specimen offered up for consumption or capture. Mark Seltzer addresses the fascination with and circulation around the wound as a cultural phenomenon in contemporary art in terms of what he calls “wound culture” – that is, “the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound.”<sup>175</sup> Here, the wounded body figures as a spectacle for public consumption. However, by shifting the focus away from the ‘image’ of the afflicted flesh and towards the singularity and relationality of the affects oozing from it, I seek to work – and feel – through the possibilities of a traumatic *exposure* that does not rely upon such apprehensive or exploitative logics.

The wound that pierces through the strange horizon of the event interrupts the myth of collective community in its refusal to offer the broken, fragmented body as a site of gathering – and staring. In becoming open, undone, the flesh refuses to incarnate communion, but rather

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<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 96, original emphasis.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>175</sup> Mark Seltzer, “Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere,” *October* 80 (Spring 1997): 3.

remains suspended at the very limit of exposure; as preciously advanced it becomes ecstatic – beside itself: “outside itself, over that edge that opens up its being-in-common.”<sup>176</sup> Here, being is not gathered; it is outside itself, inclined toward others and to their singular death in an incommensurable relation to an outside that may not be grasped. At this limit we share only the recognition of our common finitude. The work of community as prescriptive operativity must then be “abandoned on the common limit where singular beings share one another,”<sup>177</sup> that is, at the moment of interruption – of breakage. Hence, the injury may be thought of as the most explicit form of being-in-common without total community.

The injury that can never be completely shared is nonetheless an exposure of finitude that *is* shared, insofar as finitude is *being*, shared-out. It is a *partagé* of the flesh (and blood): the fundamental relation between singular beings of sharing that which also divides – the limit. For Nancy, the limit that lies between us and that calls us to a community that can be neither lost nor completed constitutes an origin that is a *between*, “the spacing of the experience of the outside:”<sup>178</sup>

We are alike because each one of us is exposed to the outside that *we are for ourselves*. The like is not the same (*le semblable n'est pas le pareil*). I do not rediscover *myself*, nor do I recognize *myself* in the other: I experience the other's alterity, or I experience alterity in the other together with the alteration that 'in me' sets my singularity outside me and infinitely delimits it. Community is that singular ontological order in which the other and the same are alike (*sont le semblable*): that is to say, in the sharing of identity.<sup>179</sup>

If the one and the other are *semblable* – a semblance of an ontological order of relationality, then I posit the wound as the exposure that makes this likeness palpable; the split that

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<sup>176</sup> Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 4.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 33–4.

*appears* the contact of being-with in the event of singularity, for “[t]he break is nothing more than a touch, but the touch is not less deep than a wound.”<sup>180</sup> The abysmal caress of the torn flesh feels out the ‘semblematic’ event as an *ontogenic* order of share-ability.

Wound is original rupture, and not unity, that orients our be/longing to each other. Massumi writes: “belonging is a dynamic corporeal ‘abstraction:’ the ‘drawing off’ (transductive conversion) of the corporeal into the dynamism (yielding the event). Belonging is unmediated, and under way, never already-constituted. It is the openness of bodies to each other and to what they are not – the incorporeality of the event.”<sup>181</sup> In proximities with these ideas, I propose an interpretive methodology that posits the breakage, the cut of the body, as an event that may be dispersed and manifested in forms that are not directly linked with the event of wounding, but which bear some trace of their source within the remediations *yielded through* by the semblamatic incorporeality of its virtual and vital rem(a)inders.

Performance might here return to flip the event onto its ‘backside’ – its expanded vitality – as an *alive* technique for inverting matter into the spacing out and holding together – the *partagé* – of singularly shared virtualities. Within this technology of lived abstraction, the condition of woundedness figures like a Barthesian ‘punctum’ – the residue of semblant potential that can effectively escape capture; the vanishing point that continues into the ‘dys-appearance’ of a life at its limit. This ‘unique’ corporeality comes to the fore in the pragmatic sense of its capacity for affecting and being affected, its potential to collapse border thresholds. In this presence one breathes in an uncanny and unstable “likeness” of something that erupts in a great and echoing surge of a “moreness” to life channelled in-between bodies – into an open field of affective transits.

What is at stake here is the possibility of connectedness, resonance, and change that you get

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>181</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 76.

from bodies as limit-attractions, simultaneously co-attracting and co-distancing, co-absenting and co-presenting along their varying virtual potentials. I call this potential 'visceral force,' and not just for rhetorical effect, or the 'push-and-pull' of the body – the affective, 'gut feeling' of a life welling at the cusp of its perishing. These affects are largely transmitted as a contagion consequent to "affective attunement," or "entrainment" – a feeling-with of being with others in living attention and attendance. It is the sensation arising in the spacing – and distancing – of sharing out that is the operative element here; its capacity to sustain sensation and unleash passion:

the 'unleashing of passions' is of the order of what Bataille himself often designated as '*contagion*,' another name for 'communication.' What is communicated, what is contagious, and what, in this manner – and only in this manner – is 'unleashed,' is the *passion* of singularity as such. The singular being, because it is singular, is in the passion – the passivity, the suffering, and the excess – of sharing its singularity. The presence of the other does not constitute a boundary that would limit the unleashing of 'my' passions: on the contrary, only the exposition to the other unleashes my passions. [...] 'Being is never me alone, it is always *me and those like me*' [...] This is its passion. Singularity is the passion of being.<sup>182</sup>

What Nancy describes as "passion" seems to echo the potential relationality expressed by Massumi's conception of "belonging" – of becoming-together. Recognising both sides of these arguments, we could adjoin their value in the movement of *compassion*: the "contact of *being with* one another in this turmoil."<sup>183</sup> The making-sense of these surges through the personal, social and aesthetic ambit of performance constitutes an aesthetic politics that serves to

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<sup>182</sup> Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 32-33.

<sup>183</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), xiii, my emphasis.

disseminate the multiplication of sensuously perceived similarities and differences. In those fleeting moments where a vibrating atmosphere, mood, weather is shared in the affects bodies release, under the pressure of shifting (historical) times; where singularities can be in the room with things and attach to people via circulation and modulation of their virtual extensions, this abstractive technology can indeed stage the “multiplication of powers of existence, to ever-divergent regimes of action and expression.”<sup>184</sup>

These activist forces can become involved in the registers of the personal, the social and the political by foregrounding the value of an ethos of belonging-together in the construction of a temporary community where what singular beings want is not to gather around exclusive properties, but instead, following here Giorgio Agamben’s invocation, they long to orient belonging itself to “whatever being,” to the other “*with all of its predicates*, its being such as it is,” where “whatever” (*qualunque*) designates infinite potentiality and not arbitrariness or lack.<sup>185</sup> Such spacing, and timing, of the sympathetic in-*between* exposes us to the pleasurable (or traumatic) sharing of no-thing that yet remains to be seen, and felt. These capacities and opportunities to form affinities can create the conditions for social change, a change both singular and shared.

The creative event that channels and extends these emergent and co-affective experiences in the historical, can serve to re-virtualise and re-transmit the virtual representations and viral transmissions proper to the rupturing dynamic of the wound. These emblematic re-circulations unflesh the corporeal into the smooth space and exploratory, experimental, and improvisational event-time of the “body without an image.” In this exemplary model of being – of the event – the aesthetic is transformed, via movement, tendencies, vibrations, resonances and modulations, into the measureless gap of the quasi-corporeal and purely-relational. Here,

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<sup>184</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 34.

<sup>185</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1993), 2, original emphasis.

the cracks, the cuts, fissures, and dissolutions experienced by the body are transversed into a biagrammatic model that can be then used to explore differently conceived mechanisms of belonging and beholding – that we can also call passion (in the sense of desire) and pleasure (in the sense of *jouissance*).

This paradigmatic figuration has already been fleshed out as beyond any phenomenological or psychoanalytical, embodied or immersive, wholly specular body experience. Rather, what takes place in the *gap* of the disappearance of the imagistic body of the self-possessed subject is the range of relative perspectives in which the body is subject, object, and in-between; its emergent qualities interlocking, distributed, contingent, and multiple. What is left is a continuous *process* transposed on a temporal scale of interstitial nodes where empirical space is distantiated and the relational engendered by the distribution of affective architectures and topographies. This is a manifestation of the virtual: it belongs to the virtual. It is real but also abstract, with a potentiality of transformations and transpositions that actualises the event-full process of being-becoming, becoming-intense, becoming-other, and now belonging. I call this the *alive* event of performance.

In this sense, performance indeed *dys*-appears as a sensuous experience of nonsensuous relations, as a form – or a technique – of life fundamentally shared. Its affective currents – vitality affects and affective tonalities – arise spontaneously and often come to pass ‘unrecognised,’ falling outside of consciousness. They are activated and disseminated; kinetically and synesthetically yoked together, across sensory, spatial, and temporal disparities. They operate through vision but are not contained in or by it. By manipulating rhythm, movement, scale and light differentials, this practice of abstraction makes its subject appear and disappear with the mimesis and artifice necessary for the event to return its repeated invocations, and re-orientations. It can produce a visual experience of essentially invisible realms: shared phantoms or hallucinations that “might be better off called a fictive

relational reality;<sup>186</sup> incorporeal interactions of separate forms of life that emerge together in  
occurrent affective attunement. From this perspective, *alive* performance can envelop a  
*universe of felt relations* and constitute a “tacit archive of shared and shareable  
experience;”<sup>187</sup> a register of semblances in which no-thing appears. An affective archive in  
flesh-and-blood.

What we experience in this archive is an intensity mobilised through proprioceptivity and  
viscerality: *affect as passionate*, a folding in and out of subject-object relationality in a ‘sensitive’  
time-form. The cellular structures of the wounded semblance of the “body without an image”  
that this thesis addresses can be articulated as the critical practice of a vital *and* virtual  
archive of experience: the visceral sensibility of the (proprioceptive) temporalities of the flesh.  
This corporeal registers are here activated as a temporality of habit and memory that  
recognises the excitations of life that re-appear – re-mediated, re-modulated, re-circulated –  
across possible futures of opened up pasts, hence remaking the historical present as  
something lived and stretched out. Before the pragmatic implications of such interpretive  
gestures can be unpacked in the following chapters, I would like to further explore the  
intersection of these temporalities in the aesth/ethic theory of performance and research by  
way of traversing the phenomenological body with an immersive activist philosophy.

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<sup>186</sup> Brian Massumi, “The Archive of Experience,” on *brianmassumi.com*. N.p., 2003: 12,  
<<http://www.brianmassumi.com/textes/Archive%20of%20Experience.pdf>>.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

## Flesh-and-Blood

Maurice Merleau-Ponty understood human perception in the lifeworld as a meeting in the “flesh” (*la chair*). For the phenomenologist, we open onto the world through flesh, which organises or concretises what one sees, ensuring that one’s particular vision is a modality of an anonymous visibility; that is a “primordial property [belonging] to the flesh.”<sup>188</sup> However, “it is not *I* who sees, not *he* who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general.”<sup>189</sup> Similarly, it is not “I” or even the localizable body that perceives, rather, it is perception that flows from and through the flesh: “[m]y body does not perceive, but it is as if it were built around the perception that dawns through it.”<sup>190</sup> Perception flows from and through the flesh, marked by the infinite reversibility of the touched touching.<sup>191</sup> If the body is the storehouse of such “knowledge,” and if experience is inextricably tied to the flesh, there is a significant gap left by its second skin, its own reversible fold.

Drew Leder expands on Merleau-Ponty’s work to articulate the manifold dimensions of experience. He writes: “the ‘flesh’ is a kind of circuit, a ‘coiling over of the visible upon the visible’ [...] which traverses me, but of which I am not the origin.”<sup>192</sup> Simultaneously, he also introduces the concept of “blood” to supplement the notion of “Viscerality,” constituted by the: ‘circuitry of vibrant, pulsing life which precedes the perceptual in foetal life, outruns it in sleep, sustains it from beneath at all moments.’<sup>193</sup> Like the “Visible” of the flesh the Visceral “cannot be properly said to belong to the subject: it is a power that traverses me, granting me life in ways I have never fully willed nor understood.”<sup>194</sup> The visible world rests upon a visceral invisibility, the two are “reversible” structures: “there is an intercorporeity of the blood, of which

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<sup>188</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 142.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>191</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s famous example of the flesh is found in his description of the left hand touching the right.

<sup>192</sup> Drew Leder, “Flesh and Blood: A Proposed Supplement to Merleau-Ponty,” *Human Studies* 13.3 (1990): 210.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.



the fleshly, perceptual encounter is a sublimated reflection.”<sup>195</sup> They are not the same, not fused, yet each gains its definition in relation to the other; they do not coincide, but still neither is known without reference to the other: their relation can be described as a com-passionate attachment.

Similarly, Massumi, as previously formulated, makes a distinction between the dimensions of proprioception and viscerality. Proprioception as a factor of perception registers effects of the body’s actions continuously as duration, translating every encounter into a muscular memory of relationality. It is a dimension of the flesh that opens into the space and “registers qualities directly and continuously as movement.”<sup>196</sup> Viscerality instead is the sense perception that feels the immediacy of image/sound intensity as stimulus, before any visual recognition. The modulations of tonalities and rhythms are part of this recondite dimension. The dimension of viscerality is adjacent to that of proprioception, but they do not overlap. Taken together as two complementary sensibilities they are “most directly implicated in the body’s registration of the in-betweenness of the incorporeal event”<sup>197</sup> – that is, the space/time of pure processuality. The temporal pathways of action and reaction circuits in the body climactically resonates through movement and affect as the time of *sensation* in the space of *passion*.

What emerges from these separate but somewhat complementary versions of viscerality and sanguinity is a sense of the spatial folding and unfolding of the fugitive temporalities and indeterminate spatiality of the *in-corporeal* event. For a slippery moment, we can then figure the present to be the temporal flesh; that is, the visible dimension inextricably linked with the bodily relationality, the pervasive atmosphere of sexuality, the expressiveness of language. Similarly, we can fugaciously imagine the past as the blood of the temporal frame of a human continuum, the sensible structure behind the body, the visceral depths constituting the vibrant,

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>196</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 59.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 62.

pulsating life that precedes perception. Then, the vital *and* virtual archives of existence (as experience) can actualise as the continuous duration – or endurance – of chiasmic mo(ve)ments of encounter that sustain the life of the unfolding flesh of the present whilst extending into the visceral past of infolding intensities, suspended for further realisation.

These evidentiary traces of affective vibrations and active forces are not merely born out of an unconscious past, nor are they expression of the visible surface of life. They are present spirit and carnal absence, they are *in fact* spirited; they are phantoms of flesh-*and*-blood. Between flesh and blood the body folds out and back on itself in a reversibility that disfigures the logic of chronological order. We can imagine this relationship as a matter of time bleeding in and out of flesh. This figural failure of signification can, with the right turn (I suggest here upside-down into the void) open strange horizons of possibility for knowledge and meaning. Such epistemological potentials cannot be conceptualised as self-contained and unitary constructions, but can only ‘make sense’ as circuits, force-fields of impacts and resonances set in continual motion by the intermingling of experiences, encounters and feelings routed and reclaimed via the being-in-common of bodies – including thing-bodies – in the event of living.

This mode of conceiving *alive* events, I propose, reopens the critical field of performance as a sustained practice of lived abstraction that performs an impossible fidelity to the surges, relays and impacts of movements that seek to attend to the invisible traces – or semblances – of cultural and historical moments. Thus realised, performance qua *alive* art becomes foregrounded as a creative and inventive technology of feeling-with and becoming other; an archive of embodied, dis-embodied and re-embodied attunements. I advance this ‘eventfull’ sensibility as a kind of archival *vigor* (and not *rigor*): not a compulsive drive for firming or assimilating bodies but a passionate yielding into the folds of their expressions, intimacies and (dis)connections; the everyday acts and repetitions that become the primary register through

which we may begin to process disappearance and dissolution as the possibilities of contact with inconsistencies and gaps of knowledge. Not a pathological fever that clings to the traces of meaning, but the sensuous desire to near the abyss of signification. Not dust but the transporting atmosphere carrying its particles.

In the impasse between the theory and practice of historicity – one apparently unable to acknowledge the *un*-resting vitality of its sources, the other seemingly caught between liveness and ephemerality – I want to open a passage (a gap) for the affective dimension to filter through its vital *in*-formations. Tracing the incipient force of the inconsistent epistemologies that surge from the vibrant feeling of the body touching the void and the silencing vulnerability of a life at the limit, I follow the sensuous demand to lend a hand, an ear, a voice to the histories that bear the marks of the failure of ontological securities, of the violence of power, the ecstasy of being-with, and the chance of doing without. In the geographies and maps of these critical appearances, I recognise, again and again, the potential for new epistemic bodies of “corporeal literacy”<sup>198</sup> to emerge in experiment with life at the margin of visibility and at the edge of signification.

The encounter with the wounded semblance of the body – “the body without an image” – within the relational archive of performance transmits and disseminates mainly rapturous atmospheres and transient moods, affects and situations that make sense and knowledge only as affect(-potentials) passing between bodies. The passage from event to experience, from experience to knowledge, and back, can in fact only occur in affective co-presence (and co-attendance) of being beside-*ourselves*, despite and *because* of our singularities. Being beside, Sedgwick explains, is an experience of “noncontradiction” – hence the permeability of

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<sup>198</sup> In “Passages in Post-Modern Theory: Mapping the Apparatus,” Maaïke Bleeker writes: “[c]orporeal literacy is a strategic term with which we want to argue for an understanding of bodies as capable of reading and thinking in ways that are both concrete and abstract, both material and cultural, always lived through the body, though not necessarily consciously so. Becoming corporeal literate will not provide us with a more true reading of the world as we encounter it, but it may increase awareness of what kind of body is implied within a reading that convinces as truthful, and whose body this is” (*Parallax* 14.1 [2008]: 67).

perspectival relation. Yet “besides” does not succumb to a “fantasy of metonymically egalitarian or pacific relations.”<sup>199</sup> To understand how the lived technologies of performance balance these two polarities – nondualistic relation and individuated conflict – we must first understand our permeable singularity of our encounters vis-à-vis the other.

This is precisely the ethical movement traced by this thesis: making sense and fleshing out the *event* of the body to make it knowable to and oriented towards an other not in order to preserve it but in order to learn how to ‘lose’ it, and to find a language for that loss. This is what the phantoms feelings and vital affects in the *flesh-and-blood* records (and re-plays) of performance can do: they can move *us* – and move us beyond the binaries, they can help us make sense of the rupturing mo(ve)ments of existence, and make changes in their cultural, social and political maps. These visceral and sensory registers fit the incongruous desire to (re)create meaning and knowledge out of ‘nothingness’ without reliance on authoritative and wholesome narratives that in tracking down ‘origin’ stories reduce them to their very last breath. It would be opportune to dwell in the gap of the moments missed, the voices unheard, the gestures disregarded or forgotten by the official records before our reflexive scholarly protocols send us rummaging through the dust of the institutional archives in the longing for a tangible piece of the past or a gem of knowledge hidden under the weight of labour, only to find that we frantically send our arms up in the air for ‘no-thing’ at all that yet moves, now and again.

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<sup>199</sup> Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* (op. cit.), 8.

## 2. Where's the Passion? Where's the Minimalism? Or, How Yvonne Rainer Turns on the Facts of Her Feelings by Impersonating, Approximating and End Running Around Her Selves and Others.' Or, Why Are We Still Looking at *Trio A*?

### Despoiled Views

Writing on "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity,"<sup>1</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick begins by describing the compulsion, probably shared by many people walking the streets of New York in the aftermath of the destruction of the World Trade Centre, to gaze downtown toward a sky empty of the towers, where once stood the 'things' that proclaimed the status (stature) of the city: "[t]his inexplicably furtive glance was associated with a conscious wish: that my southward vista would again be blocked by the familiar sight of the pre-September 11 twin towers, somehow come back to loom over us in all their complacent ugliness. But, of course, the towers were always still gone. Turning away, shame was what I would feel."<sup>2</sup>

To perceive the full extent and implications of such an event where the surging desire for 'something' – a blocked view in this case – is met by a saturated sense of no-thing – a 'revolting'<sup>3</sup> shame – we need to turn away from view, as it happens, and towards more ordinary feelings, if only to re-turn to the scene in a new light, and discern the nature of the incipient invisibility that is laid out before us. Sedgwick does so in the following page:

The flashes of shame didn't seem particularly related to prohibition or transgression. Beyond that, though it was I who felt the shame, it wasn't especially myself I was ashamed of. It would be closer to say I was ashamed for

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<sup>1</sup> This is the first chapter of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>3</sup> From the Italian *rivoltare*, based on Latin *revolvere* 'roll back,' *Oxford Dictionary*, <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/revolt?q=revolt>>.

the estranged and denuded skyline; such feelings interlined, of course, the pride, solidarity, and grief that would also bound me to the city. The shame had to do too, with visibility and spectacle – the hapless visibility of the towers' absence now, the shockingly compelling theatricality of their destruction.<sup>4</sup>

These and further considerations on the theatricality and performativity of affects can be found in Sedgwick's volume *Touching Feeling* first published in 2003 – two years after the fall of the Twin Towers: a collection of essays written and talks presented over the previous several years. Before this prolific time, in 1999, Sedgwick had learnt that a breast cancer she thought was in remission had in fact become incurable.<sup>5</sup> Although in the book she discusses in depth critical and affective conditions of experience in order to address her concern with the relationship between, feeling, action, and learning, Sedgwick only sparsely refers to her own illness.

For instance, she never writes of the compulsion, probably shared by many women walking their hands and eyes over the outline of their body in the aftermath of their mastectomy, to gaze down toward the empty torso, where once stood the 'primary things' that bore the markers of femininity and desirability with a conscious wish "that this southward vista would again be blocked by the familiar sight." If she had, probably the 'things' would still be gone, and shame would turn up in their place. But then again, not shame of oneself but a sense of estrangement and defacement mixed with pride, solidarity, and grief that also bounds us to our bodies – and those of others – before the hapless visibility of such intervening absences. But even if none of these possibilities made history, a recalcitrant feeling still lingers, and one that Eve's work takes pain to show: that there are limits to the representation of (traumatic) experience, for ultimately how people 'feel,' and feel differently, is inflected precisely by what

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<sup>4</sup> Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 36.

<sup>5</sup> Towards the end of the book she writes: "nothing dramatizes the distance between knowledge and realization as efficiently as a diagnosis with a fatal disease" (*ibid.*, 173).

exceeds one's grasp.

We can concede, perhaps, that at the turning point of facing up to a crisis – political, catastrophic, cultural or individual – what ties us all together is the very inability to grapple with the matter of things and to grasp what the matter *is* with the 'things' of our body. Peering through the debris of loss, the haze of desire, the daze of hope, and the fog of shame, one may find that the textural mapping of our affective movements – and attachments – may provide an opening to recollect and reconnect 'some' bodies, and apprehend some 'things' that otherwise we cannot bear. As the body leans toward a temporal elsewhere that it cannot see and can never hold again, the dramatic – and sensuous – scene of absence conjures up something impalpable, incidental, fleeting, and yet solidly etched in the world and enmeshed in its sociality; an affective, embodied 're-turn' that is also a haunting.

In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon sustains that the practice of excavating society's "ghostly aspects" changes fundamentally how we produce knowledge:

The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something is lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening.<sup>6</sup>

As we (sometimes) hear, revenant forms of life draw us affectively into what Gordon borrowing from Raymond Williams calls a "structure of feelings:" a sensual knowing, or "practical consciousness" in the present (presence) of something that, though from the past, is

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<sup>6</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 7.

paradoxically not yet, and not yet cast into “cold knowledge.”<sup>7</sup> This indeterminate and indelible reappearance turns up as a compulsive rem(a)inder that prevents the monumentalising – the turning to stone, or the turning stone cold – of history whilst refiguring the need to upturn and unsettle each speckle of grave matter in the attempt to recover and re-member what the body can no longer (be)hold, face up to, or fully comprehend.

The movements of walking – and indeed working – through the saturated landscape of affective experiences by which we are effaced register the turns and returns of events that sustain life’s continual re-emergence, out of time, out of joint. In both a metaphorical and practical sense, the body’s temporal horizons move us to affects and attachments that are not bound to their instantaneous eruption. The feedbacks of feeling are etched out of moments of temporal warp that enfold diagrams (biograms)<sup>8</sup> of (inter)subjective and structural changes that ripple across the before- and after-time of the event, moving side by side, at the point of almost touching.

As Judith Butler quite literally exemplifies in “After loss, what then?,”<sup>9</sup> the afterword to *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, what comes afterward might provide another way to understand what went on before. Simultaneously, the scene of the past can open up a gap for its unseen potential to meet future re-figurations. Tracing Butler’s reflections on Walter Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, if “the collapse of a [narrative] sequence into simultaneity seems to imply both spatiality and figuration,” then our personal and cultural (hi)stories can evolve in spatial distributions that can be described as “choreographic.” As a result, it seems that “the loss of history is not the loss of movement, but a certain configuration (figural, spatial, simultaneous) that has its own dynamism, if not its own dance.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>9</sup> Judith Butler, “Afterword: After Loss, What Then?,” in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 467.

<sup>10</sup> All quotes *ibid.*, 467.



The following re-meditations of the event of dance-performance propose ways to reimagine what the sensual configurations of certain historical moves embedded in the excorporations and circulations of social, political and aesthetic choreographies of late twentieth century art affectively show. In particular, I am interested in dissecting and analysing the spatial thinking and untimely feeling behind the radical minimalist forms embodied by the work of artist Yvonne Rainer that I take to be exemplary of a shared and transmitted, if perhaps closeted, historical affectivity – or zeitgeist. Turning a downcast view towards her ‘classic’ *Trio A* composition, I hope to excavate the spectral force of the affective dispositions behind her critical moves. Re-directing the relational architectures of her formalism, these vital energies foreground the landscape of a ‘new’ political agency (and scholarship) that can keep *alive* the dance of time lost and regained.

## Unseemly Underbelly

The contribution of American iconoclast choreographer and filmmaker Yvonne Rainer to the culture of the moving body – and image – is well documented by an impressive number of books, essays, autobiographies, published interviews, lectures as well as doctoral theses that chart the dense critical engagement that has accompanied the development of her aesthetics and ideas over the past fifty years, and still counting.<sup>11</sup> The remarkable impact of her artistic practice is representative of the '60s and '70s, the historical era that witnessed the vibrant emergence of the avant-garde sensibility expressed as the radical resistance to the commodification and objectification of the art world and the construction of social empowerment as an embodied 'movement' of activism.

Notoriously, Rainer was a founding member of the wildly influential Judson Dance Theater,<sup>12</sup> a collective of artists that gathered around the dance compositions of musician Robert Dunn and a group feeling of unity and community. The aesthetic imagination, working practices and political bodies they cultivated quickly built momentum and became the new ground for innovation in contemporary dance as well a focal point for vanguard activity during a time – 1962-4 – often invoked as the epic moment of the artistic revolution of the late twentieth century. But by 1965, the avant-garde explosion was beginning to subside; experimentation,

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<sup>11</sup> It would be impossible to reproduce an exhaustive bibliography; critical engagement with Rainer's work is, however, substantial. I will here only mention Susan Leigh Foster, Mark Franko, Ann Cooper Albright, and Sally Banes, who writing in the 1980s and 90s have tackled the critical reflection of Rainer's dances. Also Lucy Fischer, Peggy Phelan, Kaja Silverman, Ann Kaplan, Lauren Rabinovitz, and Scott MacDonald have dedicated to the artist a number of book chapters.

<sup>12</sup> Dunn had studied music composition with John Gage. The members of the Judson Dance Theater were trained dancers but also untrained visual artists, musicians, poets, and even filmmakers. The first Judson concert took place on July 6, 1962, with works created by Steve Paxton, Fred Herko, David Gordon, Alex and Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer, Elaine Summers, William Davis, and Ruth Emerson. The activity and legacy of this historical collective has been analysed in depth by art theory at large but also by some of the choreographers and artists involved, who used the practice of writing to forward their own philosophies and creative practices. Rainer herself is the most prolific documentarist of the life and practices surrounding the Judson Dance Theater. She has produced several autobiographies, lectures and self-reviews that have often been taken to 'speak for' that period in dance history. See Sally Banes, "The Birth of the Judson Dance Theatre: 'A Concert of Dance' at Judson Church, July 6, 1962," *Dance Chronicle* 5.2 (1982); Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964* (Duke University press, 1993); Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and for a more recent review Ramsay Burt, "The Specter of Interdisciplinarity," *Dance Research Journal* 41.1 (Summer 2009).

provocation and subversion had reached their peak and the (radical) spirits were slowly acquiescing into the more subdued flow of intellectual pursuit. Marcia B. Siegel poignantly registers these shifts:

Avant-garde transformations have no real beginnings or stopping points. You could pin down the dance revolution of the late twentieth century to the Judson Dance Theater (1962-64) but that would be as false as to say modern art began with 1913 or *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. The dance avant-garde had its provocateurs and teachers, its daring early gestures, its collaborators and quiet fellow travelers. It gathered adherents quickly, was historicized and pigeonholed early, acquired symbolic protagonists and icons. By the time its ideas filtered into the mainstream, contributing significantly to the Dance Boom of the 1970s and '80s, it had lost its diversity and relinquished its detail under the intellectual surface of theory.<sup>13</sup>

Notwithstanding the turns of tides, Rainer continued to be a highly influential figure. In 1965, she (in)famously, and unwittingly, drew the new rules for dance-making by way of negation,<sup>14</sup> eliding in one single stroke the theatrical strategies of much Modern American dance drama, and seemingly rejecting the legacy of Martha Graham and, to a certain extent, Anna Halprin. Her creative directives of the time immediately became regarded as the 'NO Manifesto,' a dogma and a mantra to reform the future of dance, although Rainer had warned it was only "an area of concern as yet not fully clarified for me in relation to dance, but existing as a very large NO to many facts in the theater today. This is not to say that I personally do not enjoy many forms of theater. It is only to define more stringently the rules and boundaries of my

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<sup>13</sup> Marcia B. Siegel, "Revolutionaries Revisited," *The Hudson Review* 60.4 (Winter, 2008): 638.

<sup>14</sup> The full title of Rainer's essay was "Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Called *Parts of Some Sextets*, Performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, New York, in March, 1965," published in the *Tulane Drama Review* 10 (Winter 1965) as a retrospective review of the dance, later reprinted in Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1961-73* (Halifax, NS: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), which is the source referred to here. The so-called 'NO Manifesto' were in effect the notes added by Rainer as postscript.

own artistic game at the moment.”<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, her negative tactics became crystallised into the very emblem of the avant-garde dance revolution. More than 40 years later, Rainer wrote: “I wish it could be buried [...] I never meant for the manifesto to be prescriptive. Manifestos are meant to clear the air and challenge, and then their usefulness is over. I myself haven't abided by that manifesto, and I don't expect anyone else to, either.”<sup>16</sup> Rainer's willfulness refuses to 'still' the atmosphere of critical gestures and movements whilst her earlier predicaments are distilled into a cast of time that erases the afterlife of shifting bodies and minds. The 'official' history maps are again caught up in the making and apprehending of on-going mo(ve)ments related to a shared and transmitted historicity, congealing its events and experiences into a unity that limits their potentially unfinished and enigmatic activity.

Rainer's subsequent moves became well recognized and documented, as her work in dance became absorbed into its history. The aesthetic vocabulary of her experimentations introduced into the postmodern lexicon of dance the cool, emotionally detached formalism synthesized by the 'neutral body' – human scaled and non-virtuosic, mainly absorbed in functional activities with directness and simplicity. Her earlier works, *Three Seascapes* (1962), *Part of Some Sextets* (1965), and *The Mind is a Muscle* (1966), are iconic examples of the qualities of task-like, work-like, matter of fact physical actions of what is generally referred to as her body-based 'minimalism.' In a 2011 interview, Rainer wants to set the records straight: “we didn't characterise it as minimalist movement, we called it ordinary movement, everyday movement. It fit into the *zeit* of the time... The *gaist* rather, in that minimalism was happening at the same time.”<sup>17</sup> We hear, once more, how the ghost – *gaist* – of visceral imageries appear as a shared nervous system that fills the space of time – *zeit* –

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>16</sup> From “Meeting Yvonne Rainer,” interview by Helmut Ploebst, *Corpus*, <<http://www.corpusweb.net/meeting-yvonne-rainer-2.html>>.

<sup>17</sup> “Movement & Task,” interview, 2011, *Vimeo*, <<http://vimeo.com/26643790>>.

not yet over-coded with meaning, not yet frozen into 'stilled' moments later called epochal.

These tendencies and moods seem to exude, using Raymond Williams's words: "the pressure and structure of active experience, creating forms, creating life," and at its heart can be found the "structure of feeling," something that is "lived and experienced but not yet quite arranged as institutions and ideas."<sup>18</sup> This is the dense atmosphere of "social experiences in solution" that "do not need to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures."<sup>19</sup> Structures of feelings, the extant documents of ordinary moments of lived life and experience consciously and unconsciously shared and not yet turned cold, set the score for the formal, material aspects of the work of art. What matters here, dramatically,<sup>20</sup> is how the affective sense of common experiences gets transmitted and their forces and desires reorganised into spatial and figural choreographies of 'felt' time.

Yvonne Rainer takes a leap into this temporal frame when, towards the conclusion of her confessional memoir, *Feelings Are Facts*, she expands on the subject of the title:

an adage of the late John Schimel, my psychotherapist in the early 1960s, [that] became an unspoken premise by means of which I was able to bypass the then current clichés of categorization [...]. Ignored or denied in the work of my sixties peers, the nuts and bolts of emotional life comprised the unseen (or should I say "unseemly"?) underbelly of high U.S. Minimalism. While we aspired to the lofty and cerebral plane of a quotidian materiality, our unconscious lives unravelled with an intensity and melodrama that inversely matched their absence in the boxes, portals, jogging and standing still of our austere sculptural and

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<sup>18</sup> Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 59, 138, 192.

<sup>19</sup> See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 133, 132.

<sup>20</sup> I am using this pun to shift the focus back to the theatrical context of such transmissions.

choreographic creations.<sup>21</sup>

A coherent sense emerges in Rainer's statement about the qualities of *intensity* – the edge of affect – that recede into the creative forms they give rise to. Unseemly, the driving engine and underlying force behind the formalist impulse of late twentieth-century art, its unexpressed subjectivity, *is* its affective *immateriality*. This elusive dimension is a thickly inhabited atmosphere of unsighted particles that travel and form attachments. These spectral remainders of bodies and subjectivities stubbornly refuse to leave the scene; much like the corporeal phantoms summoned in the preceding chapter, they are the unacknowledged or negated term of what cannot be seen but that cannot be suppressed. Feelings, in fact, remain in the work in inverse proportion to their occlusion; the formers indeed a more autonomous, durable and persistent energy than the latter's most evidentiary practices.

This counter-active impulse is made evident in Rainer's own rhetoric of refusal: No to spectacle. No to virtuosity. No to transformations and magic and make-believe. No to the glamour and transcendency of the star image. No to the heroic. No to the anti-heroic. No to trash imagery. No to involvement of performer or spectator. No to style. No to camp. No to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer. No to eccentricity. No to moving or being moved.<sup>22</sup> The final term of this leitmotiv, the capacity to affect and to be affected, occupies a central role in Rainer's thinking. "To move" or "to be moved" is the ultimate "NO" that demands a secreting of the unseemly inventive source that affect is. However, I argue, the pressures exercised by these forces elicit a ghostly return as they disappear in the relational formations of the artist's compositions, whilst 'dys-appearing'<sup>23</sup> in their proliferating reiterations.

My proposition here is that Rainer's identification of the affective and allusive dimensions

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<sup>21</sup> Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings Are Facts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), 391.

<sup>22</sup> Rainer, *Work 1961-73*, 51.

<sup>23</sup> In the sense expressed in the first chapter as 'bringing to the fore,' 'foregrounding.'

within her 'minimalism' is not an expression of a repressive drive but rather the re-emergence of a 'recessive' affect: a subtraction of background for the foregrounding of the artistic work into a system of self-self interaction. Rainer, in fact, is not only the author of the artwork but she is also actively involved in its multiple forms of re-access. Alongside being a prolific 'maker' of art she is also a keen 'producer' of a kind of "overwriting" of her creative 'movements,' Ramsay Burt notes: "Yvonne Rainer started to use publication to make claims for [her] particular directions in artistic practice as a way of building an informed public for their work, [she was] intervening directly in the field of public discourse."<sup>24</sup>

This analysis attempts to (b)reach the gap or "virtual" space between these different intentionalities. I will approach Rainer's creative practice at the intersection of its 'aesthetic' re-realizations (or reenactments to borrow Rebecca Schneider's term) and their 'reflective' re-iterations (or successive approximations) in written or spoken form. The textual re-iteration of the work, I pose, is not identical with its re-enactive manifestation, nor is it its interpretation. Rather, one and the other are two different, and not opposite, poles of reactivation for playing with the artwork malleable material and unfinished potential, in the time of the return and in the space between words and action. It is this spacious gap of openness, I argue, that dynamises the work and transforms it into a process of 'becoming-other,' revitalising its aesthetic spur and political viability.

These tendencies contribute to the foregrounding of the durational qualities of the artistic event beyond the supposedly instantaneous moment of its emergence – the present of its happening – generating the conditions for its eruption into a continuous in(ter)vention of alternative (temporal) choreographies. I will begin then by turning my attention to the minimalist operations enacted by the Rainer's determinedly unspectacular and remarkably representative solo *Trio A* (1966), perhaps the finest episode of her formal enactive

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<sup>24</sup> Burt, "The Specter of Interdisciplinarity," 19.

negations, alongside its enunciated variations in the artist's positive, if frustrated, reassertions of the work's artistic ethos. By doing so, I hope to map a 'relational archive' that reroutes her affective moves away from reaching yet another culmination and crystallisation – or regression – under the stringent views of (some) history and scholarship.



## Still Moving

In her 2009 performance-lecture “Where’s the Passion? Where’s the Politics?”<sup>25</sup> Yvonne Rainer charts the ambivalent charges underpinning her work as she delves into interdisciplinary models of art and self-exploration. In a format punctuated with anecdotes, demonstrations, ‘live’ commentary, she is “behooved” to return, once again, to her own seminal dance *Trio A*. Her chosen point of access, she explains, is the much “calumniated category of self-expression,” and in particular the quality of “**PASSION**” [she shouts],<sup>26</sup> as she is compelled to approach the dance from the pedagogic experience of having had to “articulate, yet again, its complexities and contradictions.” Almost immediately, she produces an assessment of her ‘compulsive’<sup>27</sup> and perhaps “redundant”<sup>28</sup> (self)interest in the work: “[d]espite the fact that this dance has already been theorized and expatiated on with great acuity [...] I find to my amazement that I still have things to say about it and that the bloody thing still has ‘legs’, so to speak.” The restless legs of *Trio A* have indeed come a long way, but I ask, what is that keeps them still ‘alive and kicking?’

*Trio A*<sup>29</sup> was initially conceived as the first section of a larger project titled *The Mind is a Muscle*, devised for three dancers (David Gordon, Steve Paxton, and Rainer herself) and first presented at the Judson Church Theatre in New York in 1966. This short composition<sup>30</sup> consisted of a constant flow of continuous and non-repeating movements with no accent or

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<sup>25</sup> The full title is “Where’s the Passion? Where’s the Politics?” Or How I Became Interested in Impersonating, Approximating, and End Running Around My Selves and Others’, and Where Do I Look When You’re Looking At Me?.” Rainer is famous for the use of long quips as titles of her essays. My analysis here refers to the publication of the DVD recording of this lecture-performance as presented at Tramway Glasgow on 8 October 2010, in the Canadian journal *PUBLIC 44: Experimental Media* (December 2012). However, the citations are taken from a transcript of the text that can be found at *yimg.com*, <<http://tinyurl.com/ohtxhgd>>. Henceforth, I will use this abbreviation as reference: Rainer, “Where’s the Passion?”

<sup>26</sup> All quotes in this paragraph from Rainer, “Where’s the Passion,” 3.

<sup>27</sup> My word.

<sup>28</sup> Her word.

<sup>29</sup> For an exhaustive backward glance at this work, I suggest Yvonne Rainer’s own survey in “*Trio A*: Genealogy, Documentation, Notation,” *Dance Research Journal* 41.2 (Winter 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Four or five minutes depending on “the performer’s physical inclination” (Reiner, “*Trio A*,” 12).

emphasis, performed in-group simultaneously but not in unison.<sup>31</sup> The phrasing was composed of task-oriented actions focused on dynamic distributions of energy and weight and seamless transitions featuring no interaction with the audience. These two aspects, and the latter in particular, form the backbone of the work, as Rainer herself indicates: “[t]wo primary characteristics of the dance are its uninflected continuity and its imperative involving the gaze. The eyes are always averted from direct confrontation with the audience via independent movement of the head, closure of the eyes, or simple casting down of the gaze.”<sup>32</sup>

Radical and idiosyncratic at its first appearance, today this work is largely regarded as a ‘classic’ landmark in dance history. Its emblematic conceptual and aesthetic construction became the anathema to the new ethics of inclusivity of a postmodern movement that rejected dance’s recent modernist past. As art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty reports in her 1999 article “Moving Still: Mediating Yvonne Rainer’s ‘Trio A:’”

Yvonne Rainer’s art of the 1960s was both serviceable and scratchy-utilitarian in feel, and for this, insistently oppositional. This is especially true of *Trio A*, which epitomizes a particular period in performance history: the years in which Rainer and her cohort of young choreographers, encouraged by chance methods and inclusive aesthetics learned from John Cage and other artists of the neo-avant-garde, developed a range of strategies to counter what they considered the rarefied, exhibitionist technical vocabularies of even advanced modern choreography.<sup>33</sup>

Rainer herself admitted in an interview: “*Trio A* was the dance I referred to when I said I was a post-modern dance evangelist. It was quite difficult – it had a great deal of nuance and

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<sup>31</sup> For a detailed description see Catherine Wood, *Yvonne Rainer: The Mind is a Muscle* (London: Afterall, 2007), 91-3.

<sup>32</sup> Rainer, “*Trio A*,” 12.

<sup>33</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, “Moving Still: Mediating Yvonne Rainer’s ‘Trio A,’” *October* 89 (Summer, 1999): 90.

technical demands – and I wanted to teach it to the world.”<sup>34</sup>

The artist’s pedagogic wish – or willfulness – has today become fully actualised. For almost fifty years, *Trio A* has been re-performed, recorded, reassembled and passed on a myriad of times – and still counting – accruing a new version with each relay performed, and undergoing as many incarnations as the (ever growing) number of people who have learned it. In the book *The Mind is a Muscle*, Catherine Wood emphasise the value of such proliferation: “[i]n this sense, it is all the more pertinent that *Trio A* became not just a piece of choreography that Rainer would stage as a performance, but also an ‘editioned’ artwork taught person-to-person as a kind of code. Although it has been captured on video and in numerous photographs, its real transmission has been as a form of living archive.”<sup>35</sup>

Wood also reflects on how the piece’s transduction from body to body came to participate in a “dematerialised aesthetic economy”<sup>36</sup> of gift-giving that determined unprecedented and unexpected forms of exchange and transmission founded on interpersonal relations, assumingly with the only return of dissemination and recognition. However, Rainer’s early eagerness to pass the dance on to virtually anyone willing to learn it,<sup>37</sup> who could then inhabit it for further transmission if they so desired, was more recently met by a conflicting drive for correct preservation. In 2009 she writes: “[i]n the last decade I have become far more rigorous – some might call it obsessive – not only with respect to the qualifications of those whom I allow to teach the dance but in my own transmission of its peculiarities.”<sup>38</sup>

The artist has acknowledged the contradictory nature of her belated anxiety of conservation by admitting that: “[i]t might seem incongruous that such rectitude be brought to bear not only on the choreography of a dance composed under the free-wheeling firmament of the 1960s

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<sup>34</sup> Wood, *The Mind is a Muscle*, 91.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>37</sup> Dancers and non-dances alike.

<sup>38</sup> Rainer, “*Trio A*,” 17.

but on its exact preservation.”<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, her obstinacy in the pursuit of exactitude and her insistence on ‘official’ and authoritative modes of transmission sits strangely at odds with the non-hierarchical and egalitarian determinations of the work. These tendencies, it can be argued, largely preclude the “free-wheeling” spirit of avant-gardist aspirations into the afterlife of dance. In addition, the fact that nowadays Rainer, and the official transmitters of the dance,<sup>40</sup> no longer make ‘gift’ of their teaching and that Rainer receives royalties whenever the piece is performed complicates matters further polarising the debate around preservation, immortality, ownership and control over the performance work.

However, I do not intend to contest the transactions (economic or of a different order) that have, in time, determined the materialism of her oppositional aesthetics, nor do I wish to get stuck in the complex web of contradictions and complexities around the issue of (politically) correct preservation. Rather, my intention here is to elaborate, against the grain of the ‘common’ grounds of history making and recording, a rather ‘uncommon’ (temporal) sense of what keeps the unrelenting legs of *Trio A* still moving and moved, after all. Therefore, I would leave the contentious terrain of the politics of material conservation to turn, yet again, to Rainer’s own questions: “Where’s the Passion?,” “Where’s the Politics;?” and “Where Do I Look When You’re Looking At Me?.”

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 16

<sup>40</sup> Pat Catterson, Linda K. Johnson, Shelley Senter, and Emily Coates.

## Where's the Passion?

Whilst many witnesses of *Trio A* remember the trepidation surrounding its first performances, and many others have later become fascinated with the black-and-white filmic version,<sup>41</sup> many observers found its introverted aesthetics rather abstruse. Lambert-Beatty recounts: “[i]ndeed, critics at the time of *Trio A*'s debut described this brief dance as ‘a long business,’ and ‘a sort of boring continuum;’ even a sympathetic writer like Jill Johnston of the *Village Voice* likened *Trio A* to ‘woolen underwear’.”<sup>42</sup> To the artist's own admission, this is a demanding and challenging piece of work, both to perform and to watch. Mostly for its utilitarian approach, aesthetic restraint and self-contained logic, the dance has long been associated with a certain lack of affect.

Hence, some of Rainer's followers, observers and critics might feel disoriented by the modulated expression of her feelings about this work as in her idiosyncratic address she soundly proclaims: “[i]n response to the question – ‘Where's the passion?’ [...] I want to scream: **PASSION PASSION PASSION! EXCESS, EXULTATION, CATHARSIS, EXORCISM, MADNESS, RAGE, FEAR, PITY, ENVY, CONFLICT, ECSTASY, MURDER, WAR, EPIPHANY, CRUELTY, DUPLICITY, JOY, BETRAYAL, AMBIVALENCE, TERROR,**” and then again, in an impassive counter tone: “passion passion! excess, exultation, catharsis, exorcism, madness, rage, fear, pity, envy, conflict, ecstasy, murder, war, epiphany, cruelty, duplicity, joy, betrayal, ambivalence, terror.”<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, the passion that had long infused modern dance since Isadora Duncan, making the ‘self’ expressed on stage indistinguishable from its overarching emotional states, the very

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<sup>41</sup> In 1978, five years after Rainer had stopped performing the dance, she performed it in Merce Cunningham's studio for a 16mm film produced by dance historian Sally Banes.

<sup>42</sup> Lambert-Beatty, “Moving Still,” 90.

<sup>43</sup> Rainer, “Where's the Passion?,” 2.

passion nowhere in sight of Rainer's "selfless performance" of her signature piece, is in fact the generative, occluded force of its 'original' design: "as far as *Trio A* was concerned, PASSION [...] was a given; it resided offstage, in the obsessions of the artist, among other excesses and more quotidian expressions of emotion. While no emotions were consciously generative of or relevant to the movement phrases in the ultimate sequence, they remained latent, submerged in the uninflected flow."<sup>44</sup> Rainer here sheds some of her reserve. For her, the pathos resides 'elsewhere' from the stage of artistic creation; in the steady flow of the everyday and the compulsive spillages that move *her* but that move away from sight upon being transported into action and gesture.

*Trio A* thus materialises as an exercise in self-constraint; its emotional source dispersed, evacuated, displaced as a quasi-afterthought in the front matter of the retrospective look of the artist, who concedes: "[i]t can be said that the performing self of *Trio A* takes care of its self and its expression by a mode of expression that recuses the self."<sup>45</sup> The mode of expression characteristic of this piece is thus an expedient; the result of a "care" – and what I will here call an '*alive* attention'<sup>46</sup> – for the self who makes its charge – the matter of feelings – fall back and beneath an aesthetic task-like, work-like, matter of fact 'look' that offers up its bodies to the abstractive gaze of the spectator. Passion hence, can be thought of as the "immaterial motive" (both fuel and motion) of a recessive method played out by the performers in the spatial foreground of stringent timing, and execution of formal precision, and self-attention.

This recessive trait is mostly expressed, as previously noted, through the function of the performer's averted gaze, which, as Rainer explains: "becomes even more noticeable when

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>46</sup> This articulation comes from the re-elaboration of Theresa Brennan's notion of "living attention," and my understanding of practices of *aliveness*, as expressed in the previous chapter.

two or more people perform the dance simultaneously.”<sup>47</sup> If the conventions of dance composition – classical modern, or even postmodern – see the convergence between the dancers and audience played out in a (metaphoric) *pas de deux* of interlocking gazes, the representation of *Trio A* does not reproduce such mirroring, as there is no coincidence between the seer and the seeing of the other.

Rather, Rainer explains: “each *Trio A* performer not only avoids the gaze of the audience, but is absorbed in monitoring the workings of her/his respective body parts rather than engaging with whoever may be performing at the same time.”<sup>48</sup> Both the disaffected view and the distancing effect of this absorption are plastically demonstrated when Rainer takes to the stage to follow one of her ‘guests’ as she executes the *Trio A* sequence. As the dancer moves about, Yvonne closely monitors her face/expression, trying to catch, or even anticipate the direction of her eyes, to no avail. What becomes plain to see is that the downcast gaze of the performer prevents any contact or exchange between movers, and between movers and their unmoved witnesses. Yet, there is more to *Trio A* than meets the eye.

‘Looking-at’ and ‘being looked-at’ – or the sense of self in performance as expressed by the spatial and relational dispositions – is a central concern in Rainer’s textual, and more generally artistic inflections, for, she explains that her primary interest lies in “the gap, or consonance, as the case may be, between the playful illogic of the artist and the expectant perceptions and preconceptions of the spectator.”<sup>49</sup> These tendencies become rearranged and somewhat inverted when she tackles the riddle of the titular question – “Where do I look when you’re looking at me?.” She in fact puts herself ‘on the spot’ of her own witnessing, in the place of the ‘other’ as she explains: “[w]henver as a spectator I see dancers staring blankly out at me [...] I lose the thread of the dance and find myself asking, ‘Why are they

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 11.

looking at me? What does it mean? What are they trying to say to me?”<sup>50</sup>

For Rainer, these questions take on a particular urgency in the context of a representational form – dance-performance – that always incorporates the gaze of a living human being: “it is the live presence of the dancer that more potently discombobulates, leaving me unnerved by the ambiguity of the speechless gaze. From the vantage point of a spectator I am prompted to exclaim to myself, ‘You lookin’ at me? Trying to seduce me? Accuse me?’ As an audience member in a small theatre I always feel compelled to look away.”<sup>51</sup> This instance of felt and projected anxiety (about being looked at in the act of looking at) and dread and desire (of being caught in the act and be ‘dys-appeared’ to the gaze of the other) engenders an affective wound – the disease of feeling ill-at-ease – whose sensuous conundrum can be productively unsettled by – or even against – its own predicaments.

Rainer’s affective choreographies figure as a particularly resonant (and pervasively familiar) articulation of a range of expressions often associated with shame. Sedgwick, expanding on the work of Silvan Tomkins, turns to shame as the “keystone affect” in the process of self-development. Shame, befalling infants at a very early stage, is a disruptive moment of loss of feedback from others, of refused or negated return (of the gaze); an absence of contact that individuates the subject whilst intensifying the ambiguity of an intrinsic relation to others:

“[b]lasons of shame, the ‘fallen face’ with eyes down and head averted [...] are semaphores of trouble and at the same time of a desire to reconstitute the interpersonal bridge.”<sup>52</sup>

Rainer’s fantasies of self-projection take shape as a staged interaction – a theatre of fugitive gazes – that upsets deeply introverted performative inclinations, gestures and utterances rooted in the experience of shame. In re-playing her emotional response to sudden exposure, I argue, the artist re-presents a disruptive moment in the circuit of visual communication

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>52</sup> Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 36.



resulting in a turning away of the self that shifts the attention away from sight and towards an abiding relation to an 'other,' by whose gaze she is 'dys-appeared' and made flesh, but whose view of herself she cannot control. Under scrutiny, suddenly an outside appearance transpires which escapes her own grasp, a skin that is more immediately accessible to others than to herself, as Sedgwick with Tomkins suggests: "shame effaces itself; shame points and projects; shame turns itself skin side out."<sup>53</sup>

The function of this tripling mirror is further complicated by the fact that the embarrassment to which the scene is intensely linked is seemingly projected onto an 'other' (version of her/self) – that is, the spectator – whom Rainer impersonates in the recreated context of watching a 'live' event. These fictional motions, in turn, are offered up for possible identification to the audience in the lecture theatre, caught as they are in the act of witnessing the speaker talking from their own position whilst replicating the gestalt of evading eye-contact by wilfully keeping her gaze consistently diverted from their faces, naturally turned to – intent in – her address. This engaged and refused interface between the scene and the seen, the projected and the evaded, the fictional and the actual, immediately reveals issues of theatricality and performativity in the face of a choreography that becomes even more labyrinthine in the deeply intersubjective forms of its occurrence.

On this stage, in an interlocking web of identifications and dis-identifications, readings and misreadings of other readings of themselves, shame is blocked, evaded, suffered, deflected and passed on suggesting the ways in which this affect is both painfully individuating and infectiously intersubjective. As Sedgwick notes, in fact, shame is a peculiarly contagious affect: "[o]ne of the strangest features of shame," she writes, is the way "someone else's embarrassment, stigma, debility, bad smell, or strange behavior, seemingly having nothing to

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 38.

do with me, can so readily flood me – assuming I’m a shame-prone person.”<sup>54</sup> This ambivalent feature is what Sedgwick defines the “double movement shame makes: toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality,”<sup>55</sup> such that the very thing that makes a subject also forces it to witness its own de-subjectification.

I propose then that in Rainer’s moves, and their replication – and amplification – via enunciation, the strings of perceptions are weaved through a series of narrative impersonations and identifications relayed inside or beside an other’s experience – of (self-)consciousness – revealing a deep sense of interconnectedness and relationality. The appropriation and triple re-appropriation of experience extends down a long corridor of affective resonances that, however unsettling, unfold ways of attending to the embodied experience of ‘becoming-other.’ In the orbit of the other the artist perceives, or believes to perceive, through the way the body turns (away), a trace of her own previous feelings and gestures, redirected towards others for further (re)embodiment or revision. What remains intact, however, is a diffused sense of ‘some-thing’ that looks like ‘no-thing’ but that is so strong that compels her, time and again, to turn away, if only from sight.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 37.

## Hiding in Plain Sight

Shame draws on faces etchings of their recessive motives. Within Rainer's theatricality of self-projection, the feeling of exposure introduces an irrevocable excess to the experience of witnessing; a fissure of being that, in a threefold movement, triangulates the relation to oneself 'as' other – being-self, being-other, being-for-others – and contests simultaneously her position of mastery and the assumed and negated "vantage point" of the spectator. Her deflection of the gaze onto an outer perspective is symptomatic of an attempt to take the distance from her own tenuous sense of self – her desire to be simultaneously the subject and the object of the spectators' attention without their losing interest (both in the theatre scene and the lecture theatre)<sup>56</sup> engendering a site of "intense" affect that reflects her own "embarrassed" vision (of herself).

In a letter written to her brother and sister-in-law in 1961, Rainer writes: "I suppose you read my last letter to Mama in which I described all my 'symptoms' preceding the performance. I literally shat out my guts for a solid week in sheer panic, went around with dripping armpits (not from the heat) and bottomless stomach and choked gorge."<sup>57</sup> And writing about the night she first took the stage of the Living Theatre:

It felt like nothing that I had ever experienced before. [...] the standing in place on-stage finally, watching thru the transparent scrim as the house lights dim off, the brief moment of darkness as the scrim opens. I have one bad moment of absolute dread – my heart is like an inert stone, a feeling of paralysis. Then the stage lights dim on; I face them, a vague sea of spectacles – the lights protect

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<sup>56</sup> For Tomkins shame operates in direct relationship to pleasure, interest and enjoyment: "[t]he innate activator of shame is the incomplete reduction of interest or joy. Hence any barrier to further exploration which partially reduces interest [...] will activate the lowering of the head and eyes in shame and reduce further exploration or self-exposure," quoted in Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 39. These figurations also seem to reflect the motions of depression, to which Rainer was no stranger.

<sup>57</sup> Yvonne Rainer, "From a Memoir-in-Progress," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 14.2, (2005): 9.

me – I feel life and energy flowing back. My music begins and I am transported into a very special world. I felt beautiful, confident, knowing, proud, completely carried away by the magic of my own gestures and movements.<sup>58</sup>

A familiar scene. A familiar sight. A familiar feeling. Before a sea of eyes Reiner's younger self is petrified, yet flooded by lights that obliterate vision, she turns, as if by magic, into her most beautiful and boldest self. In the light of this experience, I would speculate, Rainer's own 'mirror stage' is the set of an internalised shaming or shamed figuration of herself that projects 'elsewhere' the fright of exposure – and the risk of subsequent embarrassment – implicit in the theatrics of both subjectivity and theatrical performance.

In fact, in the staggering dramatic sequences of evasions proposed and accepted, Rainer is deeply active in a performative act of reperformance and redress – or re-dragging – through which she helps her audience to help *her*. The passage between her vision of their vision of herself, their vision of her vision, and her vision of their vision of her vision, reveals a deep evasion of knowing – or admitting knowing – what is really at stake in the artistic impulse she is slowly dissecting: her (stage) fright to be revealed, to become beside herself with (overwhelming) feelings; to be made into the *flesh-and-blood* shadow of her (former) self. The result though is that what is carefully eluded – the shameful feelings – paradoxically stand off from her figuration, moved back from it visibly, palpably, traceably as an open chasm now suddenly perceived.

What I want to suggest here is that the narratives of shame add another spin to the story of *Trio A* releasing an affective force that ruptures, invades, espouses, and deceives, sometimes all at the same time. Yet, as particularly susceptible to shame, Rainer is also capable to rework its 'bad feelings' into an aesthetic format that bears (almost) no resemblance to its initial impulse but that fully deploys its transformative potential as already

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

inherent to (its and her) performance. Sedgwick explains: “transformational shame [...] is performance. I mean theatrical performance. Performance interlines shame as more than just its result or a way of warding it off, though importantly it is those things. Shame is the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, between absorption and theatricality, between performance and – performativity.”<sup>59</sup>

The set of Rainer’s theatrical performance figures as a performative theatricality of (dis)identification that extends outward to include the other’s purview and judgment, only to deflect it. Addressing the audience of her performance-lecture, the artist once again projects herself onto them to anticipate their view of her: “[i]f I now project my audience angst onto you, you might feel justified in judging my reluctance as a performer to meet your gaze as nothing more than an effort to overcome embarrassment or self-consciousness at being looked at.”<sup>60</sup> Seemingly, the artist here acknowledges her inability, at this time and in retrospect, to shed the embarrassment and shame saturating the scene of performance. However, her (self)affirmations take an even more remarkable turn when she justifies her moves with the help of psychologist John Dewey:

In attempting to disconnect movement from emotion by contesting previous notions of ‘direct nervous discharge,’ Dewey cites ‘sensations of awkwardness, of bashfulness, of being ridiculous (as when one starts an appropriate movement, but is made conscious of it in itself apart from its end).’ [...] This last quote might be used to describe my earliest efforts of forty-five years ago, when working on *Trio A* I might have transformed a specific emotion into an aesthetic ploy. However, the reality was that whatever residues of ‘inauthenticity’ and ‘bashfulness’ remained in my psyche were subsumed by what I perceived as the challenges of dance history to create movement conscious of itself ‘apart from its

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<sup>59</sup> Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 38 .

<sup>60</sup> Rainer, “Where’s the Passion?,” 7.

end.’ Or its beginning, I would add.<sup>61</sup>

In my ‘view,’ here the author toils with her (re)vision of her early work as a way of remaining unabashed by her feelings through a process that ‘overwrites’ the desire to overcome the very affective activity that set her dance in motion in the first place. The turning off and sending away of this unseemly affectivity, according to Rainer, ghosts any residual trace of it into an aesthetic *gestalt* that becomes its foreground under the demands of an uninflected *zeit*, with the result of rendering this potentially paralysing affect narratively, emotionally and performatively productive,<sup>62</sup> beyond its means and ends. Learnt in the ways of keeping the scandal of the self from showing, Rainer helps us ever so willingly to see the grave distinction between substance and form in a very ‘ambitious’ work of art. The lowered gaze becomes the front matter of a very elaborated aesthetic ploy of gestures that seek to block, circumvent, shield and, above all, hide the passion away from view. Rainer’s relays and revisions intensify these multiple strategies as her language of affects honed and disowned returns – *dys-* appears – the experience of shame lurking within the strings of perception.

For all the “[l]ove, contention, yearning, abuse, power”<sup>63</sup> that flooded the modern (and some postmodern) stage she finds a new mode of expression whose protoform is the despoiled view of an effacement. This formal (dis)figuration is relationally displayed as a spatialised subjectivity that “demonstrates a kind of alert detachment from audience and fellow performers alike, a selfless, rather than narcissistic, self-absorption.”<sup>64</sup> The artist urges on: “[i]t can be said that the performing self of *Trio A* takes care of its self and its expression by a mode of expression that recuses the self,”<sup>65</sup> especially *her-self*. More than a literal performance of shame, *Trio A* absorbs this performative affect *par excellence* in its folds

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>62</sup> I am here borrowing from Sedgwick’s own elaboration of Henry James’ dramatization and integration of shame into his literary work, see *Touching Feeling*, 44.

<sup>63</sup> Rainer, “Where’s the Passion?,” 4.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 4.

through an embodied articulation that nonetheless speaks to the ways shame, as an affect, erupts not just in the space between one version of 'self' and an-other, but also in the space where one wants more acutely to give up, break up or elude the self one has, and replace it with "a provisional or ambiguous self that is at once produced, erased, and confounded."<sup>66</sup>

Rainer's seemingly (and wilfully) "regressive"<sup>67</sup> mode of engagement – the refusal to come eye-to-eye with the other (beside one-self) – is embodied in a performative turn (away) that yields knowledge not at all equivalent to the sense of shame with which it started. This new embodied epistemology, all the same, defers to a sequel of *formal dispositions* that no longer resemble shame but that become something 'other,' in the artist's words: "they constitute part of a continuum of choreographic possibilities, a gamut of affects that, as in the democratic organization of components in *Trio A*, foregrounds the performer performing, the self receding, and the passion hiding, in plain sight."<sup>68</sup> Rainer's narrative hinges on the coveted desire to rid oneself and others of shame, or shame related affects. But if this affect cannot easily be done away with, then perhaps it offers a more productive turning point: not how to do without feelings, but rather how to do things *with* them.

At one point in her address, Rainer invokes Butler's ideas on performativity and the taking on and off of 'life-like' identities to put into question the politics inherent in the performance of the self – theatrical and otherwise – implicating her own:

The mantle of impersonation has fallen away to be replaced by a 'performance persona,' an executor of references rather than an impersonator of a singular individual. [...] I too enter a nether world of multiple channelling, performance performing, and elusive selfhood in which a coherent persona is subsumed and overtaken by multiple fragments of impersonation. The unified integrated self is

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 12.

now submerged, with even more layers of origin added to the stew.<sup>69</sup>

The sublimation of shame occurs in the disruption of what might otherwise be seen as a continuous self. However, by triggering a circuit of intersubjectivity, the performativity of shame does not 'merge,' synthesise or coalesce, rather it flourishes in the very space of interpersonal fissure.

Further more, she intones: "[f]ar from ignoring or evading the subjectivity and scrutiny of you, the audience, I maintain that by choosing to avert my gaze, I am refusing to enter into a complicit relationship that might produce in you unpleasant feelings of coercion or manipulation."<sup>70</sup> Here is where a shadow of ethics pops up. Rainer believes in her performance of self-construction and thus becomes more concerned by the possibility that her spectator might feel the pang of deception and exposure that she herself experiences. Sympathetically – or compassionately – she wishes to let off the spectator for whom she feels, beside her selves. Thus, the paradoxical nature of shame resurges with its splitting edge of individuation, identification with, and attention for the other. Rainer's narration deploys shifting strategies in representing the phenomenological fabric, the chiasmus – together with the chasm (the interval) – of deep intersubjectivity laid between the performer and her spectators. The fabric so densely woven contains deep gaps, isolated threads, and brief intervals of insight.

What I propose here is that the circuit of shame serves in this context to highlight relational structures and, ultimately, collective modes of responsible cohabitation that are more fundamental than the expression of subjectivity itself. This view instils a politics of resistance to narcissist self-absorption grounded on an ethics of what I have earlier called '*alive attention*' for the position, and disposition, of the other. A longer quote from Rainer may be

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 8-9.



useful to explicate this ethos:

my *Trio A*'ers [...] go about their respective business much like neighbors on my middle-class Los Angeles street who acknowledge each other as one backs out of his driveway and the other is just arriving home. When one performer has executed the dance once and retires to the sidelines to assess the total field in order to find space in which to repeat it, it's as if she is asking herself, 'Where do I park my car now? Not in front of my neighbor's driveway.' As spectators, we are witnessing autonomous lives that do not preclude the possibility of cooperation and mutual aid.<sup>71</sup>

Rainer here articulates an ethical dimension induced by small, ordinary acts of communal involvement in the face of the shared event of life. In this 'situation' the *contiguity* of inflected attention is favoured over the *continuity* of familiar contact; here subjects do not share intimate attachments but instead, invoking Brian Massumi's terminology, a "relation-of-nonrelation"<sup>72</sup> between autonomous beings in co-presence and co-existence. For the artist, the work of art becomes a skilful accomplishment of a detached yet connective relation of proximity that establishes and maintains a workable balance of 'assisting' one another, where 'to assist' takes on the amplified meaning of 'being present' – being witness to – and 'attending to' – giving support or aid.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>72</sup> Massumi's notion of non-connective relation is articulated in the introduction of *Semblance and Event*, 22-4. Also see Chapter 1.

## The One Next Door

The matter of the neighbour – and I use the term matter both in the sense of issue or question and in the sense of physical, irreducible presence – has posed a historic challenge to any interrogation of selfhood and intersubjective relations. Freud famously used the word *nebenmensch*, which literally translates as “the one who is next to me”<sup>73</sup> to theorize the vexed relations of proximity at the centre of civilization and its discontents. For Freud, the feeling of paranoia is associated with the one-next-door, who inhabits an uncanny space of contiguity, a possibility of nearness teemed with fantasies of violence and aggression.<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, this relation is unsustainable for, as *nebenmensch* divides us against ourselves, so our neighbour’s *nebenmensch* divides us against him or her.

In Emmanuel Lévinas's ethics of alterity, on the contrary: “[t]he proximity of the neighbour – the peace of proximity – is the responsibility of the ego for an other.”<sup>75</sup> For the philosopher, the function of this contiguity is an ethical non-relationship based primarily on exposure: the neighbour is someone to whom we must respond merely because he is *there*, face-to-face with us, coming before us as a stranger to himself in just the same sense that, in his presence, we too can no longer presume to know ourselves. In this way, the relation of neighbour to self reflects the strangeness and externality of the self to itself.

Jacques Lacan uses the term “extimacy”<sup>76</sup> to describe this non-relationship distinguishing the demands of pure proximity from the relations of intimate closeness. The one and the other

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<sup>73</sup> In Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 51.

<sup>74</sup> For Freud, the neighbor is potentially “not only a possible helper or sexual object, but also a temptation to them to gratify their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him.” What strikes inclinations toward aggression or toward repugnance is, the Other's excess or the particular way he enjoys (his *jouissance*). See “Civilization and its Discontents,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929), 111.

<sup>75</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, “Peace and Proximity,” in *Emmanuel Lévinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, eds. Adrian T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, trans. Peter Atterton and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1996), 167.

<sup>76</sup> See also previous chapter.

exist 'beside themselves' as uncanny co-habitants of an intersubjective space in which the 'other' functions as the cause of the subject's 'own' desire. Imaginary relations with the neighbour are knotted with an unbearable fantasy of enjoyment where the other in the subjective equation is the one whose strange surplus of enjoyment seems somehow an usurpation of one's own. This fantasy is, according to Lacan, a kernel of the "Real" of one's own existence; the jouissance that differently inhabits my neighbour and myself, makes each of us not only strangers to each other, but strangers to ourselves.

The adversary histories of working through Freud's uncanny aversion, going through the 'fantasy' with Lacan and coming face-to-face with Levinas's moral binds of responsibility help us understand the political and power relations that have made the ethics of proximity difficult to bear. Yet, what I want to address in the encounter with "the one who is next to me" is the spatial approach that can bring to the fore a different turn on the subject(s) of neighbouring that holds the promise to sustain an *alive* commitment to the contingent and adjoining forces that produce the knots of attachment and disaffection, and undo them, opening a portal into the ethics of Rainer's own interrelation theatrics loaded as they are with shame, paranoia and desire.

In the introductory remarks to *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick advances the concept of the "beside." "*Beside*", she writes "permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object."<sup>77</sup> Beside (not beneath, behind, or beyond) is a spatial determinant that eschews the flat line of opposition and duality. Taking a "distinct step to the side" of any constitutive project of subjectivity, invokes a logic that suggests multiple (Deleuzian) relations, wherein any "number of elements" may lie and operate "alongside one

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<sup>77</sup> Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 8, original emphasis.

another.”<sup>78</sup> As any siblings who have shared a bed will know, the “beside” comprises a “wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations.”<sup>79</sup>

The logics of beside-ness are implicit in neighbour relations; the ethical terrain spanning between oneself and “the one next door” tends to position individuals ‘beside themselves.’ To be beside oneself means to become disoriented in relation to the familiarity of one’s own position, to recognise oneself *as* an-other so that one is given over to one’s ethical enmeshment *with* others becoming an *ecstatic*<sup>80</sup> subject of recognition. The notion of intersubjectivity emphasises the intellectual and emotional significance of being able to simultaneously occupy a subject position – to feel one’s own presence and to see from a particular perspective – while at the same time being able to stand beside oneself in a third place where the world becomes visible and representable from multiple perspectives, including one’s own, and from which one can understand one’s own position as one ‘along’ many.

Such geographies of relations, I pose, reappear in the fundamentally intersubjective (and antagonistic) politics of feeling, attitude, and behaviour as played out in real time, in the live situation, in the *alive* mo(ve)ment of performance. Here, the parallel motions of actors and observers represent active, performative negotiations of the social and ideological circumstances that form both internal and external landscapes of interpersonal experience. Within this performance and performative encounter, the affective diagrams of embarrassment, frustration and passion drawn by Rainer’s verbal reiteration of her early dance – alongside their practical demonstrations – can be understood as discursive relations

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>80</sup> Via late Latin from Greek *ekstasis* ‘standing outside oneself’, based on *ek-* ‘out’ + *histanai* ‘to place,’ in *Oxford Dictionaries*, <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/ecstasy?q=ecstasy>>.

that connect states of being to social interactions. Towards the end of her presentation Rainer declares:

I have nothing to 'say' to you, so there's no reason for me to look at you in this particular instance. You lookin' at me? My imaginary contract politely requests that you let me go about my business and I'll let you go about yours. I shall pretend you're not looking at me, so then I won't have to look at you. And you in turn are free to watch me work without feeling you have to. From this perspective I can say, without rancor, that such an arrangement is not necessarily about you. It is about a life on the stage, or lives of performers. *You* just happen to be there.<sup>81</sup>

The scene of the despoiled relationship indeed interrupts the scene of identification and intersubjective communication, but what is the value of such move? Rainer is concerned with the 'viability' of social contact that does not annihilate the autonomy of bodies 'moving and being moved.' Her aesthetics of denial want to return to the ones present in the event of 'attending' their own position in the situation of 'assisting' the other whilst being within the self, from the side lines of uncoerced and uncoaxed experience. These prescribed orientations reveal an "extra alertness to the multisided interactions among people 'beside' each other in a room,"<sup>82</sup> setting up an ethical model of co-habitation that favours non-hierarchical neighbouring, besidenesses, and vicinities.

As a relationship of ecstatic beings – an extimacy between neighbour and neighbour, body and body each of whom can never know the other's inner life – *Trio A* captures the interplay of (affective) forces which allow individuals greater freedom of movement. Rainer's intellectual and literal inclinations and dispositions, I argue, provide a way out of familiar binds

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<sup>81</sup> Rainer, "Where's the Passion?," 8, original emphasis.

<sup>82</sup> Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 9.

and orientations instead allowing individuals to remain autonomous and unmerged.

Paraphrasing Judith Butler's queer ethics of ecstatic relationality,<sup>83</sup> the way in which the body figures in the negation of straight lines of sameness serves precisely "to underscore the value of being beside oneself, of being a porous boundary, given over to others, finding oneself in a trajectory of desire in which one is taken out of oneself, and resituated irreversibly in a field of others in which one is not the presumptive center."<sup>84</sup> Thus, I would say that in the configuration of *Trio A*, identification is refused with a pivotal move that makes relationality possible. The formal result of shame and embarrassment shape the viewing experience of the dance into unpredictable, individually negotiated attachments that might indeed have a semi-Deleuzian effect of transporting viewers involuntarily 'beside themselves.'

Thus, "You go about your business and I'll go about mine", in a radical emotional sense, becomes the real moral injunction of this 'staged' intersubjective encounter; a mandate that allows one to stand, unthreatened by the other's side whilst showing a certain kind of regard, an 'alive attention' that implies responsibility for the other. This system of autonomous participation within an egalitarian structure calls for what Butler terms a "liveable" world, a "more capacious and, finally, less violent world, not knowing in advance what precise form our humanness does and will take [...] we must be open to its permutation in the name of nonviolence."<sup>85</sup> *Beside* the gift economy of 'official' bodily transmission tied up with the ensuing social and moral obligations, and *beside* the multiple commercial transactions around these movements and exchanges, the *given* sentiment of *Trio A*, dare I say, is the desire to 'assist' autonomous positions of mutual (dis)regard that refuse appropriation and assimilation of experience and only demand, in return, to be attended – witnessed.

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<sup>83</sup> See Judith Butler, "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy," In *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004). According to Butler's theory of identity defined through the experience of ecstasy, of being "beside oneself", individuation through same-sex sexuality places prime importance on the Levinasian ethic of existing for the other, or for the other-in-relationship. See also Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1985).

<sup>84</sup> Butler "Beside Oneself," 25.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

## *Geist* Out of the Closet

Rainer's 'fantasies' of identifications, decades on, turn inside out her passions and desires on the turntable of history to tell a different story perhaps from the one we already know, one that strives to reintegrate the living, the *felt* of vivid sensation between and beside art and life.

Rainer's narcissistic revision<sup>86</sup> reconstructs the narratives of her work both alongside and against the array of official histories surrounding the piece, via redeploying, if not shedding, the very affect that her austere aesthetics deny – for, as Sedgwick notes: “the forms taken by shame” are “available for the work of metamorphosis, reframing, refiguration, *transfiguration* [...] but perhaps all too potent for the work of purgation and deontological closure.”<sup>87</sup> In this context, *Trio A* emerges from the vantage point of shame as a rich site for thinking about this peculiar affect and its thorny, stigmatised and ‘minimalised’ imbrications in the history of post-modern ‘movements’ in order to readdress its “experimental, creative, performative force.”

A transcendental mode of participation and a material politic of affect appear in what seemed to be an occluded narrative. The barely perceptible tremor of original sensibility that motivated *Trio A*, its own permeating structure of feeling, resurfaces, through deflection and inversion,<sup>88</sup> into an achieved social formation, from self to others, where witnessing emerges, uncoerced, into a performance of mutual tolerance and cooperation. The necessity of preserving the integrity of the positions of ‘looking’ and ‘looking at’ may appear obsolete to the post-post-modern reader, yet the innovatory, ahead-of-the-game aspect of this vision can be placed in dialectical relation to the ‘conventions’ set behind and beside it. The formal and austere exposition that may have appeared somewhat obscure and oppositional seems to imply a temporal metamorphosis that rigorously challenges the expansive forms of

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<sup>86</sup> As Sedgwick acutely points out in relation to Henry James' work: “[w]hat undertaking could be more narcissistically exciting or more narcissistically dangerous than that of rereading, revising, and consolidating one's own ‘collected works’?” (*Touching Feeling*, 39).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>88</sup> I am really tempted here to use the word ‘perversion,’ but I will restrain that compulsion until it finds its own release in Chapter 4.

modernism whilst abashedly positioning itself alongside the abstract, disaffected compositions of minimalist postmodern.

Rainer's work may be inextricably interweaved with a certain *zeit* of the 60s, but it also sharply cuts through a very distinct *geist*, an affective structure that produces bodily knowledge that can turn history inside out, and beside itself. The shame-saturated 'performative mode' of the piece, reappears, through the 'performed reiterations' of the auteur, as an (un)conscious attempt to re-present what had been exhausted by the grand gestures of modern emotionalism, and removed by the formal attitude of post-modern minimalism. Rainer proceeds by incorporating rather than exploding or expunging the ordinary language of the everydayness of emotions in a more nuanced, materialist, and 'minimalist' version of the performative politics of (shameful) affect in performance. As a result, I suggest, her iconic piece reveals the full scale of the ethical challenge posed by traversing the fantasy of self-possession that sustains the closure of the modern subject with an emotional architecture that is so intricately, explicitly, and expansively intersubjective to pass (as) the (post-modern) stubbornness on anti-dualistic structures.

Rainer's recessive mode of expression points more broadly, I feel, to a central anxiety of the Minimalist venture, which claimed to create uninflected shapes that meant *nothing*. The critic Michael Fried found this practice suspicious and alienating describing the experience in the presence of the artwork as a "theatrical" encounter that produced a *distancing* effect.

According to Fried, the minimalist (literalist) work threatened authentic aesthetic experience by refusing to "let the viewer alone – which is to say it refuses to stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him."<sup>89</sup> He evokes the affectively neutral encounter theorised by minimalist sculptor Robert Morris – Rainer's onetime husband – as the unsatisfying awareness of bland materiality. Even worse, he brands this "objecthood" as the artist's

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<sup>89</sup> Fried also notes that the literalist work "distances the beholder – not just physically but psychologically." Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), 140.



imposition of hollowness onto the viewer: a reinscription of the self in a world of banal objects and spaces and alienated, theatrical relations. Ultimately, the problem with the object of minimal art, for Fried, is the 'affect' of literalness; it is what it *feels* like to stand in front of a Robert Morris or Tony Smith, Dan Flavin or Carl Andre – a numb solipsism.

I would like to counter these ideas with the sense that the matter with minimalist form is not the 'affect' of literalness but affect *in its* literalness; its non-sensuous virtual, theatrical and transformative qualities. The alleged reductive *zeitgeist* of Minimalism can then be perceived as a dense atmosphere made of no-thing moving and being moved: the very communicative potential of the theatricality of fugitive moments of diffused 'aliveness.' What transpires from Rainer's seminal composition and its disseminating reiterations is that the work of minimalism is not always what it seems. Lurking in the background shadows of the literalness of her aesthetics is in fact an affective operation that sublimates the condition of feeling into a virtual likeness – a semblance<sup>90</sup> – that in turn generates a despoiled visual result. The work's modular organization becomes a method for arranging entities in a provisional order that instead of being what Donald Judd invoked as "not rationalistic [...] but simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another,"<sup>91</sup> (dys)appears as complexly relational, in the *likeness* of contiguity of one thing beside the other.

From this (self)removed position, the affective contours of the work become indeed difficult to grasp for an abashed visuality, as the underbelly of its 'objective' marker – affect – re-emerges in the dematerialised perception of an expanded field of relationality. The matter of form 'itself,' despite its aspired conditions, is not as hollow as we heard; rather it becomes collapsed into a matter devoid of shape, not as matter-of-fact but a matter-of-affect. We could then point to Minimalism in this *doubled sense*<sup>92</sup> that places the body of the artist at the centre

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<sup>90</sup> I remind the reader, once again, to the reading of the first chapter for my rendition of these concepts.

<sup>91</sup> Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," in *Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 184.

<sup>92</sup> We can then imagine this sense bent over itself in a threefold way.

of the work's making but that in the process of its (re)actualisation in a recursive frame also opens up a space – a gap – of expanded relationality occupied by its witnesses. To see doubly – and triply – in this sense returns a flickering awareness, a wavering comprehension of the counteracted paradoxical perceptions and perspectives that become absorbed and defused in the work's future intensities.

There is a big gap opening between an original motivation and its eventuations as experienced by the moving body: *Trio A* is not a work to “look at” – in Judd's sense – but one that forces the beholder to move sideways. Rainer devises a choreography that stages the manipulation of the matter of feelings as such that it mobilises the indistinct virtual qualities of materiality in what I would call a synesthetic relational architecture. In the shift from work (intentionality) to beholder (relationality) the viewer-participant is no longer constrained to look at the work but is always already implied in the way it moves. If Rainer's insistence on perfect preservation and transmission spoke of a desire to make ‘precious’ the work she so dearly (be)holds, it is this relational archive that opens up the work on the receiving ends.

I would say that by not taking the official accounts of Minimalism at face value, the experience of its event-fullness can exceed and pervert the claims of history. In the non-relational tactics Rainer describes, the overall arrangement, the execution, and the sense of the theatrical performance is one that does not capture or sustain one's attention but rather one that compels its audience to look ‘away,’ grounding perception in an experience that is sufficiently autonomous to stand beside – at a distance from – its representation. This is how the artist builds something only barely visible that amounts to ‘next to no-thing,’ which is the singularity of the feelings (the moods) we share. Beyond the work's immediate *presentness*, Rainer's remixes the before and after in recursive reiterations where motivations and intentions meet (e)motions and intuitions that drive to rid the work of expressive (sentimental) associations via an affective impulse that achieves something that *becomes* ‘nothing’ but generative.

Rainer shares perhaps the common ambition amongst those figures associated with the Minimal field – the generation of sculptors, dancers, painters, and musicians who, converging in New York during the mid-sixties aimed to purge their work of feeling. Yet this ‘reduction’ yields more than a deliberate suppression. The intensified negations that permeate Minimalist practice and discourse show a resistance to and refusal of interpretation and individuation that elicit and build in return *negative* associations. These antagonistic charges incite not a practice of exclusion but one of sublimation of expressions and sensibilities by negating direct exposure of an object of formal interest and offering instead a structure of circumspect feelings; a relational architecture of ‘*alive* attention’ towards one-self and the other. Here purgation *produces* affect.<sup>93</sup>

I propose this unacknowledged term – the thing negated, that *must not be* (seen) – to be the driving engine of the formal, reductive impulse of late twentieth-century art. Then Minimalism – the quintessential ‘art of facts’ that had little use for feelings – can be ‘perceived’ as the eventuation of the literal *facts* of feelings. *Trio A* is then, I offer, the purest manifesto, yet another one, of how much of the ‘minimal’ work of art constitutes a memorandum of consciously misplaced feelings. Watching the spectacle of Rainer’s minimalism I want to shout: PASSION! is the aesthetic force behind *Trio A* and shame its affective archive. This feeling can be realised on the spot, in the social temporality of encroachment, thickness, spatiality – and here, from a certain temporal remove – that bespeaks not the absence of shame but rather its pleasurable recirculated afterglow.

Specks of bashfulness emerge, transformed, through simultaneously disruptive and connective formal mo(ve)ments charged with Rainer’s past and present performative ruptures and textual pleasures. Rainer’s re-contextualisation of her ‘old’ strategic moves into new media, new somatic material and new semantic environments, becomes an aesthetic project

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<sup>93</sup> I am assisted in this formulation by James Mayer observations in “The Minimal Unconscious,” *October* 130 (Fall 2009).

that engenders its own resistance to, and embracing of, conventional everyday life via a more private public experience where both the artist and the reader/auditor/witness are explicitly absorbed in cultivating the formal aesthetics of a political design. Hence, an old repertoire<sup>94</sup> is renewed via the backward view of a (recursive) retrospect that serves to refocus the conceptual and performative force of the event 'in view' of the interpersonal relationships shaped by an 'originary' affectivity whose particular structures of expression, mimesis, pain and pleasure makes this very relationality possible.

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<sup>94</sup> Notably, Diana Taylor marks the distinction between the archive and the repertoire arguing that the latter is "opposed to the supposed stable objects in the archive" as all that "enacts embodied memory" (*The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003], 20). I am here turning this conception towards the inexhaustible vitality of affects.

## Feeling Exposed

Through recursion and repetition, Rainer shows an endemic attachment to something *Trio A* evokes but sheepishly eludes – a passion for an ordinary language of feelings that conventional histories of culture and politics constantly brush upon but hesitantly return to and reawake. Her compulsive re-telling of her artistic moves in many performance and performative ways, much like her recursive re-writing of her life and struggles in many public and published versions, release covert narratives of passions, desires, disguises, sensuality and private idealism that the aesthetics of her work do far less to acknowledge. The artist's recuperations effect a re-opening – to interpretation – that stands both as an acknowledgement of her self (the *auteur*) and as a recusing of her private wounds. However both positions, I argue, are in the process turned inside out – beside themselves.

The apparently contradictory ways in which Rainer sees (herself in) her work demonstrates a certain cynicism – or what Peter Sloterdijk call “enlightened false consciousness”<sup>95</sup> – that calls for what Sedgwick posits as a “paranoid reading.” In “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,”<sup>96</sup> Sedgwick describes the paranoid position as a cognitive/affective practice that places its faith in ‘knowingness’ and exposure to anticipate and annul surprise and deception, since the first imperative of paranoia is “[t]here must be no bad surprises.”<sup>97</sup> In its resistance to and avoidance of surprise, paranoia prescribes a rigid temporality that is “at once anticipatory and retroactive,”<sup>98</sup> requiring all the bad things that have happened to be always already known in order to anticipate and be ready for all the bad things yet to come. In such way, paranoia works to anticipate and to deflect negative feeling, in particular “the negative affect of

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<sup>95</sup> That is, a false consciousness aware of itself being false, or as Sloterdijk puts it: “the universally widespread way in which enlightened people see to it that they are not taken for suckers” (quoted in *Touching Feeling*, 141).

<sup>96</sup> In *Touching Feeling*, 123–52.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 130, original emphasis.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

humiliation.”<sup>99</sup>

Rainer’s multiple reiterations, I suggest, insist on intellectual moves that are characteristic of such paranoid mode. Her absorptive self-interest reveals – beside her own intentions perhaps – a (paranoid) project of continuous self-exposure that claims to know every permutation of the ‘deeper’ meanings of her work/world, while simultaneously seeking to anticipate any possible interpretation or criticism. And as it often happens, a paranoid reading seeks a paranoid writing. The reflexivity and mimesis that Sedgwick identifies as the hallmarks of paranoid thought are evident throughout the textual, verbal and performative projections of her seminal work within the format of the lecture-performance here analysed.

Perhaps the most striking examples are the moments of self-effacing dead-pan humour: “[a]t this point I feel like an aging parrot that, constrained by its limited vocabulary, can get its ideas across only with ever shriller squawks,” or in the situations in which she second-guesses the audience: “[y]ou may titter to yourselves at my efforts to appear inert, inexpressive,” and “I must face the fact that you may find this androgynous aging face bespeaking passions known and decayed, terrors unleashed and confronted, cruelties suffered and imposed.”<sup>100</sup> And finally, when she advances her most sardonic view of herself: “placing myself under my own harshest scrutiny, I am tempted for the moment to offer up *Trio A* as a kind of regression, as harboring a phobia, or, to put the worst possible stamp on it, as a sociopathic refusal to engage with the other, see you eye-to-eye, become a social being” – only to provide a counter-view that anticipates further (mis)interpretations: “[o]n the other hand [...] such a moralistic, mechanistic response ignores the viability of individual agency and independence.”<sup>101</sup>

The artist knows how intimacy, in and out of the theatre, can produce fear, shame, betrayal,

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>100</sup> All quotes from Rainer, “Where’s the Passion?,” 2.

<sup>101</sup> Both *ibid.*, 8.

and violation: “my performance for my shrink with its concealments and confessions can be likened to my performance of *Trio A*, which demands a comparable juggling of suppression, or censorship, and exposure: of energy investment and sexuality, no less than expression of self,”<sup>102</sup> so she disavows this affectivity via an aesthetic expression and a narrative self-projection that wards off the bad surprises of feelings. These tokens of vivid experience remain in the work nonetheless, present in an inverse ratio to their occlusion; the more veiled their presence in the work, the more volatile their hold on the ‘matter’ of life, but also the more imminent their unravelling. As the artist herself suggests, emotion is something essential, though invisible, not a give-away but a ‘given:’ *feelings are facts*.

In the face of what was genuinely and influentially ‘not there,’ in *Trio A*, resonant by virtue of its absence, inexpressible and dwelling in the ‘beside-itself’ of an unspeakable, ecstatic jouissance (of being ‘with’, ‘standing by’ or ‘beside’ the other) that escapes spectacularisation, the paranoid approach is turned performatively on its heads. In Rainer’s reading, paranoia is mediated by the re-assembling and re-making of a recessive affect that reveals layers amongst the autobiographical, tangential, associational and allusive. The twists, turns and restricted views of her (re)iterations employ affective performativity *as the means of re-dress* open out on to the view of a more original design, which allows what Sedgwick defines as a “depressive position,” which nonetheless inaugurates a “reparative practice.”

Seeking a wider range of critical responses than the hermeneutics of suspicion, Sedgwick borrows from the Kleinian concept of *positions* – this term being particularly susceptible to flexibility and movement – which sees the paranoid position always in oscillatory context with a very different possibility: the depressive position. On one side, the paranoid position is: “a position of terrible alertness to the dangers posed by the hateful and envious part-objects that one defensively projects into, carves out of, and ingests from the world around one.” In a

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 10.

contiguous spot, the depressive mode stands as: “the position from which it is possible in turn to use one’s own resources to assemble or ‘repair’ the murderous part-objects into something like a whole.”<sup>103</sup>

What interests Sedgwick more by valuing these dispositions is: “doing justice to the powerful reparative practices that [...] infuse self-avowedly paranoid critical projects.”<sup>104</sup> Rainer’s compulsive reprisals of her own work, I would argue, seem to be tracing this reparative intuition. Her insistent and recursive reassessments represent the shift of intention or positionality from one in which a paranoid tendency predominates to one in which a depressive, and consequently reparative weaving, sieves through to assemble or re-make alternative meanings and multiple positions, interceptions and viewpoints; a move that changes her re-performance into ‘some-thing’ – a feeling perhaps – that offers more than a reproduction of itself.

The trauma of unspeakable self-effacement – all silenced and beside-itself – returns outstripped as the material for the audience to rediscover as “an anxiety-mitigating achievement” that once reassembled “is available both to be identified with and to offer one nourishment and comfort.”<sup>105</sup> Through their physical immersion in the components of the performance (and the narrative) twin trajectories of paranoia and reparation, the audience, alone and each of them in turn(ing), can in fact imagine the tension of embarrassment and pleasure and, at best, experience something of their remediation in what remains of the work of affect; the creation of a place of bounded freedom made by their own reparative, non-alienated participation.

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<sup>103</sup> Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 128. In the last part of the quote, about the “repair” of “part-objects into something like a whole,” I would like to emphasise the element of ‘likeness,’ or semblance if you will, as an instance of re-mediation of parts into a temporary sensation rather than the simple resemblance of (recovering) an presumed integrity of being. For more on this I remand the reader to the applications of Massumi’s theories of semblance in the first chapter of this work.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.



My argument here is that, by repositioning her thinking *and* feeling sideways, and doing what her performance strategies do – jumping from one subject to another whilst entangling their traces, checking lines of juncture against the trajectories of their dispersal assuming any contact can be a significant one – Rainer’s reiterations re-write the artist’s own injunction of the look as a form of in(ter)dependence constitutive of a mutual ‘*alive attention*’ between the body seen and the body seer – the beheld and the beholder. Thus, the apparent indifference of Rainer’s model of neutral aesthetics opens up on the surface of the visible a gap of unexpected conceptual possibilities, ways of thinking, gestures, and textures of experience that lead to multiple ‘points of view’ and multifaceted places of seeing within the complex fabric of a subsumed “moving and being moved.”

So what if *Trio A*’s ‘eccentric’<sup>106</sup> and ecstatic turning-away is not the material proscription of something unspeakable, but rather a dispersal and transformation of an already absented force that weaves through the fabric of the piece? And, if looking is so important, what is the significance in the viewing platform of being looked at? Or, “Where Do I Look When You’re Looking At Me?.” On re-visiting Rainer’s titular question, I offer a possible interpretation: she is looking for ways in which others might reshape or make sense of the text she herself ‘disappears’ by turning inside-out its *flesh-and-blood* registers. In *my* vision – if perhaps an unsighted one – the readjusted focus is not on that which draws the audience’s eyes but on that which displaces their feeling of being exposed, being looked at, allowing them the position of being *beside themselves* in co-habitation.

Intersecting Rainer’s ‘paranoid style’ with the counter-action of her depressive methods emphasises a position that inaugurates a new ethical possibility: “in the form of a guilty, empathetic view of the other as at once good, damaged, integral, and requiring and eliciting

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<sup>106</sup> Away from a centered view.

love and care.”<sup>107</sup> For Sedgwick, such ethical possibility is “founded on and coextensive with the subject movement toward what Foucault calls ‘care of the self,’ the often very fragile concern to provide the self with pleasure and nourishment in an environment that is perceived as not particularly offering them.”<sup>108</sup> This model of ethics resonates with the idea of “self-management”<sup>109</sup> that Rainer refers to in her address and that confers to *Trio A* a different quality of self-absorption in the *work* of dancing, one that takes care of the self (and the other) by taking and giving pleasure (and PASSION) in the place of (often painful) effacement.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>109</sup> Rainer, “Where’s the Passion?,” 6.

## Once More, With Feelings

Rainer's re-turn to her work vacillates between a paranoid mode and a reparative one; a reading of her processes as all about the former without the latter would mean we are not paying attention to how she moves, and how she *is* moved. What I want to propose here is that the repetitious procedures of dis-assemblage and re-assemblage, of the making and re-making, of the telling and re-telling of the performance of *Trio A* reaches a point where the paranoid and reparative interweaving becomes part of an intervention in, or subversion of, a wider discourse about the politics of public performance.

It is the function of recursion, together with repetition, I argue, that allows for such interweaving in that elements from the very beginning of a process return, are folded back into the narrative, where 'some-thing' like a feeling becomes transformed into its semblance – its (un)likeness. Borrowing from Tavia Nyong'o's mobilisation of Sedgwick's work,<sup>110</sup> here the term recursion is intended in its technical connotation as "any procedure that includes at least one sequence that must be repeated before it can be completed,"<sup>111</sup> its re-occurrence in the work of art suggesting "the means by which paranoid and reparative readings may interdigitate."<sup>112</sup> Nyong'o finds a famous example of visual recursion in the Droste effect in which the same image or a picture is depicted and re(pro)duced within itself, the smaller version containing a smaller version of it, which in turn contains an even smaller version, and so on, in a continuous loop or self-referential system that produces an almost surreal *mise en abyme*.

A similar effect appears in Rainer's proposed account of her dance in the performance-lecture

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<sup>110</sup> Tavia Nyong'o, "Trapped in the Closet with Eve," *Criticism*, 52.2 (Spring 2010): 247. The following reading is heavily indebted to Nyong'o's own analysis of how a recursive temporality in relation to the 'working through' of dramatic affectivity at the crux of the two critical positions here discussed.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>112</sup> This verb is cited from Sedgwick, see in *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick: "the history of literary criticism can also be viewed as a repertoire of alternative models for allowing strong and weak theory to interdigitate" (145).

format of “Where’s the Passion?,” where the narrative of *Trio A* is depicted and reactivated as the piece is enunciated, instantiated and re-performed within the frame, in a multiple sequence of showings, viewings, auditings and readings. To break it down step by step, I will excavate some of these passages. For example, when the author gives voice to the attempt of ‘unpacking’ her work, the sign-language interpreter by her side faithfully retraces the effort with her upper body, whilst fellow performer and official transmitter of the dance Pat Catterson takes her legs on the journey of demonstrating it. Once a first cycle of the dance is completed, Rainer stops in mid-sentence, passes the commentary on to two other fellow performers and begins to end-run around a younger dancer who executes a second sequence of the composition. As this series draws to an end, almost in a loop, Catterson returns to the stage to action the score once more, accompanied this time by the notes of *In The Midnight Hour* by The Chambers Brothers, and is joined eventually by the previous performer who completes the whole course.

By the end of the representation the audience have seen, heard, witnessed, imagined, and moved along to the piece a potentially infinite number of times as the ‘picture’ continues as long as the resolution of the body’s senses – with the aid of memory and imagination – allow. What happens is that recursion can take hold of one’s perspective and vantage point with the threat of remaining stuck in a loop of sameness or the promise of extending a loophole out of this maze, or both, “provided only that one invests in its logic long enough to perpetuate its effects.” This happens because “[u]nlike the vanishing point of traditional perspective, the infinity into which recursion disappears does not stabilize but rather provokes and troubles the visual field. It calls attention to itself and keeps the eye anxiously roving.”<sup>113</sup>

I offer here that Rainer’s recursive embodied narratives reveal a mo(ve)ment of effacement that only leads to another, moving her paranoid ploy recursively forward not out of the

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<sup>113</sup> Nyong’o, “Trapped in the Closet,” 247.

willingness to show some original 'truth' but rather "out of the sheer paranoid drive to uncover the principle out of which [...] covert intimacies are perpetually being exfoliated."<sup>114</sup>

Nonetheless, formally, and in all senses – visually, aurally and kinaesthetically – this recursion plays out in such a way as to yoke its paranoid perspective on the matter of feelings to a potentially reparative outlook on social life. It does so by providing a model of attentiveness that looks after a possibility of oppositional but cooperative solidarity that gains a certain political viability. Furthermore, Rainer's fantasy of self-projection – the way she assumes herself in all imaginable positions of enunciation – makes her voice irreducible to the single speaking subject in an act of amplification. This expansion happens in a manner that "works on and upon an identification rather than either accepting or rejecting it,"<sup>115</sup> producing a recursive 'virtual' counterpoint to the visual structures, hence creating the semblance of a narrative beside-itself.

Embedded enigmatically within this perceptual narrative, the fear of exposure reveals itself as the negative, yet transformative 'relative truth' of experience that, in turn, does and undoes all social ties and allegiances. As Nyong'o in the closet with Eve would put it: "[e]veryone's ears are burning, but everybody's listening."<sup>116</sup> In the interface of "Where's the Passion?" and "Trapped in the Closet," we can find an opening gaping wide under the pressure of Rainer's re-occurring reiterations that produce "such a surplus knowingness, enacting an excess of recursive procedures upon the social that, in the end, multiplies rather than reduces the opportunities for intervening within it."<sup>117</sup> Rainer's contiguous re-figurations of (performing) selves, beside one another, open out a rich landscape of positional relationalities, especially around the intersubjective solicitations of shame. Such recursive re-appearances are not poised to merge one position with the other, rather, they call for a distance – figured as both temporal and spatial – that allows the sides of *multiplicity, surprise, divergence, creativity*, and

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 249.

love to show.

Yvonne Rainer's speculative project of self-exposure, I advance, can then be read as an attempt "to take control of the time and rhythm of entering, exploring, and leaving the space of trauma,"<sup>118</sup> of her 'wounded subjectivity.' In her memoir *Feelings Are Facts*, her brutally confessional narrative constitutes a parallel text to her much documented artistic activity; a tell-all tale of her parents' abandonment as a child, her mother's chronic depression, her adolescent erotic encounters and her marriages, her dissonant love affairs, her near-successful suicide attempt, as well as nervous breakdowns, health crises, and years of therapy sessions in the evolving quest for clarity. It would seem that no (painful) detail of her personal and professional history has remained hidden. Yet her relentless and continuous reopening of these wounds cut through her compulsion to re-access and re-assess the time of before and after, for figuring and re-figuring what the matter is with her – feelings.

In this immersive scenario, recursion frustrates the rigid temporal binds of paranoia to regularity and repetitiveness with the necessity to look for surprises that can offer a glimpse of other possibilities:

Because it includes, but is not reducible to, repetition, [recursion] provides a potentially useful way of diagramming the relation between affect and sexuality, between past and future. It is a way of going forward, nonteleologically but without committing in advance to remaining stuck in the past. Reading recursion reparatively [...] is one way of better understanding the loopholes of conspiratorial solidarity that honeycomb contemporary society.<sup>119</sup>

Rainer's recursive acts of revision and exposure are a far different business from what they would have been in the 1960s, yet, as Sedgwick notes, "[s]ome exposés, some

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<sup>118</sup> Sedgwick quoted in Nyong'o, "Trapped in the Closet," 246.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

demystifications, some bearing of witness do have great effectual force (though often of an unanticipated kind),”<sup>120</sup> even and especially from a time removed. The common thread of shame and shame-related affects that hover around the affectively charged overlapping of activities related to the past – including viewing, reading, listening, writing, fantasising, role playing, and recording – provide here a trace of experience, a mechanism for recollection, and, consequently, a re-opening for analysis and understanding.

The strategies of recursion and repetition undercut the re-emergence of the work in its own mo(ve)ments as they are repeated, reperformed and reiterated in ways that are more affective than the occluded spectacle of *Trio A* ever really shows, and in a manner that does not find articulation in the volumes of discourse around this work, or even only from embodying it.<sup>121</sup> Thus, *Trio A* and its re-occurrences can possibly be-held within an enigmatic relational archive of feelings that, like Ann Cvetkovich’s writings<sup>122</sup> suggest, finds shape and texture through the desire to remember, repeat, and work through a radical emotional ‘sense.’ For, as we return to tell our (hi)stories again and again even when they still feel bad, they may, hopefully, also feel good in a future like when: “events from the past rose like waves and battering against her mind, threw it into a wild commotion of shame, grief, and joy.”<sup>123</sup>

To take control of the time and rhythm of entering, exploring, and leaving the space of an affective atmosphere is, Nyong’o suggests, “not to decide for or against sexuality or affect, or for paranoia or reparation, but precisely to defer such a finality through an act of aesthetic and

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<sup>120</sup> Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 141.

<sup>121</sup> An attentive analysis of the instance of corporeal assimilation, and fixation, would exceed the length of this study, however I signal the testimony provided by the writing of one of the official *Trio A* dancers, Cat Patterson, in “I Promised Myself I Would Never Let It Leave My Body’s Memory,” *Dance Research Journal* 41.2 (Winter 2009). I would also reiterate that this project does not seek so much to compare modes of transmissions and conservation in order to find a more ‘correct’ form, rather it is concerned with the ways the relational transactions that underpin such movements and circulations can be re-accessed and re-vitalised through the gaps between what is already known and what can be forgotten, because indeed not everything can be held within *one-self*.

<sup>122</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>123</sup> This text is from a slide projection that appears in Rainer’s film *This is the Story of a Woman who...* (Zeitgeist, 1974).

political imagination.”<sup>124</sup> The tender and sensible work of remediating, attending, assisting – and sometimes letting go – of these dense environments may move us, transport us, resituate us, or displace us right in the midst of being-beside more than one-self. As Heather Love points out: “[n]ot only are these two positions – the schizoid and the depressive – inseparable, not only is oscillation between them inevitable, but they are also bound together by the glue of shared affect.”<sup>125</sup> Allowing paranoid and reparative reading to interdigitate at the level of relational ethics and affect, I argue, not only works well for epistemology and knowledge but also feels good for different surprises and hopes for the future, and the past: “[b]ecause the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did.”<sup>126</sup>

Putting paranoid thinking, reparative reading into dialogue with the politics of affect serves here as a critical strategy that advances an affective philosophy of gestures, performances and rituals that can disentangle the (virtual) traces of our relational activities from the kind of totalising and finalising “strong theory” of the world that explains too much, explains too well, in favour of the more nuanced local readings of a “weak theory” that “gives up on hypervigilance for attentiveness; instead of powerful reductions, it prefers acts of noticing, being affected, taking joy, and making whole,”<sup>127</sup> if only for fugitive mo(ve)ments.

In order to take in this work, I suggest, we must shift back and forth between sides – between one position and the other, one version of one-self and the ‘other’ – in a temporal suspense in which we can forget what we have just seen because we can never see it fully, can never experience it wholly. Rainer’s dance is a work of particulars, singularities and reiterations that can be experienced not as an object of formal (and visual) interest but as a structure of

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<sup>124</sup> Nyong’o, “Trapped in the Closet,” 246.

<sup>125</sup> Heather Love “Truth and Consequences: On Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading,” *Criticism* 52.2 (Spring 2010): 239.

<sup>126</sup> Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 146.

<sup>127</sup> Love, “Truth and Consequences,” 238.



circumspect feelings. Its morphology makes felt the activation of the contours of experience – the intensity of virtual energies. This affective module might well be described as the biogram – *the alive structure*<sup>128</sup> – of the relational environment co-created by moving and being moved in what Erin Manning – with Suzanne Langer and Daniel Stern – would read as an “[a]ffective attunement: an open field of differentiation out of which a singularity of feeling emerges and merges. A matching not of content but of expression.”<sup>129</sup>

These operations take the form of the inverse of *one set of feelings* – the ideational content we could say – extensively doubled and tripled by a series of performative reiterations into a *continuous mood* that anticipates its possible extension; its endless variables. Within this frame, the perceptual recursions enact a staged expansion of the feeling’s transformational potentials. Both these affective contours emerge from deep tissue to shallow depth in a *flesh-and-blood* relationality of ‘*alive* attention.’ Ultimately, the shape of this *minimalist affect* is not an endpoint of reduction but an open chasm of proliferations that instead of removing, successively approximates the shapes experience takes. Paraphrasing Massumi,<sup>130</sup> I would here propose that if *Trio A* is the object of a self-archiving of one person’s world of felt relations, then its separate reiterative and recursive expressive forms are a tacit, permeable archive of shared experience. With this proposed approach, the work can no longer be grasped as a unified image (of the averted gaze) but as an *alive* performance event that can be added to, transformed upon, and loved without being assimilated into a single slate of history.

With a sharper but tender attention to these re-mediating interpretations, I deliberately turn away from the historically monumental and towards the affective landscapes of the archival.

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<sup>128</sup> See Chapter 1 for more of Massumi’s concept of biogram.

<sup>129</sup> Erin Manning, “What if it didn’t All Begin and End with Containment? Toward a Leaky Sense of Self,” *Body & Society* 15.3 (September 2009): 41.

<sup>130</sup> Brian Massumi, *The Archive of Experience* (2003): 9, <<http://www.brianmassumi.com/textes/Archive%20of%20Experience.pdf>>.

Such 'reachings' take into account both the paranoid and reparative positions of critical theory and cultural practice, both of their dares to make visible and veritable the extraordinary vitality beneath the ground of every event of experience – the liveliness of organic life, its rhythm drawn to habit or the forms of chaotic enmeshment – and give in to its yet unsighted potentialities that can bring about, enact, give us the time to feel surprise for the past and hope for the future.

At the end of "Where's the Passion?," Rainer looks back, once more, with feeling, at the most affective events and figures of her life to hail with gratitude her illustrious forbearers John Cage and Bob Rauschenberg, perhaps with an abashed desire to, in the possible future, join their ranks: "[t]heir brilliant shenanigans, by now thoroughly historicized, laid the groundwork for my own shenanigans and created a groundswell that reverberates to this day. They opened the palace gates of expression, so to speak, allowing a rabble of chairs, coughing, and standing still to rush into the hallowed halls of high art and demand legitimation in the expression sweepstakes."<sup>131</sup> And so shall the facts of Rainer's feelings.

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<sup>131</sup> Rainer, "Where's the Passion?," 12.

### 3. Crabface, Wounded Woman and Buttman – Refiguring Moving, Infecting Temporalities

#### Crabface

Cancer has been known since antiquity. The first documented case hails from ancient Egypt in 1500 BC and records the description of bulging tumours of the breast, the inscription reads: “there is no treatment.”<sup>1</sup> The name for the disease derives from a figural and figurative ‘impression’ of the mark it bears on the body. The term *cancer*, in fact, is the Latin transliteration of the Greek word *karkinos* – meaning, literally, ‘crab.’ It was Hippocrates, the “father of medicine,” who first observed the appearance of the cut surface of the tumour and found a figural resemblance with the sea creature.<sup>2</sup>

The archetypal form of this figural ‘vision’<sup>3</sup> was breast cancer: its massy profile, spreading filaments and swollen veins suggesting the legs and feelers of a crab burrowing deep into the body’s landscape. This image(ry) was also extended to include other characteristics: hard and rough on the exterior, this crab-like disease deeply penetrates the surface crawling under the soft flesh, its extremities spreading in all directions tenaciously clinging onto the tissue; the pain like sharp claws seizing the depth of the body. It can re-emerge quickly, or it can quietly lie in wait and then suddenly reappear: silent in its invisibility yet fully present and persistent in its attacks from within, literally refusing to go.

The metaphor of the crab – walking, dancing, sliding into the depths has seized hold of the body, painfully persisting in time, beside scientific knowledge and beyond the imagination.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the so-called Edwin Smith Papyrus. See “The History of Cancer.” *cancer.org*, <<http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/cid/documents/webcontent/002048-pdf.pdf>>.

<sup>2</sup> Hippocrates of Cos (460-370 BC). See, James S. Olson, *Bathsheba’s Breast: Women, Cancer, and History* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> That Hippocrates came to describe cancer as looking like a crab clearly indicates that he wasn’t looking at the kinds of cancers that we cannot see with the naked eye. He was observing mostly large tumors close to or on the body’s surface such as those of the breast, skin, neck, and tongue. Unlike other internal cancers, breast tumours can be detected through visible symptoms, especially at later stages when lumps are fully formed.

Embodied in all senses, corporeal and figural, it haunts the flesh and blood narratives that continue to bear/bare its mark. Cancer – the crab – not only has infected the figural and figurative tropes with which bodies touched by this illness have been, and might be, represented, but also has become ‘the figure’ of a certain inhumanity; the obscured face of life through the appearance of its negation. A particular kind of epistemological recalibration thus takes place when confronted with this presence.

In *Teratologies*,<sup>4</sup> sociologist Jackie Stacey reports on how not only medical diagnosis and treatment but also, more generally and perniciously, all aspects of contemporary culture are marked by their visibility to the extent of determining the socially mandated invisibility of cancer subjects and ill bodies. Stacey relies on her experience of teratoma<sup>5</sup> to offset the infectious and explicit suturing of cancer tropes and monstrous forms manifest within the performances of social as well as clinical discourses. In doing so she prompts new ways of thinking about carnal and affective histories within the frameworks of the culturally lived and imagined.

In particular, Stacey posits the disturbing figure of teratoma as a monstrous, abnormal and other-than-human entity by drawing on the grotesque connotations of both its etymology<sup>6</sup> and morphology, which have constituted the factual basis from which the imagination has conceived tales of monstrous births:

The foetus and the tumour are both constituted by cell growth. [...] The analogy becomes a mimetic image in the case of the teratoma, whose germ cell origins imitate pregnancy and release the same hormonal indicators. The teratoma tumour may even develop differentiated cells and show hair, teeth and nails on

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<sup>4</sup> Jackie Stacey, *Teratologies: A Cultural Study of Cancer* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> A teratoma is an encapsulated tumor containing tissue from the germ cell (the egg or the sperm). It is one of the most fatal cancers.

<sup>6</sup> Poignantly, the origins of the term *teratos* retains a double sense in Greek as that which is both prodigy and demon, marvelous and abnormal, evoking fascination and horror and, as such, intrinsically ambiguous and unstable.

birth: a monstrous birth, delivered to the waiting medical gaze.<sup>7</sup>

The deviant fetus threatens the mother's body by destroying its internal 'social' order; therefore, this malign creature must be extirpated and cut out of the substance that made it. Yet, the separation leaves behind an echo of attachment; the spectre of an abject state that returns the body's ends – birth and mortality – to the inevitable continuum that connects death and life.

Stacey further refigures the relation of the monstrous (maternal)<sup>8</sup> to the tumorous growth in the combination of the deviant and complicit affinities found between sexuality, monstrosity, and mortality. In consideration of cancer as a system of replication of the same (deviant cell), her analysis establishes a contact with certain categories of sexual deviations – such as lesbianism – that carry the threatening promise of abject sameness. She writes: “both categories generate anxieties about the certainty of the boundaries between subject and object, between normal and abnormal or deviant, between inside and outside, between sameness and difference and between life and death.”<sup>9</sup>

Bodies that deviate from the norm become monstrous, doubly so when they perform female difference, triply so when they denaturalise the cultural practices that constitute identities by, in Donna Haraway's words: “queering what counts as nature,”<sup>10</sup> all multiplied by the thread of impending mortality. The spectres of the monstrosity remind us that the medical and social gaze is itself not reducible or exclusive to what might be 'seen' as we can be 'moved' by the disfigurement of the body beyond the idea of visibility and into the conception of a more

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<sup>7</sup> Stacey, *Teratologies*, 89-91.

<sup>8</sup> Also here comes to mind the work of feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti in relation to the concept of the monstrous and the image of the pregnant body articulated via what Braidotti calls a “materialist theory of becoming” (*Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Belonging* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002], 2). Braidotti's view of teratology builds productively on Donna Haraway's “promises of monsters,” see “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,” in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992). Their ideas, in turn, following the connection that Kristeva made between the maternal body and abjection in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> Stacey, *Teratologies*, 77.

<sup>10</sup> Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters,” 300.

sensate and 'human' cultural revision.

To engage with the anomalous and monstrously different may promise different kinds of figurations of corporeal subjects and new ways of being in the world. Monstrous births deliver the promise of a powerful re-figuration of sensation, imagination *and* action making knowledge happen by circulating the affecting figure of instability and mutation, change and transformation, which in turn(ing) generate 'new figurations.' Stacey argues that "[a]ll forms of tropes, or figurative language, involve some kind of 'turn', 'conversion' or 'deviations.'"<sup>11</sup> By putting unstable appearances and deviant figurations in contact with the cultural event of performance, I wish to propose the figure of the crab – and crab-like movement – as a kind of (dis)figuration that clings to the human; a monstrosity *and* a deviation that, as such, proliferate, spatially and temporally, in the face of the uncanny in-humanity intrinsic to the human.

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<sup>11</sup> Stacey, *Teratologies*, 49.

## Murderous Sensibilities

On March 22, 2009, the 1978 film version of *Trio A*, Yvonne Rainer's early, much celebrated, epic dance,<sup>12</sup> was screened alongside her lesser known and final (?) feature length movie *MURDER and murder* (1996)<sup>13</sup> in a small auditorium of the British Film Institute in London.<sup>14</sup>

At the extreme ends of the artist's distinct careers as a dance choreographer first and experimental filmmaker later, these two works appear to have not much in common, if not the artist's persistent and enduring exploration of the body – starting from her own – in relation to the viewer/audience.

In the early 70s, Yvonne Rainer, the radical “shaper of dances,” “mover of bodies,” and “sculptor of spectatorship”<sup>15</sup> of the American avant-garde, sought to transpose the intense emotions of her minimalist performance aesthetics into the more malleable form of the moving image. The cinematic lens granted her the objective distance she sought to re-present her subjects – character, social relations and spectatorial position.<sup>16</sup> The body of theory – built on the anatomies of post-structuralism, psychoanalysis and feminism – provided at the time a more extensive vocabulary for the exploration of her conceptual and dialectic concerns.

Rainer's movies are not only about form and/or politics but also and most importantly about the politics of form; her radical moves are always aesthetically imbricated.

Combining image, language, ideology and action with the manipulation of cinematic movement, she interrogates the politics of the personal and the encroaching sticky matters of

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<sup>12</sup> *Trio A (The Mind is a Muscle, Part 1)*, the silent, black-and-white directed and produced by dance historian Sally Banes and danced by Rainer herself.

<sup>13</sup> *MURDER and murder*, directed by Yvonne Rainer and starring Joanna Merlin, Kathleen Chalfant (Zeitgeist, 1996). The film won the Teddy Award at the Berlin Film Festival in 1997 and the Special Jury Award at the Miami Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in 1999, however it was never picked up for wider distribution. It is also one of the least analysed texts in the panoply of criticism on the artist's work.

<sup>14</sup> The showing contributed to works of the artist the 23rd London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival's programme and was curated by Irene Revell and Nazmia Jamal, in collaboration with art organization Electra.

<sup>15</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer And The 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Against the grain of that definition of minimalism that had so easily become attached to her performance work.

power and authority. Her filmic treatments thwart genre expectations pushing through the walls of narrative and into the spectatorial seat. *MURDER and murder* is no exception. Rarely screened in movie theatres and only officially presented at art-house festivals, the film is a semi-autobiographical meditation on the silent killers of society such as sexism, homophobia, illness, and most significantly breast cancer. The narrative sharply interconnects the progress of the relationship between two women falling in love with each other in their later years, with Rainer's clinical examination of the effects of breast cancer via the use of her own post-mastectomy body. *MURDER and murder* touches on different figures of bodies, changing in habit and morphology through sexuality, age and illness.

In what Rainer has alluded to as the most psychologically realistic of her films for the full-blown characterisations and enactments of the two central protagonists, her signature choreographic approach to figural and filmic movement remains evident. Doris and Mildred are two white, middle-aged women, one is 63 and an unaccomplished performance artist, the other ten years younger and a tenured academic; one a newly persuaded lesbian and thrilled by her new brand of radicalism, the other an unabashed fervent dyke for as long as she can remember. They fall in love, move in together, fight, make love, and cope with a cancer diagnosis and subsequent mastectomy.

But, *caveat lector*, this is no conventional melodrama. A number of disruptive strategies complicate matters. From the outset, the romantic proceedings are witnessed and commented upon by Jenny, Doris' mother, and Young Mildred (Mildred's 18-year-old incarnation); they are ghosts from the past who haunt the film's present by reflecting on the living, to whom they provide invisible support whilst figuring out their possible futures. Further parallel threads unfold via the commentary and presence of other characters intervening in the narrative – friends, relatives and peers who in turn appear on the screen to articulate opinions, voice popular misconceptions, or just to attend to the couple's story.



Through a maze of tableaux, contiguous narrative times and spaces collapse into one another, interrupting the comfort and complacency of unimpeded watching, dislocating spectatorial position. These manipulations result in the fragmenting of time into a sequence of indiscreet moments that stand beside one another. Rainer plays off that deception through panoply of formal and discursive strategies that juxtapose dialogue, humour, slapstick, visual metaphor, statistics, quotations, archival footage, commentary, voice over and direct address. In the mix of cinematic codes, the categories of culturally and scientifically determined notions and perceptions of pathology are successively invoked and dismantled.

The film complexity and wit turn on the creation of images within images, and here again, the figure of the body plays a key role. In one of the most important sequences in the film, the effect/affect of illness is literally made visible. Rainer, herself a lesbian<sup>17</sup> in her early sixties and a survivor of breast cancer, appears on the screen to trouble the fictional narrative with the asymmetries of her mastectomised chest whilst inquiring into the ambiguities and contradictions attending the 'marked' subjects of murderous body politics. This is how critic Berenice Reynaud reviews these mo(ve)ments: "Rainer [...] locates a more accessible film on the site of her body, which she has always used as a 'site of scandal' since her early experimental films. The constructive scandal of *MURDER and murder* is the fact that this body, marked by old age and the threat of death by cancer, dares to love, even love beyond the conventional norms."<sup>18</sup>

In the midst of such idiosyncrasies, the trajectories of different and differently invisible, wounded and ecstatic narratives come together in the place where sensing and sensuous bodies meet with the reality of having to cope with shifting shapes, times and identities, while

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<sup>17</sup> By then Rainer had resolved her identity as a lesbian in characteristic style with a very public and publicly self-analysed 'coming out' in 1991. See Rainer's lecture/article, "Working Around the L-Word", in *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, eds. Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Scott MacDonald's interview "Yvonne Rainer," in *A Critical Cinema 2*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> Reynaud, Berenice, "Murder and Murder," review, in *Cahiers Du Cinema* 509 (1996), on *Teddy Award*, <[http://news.teddyaward.tv/en/video/?a-z=1&select=M&id\\_film=397](http://news.teddyaward.tv/en/video/?a-z=1&select=M&id_film=397)>.

remaining animated by the desire to resist, connect and survive. This unsettling avant-garde tale of life, death and love documents somewhat fictional and fragmentary, yet 'real' and connective experiences that surface at the edge of visibility and representability. In *MURDER and murder*, the visual play of surfaces of bodies and identities displayed in their mundane, as well as performative gestures, encroach upon their experiential qualities – the sensible structure of flesh, the tenderness of wounds, the impulsiveness of desire. These 'appearances,' I argue, gives rise to multiple figurations, disfigurations and reconfigurations – literal, performative, metaphorical, and, perhaps most poignantly, autobiographical – providing the basis for an intense aesthetic experience that has a deep and lasting in-visible *affect*.

This affect refers to the embodied qualities of pain and pleasure in the image, where the body is *seen* and *touched* via contact of surface depths and transmission of their forces, whether between experiential bodies and fictional characters, between narrative modes and cinematic devices, or between visual image and embodied viewer. It is these moments of 'contact' that I want to address through a return to the body politic as it is imaginatively figured, literally figured out and socially and culturally transfigured through the narrative strategies of Rainer's polymorphous tale. In particular, my interest is in the manner in which Rainer engages the figural and material practice of viewing the sensible qualities of bodies and identities, which, in the filmic diegesis, dance to a complex choreography that oversteps the bounds of the visible. I here use the word 'sensible' – in both adjectival and nominal form – following Davide Panagia's definition of the term as both "what makes sense" and "what can be sensed."<sup>19</sup>

In *The Political Life of Sensation*, Panagia takes an aesthetic turn on politics in order to revive the crucial dimension of sensation, which he defines as "neither sense nor perception [...] but rather the heterology of impulses that register on our bodies without determining a body's

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<sup>19</sup> Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 3.

nature or residing in any one organ of perception.”<sup>20</sup> Sensation, Panagia continues, gives rise to, “an experience of unrepresentability” in that it “occurs without having to rely on a recognizable shape, outline, or identity to determine its value.”<sup>21</sup> Such sensory events produce “moments of interruption,” as “disarticulation” or “disfiguration,” which can then “invite occasions and actions for reconfiguring our associational lives.”<sup>22</sup>

Borrowing on these and other ideas on the political stakes of ‘sensible’ experience, I want to develop an understanding of the defacing quality of Rainer’s rhetoric and figurality. Retracing Panagia’s considerations on the aesthetic and political dimensions of visuality across Judith Butler’s ethical recalibration of the disfiguring force of the image, the imagined and the felt, I will examine some of the ways in which Reiner’s cinematic mo(ve)ments perform the activities of contestation and disfiguration of the ‘sensible’ progressively reflecting a kind of ethical confrontation that occurs in the interval and distance between differently ‘murderous’ identities. In my analysis, these operations emerge as an ‘ethics of dys-appearance’ that grows out of moved and moving bodies and their infected and infectious image(rie)s, in and out the time of contact.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

## Wounded Woman

Title: "Shrinkage." On screen, two middle-aged women are boxing in a ring. They are arguing about their relationship. Camera pans to the floor of the ring; the canvas is stencilled with breast cancer figures and statistics. Medium close up of YVONNE sitting on the scaffold right in front of the ring. She is wearing a fighter's robe, red straps around her hands, as though she were the next contender. She removes her left arm from the sleeve of the robe to reveal a beam of white flesh against the dark and glossy cloth of the fabric; an ambiguous site of corrugated flesh: a mastectomy scar. On the background the sounds of cheering and pummeling. On screen-direct camera address, slightly offside; an even, almost toneless voice that verges on the deadpan:

YVONNE: All right, I've been putting this off. I had been living an oblivious cat's life, only in my case I had five chances instead of nine. Five biopsies – "I almost said lobotomies" – five biopsies in eight years following up on that first diagnosis of lobular carcinoma in situ. Eight years ago they didn't call in situ carcinomas breast cancer. "A marker of higher risk," that first breast surgeon kept repeating, and I in turn repeated it like a mantra. "Not breast cancer, but a marker of higher risk." He wanted to take 'em both off. No breasts, no breast cancer.<sup>23</sup>

This is an emblematic sequence of *MURDER and murder* and a spectacular send-up of the film's metaphors of fiction and reality. Rainer uses the figure of her own body to create a 'arresting' viewing effect<sup>24</sup> that interrupts the plot progression, confounding the distinction between autobiography and fiction. In an ecstatic moment of appearance, we are exposed to the figure of cancer – the crab that has seized the surface of the body. The wound, the scar, the shrivelled up nothingness that she offers up in the visual frame lies in an ambiguously

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<sup>23</sup> Yvonne Rainer, "MURDER and murder," screenplay, *Performing Arts Journal* 55 (1997): 102.

<sup>24</sup> The arrest of visual capture will hopefully translate along the way into the 'unrest' of sensation and relation.

absented space where the breast once was; an image carved on the surface of the flesh and impressed on the patina of the eyes but existing 'elsewhere,' removed. Sight awkwardly feels its way through this empty space in its distortion and disfiguration.

*MURDER and murder*, I propose, dramatizes the very ways the flesh of the gaze is exposed to the perception of a contact with a transposed experience of corporeal difference that complicates the relationship between viewing and narrative movement. Rainer engages the formal features of the cinematic event that invokes the affective dynamics of attention that Panagia calls the "effects of viewing." In "The Effects of Viewing,"<sup>25</sup> Panagia addresses the dynamics of interruption (or "capture") involved in practices of viewing that contest the rule of narrative, or what Panagia calls "narratocracy" – that is: "the organisation of a perceptual field according to the imperative of rendering things readable."<sup>26</sup> Narratocracy is committed to give an account or justify the sense of an appearance by providing a narrative or storyline, and by constituting the modern democratic subject as a literary or reading subject.

However, Panagia argues, the immediacy of the aesthetic experience can unground this subjectivity via an effective disruption of the organoleptic configurations – i.e. the correspondences that bind a sense organ to an act or perception: the eyes give sight, the mouth gives taste etc. – that constitute the narratocratic disposition of a sensing body. He recognises in the viewing effects of painting – but also of other visual objects – movements that invoke a diversity of intensities and sensations that impact on the body disfiguring, and reconfiguring its organs of perception. The dissensual<sup>27</sup> nature of these sensory events, he maintains, can disarticulate the regime of perception and its "organoleptic assurances" opening up the experience to shifting modes and postures of perceptual attention, and different conditions for a non-authoritarian circulation of the senses within democratic life.

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<sup>25</sup> Full title "The Effects of Viewing: Caravaggio, Bacon, and The Ring," in Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, (op. cit.) 96-122.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Panagia here borrows heavily from Jacques Rancière's elaborations in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum Press, 2010), which I will soon (re)turn to.

Panagia recognises the actualisation of these possibilities in the aesthetic effect of the simultaneous immersive moment of painting and specular instant of viewing triggered by Caravaggio's paintings of decapitations.<sup>28</sup> These movements of "capture" occupy a liminal space between absorption and spectatorial distance, which, for Panagia, in these images is epitomised by the figure of the open orifice of the mouth agasp in exhalation – a pervasive expression of the shock of facing one's life as it encroaches with death. Such representational potency, he argues, seizes the whole body into the scene while displacing any possibility for constructing either a story or a stable bridge between perception and signification. By rendering invisible intensities palpable on the surface, such viewing effects interrupt common modes of apprehending the artwork thus denying hermeneutical depth of narrative.

For Panagia, a similar confounding of sensible experience is at work in Francis Bacon's portraits of (not so human) "Figures." It is Deleuze who first draws attention to the operative field around the isolated image that Bacon deploys in order to "avoid the figurative, illustrative, and narrative character."<sup>29</sup> This technique of isolation, Panagia sustains, severs the painting from narration leaving in its stead only the invisible horror of a scream – the round hollow of the face stretched into a spasm that represents "the intense effort of a body wanting to escape its own figure"<sup>30</sup> – a site of affective *disfiguration*. Hence, Panagia is able to trace a figural analogy between these differently deformed bodies caught in a critical impasse:

Caravaggio destroyed painting because he painted the effects of seeing without telling stories; Bacon's scream is the spasm of a deformed body whose modes of perception are no longer secure and whose ability to rely on sight, sound and touch as distinct capacities is provisional to the point of evading narrative

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<sup>28</sup> A fundamental aspect of this articulation is that the singular instance Panagia analyses to make his case, namely Caravaggio's *Medusa*, is actually a self-portrait. What is at stake here is not (only) the possible convergence – and indeed divergence – of author and its experience, but mostly the distance between representation and aesthetic effect/affect.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

iteration. Without the assurance that our eyes grant us sight and our hands give us touch, we can no longer assume that we know how to read and write, how to tell a story.<sup>31</sup>

The viewing effects of Caravaggio's and of Bacon's portraits, Panagia suggests, cannot be reduced to a mere seeing, to an ocular visuality, but they invoke a "haptic visuality"<sup>32</sup> in which not only the eyes but the entire body is at play in a configuration and reconfiguration of sense experience.<sup>33</sup> This mode of perception is a provisional engagement, or organisation of the organs, that makes narrativity insufficient to the aesthetic experience of the image. Storytelling is no longer an adequate response before such visual images, as figuration and narrative come always after the moment or durational intensity of sensation. Instead, the aesthetic object must be here engaged on its own terms, in light of its presentational properties; it is an appearance of a singularity without model of resemblance – the image is its own referent.<sup>34</sup>

Returning to *MURDER and murder*, I want to suggest that Rainer's cinematic disfigurements enact a movement of suspended narration through the exposure of a cut in the flesh that also tears the visual patina of the filmic frame in a situation quite similar to the dynamics of capture (of attention) advanced by Panagia. The figure of embodied alterity, in fact, discloses a more profound and critical experience than that which meets the eye; the reality of a life lived in relation with death. In facing the body tainted with mortality we also face the possibility of its absence. This marked appearance, in its immediacy and unrepresentability, is an interruption that severs the (mimetic structure of the) story, as well as the 'common' nature of experience allowing the excess of new meanings to arise. The result is the emergence of sensation – an

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>32</sup> Panagia derives this expression from Deleuze's recognition of the tactile function of vision as "the haptic," in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); and with Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (op. cit.), but also from Laura U. Marks' concept of "haptic visuality" in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (London: Duke University Press, 2000). More on this will follow in the incoming discussions.

<sup>33</sup> Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, 109.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 110.

experience that “occurs without having to rely on a recognizable shape, outline, or identity to determine its value”<sup>35</sup> – which returns attention to the *sur-face*<sup>36</sup> of things.

What can be found at the surface level of bodies that no longer appear to be ‘wholly’ human is a ‘defaced’ actuality that figures the faciality of an otherness in frontality of the ‘still’ open wound – a plane of inconsistencies, a surface-depth of expanded tension quickly nearing both the “night side of life”<sup>37</sup> and the abysmal depth of existence. Hence, the agape cut attains the value of a screen, a surface of reflection – in other words, a threshold event of mortal horror and vibrant vitality by which one may feel affectively ruptured/captured. The interventions into what is visible of the interruptive and disfiguring force of the image, the imagined and the felt demonstrate the ambiguous and polyvalent relations of senses taken at ‘face value.’

Like Caravaggio’s agasp faces and Bacon’s facial spasms, Rainer’s scar is a disfiguration, or a defacement, that is experienced as an intensified source of sensory energy. My suggestion is that the affective force of Rainer’s appearance becomes transmittable through a figural and figurative “face” – a faciality – that becomes the recognisable nexus of the perceptual and political field of the image. Here, a brief interruption feels necessary to explore how Judith Butler links these specific points of reflection to an ethics of appearance. Drawing on ‘some’ resonating affinities between powerful impressions on the visage in critical and political theory, what I am interested to expose is not only the rethinking of an affective moment of appearance but, most importantly, the reimagining of an ethical movement of transmission.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>36</sup> This word is modeled on the Latin *superficies* equivalent to *super-* *super-* + *-ficiēs*, combining form of *faciēs* – face.

<sup>37</sup> In *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag argues that illness “is the night-side of life” (op. cit., 3).



## Vis-à-Vis Ethics

In the final essay that gives the title to her volume *Precarious Life*,<sup>38</sup> Butler explores the themes of injurability and responsibility through a re-signification of Emmanuel Levinas' discourse on vis-à-vis ethics. For Levinas, the face is expressive, in a penetrating way, of an ethical demand made by the "Other;" it is the vocalisation of suffering "by which we are wakened to the precariousness of the Other's life."<sup>39</sup> Yet, this expression is not yet or no longer language, but a silent address that can take no direct representation.<sup>40</sup> Thus, for example, if we refer back to Caravaggio's and Bacon's faces agasp in the moment when life encounters death – when the last breath is expunged but not yet exhausted – we might say that these representations "seem to be figurable as a 'face' even though they are not faces, but sounds or emissions of another order. [...] In this sense, the figure underscores the incommensurability of the face with whatever it represents. Strictly speaking, then, the face does not represent anything, in the sense that it fails to capture and deliver that to which it refers."<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, the open wound can be recognized as a non-literal face for which philosopher Silvia Benso suggests the term "faciality:"

Faces express a specific content, a defined contour, an individuated existence. Facialities invoke the intimation of signification of a face, and yet the vagueness of a cluster of meaning the demarcation of which remains blurred, fluid, porous to a continuous, osmotic exchange between inside and outside that mobilizes boundaries, and therefore definitions; that runs the risk of a continuous slippage away into the night of the indistinct, undifferentiated, anonymous; that creates

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<sup>38</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 128-51.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>40</sup> See *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

zones of shadows, ambiguities, perplexities, contradictions, and therefore richness. Facialities evoke the possibility of the existence of faceless faces, which, despite their facelessness are yet endowed with the intimating power of the face to demand an ethical response.<sup>42</sup>

Benso finds in 'things' a faciality that is not merely an expression of the interhuman relationship, but rather, a hazy manifestation of an (im)possible relationship with the non-human. Hence, she brings to bear the emergence of both face and faciality on questions of ethics, politics and values in relation to the constitution and reactivation of the singularities that are an effect of the figuration *and* disfiguration of the human. Somewhere in between this difference, she maintains, traversing the borderlines between the human and inhuman, lays a possible way for witnessing the relation between subjectivity, identity, difference, and singularity in their appearing.

In this potential consonance, Butler reflects on the ways in which representation works in relation to humanisation and dehumanisation by noting that: "the human is not identified with what is represented but neither it is identified with the unrepresentable; it is, rather, that which limits the success of any representational practice."<sup>43</sup> The face is not "effaced" in this failure of representation, but is constituted in that very possibility."<sup>44</sup> Hence, the potential encounter with the singularity of an unrepresentable humanity – which I shall call 'inhumanity' – can only happen in the failure of representation to "capture" its referent and in its *showing* of this failing.<sup>45</sup> Then what of the dynamics of "capture" that I described above?

I argue that the captivating representational instances here analysed are conveyed and 'marked' by a representational impossibility, a failure to appear fully, expressed and *shown* in

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<sup>42</sup> Silvia Benso, *The Face of Things* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), xxix-xxx.

<sup>43</sup> I here imagine Butler's "successful representational practices" to have some connective affinities with what Panagia conceives as the power of conviction associated with narratocratic modes of visuality.

<sup>44</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 144.

<sup>45</sup> See Butler, *Precarious Life*, 145-6.

the guise of a deformation or disfiguration, that here is, in all effect, a defacement.<sup>46</sup>

Returning, again, to Rainer's film then, I suggest that the apparent disfiguration of the body indeed *captures* something irreducibly human about the experience of vulnerability.

Simultaneously, however, the director's self-reflection openly *fails* to capture the life that always exceeds itself, in the *end* revealing a more profound wound; the palpable expression of a sensitised and sensitising position towards mortal experience that is suggestive of ways to vitally refigure the conditions of (in)human re-appearance.

In pursuit of these possibilities, I recognise the wound as that which stretches out to resemble the Levinasian face "which no face can fully exhaust,"<sup>47</sup> or even Benso's expression of "faciality" – the constitutive possibility of an ethical encounter with the being human of things. These are only some in a series of catachrestic<sup>48</sup> disfigurations, or defacements, where the lineaments of the scar figuratively appear as the ligaments of a crab, which, in turn, are refigured as a face that in re-turn is reconfigured as the faciality of palpable intensity, of the rupture of being<sup>49</sup> and being not. Thus, the surface of the body operates as a face whose expression does not draw a distinct picture, whose address does not settle into words, and whose affect is not affixed on the patina of the visible.

In addition, there is a material contiguity in the frame between the 'wound-face' and the 'subject-face,' whose actual mouth opens in a direct address to the camera. These figures do not touch but are joined as two cuts that lie parallel in the same flesh. Rainer's speech act stands as a powerful counterpoint to her wounded appearance, disclosing the autobiographical self as a kind of rhetorical accomplishment in a language suffused with the crude facts of statistics, and transformative potential of irony:

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<sup>46</sup> See *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>48</sup> Catachresis is a rhetorical term for the necessarily inadequate (ab)use of language to express a conceptual problem that precludes adequate expression in its essence.

<sup>49</sup> Levinas writes: "[b]ut to speak truly, the appearance of being of these 'ethical peculiarities' – the humanity of man – is a rupture of being. It is significant, even if being resumes and recovers itself" (quoted in Butler, *Precarious Life*, 132).

YVONNE: I did my research, found a more conservative surgeon, and weighed the odds. Twenty to thirty percent higher risk than the general population. At that time one woman out of every ten or eleven got breast cancer. Now it's one out of eight or nine. "You're more likely to die in a car accident," Dr. Love had said. Since I didn't own a car, I didn't know quite what to make of that.<sup>50</sup>

In this counter-punctual exposition, the figure that exceeds and interrupts narrative is faced up, momentarily, with a story that touches (on) *it* offering a new perspective on the ways that one's life might be threatened.<sup>51</sup> Here, the address of the "face" becomes denuded to us in a moment of double exposure<sup>52</sup> – figural on one side and figurative on the other – that transmits a sense of the precariousness of life. Levinas remind us that it is this proximity to the fundamental vulnerability of the Other that reveals the conflict within the concept of the "face": "the face of the other in its precariousness and defenselessness, is for me at once the temptation to kill and the call to peace, the 'You shall not kill.'"<sup>53</sup>

The appearance of vulnerability awakens not only to what is precarious in another life, but also to the precariousness of life itself, including one's own.<sup>54</sup> In order to suppress this fear of injurability one feels compelled to annihilate its cause. The kernel of such impulse, the face that represents such threat, thus becomes a murderous temptation to establish one's own supremacy in the face of the other, by giving face to their death.<sup>55</sup> In other words, the appearance of the face bespeaks a fundamental tension: to grasp life's precariousness and feel tempted to take advantage of it, to apprehend it or 'capture' it. Butler suggests: "If the Other, the Other's face, which after all carries the meaning of this precariousness, at once tempts me with murder and prohibits me from acting upon it, then the face operates to

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<sup>50</sup> Rainer, "MURDER and murder," 102-3.

<sup>51</sup> Paradoxically here, by the address of those who should attend to such figure.

<sup>52</sup> Or failed double-capture.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Butler, *Precarious Life*, 134.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

produce a struggle for me, and establishes this struggle at the heart of ethics.”<sup>56</sup> This same dilemma, I argue, is at the core of Rainer’s ‘murderous’ tale.

Let me then simply call attention to Rainer’s choice of *metaphor* for the film’s title, which I wish to reactivate in the shadow of Levinas’ and Butler’s ethics. Back to the ringside of the previous scene, a few frames later, the camera lens returns on YVONNE, her robe now done up hiding momentarily what lies beneath. Her teeth clenched on an enormous unlit cigar, she speaks into the camera with the aid of two display cards one reading ‘MURDER’ with capital letters, and the other ‘murder’ in lower case, which she holds up in turn as she explains:

There is MURDER and then there is murder. MURDER by homophobia; murder by social and legal abuse, repression, stigma. MURDER by DDT, PCBs, dioxin, by 177 organochlorines stored in our fat, breast milk, blood, semen, and breath, by nuclear tests conducted in the 1950s. MURDER by electromagnetic fields. MURDER by breast cancer. And how must lesbians murder in order to survive? As children we fantasized MURDERING our sisters, our mothers, our newly born siblings. As adults we must learn to tolerate and work through the fantasized murders of our lovers. Thoughts can be murderous, but thoughts don’t kill. The seeds of certain fruits are said to be toxic if eaten. When I was ten years old I saved up apple seeds with which to poison my older sister. I had heard it took a cup.<sup>57</sup>

There is ‘capital’ MURDER that claims deaths by industrial toxins and nuclear testing; deaths from homophobia and other forms of stigma; deaths by incurable diseases and clearly defined social causes, and there is murder of a lesser order; the ‘banal fact’ of murder as it is played out in our fantasies of mastery over our siblings or lovers. But which MURDERS could be

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>57</sup> Rainer, “MURDER and murder,” 104.

prevented and which murders cannot be resolved?

The conundrum posed by this rhetoric is rehearsed against Rainer's backdrop of possible murders in the face of which the political and economic dimensions of MURDER's traumatic suffering are never absent, but rather are transfigured through exquisitely evocative and provocative gestures. Rainer's visual strategies give us a way of thinking about the relationship between representation, politics and ethics in a formal choreography of vis-à-vis interactions. As previously explicated, Rainer's recurring self-image, forces the viewer to come face-to-face with something that clearly is not lodged in the visual field but rather that is diffusely located in the flow of sensation generated by the encounter. Yet, the sensibility of this one-to-one is transferred and extended into a parallel narrative where the privileged model in which subjectivities meet and enter in conflict, and contact, is via a frontal (facial) confrontation.

## (Thou Shalt Not) Kill Your Darlings

We are back to the boxing match sequence, punctuated by Rainer's previous monologues, where we left the main characters, Mildred and Doris, facing one another on the ring. Here we find the two women prance about, jabbing and weaving, holding up their guard; they clinch, they separate and continue on. The scene is interspersed with jump cuts of faces looking on: Mildred's trainer, black-and-white shots of people taken from old Hollywood movies, Doris's trainer, the two ghosts. The two women end up in another clinch and start a verbal match:

DORIS: You put too much soap in the wash. That's why your skin itches.

MILDRED: Don't you dare tell me how to do laundry. You're always throwing off the blankets and making me freeze.

DORIS: You wash the kitchen counter with that stuff and never rinse it off.

You're trying to poison me

MILDRED: You're still putting the English muffins in the freezer.

DORIS: I have no rights here. You can throw me out anytime. I don't feel at home.

MILDRED: You don't support my work.

DORIS: You're not there when I need you.

MILDRED: You don't tell me when you need me.

DORIS: You expect too much of everybody.

MILDRED: You're always angry.<sup>58</sup>

This parodist and metaphoric frontal combat seems to rehearse Butler's dilemma of a constitutive ethical anxiety before the other: "[t]here is fear for one's own survival, and there is anxiety about hurting the Other, and these two impulses are at war with each other, like

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<sup>58</sup> Rainer, "MURDER and murder," 103.

siblings fighting.” Or lovers, I shall say. Butler continues: “[b]ut they are at war with each other in order *not* to be at war, and this seems to be the point.”<sup>59</sup> These mo(ve)ments signify singularities that are defined by their contrariness and antagonism. By figuring subjects in terms of their confrontational dispositions, Rainer makes visible a possible politics of disfiguration and reconfiguration of ‘sensibilities’ by the encounter with others in the endeavour of re-tuning, facing, and simultaneously shifting and altering different perceptions, which parse what is valuable and worthy of recognition in interhuman relations.

Instead of the kind of consensus partaking in the wholesome views that suppress some ‘others,’ who have no part in the sensible and political lifeworld, these antagonistic configurations seem to bring in Rancière’s very notion of democratic politics; that is, an event that simultaneously creates consensus in the very act of performing dissensus, or as Rancière would put it, participation in contraries.<sup>60</sup> This concepts is activated in Rancière’s descriptions of democratic political argumentation,<sup>61</sup> which is at one and the same time the demonstration of a possible world in which new ways of cooperating and being together are made possible through on-going acts of making (even litigious) claims against the rigid distribution of the sensible. Rainer’s characters, in my proposition, embody the forms and dispositions of these aesthetic and political gestures.

During the match, from their separate corners, the two women are incited by their respective coaches, Doris’s trainer: “[o]k Doris, go out there and don’t fight!!,” Mildred’s trainer: “[j]ust back off. Back off, stay down; stay on the defensive. Got it?.”<sup>62</sup> The lovers play out their rivalry in order not to prevail but to stay together: their accord is not found in a serene, passive pacifism, but in a belligerent attempt to remain by each other’s side, against all odds. Once could say that their frontal combat is a weapon of conciliation. Butler finds a similar

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<sup>59</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 136-7.

<sup>60</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, 29.

<sup>61</sup> One of these definitions can be found in Rancière, *Dissensus*, 39.

<sup>62</sup> Rainer, “MURDER and murder,” 102, 103.



configuration in Levinas' ethics, she writes: "the non-violence that Levinas seems to promote does not come from a peaceful place, but rather from a constant tension between the fear of undergoing violence and the fear of inflicting violence."<sup>63</sup>

As the scene progresses, to YVONNE's second facing of the camera – in her robe – there follows Young Mildred addressing the viewers directly. She gives an 'overview' of the relationship from Mildred's perspective, speaking of her anguish and insecurity, her fear of abandonment and feeling of being unloved, the frustration of one and the irritation of the other; an agonised vocalisation conveying a suffering that here does not prompt violence but lust.<sup>64</sup> Camera back to the ring, the boxing sequence concludes with the two women still clinging and rolling onto the canvas. However, their ravelling soon turns into an act of love-making: Mildred lies behind Doris nuzzling and whispering into her ear whilst Doris squeals with orgasmic pleasure, the screenplay clears all doubts: "[s]he is in the middle of multiple orgasms."<sup>65</sup> This scene is slowly transposed into a different setting; they're now lying on their dining room table still wearing tee shirts and boxing shorts and engaged in their amorous revelry, front to the camera-eye, faces recumbent side-by-side.

Rainer's constructions and figurations convert the frontal impact of the human figure into an ethical form manipulating the relationship between bodies, narrative trajectories, visual frames into the 'beside' space/time of appeased survival and reciprocal attention, and care. In Chapter 2, I have already gestured at the value of 'beside' as derived from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's activation of this preposition in relational terms, she writes:

*[b]eside* is an interesting preposition [...] because there's nothing very dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them. [...] Its interest does not, however, depend on a fantasy of

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<sup>63</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 137.

<sup>64</sup> Rainer, "MURDER and murder," 105.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

metonymically egalitarian or even pacific relations, as any child knows who's shared a bed with siblings. *Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations.<sup>66</sup>

In *MURDER and murder*, these relations are all played out by a multisided interaction that places subjects, their (hi)stories and their temporal appearances 'face-to-face' and 'beside' one another to move, together, beyond "a fantasy of metonymically egalitarian or even pacific relations." The film, I suggest, presents a figural and figurative viewing that occurs as an alignment between subjectivities predicated on a non-violent 'being with' as 'being against' of bodies in the world.<sup>67</sup> The ethical implications of these dispositions are surveyed by Butler in the context of conflict and war as she writes: "[i]t is much a matter of wrestling ethically with one's own murderous impulses, impulses that seek to quell an overwhelming fear, as it is a matter of apprehending the suffering of others and taking stock of the suffering one has inflicted."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* (op. cit.), 8.

<sup>67</sup> Butler takes up these cohesive and abrasive relations as modalities sustaining the social conditions of life in a more recent article "Remarks on 'Queer Bonds,'" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17.2-3 (2011). These themes will be the subject of a larger discussion in Chapter 4 in the context of resistant modes of collective activism.

<sup>68</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 150.

## Giving Face to Face

Rainer's claims for eroticism, intimacy and love in the face of (the threat posed by) death and (social and political) invisibility are grounded in a consistent structure of feelings whose constitutive trope is best expressed by a synecdochic relationship that allows the broken frames of narrative to come in contact without being seized into a single 'view.' For an understanding of the process of figural connectivity involved in the structural and viewing strategies inherent to the body of this work, I would like to make a brief excursion into Vivian Sobchak's analysis of the tropological term and logic of 'synecdoche,' which she discusses in relation to the disabled and prosthesis-using body.

In "A Leg to Stand On,"<sup>69</sup> Sobchack differentiates between the figural operations attending the three species of tropes – metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche – by their respective relations of *resemblance*, relations of *correspondence* (or *correlation*), and relations of *connection*. The metaphor, she explains, is by tropological nature a *disfiguration*<sup>70</sup> where a normative term or concept is removed from its mundane context and *refigured* elsewhere to represent some other context via the constitution of an analogy or resemblance. Moreover, she notes how the definition of metaphor does not refer to objects, rather: "[i]t consists 'in presenting an idea under the sign of another that is more striking or better known.'"<sup>71</sup>

In contrast, metonymy constructs relations of correspondence or correlation between two objects where each constitutes "*an absolutely separate whole*." The condition of correspondence is expressed through a variety of relationships such as cause to effect,

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<sup>69</sup> In Vivian Sobchak, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>70</sup> Sobchack speaks of a *displacement* of the nominative term rather than of a *disfiguration*. This 'disarticulation' from my part is in favour of an attempt to connect the author's reasoning to my own logical procedures.

<sup>71</sup> Sobchak, *Carnal Thoughts*, 209-10, original emphasis. The author articulates her analysis through the work of Paul Ricoeur in *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), who in turn quotes from the writing of Pierre Fontanier in *Le Figures du discours* (Paris, Flammarion, 1968).

instrument to purpose, container to content, thing to its location, sign to signification, physical to moral, model to thing. Unlike metonymy, the function of synecdoche is predicated on the relations of connection through which two objects “*form an ensemble, a physical or metaphysical whole, the existence or idea of one being included in existence or idea of another.*” Also in this case, the condition of connection gives form, or figure, to a variety of constitutive relations of part to whole, material to thing, of one to many, of species to genus, of abstract to concrete, of species to individual.<sup>72</sup> However in their figural use metonymy and synecdoche may appear symmetrical, Sobchack writes: “metonymic correspondence and synecdochic connection are radically different and ‘designate two relationships as distinct as *exclusion* (‘absolutely separate whole’) and *inclusion* (‘included in...’).”<sup>73</sup>

The point that I want to make here is that in *MURDER and murder* the overarching metaphor for the entire system of representation functions as a synecdoche, a relationship not of identity or resemblance, nor of correspondence or correlation, but of connectivity and contact that raises an ethical question that refuses to stay within the bounds of *a body, a story, a mode of appearance, a sense of experience*. Rainer’s filmic diegesis instructs a sequence of meditations in which the abstract and concrete figurations of bodies and subjectivities appear through the lively and affecting affinities between trajectories of lives interrupted, but not ended, by death.

The director’s thematic insistence on the subject, on bodies, on aging, eros, and death, and the lateral value of such appearances, openly reveals the connective tissue of their tropological constitution; they are equally eager to escape from the trappings and coercions of a murderous system that ensures their invisibility to effect their capture. What is at stake in this economy of metaphors is not the production of a figure through a dialectical procedure in

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<sup>72</sup> Both citations in this paragraph are interior quotations from Fontanier, emphasis added in the text. In Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 213-4.

<sup>73</sup> Interior quotations from Fontanier, original emphasis, *Ibid.*, 214.

which difference is subsumed into sameness, but the appearance of an affect through corporeal dispositions in which parts and w/holes come in contact. Hence, the figure of the absent breast here reappears as a corporeal synecdoche, as the connective tissue that gathers together all figurations of bodies against the attempts to capture and subdue their image.<sup>74</sup>

Rainer, the survivor, 'figures' in the first person an event that is the groundwork for the fiction of the other, parallel narrative, which, in turn, transfigures the reality of a spectre shape into a form of adjoining agency, or ethics. The overlapping of the two always attends representations of 'extraordinary' forms of embodiment. Here, ill, aging, queer bodies that transform in habit and morphology challenge models of physical and conceptual 'wholeness' and normativity by 'dys-appearing' in the field of appearance their moving, and touching, subjectivities not as a set of identities but as an array of positions, desires, acts, and practices. What these displayed dispositions have in common, then, is a reliance upon a visual synecdoche that is made available into the guise of a 'face.'

Thus, the figure of the bare wound – the face, if you will – functions synecdochally not only as the marker of the whole body of representation but, more importantly, as the reconfiguration of life itself through a disarticulation (disfiguration or defacement) of the sensible experience of coming in contact with the prefiguration of one's own mortality. In this image, we can identify yet another figure that completes the tropological spectrum of this viewing experience: it is the figure of prosopopoeia;<sup>75</sup> that is, the function of an apostrophe to an imaginary, absent,

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<sup>74</sup> On this merit, I return the reader to the formulations in Chapter 1.

<sup>75</sup> In order to explicate the implications of this rhetoric term, let us briefly turn to Paul de Man's recasting of the term 'human.' Even if de Man does not address the body as 'post-human'-body at all, he nevertheless questions what is said to be human by and through the trope of prosopopeia: "[m]an can address and face other men, within life or beyond the grave, because he has a face, but he has a face only because he partakes of a mode of discourse that is neither entirely natural nor entirely human" (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1984]: 90). Hence: "[p]rosopopeia is the trope of autobiography, by which one's name [...] is made as intelligible and memorable as a face" (ibid., 76). This would suggest, as Cynthia Chase emphasizes, that "face is given by prosopopoeia" (*Decomposing Figures. Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986]: 84), and this figure constitutes the subject of speech in the first place – as figure, as face, as voice.

disappeared or voiceless entity, which confers upon it the power of speech through a silent address, or, in Butler's terms: "the wordless vocalization of suffering that marks the limits of the linguistic translation."<sup>76</sup>

This chain of connections from the figure to the face is made manifest by the etymology of the trope's name, via Latin from Greek *prosopon poien*: to confer a mask or a face (prosopon). *MURDER and murder* deals with the passage and passing of faces and defacing, of figures, figurations and disfigurations. The face of the scar – the figure of the crab – marks the recognition of that which can be felt but not seen through a mo(ve)ment of contact allowed by a frontal mode of viewing. There is no opposition here between the literal and figural, between the visible and the unrepresentable, rather, these movements occur in such a way that feelings, bodies, images that seem opposite to each other have another and finer connection that keeps them by each other's side. This visual dynamic of proximity and 'touch' is made evident in the sequence titled *Reconstruction*.

The set is a cocktail party in Mildred and Doris' apartment. Mildred and Jeffrey, a black gay man in his thirty, are sitting side by side on the sofa, they exchange news about the week; their tone is familiar and intimate but increasingly engulfed by the noise of the crowded room. The camera cuts to a wall upon which someone is stenciling: "[i]n 1992 thirty-seven and a half million people in the U.S. had no health insurance."<sup>77</sup> YVONNE walks into the frame, she is wearing a tuxedo, the whole left side of which has been cut away so as to reveal her mastectomy scar; this is her costume for most of the second half of the movie. She appears in middle wide angle standing slightly off to one side, behind her, people walk by without taking notice. She begins to speak to the camera as she cleans her glasses:

YVONNE: In the beginning you also get stabbing pains at the back of your

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<sup>76</sup> Butler, *Prekarious Life*, 134.

<sup>77</sup> Rainer, "MURDER and murder," 112.

armpit if you move in the wrong way. The surface of your skin remains numb for a long time. That's why you want to keep touching it, testing it, caressing it. It is your vulnerable place, your Achilles Heel, the new love of your life, this absence, this flatness, this surgeon's gift. I could say I don't want my breast back. It's more complicated than that. It isn't that I don't miss it. It's just that I've gotten used to this asymmetry. I want it not to happen again. I want to live out my allotted time without disease.<sup>78</sup>

As Rainer addresses the residual feeling of the affected areas, she moves her hand across all parts of the extended physiognomy of the material wound – the armpit, the puckered flesh, the slit of the scar tissue, the tight skin over the shell of the ribs. This scene condenses, through the appearance of contact, a palpable feeling of body that rests there where once the breast had been, now the nexus of all possible figurations – Achilles Heel, surgeon's gift – and disfigurations – the uncanny asymmetry of the touch of death. These figures constantly change becoming both fully formed and fragmented parts, metaphors, and statistical numbers materialising everywhere and virtually metastasising the patina of the film. Such synecdochic figures, reversing the conditions of death and of life, appear dense and textured with an affect brooding with limitations and constrictions, as well as longing and desires.

In yet another set of specular mo(ve)ments,<sup>79</sup> the impact of the image becomes intensified by an arresting moment of sensation<sup>80</sup> where the words feel the wound that sees the hand that listens for the body reflecting the caress of the eye. This synesthetic encounter erupts in a moment of contact in which vision is bound up with its very own porous configuration or texture. This is how Nancy accounts for the chiasmic hapticity of an ungraspable caress that

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>79</sup> This intensification of appearances and (dis)figurations is revelatory of how there are always more than two subjects at play in a mirror scene.

<sup>80</sup> This instance of 'arrest' is here conceived not as a firming temporal sequence of actions, but rather as a disjunctive mo(ve)ment of 'un-resting' density that emerges from the oblivion of 'common sensing' and becomes remarkable in passing, as it travels across unconventional circuits of sensing.

reaches out to the appearance as it advenes:

What is seeing if not a deferred touch? But what is a deferred touch if not a touching that sharpens or concentrates without reserve, up to a necessary excess, the point, the tip, and the instant through which the touch detaches itself from what it touches, at the very moment when it touches? Without this detachment, without this recoil or retreat, the touch would no longer be what it is, and would no longer do what it does (or it would not let itself do what it lets itself do). It would begin to reify itself in a grip, in an adhesion or a sticking, indeed, in an agglutination that would grasp the touch in the thing and the thing within it, matching and appropriating the one to the other and then the one in the other. There would be identification, fixation, property, immobility. 'Do not hold me back' amounts to saying 'Touch me with a real touch, one that is restrained, nonappropriating and nonidentifying.' Caress me, don't touch me.<sup>81</sup>

This touching-touched relation is syncopated and spaced out in the desire to stay *before*, *with*, and *beside* this wounded figure, to survive it even. This want to be-holding and be-longing the appearance that follows and accompanies the recoil from it disfigures the senses in a way that reflects the kind of "haptic visuality"<sup>82</sup> that Panagia describes as a complex sensation where "sight is touch." This bodily disarticulation of sensory experience is manifested in the 'face' of the figure, as well as experienced by the viewer who is admitted into the scene by a touch that caresses the patina of the film-skin.

The disfiguration of the visual field shapes a certain relation of 'seeing' and 'witnessing' that

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<sup>81</sup> Nancy's discussion surveys the aesthetic experience and the tradition of Biblical iconography. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me Tangere: On the Raising of the Body* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 49-50.

<sup>82</sup> Panagia derives this expression from Deleuze's recognition of the tactile function of vision as "the haptic," in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); and with Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (op. cit.), but also from Laura U. Marks' concept of "haptic visuality" in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (London: Duke University Press, 2000). More on this will follow in the incoming discussions.



reorganises the sensible experience so that the 'affect' of viewing is a composite of many senses – touch, vision, sound – never captured fully by any one. It is the hybridity of perceptual activity that renders the filmic experience illegible according to received social, readerly and narrative conventions. This synesthetic perception shifts the focus of attention to a place where sight is partially released from the activity of the eyes so that to read and understand the image one has to re-learn how to see, hear, and feel. When the way which we receive and organize knowledge becomes deepened or distorted, one has to make way for a different system or 'sense' of belief, which moves us in this instance to experience seeing and reading as a 'touching' and 'touched' mode of attention.

Hence, the spectrum of the experience becomes known in new sensory registers through haptic maps of affective movements that pass between the image and its receiver. At the moment that viewers come in contact with haptic images the subject of view is no longer folded back upon itself in mirror-vision but is held up for the other – beside the self – to see and feel contact with. For Laura Marks, this sensuous choreography takes on an erotic dimension: "haptic images are erotic in that they construct an intersubjective relationship between beholder and image. The viewer is called upon to fill in the gaps in the image, to engage with the traces the image leaves."<sup>83</sup> However, for Marks, this interaction and relationship blurs the separation between the ground/figure and the eye/I to the point that "the viewer relinquishes her own sense of separateness from the image – not to know it, but to give herself up to her desire for it."<sup>84</sup>

Davide Panagia comes to a similar conclusion in his analysis of cinematic experiences that rest on haptic visuality: "if the beholder cannot be absorbed into the work of art, and thus collapse the partition of the sensible established by the frame, then the work of art will force its way through the partition in order to enact that collapse. In both cases, however, an

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<sup>83</sup> Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 183.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

eradication of spectatorship occurs.”<sup>85</sup> I here take a leap away from Panagia, and partly Marks, as I contend that the dynamics of immersion and viewing at play in the visual, tactile and aural dimensions of Rainer’s cinematic text define not a collapse of the distance between the beholder and the beheld, but rather a condition of connectivity that implies a spatiotemporal co-presence, which is also a spatiotemporal co-difference, where they coexist ‘beside’ one another. This condition of co-emergence-in-difference<sup>86</sup> points at forms of reciprocity and connectivity in which there is both identification and dis-identification; a relation of inside and outside that invokes the perpetual ‘re-tu(r)ning’ of a never sealed cut, split or division.

I relate this ‘touching’ relationality with Nancy’s definition of tangency without contact, adjoining without assimilation, proximity without intimacy. The encounter with the artefact, hence, does not represent separation and detachment, but it *is* the separation and detachment in which art exposes itself – beside itself – and exposes us to that exposure. Rather than defining the self’s identity, the terms of this encroachment register the fault lines that both separate and hold together the self with itself and with the world. In this triangulation, the body of experience becomes a figure in which the principle of identity or sameness is interrupted or subject to a vital ‘hiatus;’ a stilling breath of recognition. Butler alerts us to the dangers of ever attempting to vanish this fundamentally open chasm between identities:

The one with whom I identify is not me, and that “not being me” is the condition of the identification. Otherwise, [...] identification collapses into identity, which spells the death of identification itself. This difference internal to identification is crucial, and, in a way, it shows us that dis-identification is part of the common

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<sup>85</sup> Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, 118.

<sup>86</sup> Although not directly drawn from, these configurations of being also appear in the work of Bracha Ettinger, see *The Matrixial Borderspace*, ed. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

practice of identification itself.<sup>87</sup>

The strategies of representation that I have exposed insofar deal with neither symmetrical nor identical mirroring relationships but with positions that admit of difference without submitting to the binaries of one and other; they manifest processes of confrontation without domination where identities may relate to one another, but they neither assimilate nor kill each other, symbolically or literally. The other solution is to simply turn away.<sup>88</sup> Figurations, disfigurations and refigurations take place along a shared field creating the possibility for contact, exchange, and even transformation.

Such proximity does not require necessarily a physical contact, on the contrary, the body of 'surfaces' gives up local attachments: the visible baseline of subjectivity – the skin, where the scar becomes a substitute for the breast – appears as always-already *severed*, yet, capable of generating co-affecting shared moments in its inevitable disruption of the visual field. Thus, the surface of appearance becomes a 'felt' intensity that depends on the movement and circulation of 'some' bodies, images and objects,<sup>89</sup> which however does not involve the transformation of others into objects of one's own 'capture.'

The appearance of co-presence can reconnect to the quality of heterology valorised by Rancière's notion of dissensual democratic engagement that inspires an articulation of what I here call an 'uncommon sense'<sup>90</sup> that sees the co-emergence of dissimilar postures and/or organoleptic '*dys*-positions' before a sensory event – disgust and wonder, as well as the exhilarating and disorienting feeling of discovering 'extraordinary' ways of seeing that include

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<sup>87</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 145-6.

<sup>88</sup> I have taken care of some aspects of this inflection of experience and the relevant complexities in Chapter 2. I just want to reprise briefly that even the turn away may generate the occasion of an intersubjective encounter.

<sup>89</sup> It must be said that the singular experience of receptivity picks up on some adventing forms at the inevitable exclusion of others.

<sup>90</sup> For Panagia through Rancière, "common sense" is the norm governing the contemporary regime of perception that presumes a certain linearity between sensory organs and acts of perceptions, which shall not deviate from the readerly dispositions of the political body (*The Political Life of Sensation*, 7). With the term 'uncommon,' I here want to signal the charge of uncanny (synesthetic) experiences of sensation that play in the possibilities of such deviations from the norm.

the correlation of the senses. Such is the dissensual movement of haptic visuality: an interruptive and dissensual moment of sensuous encounter that collapses the rigorous distinction between the experience of seeing and that of touching. However difficult to grasp, a haptic encounter is the vehicle for a tactile visuality that lays bare a 'defaced' perception, an organoleptic indistinctness; a disfiguration of the body's organic constitution that, according to Panagia, bears resemblance with what Deleuze describes as "body without organs."

What we have here is an immediate democracy of organs, with no primacy granted to any particular perceptual activity; where seeing cannot be reduced to vision, and touching can be felt as a visual caress. As discussed earlier in the first chapter, I find a direct correlation between this determination and Massumi's definition of the "body without an image,"<sup>91</sup> whose principal perceptual modality is that of synesthesia whereby the experience of perception is not just the conceit of one sense organ but rather a composite of many senses. Both the 'inorganic' and 'disfigured' diagram of the body imply a spatiotemporal dimension that demands we take into consideration the context, the intensities, the qualities, the textures – as well as the myriad related associations – from which the given experience will emerge against the backdrop of its (historical, cultural) milieu.

This configuration finds bearing in Rancière's democratic principle of the open field of the senses, which supplies the model of a dissensual politics that can challenge and contest the social order or "distribution of the sensible" that legislates what can and cannot make sense, or what forms of speaking, hearing, seeing, reading, doing, and making are included in common sense and what forms are excluded.<sup>92</sup> Rancière's sensual opening inaugurates the "ethical regime of images" where certain arts, which encompass fully fledged sensoria rather than simple appearances, involve the perception of heterology and the capacity to apprehend how dissimilar or contrary dispositions persist simultaneously, keeping the strange and

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<sup>91</sup> For further elucidations, I remand the reader to the articulations of these ideas in Chapter 1.

<sup>92</sup> See Rancière, *Dissensus*, (op. cit.).

wondrous in the familiar, whilst seeking to find the familiar in the strange and wondrous.

*Murder and murder*, I would argue, does just that by disfiguring the perceptual expectations of (readerly) continuities, and I would say identities, endorsed by what Rancière describes as the consensual regimes of perception, or Panagia's narratocracy, which strive to render objects, events, practices, or subjects at once visible and available for accountability.<sup>93</sup> Within the filmic diegesis, the readerly postures of attention that guarantee organoleptic correspondences of sense perception and sense organs are disrupted and reconfigured through the introduction of overly antagonistic and paradoxically relational activities of sensing through which appearances, narratives, subjectivities and temporalities are literally experienced as ruptured 'beside themselves' in their diegetic redistribution.

The experience of viewing, I suggest, is here positioned within the gap or interruption<sup>94</sup> of the circuits of coherent appearances. This chasm is 'seen' (felt), as a palpable echo – the resonance of a disfiguration – that hails the subject with an address; a cry that demands 'different' ways of being and being affected. Where Rancière's notion of democratic dissensus contests a way of being that consists of assuming that "[t]here's nothing here to see!,"<sup>95</sup> I instead propose that Rainer's representational strategies oppositionally partake in a redistribution of the sensible by sur-facing those figures who have normally 'no part,' fail to be 'seen' or emerge on the 'shadow-end' of politics, and which call attention to the fact that indeed "there *is* 'no-thing' here to see," hear, touch and feel; that is, the virtual remainders of what can possibly be sensed and make sense.<sup>96</sup> This re-configuration of invisible forces, I feel, engages with the transmission of 'uncommon' – inhuman – sensuous relations that

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<sup>93</sup> See Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, 11-2.

<sup>94</sup> This repositioning also crucially contrasts Panagia's view that "[t]he metaphysical elision of the gap between object and viewer through the elimination of the spectator crucially eradicates the site of testimony and storytelling" (Ibid., 118).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 37. This is a form of consensus that Rancière diagnoses with his notion of the police, as he puts it: "[c]onsensus consists, then, in the reduction of politics to the police" (*Dissensus*, 42).

<sup>96</sup> This notion resonates with the echo of the "no-thing that here yet speaks again" elaborated in the opening chapter of this thesis.

impact on forms of political reflection and acquire extensive significance as potential instances of democratic and ethical life.

## The Monstrance of Time

*MURDER and murder* poses an ethical problem for the contemporary viewing subject, and the same ethical conundrum that Panagia addresses in the epilogue of his book, namely: “[h]ow and why does one attend to an appearance?”<sup>97</sup> And in particular here, how does one respond to the appearance of an image, or of a subjectivity, when its presence and singularity disarticulates our received, normative inheritances and provokes our particularities? And finally, how do such interruptive intensities compel us to ‘save’ (or regard) and recount (or recirculate) the experience? For Butler, the task at hand is “to establish modes of public seeing and hearing that might well respond to the cry of the human within the sphere of appearance.”<sup>98</sup>

What I have advanced in the preceding discussions is that it is the advenience of a cut – a wound – within the folds of the skin (or flesh) of the event of appearance that becomes a sensuous means for political and ethical engagement. Such opening of possibilities is made available by a contact with the interruptive force of a *dis*figuration that relates the address of the face – or faciality – (of the other) through the figure of *prosopopoeia*: the rhetorical trope that extends human voice or face to the nonhuman or absent. Thus, the surface of appearance becomes a ‘felt’ intensity that depends on – and deepens with – a vis-à-vis encounter with ‘some’ bodies, images and objects<sup>99</sup> positioned in a collateral relation of distance that avoids capture. But on what grounds are we interpellated by this affective – and effective – appearance? How do we make sense of a reality we cannot fully grasp or assimilate?

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<sup>97</sup> Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, 152. In his final chapter, he considers a particularly troubling case of interruption and reconfiguration: the appearance of the notorious Abu Ghraib photographs.

<sup>98</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 147.

<sup>99</sup> For it must be said that the singular experience of receptivity inevitably picks up on ‘some’ adventing forms at the exclusion of others.

By parsing Rainer's (self)defacing gestures, I propose an 'ethics of *dys*-appearance' that grows out of the body's capacity to make *disarticulated* and *detached* sense of the actual and unimaginable frightfulness of the other's suffering, and one's own. I return here to the foregrounding of the wound<sup>100</sup> as the emergence of the "body without an image;" the wavering call that appears as an unexpected event (of becoming other), the echo that lures attention rather than inviting capture, the mo(ve)ment that jumps out of the frame rather than being seized by it. This event potentially appears as that which Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* names the *punctum in reality* – "an element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow."<sup>101</sup> The *punctum* of a 'moving' image is that prick or shock of recognition that evokes a force of attraction that Barthes calls *advenience*. Whilst we turn to face the face of this 'other,' the equipoise of this (aesthetic) confrontation demands an ethical reckoning.

In a distant reverberation of Levinas' logic, Panagia suggests that the attendance of instantiations in the realm of politics requires an act of admission: "I admit to the appearance, to the 'monstrance' of a new political subjectivity, not because I am obliged to recognize it and give it a name, but because it is present before me."<sup>102</sup> Repositioning the value of these assertions within the apparatus of the aesthetic event, I want to offer the aberrant 'nature' of the 'defaced' physicality of the wound as the possible unrepresentable *monstrance* of the *monstrosity* and inevitability of death coming face-to-face with life.<sup>103</sup> Stacey's observation of/on teratogenies – or monstrous births – indicates the emergence of the (female) monstrous as the inconsistent and the anomalous that registers the 'difference' from the norm and other modes of (queer) 'deviation' that threaten human order and stability. This inhuman *advenience* from within the fabric of representation, I have advanced, disturbs 'common

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<sup>100</sup> Introduced in the previous segment but also more extensively fleshed out in the opening chapter.

<sup>101</sup> Barthes introduces the call of the punctum in relation to the 'moving' effect of photography image. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993).

<sup>102</sup> Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, 152.

<sup>103</sup> The word monstrance comes from the Latin word *monstrare* meaning 'to show,' which shares its root with *mōnstrum* – portent, unnatural event, monster. The term monstrance was also used by Roman Catholics to define a sacred receptacle or vessel used to expose a consecrated 'host.' This connotation evokes a link with the metaphorical thinking of the pregnant, maternal body as the hospitable carrier or domicile of a malign or benign host.



sense' perceptions and apprehension of embodiment and identity reflecting newly emergent 'abnormal' postures of attention that call for more *and* less human ways of perceiving and experiencing.

This image of the wound/crab, in short, presents a relational (aesth-)ethics of involvement emerging from those *disfigurations* that call us to engagement. The event of the wounded body *punctuates* the image itself and pierces through the walls of narrative reaching into the spectatorial seat. Hence, the event takes place against the forefront of a sensory field opened up, on one side, by the memory of the experience and the desire to survive it, and on the other side, by the necessity and demand to refigure it. This can only happen retroactively by re-punctuating the grammar of sensory and symbolic co-ordinates that called for attention. These mo(ve)ments of re-appearance of the event are not the same as the moments of its figurations but they rely one on the other in order to reinvent it, and imbuing it with a new meaning.

The injunction of faciality, its address, arrests us but "[w]hat becomes ethically significant, therefore, is not the nature of the injunction per se but our turning and re-turning around those instances of arrest, those moment of interruption in our daily lives, that compel us to reconfigure our perceptual and organoleptic arrangements."<sup>104</sup> The interruptive experience then acquires a spatiotemporal dimension that demands we take into consideration the senses, the memories, and the myriad associations from which the given experience of being 'present' will emerge against the backdrop of past figurations. Figures here can be near other figures, and this nearness, we know, is not just casual: figure-to-figure (synecdoche) and figure-for-figure (metaphor) depend on histories that 'stick' and that take us backward and forward, as well as sideways.

These dispositions aptly en flesh the turning motion of figures and tropes and confirm that the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 157.

specular moment of representation is not primarily a situation or an event that can be located in a history – a narrative that can be shaped by linear time, origin and *telos*, cause and effect – but that is the manifestation of a contact, on the level of the distant touching of an event that exceeds our ability to pin down the spatiotemporal coordinates of its (re)appearing. Rather, such emergences urge the beholder to ‘face up’ the evidence of an encounter with a precariousness that raises the spectre of other, as well our own, deaths and murders, by illness and disease, as well as by social and political injustice, eliciting to take a position from which to regard these events. Some murderous (hi)stories cannot be resolved, or at least, not at first sight, as Butler suggests: “[o]ne would need to hear the face as it speaks in something other than language to know the precariousness of life that is at stake.”<sup>105</sup>

*MURDER and murder*, I posit, becomes a document, a testimony reflection of Rainer’s subject-matter as well as an archive of the troubling appearance of the vulnerability of the body and the precariousness of life; a condition that requires us to re-turn to look back and face up those instances of arresting force and meaning to “interrogate the emergence and vanishing of the human at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense.”<sup>106</sup> The act of looking back/facing forward seems to recognise the scar’s sentience; it is a kind of facing in the ethical sense that Levinas describes that brings attention to the a kind of response to the address of the other. The autobiographical and metaphorical backward look that faces forward, is also a looking back that does not expose a single moment of the past but a looking back that also stretches forward in time, pointing to and suggesting the future present of the extended moment of encounter with the viewer. These mo(ve)ments of contact show that both self and other are *prosopopoeias* – faces and voices emerging from an affective, spectral site that is otherwise than intelligible but that, nonetheless, haunts the landscape of their appearance with the call to be attended.

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<sup>105</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 151.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

Ultimately, Rainer's aesthetic and metaphorical figurations become the corporeal synecdoche of unimaginable suffering, which then is incorporated in the visual frame of witnessing to produce a temporal structure similar to a crabwalk. Her successive *dis*figurations become palpable within an affective 'atmosphere' that arranges them by each other's side within a spatiotemporal dimension that does not recount a (hi)story but an encounter that takes place in the consonance of a 'shared' gap. This temporality is so ecstatic – or extimate – that affective response must admit a time-lapse between exposure and recognition as the force, or logic, or relation between these impressions reaches out to touch the eyes, the ear, the skin of the future in ways that make sense only retrospectively.

I am reminded here of the crucial moment of recognition which Walter Benjamin called: "the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now, with which reality has so to speak seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future subsists so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it."<sup>107</sup> In this temporal impasse we need to move quickly from cognition to resolution and to action, from aesthetic thinking to political feeling. How better and more ethically to respond to this look back that move us forward than to offer a full-fledged face and *voice* in return; to respond with an act of sensation?

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<sup>107</sup> Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography," in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kinsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1985), 243.

## Rites of Passing

In her 2010 article "Homage and Critique in Contemporary Dance,"<sup>108</sup> Australian scholar Amanda Card examines the long reach of Yvonne Reiner's lasting legacy and its connective threads with other lineages of moving bodies that have become the ground for innovation in European contemporary dance. Charting layering episodes of homage and revision, Card remembers the piece that celebrated Rainer's sudden return to dance in 2007, *RoS Indexical*, itself a tribute to a moment of early 20th century avant-garde rupture. The source for the choreography, in fact, were the proceedings of an attempted reconstruction of Nijinsky's 'original' score for the *Rite of Spring* by the Finnish National Ballet, documented in a film called *Riot at the Rite* (2005).

Another radical revision of *Rite of Spring* appeared alongside Rainer's *RoS Indexical* on occasion of its premiere, devised and performed by French choreographer Xavier Le Roy. Le Roy's idiosyncratic solo version of the classic was, in turn, instigated by the conducting antics of Sir Simon Rattle leading the Berlin Philharmonic playing the Stravinsky piece. However, the actual source for the score was Rattle's performance as recorded in a film called *Rhythm Is It!* (2004). Both at least thrice removed from their iconic 'originals,' these dance works stand as imaginative, critical and somewhat outlandish reverberations of rapturous mo(ve)ments in dance history; the same history that Rainer and Le Roy, from a slight remove, share and participate in.

Although Le Roy's work emerges from a different set of expectations and circumstances, it still resonates with the history of avant-garde performance, and the one traced by Rainer in particular. As Card notes: "[c]ontemporary artists like Le Roy are beholden to their genealogy,

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<sup>108</sup> Amanda Card, "Homage and Critique in Contemporary Dance," *Brolga: An Australian Journal about Dance* 32 (June 2010), <<http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=406292919899071;res=IELLCC> ISSN: 1322-7645>.

predicated as it is on the concerns and intentions of the group of artists who congregated around the Judson Church in New York in the early 1960s (a group which included Yvonne Rainer who said NO so loudly to so many things).<sup>109</sup> We could safely say that the critical affirmations of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century echoed with the radical negations of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Le Roy has often spoken about his fascination with Rainer and her associates at Judson Church, and their approach to a radical reorganization and displacement of the moving relations between framework and form, subject and object, in time and space. Pursuing this interest, in the mid-1990s, Le Roy joined the group *Quattuor Albrecht Knust* to work on a series of reconstructions using existing notation and documentation of dances from earlier in the twentieth century. In 1996, they performed Yvonne Rainer's *Continuous Process Altered Daily* (1970) and Steve Paxton's *Satisfyin' Lover* (1967). Through this process, Le Roy and Rainer met and began an artistic friendship and correspondence.

In his key early work and now acclaimed piece of repertoire *Product of Circumstances* (1999), Le Roy applies to the format of the performance-lecture formal and structural strategies not dissimilar from those employed by Rainer in *MURDER and murder*. But more resonances can be felt across these two bodies of work. *Product of Circumstances* confounds the conference lecture format with movement material shifting between the autobiographic and the performative rendering unstable the apprehension and conception of the visual frame. The result is a manifesto structured as anecdotes and vignettes where the bodily conventions of the textual 'corpus' are counter-punctuated by the visual and medical representation of the actual, material body.

During this hour-long disquisition, we learn that, before turning his mind and body to dance, Le Roy worked as a researcher on molecular and cellular biology. The artist begins by recounting his findings on breast cancer diagnostics whilst projecting on screen images from

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 17.

breast tissue biopsies. Occasionally he turns away from his obtrusive account of scientific data to use dance movements as alternative tools to interrogate the philosophical quandaries of corporeal objectivity and subjectivity, as the performance component of the show gathers momentum. All the way through however, the central idea remains the body: the body as figure and metaphor bonding, bending and blending the disciplines of science and dance.

At a certain point, Le Roy draws on a cultural text to us now familiar in order to evidence the incongruity of the hard-wired approaches of scientific practice:

I had from these three years of work some other conclusions and questions, such as, why do we try to give a homogenous picture of the results when they look so heterogeneous? Can we trust statistics? What is the meaning of statistical results? In regard to statistics, I would like to quote some material about the risks of breast cancer pointed out by Yvonne Rainer in her film 'MURDER and murder.' She says that lesbian have a 2 to 3 time higher risk of developing breast cancer than heterosexual women. Which means, between other conclusions that you can make about these statistics, that when a woman comes out as a lesbian, she is more exposed to breast cancer from one day to the other by changing her relationship towards women.<sup>110</sup>

The technical disposition of biomedical discourse implacably reduces the chances of bodies with calculated determinism. Le Roy laments: "I was learning that research has to follow and use the methods of capitalism (Or every other name that you like to give to the process that dominate the actual word history)."<sup>111</sup> Cancer research is revealed to be a man's world governed by the capitalist rule of productivity and where names and fortunes can be made in pursuit of the same murderous logic humorously condemned by Rainer's film.

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<sup>110</sup> Xavier Le Roy, "Product of Circumstances," *Unfriendly Takeover*, 7, <[http://www.unfriendly-takeover.de/downloads/f14\\_leroy\\_text.pdf](http://www.unfriendly-takeover.de/downloads/f14_leroy_text.pdf)>.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Interspersed with the progressive narrative are interruptive sketches of movement that provide a radicalised counter-pose or counter-argument to the 'thinking' body. The artist asserts:

"[t]hese corporeal experiences laid the foundation for the necessity of a new corporeality or new theories about the human body."<sup>112</sup> Ultimately, Le Roy explains that he made the move from science to art for a more genuine and direct engagement with the thread weaving through the preeminent subject of his intellectual and practical inquiry: the body, which became for him "the practice of a critical necessity," and the means and medium to investigate questions about "body images, identity, differences."<sup>113</sup> Much like Rainer, his biography turns into his theory.

Coming full circle, towards the end of his address, Le Roy specifically references working on the recreation of Rainer's 1970 piece as both inspiring and frustrating, because it left him with the sense that it was impossible to do anything else. Subsequently, he proceeds to demonstrate two memorable sequences of the performance, *Running* and *The Chair and Pillow Dance*. Here, I argue, Le Roy performs the transformation and extension of a history still moving that demands the temporal reflexivity of inflected bodies: *I perform myself performing Rainer performing dance...* The choreographer's telling/showing/doing triad emphasises the performative function of the figure of the body in and through time in both scientific and artistic terms. It feels right to say that Le Roy performs his body, of knowledge, 'with Rainer in mind.' Like a corporeal 'monstrance,' Le Roy is the body that has incorporated and therefore included Rainer. Together they function as a synecdochic ensemble – each part of a greater, connective body of cultural history. This is perhaps a self-consciously clever way of "dragging"<sup>114</sup> in the past on stage, but also one that seeks in the archive the possibility to revitalise the traces of irreplaceable bodies.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>113</sup> Both quotes Ibid., 10.

<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth Freeman draws on Judith Butler's theories on performativity to formulate the notion of temporal drag, in which a subject in one historical moment inhabits and revives the sensibility or desiring structures of a subject in another historical moment. A more detailed analysis of this mode of cross-generational contaminations can be found in Chapter 4.

Yet, there are also less obvious and more 'sensible' ways in which the discourse and practice of art can have a bearing on the re-emergence of past and precedent moves. I will here attempt a posture of attention that probes the ways in which the figures, sounds and silences contained within the visual apparatus of a moving performance event can re-figure a touching connection between separate temporal frames of critical and critically embodied history.



## Self Unfinished Business

To begin, as it is often the case, I shall turn back to 1998, the year in which Xavier Le Roy created his first solo piece *Self Unfinished*. Or, as it happens, I shall, for the sake of this account, move forward to March 2012, when I, an un-burgeoning scholar chasing my own self-unfinished business of figuring out the corpus/corpse of my doctoral thesis, made the trip to Barcelona to assist to the performance of this piece as (already) part of *Retrospective* by Xavier Le Roy Mercat de les Flors.<sup>115</sup>

*Self Unfinished* examines the disfiguring potentials of the representation of the body in and through movement. By paying attention to self-figuration and alterity, Le Roy opts for a nonverbal mode of address to deal with the figures of fragmentation, dismemberment, deconstruction, reconstruction and inversion of physical abilities (and disabilities). The set is minimal(ist?). In a completely white and clinical box, low on the right side, stand a square table with white top and beside it a black metal chair. Downstage left lies a portable player, however the music score, Diana Ross's *Upside Down*, will not be heard until the final moments of the performance. What happens during the fifty minutes circa that encompass the show takes shape and space at a disquietingly paced rhythm that undergoes long moments of stasis.

The choreography is composed of three main sections through which Le Roy progressively morphs from human automata (complete of vocal mechanical soundtrack), to four-legged, trunk-mutated hermaphrodite figure (with the help of a black, stretch fabric tube conjoining upper and lower limbs at the midriff), and finally to a shape-shifting animal-like denuded

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<sup>115</sup> This programme included the showing of *Self-unfinished* (1998), *Le Sacre du printemps* (2007), *Product of Circumstances* (1999), *Low Pieces* (2011) and happened in concomitance with the *Retrospective* exhibit by Xavier Le Roy, 24 February - 22 April 2012, at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies. This is the caption introducing the exhibition: "Retrospective by Xavier Le Roy is an exhibition conceived as a choreography of actions that will be carried out by performers for the duration of the exhibition. These actions will compose situations that inquire into various experiences about how we use, consume or produce time," *Fundació Antoni Tàpies*, <<http://www.fundaciotapies.org/site/spip.php?rubrique1094>>.

creature crawling back and forth diagonally across the floor. All these figurations are achieved by way of skilful torsion, manipulation, calibration and inversion of body parts, movements, gestalt and spatial relations. These corporeal mechanisms rely heavily on Le Roy's own physicality: his spindly limbs, flexible joints and long extremities. A long quotation of Card's account may help provide a sense of the experience:

he bends forward, puts his hands on the floor, and sucks in his lower abdomen in order to arch his middle back. A tube-like 'shirt' is pulled over the top half of his body. The 'legs' of his skirted arms 'face' his trousered legs; but neither set of 'legs' has shoulders, arms, neck or head – just hips and a lower back. The bare curve of Le Roy's back creates a conjoined couple or a double-ended individual who struggles, competes and cooperates in order to make its/their way around the room. It's a disarming sight – quite bizarre and beguiling. But this 'couple,' this 'thing,' creates an extraordinarily complex response as you watch them/him/her move about the stage – backwards/forwards, along a wall, right way up/upside down. The doubleness of this embodiment kept tricking me into forgetting that Le Roy was just bending over.<sup>116</sup>

Via continuous changes, disjointed moves and inflected rhythms of motion and stasis, the artist toils with a figure in endless metamorphosis, flattening the 'realities' of the human body. The familiarity of the body and the transparency of its appearance become in this process manipulated to such an extent that they turn strange and opaque. What is even more notable is that this transformation takes place in plain view, in the face of the audience, without the aid of any screen or illusion and via the use of the sole body. As the artist himself notes: "I worked on creating functions and dis-functions of the body with a quite analytical method, if not to say

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<sup>116</sup> Card, "Homage and Critique," 18.

a scientific one.”<sup>117</sup>

What the choreographer creates is a scene of figurality that dramatizes its own disfiguration. This effect is principally obtained by the skilful concealing of the head and the face of the body, respectively, the perceived locus of identity and figurality, and, recalling Butler echoing Levinas, that which defines the human in the field of appearance. Ramsay Burt provides an account of how this ‘perversion’ of the image is accomplished: “[w]hen he did a handstand with his feet against the wall, the stretched black triangle of his skirt made his hands at the bottom look like feet and his legs and feet at the top like arms and hands. If one read his body in this inverted way, the implication was that he had no head.”<sup>118</sup> It appears that disfiguration here works through defacement, or more precisely, radical effacement.<sup>119</sup> What we are able to grasp through vision is ‘only’ a dehumanised figure; a monstrous image that deprives the viewer of the figural elements necessary to identify and ‘read’ this picture.

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<sup>117</sup> Le Roy, “Product of Circumstances,” 10.

<sup>118</sup> Ramsay Burt, “Revisiting ‘No To Spectacle:’ *Self Unfinished* and *Véronique Doisneau*,” *Forum Modernes Theater* 23.1 (2008): 4,

<<https://www.dora.dmu.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2086/145/Revisiting%20no%20to%20spectacle.pdf?sequence=1>>.

<sup>119</sup> Poignantly, Burt notes how Le Roy refusal to give ‘actual’ face to the audience resonates with Rainer’s previous and famous effacing moves: “[i]ndeed, like the dancers in Yvonne Rainer’s canonical 1966 piece *Trio A*, he never faced them or made any eye contact” (ibid., 4).

## Headlessly Human

*Self Unfinished* deals with 'figure' and 'disfiguration' in the literal and corporeal sense, stretching the cultural and metaphorical figurations and signification of the defaced body.<sup>120</sup> I here want to approach this work through the structure and function of sensual and relational distortions that in a similar vein to Rainer's cinematic disfigurations foreground an experience of unrepresentability that interrupts conventional ways of perceiving appearance, provoking a turn towards new sensory articulations that resignify the event.<sup>121</sup> To begin with, I pose the figure on Le Roy's stage as an in-human entity endowed with the life of movement. This organism, I propose, carries some spectral manifestation of affective substance on the surface of the body. The body's crude exterior unfolds and projects this brooding sensation onto the beholder. The kinaesthetic transmutations of the figure become the basis for the cognitive activity of the spectator who has to figure out what is the matter with what they are seeing/feeling. Jérôme Bel, Le Roy's fellow artist and friend, aptly describes the reflexive effect of such experience:

The most destabilising aspect is that as spectators we are under the impression of being the ones who, as observers, create these images or recognise them in the mirror of Xavier Le Roy's exposed body. We have the impression, indeed real and uncomfortable, of projecting our own visions on his body, which is offered as screen. [...] that body totally identical to that of every more or less normal spectator is monstrous, or it is something different from what one

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<sup>120</sup> In an interview Le Roy thus explains its manipulation of body images and representations: "[o]ne aim was to look for another understanding of the relationship between body, movements, and technique (not technology). I also thought that it's a way to work about the embodiment of some social and cultural rules. Something like exploring how the rules of society are producing specific bodies or body images by transposing some rules directly on how a body can move within created constraints," (Xavier Le Roy, "Interview Dorothea von Hantelmann - Xavier Le Roy," on *Xavier Le Roy*, <<http://www.xavierleroy.com/page.php?id=c775674ebd34dae5be38976cf5426dec4dceb5cb&lg=en>>).

<sup>121</sup> The final accomplishment being, for Panagia, the drafting of new embodied political subjectivities. See Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, 1-20.

expected before the show, and it has hidden faces.<sup>122</sup>

The figure unfolds through a series of abstract distributions wherein the defacement has subtracted from the body its codified attachments and systems of reference. The affective force and residual material of that subtraction circulate across the stage: an atmospheric scattering of embodied traces that stand in place of the loss of figurality and visibility. Le Roy's dysmorphic scene produces what I would call a 'viewing affect'<sup>123</sup> that provisionally opens up perceptual boundaries in order to re-figure the terms and values of the body.

Significantly, the effect of this viewing experience is one of disquiet and awkwardness; a mixture of fascination for the appearance of an interchangeable body and a certain preoccupation with the visual shadow of a certain in-humanity, or *disability*. As Card notes from her experience: "[y]ou start to feel dishevelled, a bit icky, uncomfortable, and I started to wonder on the state of my humanness; it is so easily possible to become something else."<sup>124</sup> These reflections, I argue, elicit an affective surge so discombobulating that momentarily disrupts the circuit of vision. Like the agasp visages of Panagian memory and the open-wound/face of Rainer's experience, Le Roy's 'monstrance' becomes accessible through a figural and figurative *disfiguration*.

In my view, and not just, the artist's polymorphously perverse<sup>125</sup> feats of becoming-machine, becoming-animal, becoming-female and becoming-object surface as forms of post-human malleability. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, referring to Donna Haraway and the so-called "embodiment" of "posthuman bodies" (or "posthumanist" bodies), explain:

Posthuman bodies are not slaves to master discourses but emerge at nodes

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<sup>122</sup> Jérôme Bel, "Crepino gli Artisti," in Silvia Fanti/Xing ed., *Corpo Sottile, Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy, Myriam Gourfink, Kinkaleri, Laurent Goumarre, MK, Uno Sguardo sulla Nuova Coreografia Europea* (Milano: Ubulibri, 2003), 83. All the quotes from this volume are my translation.

<sup>123</sup> This is a spin on Panagia's articulation of the "effects of viewing" that counter his notion of the systematic effect of capture with the emergence of affective instances of transmission.

<sup>124</sup> Card, "Homage and Critique," 18-9.

<sup>125</sup> I am here using its term in its meaning as 'deviant.'

where bodies, bodies of discourse, and discourse of bodies intersect to foreclose any easy distinction between actor and stage, between sender/receiver, channel, code, message, context. Posthuman embodiment, like Haraway's 'feminist embodiment,' then, is not about fixed location in a reified body, female or otherwise, but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations.<sup>126</sup>

The emergence of the 'posthuman' intimates the reappearance of the body into a condition marked by the loss of stable boundaries, which are not representable or objective. The embodiment of machinality and animality represents the two paradigmatic figural sides of "otherwise than being,"<sup>127</sup> which haunt our understanding of the figure that is a non-figure. These emblematic disfigurations – of the concepts of identity, naturalness and completeness – interrupt the main threads of the human interface with the inclusion of nonhuman 'others.' As previously noted in relation to Stacey's (dis)articulation of teratomata, the deathly birth of dysmorphic organisms whose form erupts from the flesh carry the marks of an alterity that *dys*-appears the other 'ends' of lives that are somehow not fully human.

So ecstatically appeared, the matter of the other, its 'thingness' in Benso's terms, faces us challenging our view of the world by transcending our being at home with ourselves, thereby compelling us to move outward towards an inter-relations with non-human, post-human and inhuman forces. Levinas, on the receiving end, indicates that: "[t]o approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught."<sup>128</sup>

The capacity to be taught, I offer, means exactly being in-tension(ed) towards them, to be able

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<sup>126</sup> Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, eds., *Posthuman Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>127</sup> I am borrowing this phrase from the title of Levinas's meditations on transcendent ethics in Emmanuel Levinas *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

<sup>128</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 51.

to hear – and see, feel, touch – the call of the (non)human beyond one’s own narratocratic categories of interpretation.<sup>129</sup>

If the Other calls me to this responsibility, soliciting the ethic command “thou shalt not murder,” it is I who shall recognise the ethical imperative in the face of this injunction, whether it is human or otherwise than human, as they coexist beside themselves. Hence, I recognise “the face” of Levinas’s ethics as ‘no-thing’ but the metaphor of this address. The affect/effect of its echo resonates in the ‘face’ of faceless things. Supplementing Levinas’s ethics of the human face-to-face with Heidegger’s structure of things, Silvia Benso articulates the possibility of an ethics beyond the interhuman, which requires recognising the face of things. She writes: “things can be encountered in their facialities and tendered – that is treated with tenderness – because of the generosity of their self-giving, as if their alterity were a gift.”<sup>130</sup>

Then, I here want to re-figure Le Roy’s headless body, this shape shifting organism and therefore indefinable figure, as the gift of a ‘face’: the crude manifestation of a critical condition that marks (and masks) the tender appeal “coming from the vulnerability of things in their alterity.”<sup>131</sup> In this context, once again, the ‘face’ operates as a catachresis: a trope that replaces one figure (the face) with another (any one of this body’s multiple transfigurations), nonetheless withholding the ground – or the memory – of the other figure in an image that carries the signs of all figurations.<sup>132</sup> Catachresis is the rhetorical form of abjection because it figures together things that cannot be ‘seen,’ do not belong, in the same space hence hybridising the figural and literal aspects of metaphor.

In Le Roy’s carnal dramaturgy, catachresis blocks the materiality of vision by overlapping figurations to the literal. The result allows to confront something radically inhuman, a

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<sup>129</sup> Barbara Jane Davy also advances this point in her reevaluation of Levinas’s environmental ethics in “An Other Face of Ethics in Levinas,” *Ethics & the Environment* 12.1 (Spring 2007): 55.

<sup>130</sup> Benso, *The Face of Things*, xxxi.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxvii.

<sup>132</sup> This superimposition determines the catachretic additive – and revitalizing – flaw of signifiers.

materiality that does not anthropomorphise the image by figuring it as an imaginative predication, but that disfigures this organicism by grotesquely overlaying the face of the body on the sur-faces of its monstrous otherness, so that the body is ecstatically exploded beside itself. We can say then, quoting Butler, that “[i]n this sense, the figure underscores the incommensurability of the face with whatever it represents.”<sup>133</sup> By assembling figures that reflect outside and inside as neither inside nor outside of the visual frame, this ‘face’ renders vision only part of the picture, which becomes ‘unreadable’ without the intervention of other modes of apprehension.

It is then an excess of ‘faciality,’ I argue, that disfigures the scene/seen by grotesquely overlaying on the carnal matter of body figural *and* literal, human *and* non-human aspects so that it becomes ‘beside itself,’ redoubled, stereoscopic; illegible. Rainer herself comments on this experience in her correspondence with Le Roy:

The brightly lit performing area gives no clues to ‘how to read’ and the mechanical-man beginning is offset with a return to ordinary task-like activity: walk, sit, turn off tape machine. By the time you're into the contortions with the dress, we're given this extraordinary hybrid creature which confronts us with a multiplicity of interpretations. For me it alternated variously as insect, martian, chicken, watering can, caterpillar into pupa, et al.<sup>134</sup>

Confronted by Le Roy’s dysmorphic appearance, the viewer comes face-to-face with something that, in a representational frame, is only *evoked* as ambiguity and obliqueness. To say it with Butler, here: “the reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers.”<sup>135</sup> There is no solution or

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<sup>133</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 144.

<sup>134</sup> Email exchange between Rainer and Le Roy transposed on the latter’s website as part of the review notes on this piece, *Xavier Le Roy*, <<http://www.xavierleroy.com/page.php?sp=d22f5301fc93b61aedfc31f0c3c53a88e553d8be&lg=en>>.

<sup>135</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 146.



resolution in the succession of figurations, and vision cannot provide the comfort of looking.

Levinas suggests that: “one can say that the face is not ‘seen.’ It is what cannot become a content, which your thought would embrace; it is uncontainable, it leads you beyond.”<sup>136</sup> At the moment that viewers lose sight of the experience, they can only look for the phantasmata – the phenomena, apparitions, illusions, shadows, appearances primarily derived from sensation. The images they present, the impressions they emit, and the connections they ascertain all point to strata of value that extend well beyond appearance. Thus projected (outside itself), the event of the body, I argue, opens up the opportunity to confront, to come face-to-face with the fleeting instance when feelings are immediate and tangible. The appearance of a face “emptied out of the rhetorical signs of humanity”<sup>137</sup> leaves space for a distant echo sent forth at the limits of language and representation. The force and impact of these images, emptied inside-out and towards the other, punctuates with a hailing call for contact with a vision that must be reconstituted away from sight and towards a more sensuous encounter.

The scene of disfiguration pricks the viewer via a stream of ‘touching’ and ‘moving’ visions. However, this contact, I propose, is removed from the density of fleshly matter that characterises touch. Rather, it is composed of ethereal sense of light and colour, shape and texture, tonality and mood. This experience amplifies touch and lends it a power that is more typically associated with vision. Thus, new sensory connections and ways of knowing and understanding emerge in the contact of different sensory modules – touch, proprioception and vision – in circulation. As Nancy eloquently reflects: “[s]ense is [...] not the ‘signified’ or the ‘message’: it is that something like the transmission of a ‘message’ should be possible. It is

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<sup>136</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 161.

<sup>137</sup> Burt, “Revisiting ‘No To Spectacle,’” 5.

the relation as such, and nothing else.”<sup>138</sup>

In other words, what interrupts the flow of my ‘common-sense’ perception is a startling moment in which the image, as elicitor, confronts, captures me and hails *me*, who, in turn, respond to it without becoming ‘it.’ Or, I do not identify with the image; I do not imagine to see as ‘the other in the picture.’ Rather, the force of the object – the image, the representation, the sensation – wakes me, pricks me, to the necessity to ‘face’ a reciprocal sense that *I recognize – I can touch, see, hear, taste, etc. – the feeling I perceive in its expression*. This awakening of the senses performs something irreducibly human about experience, about the ‘thickness’ and complexity of life, and of the modes by which we can qualify and characterise the event of perception.

The result is a posture of attention that allows me to feel ‘with,’ and ‘beside’ the other of/in experience, and not ‘as,’ in the place of the other. These mo(ve)ments, I propose, are essential for the individual to develop not only a more capacious sense of the experience but also a more acute capacity for social and political connectedness. Le Roy’s investigation of what seems inhuman, hence, reminds the beholder of what is needed to become human. The body becomes the locus of “haptic vision;” the modular and molecular immediacy that proliferates beyond the writerly and readerly modes of apprehension, becoming the tangible vehicle for human/non-human recognition and relation.

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<sup>138</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 118.

## Buttman

In *Self Unfinished*, images appear as aggregates of 'heterogeneous functions' steered by a disfiguration that 'moves' between points of intensity and duration that take shape only as effects/affects of direct sensations or impressions emanating by the appearance of "the body without an image." Such figuration demarcates an ever-fluctuating, suspended space between sensate realities in which the spectator is enmeshed in a relationship that is constitutive of an embodied encounter with one's own abstracted carnality. Within this atmosphere, I propose, it is once again the emissions of the 'face' – a language of an 'other' order – that becomes the vessel of sensate cognition, of animate and vital affect and that makes the unrepresentable accessible to the senses only as always 'more-than-one' perceptual experience.

This athleticism of sensation emerges as the (autonomous) consequence of a dehumanisation that provides access to the human in 'the face of things' in the realisation (and actualisation) of the fact that: "beside the other as human there may be (perhaps) an other which is not human, but which, nevertheless, may be constituted (perhaps) as Other and may place (perhaps) infinite demands on human beings [...] that ask (perhaps) from human beings that they transcend themselves."<sup>139</sup> I would like to further explicate the function and significance of these com-possibilities that the human transcend its (sovereign) individuality by focusing now on one significant *appearance* and metaphor that perhaps will arrest readers' attention, remapping the sudden promontories and valleys of the face.

Of course, the aesthetic experience of this performance conjures very subjective imaginings and projections, but there is one particular figure that seems to stick to the mind and body of this work. Let me resort to a witness account that can perhaps corroborate my 'vision' and subsequent reasoning. This is how Jerome Bel introduces the second part of the show, which

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<sup>139</sup> Benso, *The Face of Things*, 44.

he names “the monsters.” In this section, he writes, by “literally putting ‘his ass up his own head,’ the most trivial thing in the world, [Le Roy] creates absolutely surprising shapes.”<sup>140</sup> Similarly, Amanda Card reports: “[o]ne blogger on a site called *Critical Dance* saw his 1998 work *Self-Unfinished* in 2001 and recorded this comment from a friend: ‘I feel like I just spent an hour watching a guy with his head up his ass’ [...]. What I like about this annoyed response is that it is disarmingly accurate. [...] In *Self-Unfinished* Le Roy does have his head up his ass, so to speak.”<sup>141</sup>

I argue this disarming figuration to be a synecdoche, yet another one, that connects the figurative and the lived space of the body. More plastically, in the place of what is fundamentally and influentially not there (to see) – the face – we find a bum, a hole. This (ass)hole, I suggest, exercises here the function of *prosopopeia*: the figure positing voice or face to that which is deprived of shape or presence. Le Roy presents the spectator with a face that is not a human face but a figure that condenses the disfigurement and defacement of the experience of being (human). One could say that Le Roy makes a crack on embodiment. Le Roy’s butt-face allows the spectators to see and move past the very place where the self is believed to live – the face – by putting in its place a joke about the very nature of identity, especially the one implied in a figure like this one, or in a body like this one. There is a serious irony at play here: we are looking at the black hole of identity, a hole that threatens the rim of vision.

The anal does not coincide with the facial; nonetheless their opening into the world reach a level of connectivity and correspondence as a kind of exposition of the human that tries to grasp its own being exposed. Giorgio Agamben brings art face-to-face with this equivalence of orifices: “art can give a face even to an inanimate object, to a still nature; and that is why the witches, when accused by the inquisitors of kissing Satan’s anus during the Sabbath, argued

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<sup>140</sup> Bel, *Crepino gli Artisti*, 82.

<sup>141</sup> Card, “Homage and Critique,” 18.

that even there there was a face.”<sup>142</sup> This irreplaceable circular relation is the expression not of a form imposed on matter in a top-down way, but rather of the fundamental reciprocity of different levels of existence, an incessant diffusion from one side to the other.

Like this episode, Le Roy’s downturned vignettes enact an inversion of body image(ry) that reflects the abyssal dimension of the carnified body, effectively open and permeable to the very possibility of becoming in/human. In a Bakhtinian turn, the most dignified and elevated site within the body – the face – is reverted into a ‘shit hole,’ the lower back-side of a disavowed viscerality that carries the scent of decay and death,<sup>143</sup> and which becomes the upturned point of contact with the scene/seen/senses. The scatological imagery of a “back hole” – the “dark face” of life<sup>144</sup> – connects the physicality of embodiment with its grotesque, frightening and destabilising aspects. In Bakhtin’s words, the “artistic logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body’s limited space or into the body’s depths.”<sup>145</sup>

This notion of the grotesque appearance of “a body in the act of becoming,”<sup>146</sup> a body in ecstatic permutation, also finds correspondence in Julia Kristeva’s incarnations of ‘abjection’ – that which does not fit, and that produces a sense of dis-ease in the body.<sup>147</sup> The abject marks the threshold of de-subjectification and the collision and collapse of the boundaries between human and animal, subject and object, life and death. I would then like to root Le

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<sup>142</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End*, trans Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (University of Minnesota Press Minneapolis, 2000), 91.

<sup>143</sup> This is also the site that Bakhtin celebrates for its chaotic freedom from ideological constraint. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968).

<sup>144</sup> To transfer this term to a direct critique that deconstructs race relations and race phobia would exceed the limits of this paper. Whilst remaining conscious of the fact that ethnicity, and in particular blackness, signifies a very complex and unique set of social positions and histories, the aim of these conversations is to outline a critical enquiry that wants to recognize the ‘contact’ between marginalized singularities over the changing ‘face’ of things.

<sup>145</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 317–18.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>147</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (op. cit.).

Roy's kinaesthetic monstrosities in the place that Kristeva reserves to literary creations,<sup>148</sup> that is: "on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject."<sup>149</sup> This is the uncanny space where the comic image of a grotesque debasement of human figuration reflects the solemn face of a fragile and vulnerable non-humanity, suspended on the edge of this abyss. Voicing Agamben:

This is precisely why the most delicate and graceful faces sometimes look as if they might suddenly decompose, thus letting the shapeless and bottomless background that threatens them emerge. But this amorphous background is nothing else than the opening itself and communicability itself inasmuch as they are constituted as their own presuppositions as if they were a thing. The only face to remain uninjured is the one capable of taking the abyss of its own communicability upon itself and of exposing it without fear or complacency.<sup>150</sup>

In its process of surfacing the dehumanised side of corporeal transgression and carnification, this filthy apparition blurs the lines of vision by *butting up* against vision: they adjoin, they border, they connect; they touch. Around this contact revolves a narrative that charts the return of an uncanny 'sense' – scent – of the deathly infecting life. Yet, this debased advenience underlies the value of replacing the abjective abolition of difference, as well as the structures of meaning based on difference, with a kind of grotesque contiguity.

The butt-man then, I offer, becomes the displaced and disfigured face of bodily self-expression, the synecdoche from which its being would seem to want to expose – and explode – itself, for the purpose of our witnessing. What is offered to the spectator is not an elevated view about appearance, subjectivity or disability but a 'butt joke' about what we

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<sup>148</sup> In the hope you can find here another bottom-up connection.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>150</sup> Agamben, *Means Without End*, 95.

expect to see, and fail to, when we 'look' at an image of the body to fix the meaning of our appearances, subjectivities or disabilities. This appearance makes the spectator the real 'butt' of the joke; the upturned face that laughs back at the heterology it observes, to uncanny effect/affect. Burt notes: "[p]arts of *Self Unfinished* were funny, but I felt that some of the audience also laughed at things that were, perhaps, so strange that they were potentially disturbing. Such laughter was, perhaps, a defensive mechanism, an avoidance of considering the consequences of what these movements were proposing."<sup>151</sup>

Against the gravity of the body, the face reacts with a laugh that erupts every time that figures overcharged with meaning disrupt our ability to organise our responses. Bakhtin believed that laughter is a moment of inversion of social relations of social hierarchy and liberation of communal energies, mining the power of the rule. Laughter does not build or make, replace or change, but it has an energy that keeps life in movement there where it is threatened with capture. In laughter, faces do not appear wise, posed or reassuring, but grotesque and full of an excess that explodes beyond its lineaments. Here, another symbolic reversion that topples up sides and relations in a sudden fluttering of the air between one face and the other, and many other things beside; a movement that refreshes with an open 'view' into the world.

Despite at first 'glance' laughter may seem just a light burst of playful desire, a privileged signifier of unruly libidinal or otherwise subjective energies/forces, it also embodies an overly serious character of gravity and danger. A transitional moment of surprise and relief, laughter is a notably audible 'fit of rhythmic sound' that interrupts the regular flow of breath (and experience); an acoustic cut – gap – in which familiarity or comfort at the level of the 'skin' comes to stand in for a feeling of un-ease, un-comfort. I begin to giggle when poked by an image that pricks me, that punctuates me, but that animates me to respond; I am infected with some kind of 'light' spirit that takes on a mouthy posture. Here, another images resurfaces in

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<sup>151</sup> Burt, "Revisiting 'No To Spectacle,'" 5.

the spasm of the open orifice of the mouth, yet again, caught between terror and exhilaration. In a gasp, life as we know it becomes momentarily interrupted.

Nietzsche's work reveals an anxiety toward laughter, which he observes occurs when "the expected (which usually makes us fearful and tense) discharges itself harmlessly."<sup>152</sup> Its trajectory takes a sudden turn from fear into malice:<sup>153</sup> "[t]he anxious crouching creature springs up, greatly expands – man laughs. This transition from momentary anxiety to short-lived exuberance is called the comic."<sup>154</sup> Like Bakhtin, Nietzsche suggests that laughter provides a momentary release of social constraints, or, I would say, a suspension of the norms governing 'common sense.'

Laughter is the ability to recognize incongruity amidst proliferation of difference, to notice that something – a ballerina with a butt-face doing the splits, let's say – doesn't fit. A crescendo of expectancy is built up, and so of a certain excitation in the lead up to a critical point at which an incompatible matrix intrudes upon the scene to produce a kind of impasse. What results from the collision of competing frameworks is an interference that momentarily interrupts the forward momentum of thought/discourse and thereby of the temporal frame of past and future that are reopened to interpretation. Hence, Laughter can be said to represent an ecstatic leap whereby static structures of being and sensing might rupture and liberate the explicitly "tragic" force of overcoming and becoming.

An allegoric version of this bursting leap emerges from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra's* "Vision and Riddle," at the moment when Nietzsche's title character is confronted with the riddle of an inhuman vision: "I saw a young shepherd writhing, choking, convulsed, his face distorted; and a heavy, black snake was hanging out of his mouth. Had I ever seen so much disgust and

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<sup>152</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. Paul V. Cohn (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 213.

<sup>153</sup> Nietzsche also accounts for a certain willfulness attached to this deviation. Willfulness will return in Chapter 4 as the protagonist of many other 'perverse' turns.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.



pallid horror on a face?" *Zarathustra* witnesses the danger of a heavy darkness lodged into the focal point of life. How can we face this deathly sight? At the passionate urging of Zarathustra to bite off the animal's head, the shepherd frees himself and is immediately transformed by a radiant and inhuman laughter: "[no] longer shepherd, no longer human – one changed, radiant, *laughing!* Never yet on earth has a human being laughed as he laughed! O my brothers, I heard a laughter that was no human laughter; and now a thirst gnaws at me, a longing that never grows still. My longing for this laughter gnaws at me; oh, how do I bear to go on living! And how could I bear to die now!"<sup>155</sup> This story can be interpreted as an epiphanic vision of a palpable temporal momentum of "inexhaustible permanence of becoming," as Nietzsche would have it.

The composition of *Self Unfinished*, I propose, follows the principle structure of laughter whilst inverting the trajectory of this episode. Le Roy carefully paces his construction, calibrating every task-like, abstract movement, progressively building up the material. He starts the audience with an accessible and familiar scene – a robot impression – a somewhat simple and recognizable scene that allows the audience the comfort of watching. Soon after, he begins to slowly construe more complex and idiosyncratic images as he turns to a kind of unconventional expressiveness that intrigues and even alarms. Expectant for a solution to the riddle, the spectators shuffle in their seats and shift between postures (of attention). And when suddenly, in a moment of unexpected metamorphosis, the body on stage delivers an 'incongruous' appearance that takes the audience by surprise – a headless man, an elephant man, a frog, a snail, a headless chicken, a headless ballerina doing the splits, an hermaphrodite impression of Martha Graham's *Lamentation*, a phallus, a crab – laughter ensues.

Like a good comedian, Le Roy takes time to build up the tension of the story before delivering

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<sup>155</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 3, original emphasis.

the prickly effective and affecting punch lines. We could say that he creates an ‘anomaly’ – that here we can call ‘interruption’ – that brings about a ‘paradigm shift,’ – that we shall define a disfiguration of organoleptic correspondences – that provides, in a flash, a completely new interpretation that sets off all previous (sensory) predicaments – or, a new perceptual experience. Laughter erupts just after the realisation has left us unscathed, yet transformed. The sudden final twist entails a complete ‘revision’ of the event though an embodied leap that resonates in the space of the social. Georges Bataille, following Nietzsche, envisaged a laughter that sends shock waves powerful enough to eventually destroy the monolithic, pyramidal structure of society. “Laughter intuits the truth,” he would claim, “that our will to arrest being is damned.”<sup>156</sup>

The context of Le Roy’s hilariously monstrous image of the ‘butt-man’ constitutes an encounter of a radically intersubjective nature with identification, and threats to identification, enacted through discomfort and mutuality, fear and anxiety for an imagined moral injunction of respect for the other’s vulnerability, which speaks of one’s own. The spectator takes ‘pleasure,’ and shame, in one’s own *monstrous* projections reflecting the dangers and desires that prompt their inner movements. The desire to suppress, capture or devoid this appearance is inverted by the rupturing momentum of the joke into the impossibility of ‘fixing’ the face as the stable locus of subjectivity and experience. Identification with the image is thus blocked by an affective interruption triggered by the inability to ‘see’ (beyond) the w/hole of representation.

Agamben writes: “[t]he face is not a *simulacrum*, in the sense that it is something dissimulating or hiding the truth: the face is the *simultas*, the being-together of the manifold visages constituting it, in which none of the visages is truer than any of the others.” Laughter, the *acoustic* shadow of a tremor, an excitation that is all too human, can reveal the

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<sup>156</sup> Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (New York: University of New York Press, 1988), 91.

simultaneity of in/human faces, “the restless power that keeps them together and constitutes their being-in-common,” in a bursting moment of “living light.”<sup>157</sup> In the distorted face of wound or laughter what we find is not what is threatening by definition of abject qualities cast out as other, but what is similar in the ways it externalises the figure of *ourselves* as others.

Returning to Agamben, we can agree that “[t]he face is the threshold of de-proprietation and of de-identification of all manners and of all qualities – a threshold in which only the latter become purely communicable. And only where I find a face do I encounter an exteriority and does an *outside* happen to me.”<sup>158</sup> I have in these writings called such condition one of extimacy that organises forms of being-together-beside-ourselves.<sup>159</sup>

Returning to *Self Unfinished*, I would like to envision that in the scene of laughter before the expression of the ‘lower order’ of the flesh, we know we are before the ravaged face of the other; part of understanding what that means involves recognising our own capacity to harm as well as to suffer. This recognition depends on some level of intimacy with other human beings – on our imaginative co-presence with them, our apprehension that they too are there, and of what their being ‘there’ means for us. Le Roy’s representation enacts this ethical susceptibility by linking the figure and effect of *prosopopoeia* to a ‘bottom-ethics’ that extends human voice, and face, to the nonhuman. This trace of humanity silently addresses a fundamental vulnerability and precariousness that shall not kill but instead restore some ‘sense’ of life, and death.

If we respond to Butler’s call to face up to the task of establishing (public) ways of seeing and witnessing that might well respond to the call of the human within the sphere of appearance, we need to hear the face as it speaks something other than language. Then, we may be touched and moved by a flash of in-sight that, released from the eyes, can meet us in the

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<sup>157</sup> Both quotes Agamben, *Means Without End*, 98.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-9.

<sup>159</sup> See in this thesis “Foresight and Sideshadows” and Chapter 2.

flesh with a new understanding and knowledge of human experience at the limits of visibility.

Butler writes:

If the humanities has a future as cultural criticism, and cultural criticism has a task at the present moment, [...] [w]e would have to interrogate the emergence and vanishing of the human at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense. This might prompt us, effectively, to reinvigorate the intellectual projects of critique, of questioning, of coming to understand the difficulties and demands of cultural translation and dissent, and to create a sense of the public in which oppositional voices are not feared, degraded or dismissed, but valued for the instigation to a sensate democracy they occasionally perform.

This is a possibility that those whose research practices interface with the matter of embodiment – its representation, its scenes and its lived abstractions – should learn to attend.

## Crab Times

*Self Unfinished* performs material processes in organic terms by making use of its figures as “the body politic.” This effect/affect is a gift for both mimicry and sensate, political reality. The appearance of Le Roy’s dysmorphic, defaced body comes upon us as the very image of embodiment as existing always in relationship with absolute alterity – with death and with the Other – generating an encounter that brings about a ‘sense’ of temporality, for the consciousness of time, Levinas writes, is “accomplished in the face-to-face encounter with the Other... the encroachment of the present on the future is not the feat of the subject alone, but the intersubjective relationship.”<sup>160</sup>

The figurative thread that strings these ideas together reappears: (self-)recognition is entirely a product of intersubjectivity and the awareness of temporality, of finitude, and responsibility all emerge in contact with others. This contact is filled with the sensuous substance of bodies; their desires, affects and imagined re-appearances, or as Massumi better elaborates:

The temporality of the body without an image coincides with the eclipse of the subject in emotion. It is a time of interruption, the moment vision plunges into the body’s suspended animation. It is a gap, like the event, but one that it is still attached to empirical time as a punctuation of its linear unfolding. It can be understood as the double, in the actual, of the event, whose reality as pure interval of transformation is virtual, on the order of potential, more energetic than bodily, incorporeal. Or, its attachment to empirical time can be understood as the durational equivalent of the edge of the hole in empirical space into which the eyes of movement-vision disappear, in which case it would be the rim of the virtual at the crossroads of the actual. Reserve the term *suspense* for the

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<sup>160</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other and Other Essays*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 79.

temporality proper to the body without an image.<sup>161</sup>

What now, then? During the last scene, Le Roy's body lies still, for what feels like a an excruciatingly long time, hedged between the flat surfaces of the bottom wall and the stage floor, in a foetus-like position; a figure literally at the edge of the scene, of movement, of vision, of representation, of spectatorship. To push my argument further, I would say that this framing of the body is not far removed from Rainer's compositional technique of placing her characters, including herself, always in relation to their environment, and framing the figure of the body always off-side, at a slightly oblique angle. This critical positioning becomes expression of a figurative representation that never fully 'captures' the image of body or the scene, because they have none. What we have instead is coefficientcy.

Le Roy reassigns the figure/ground relations that seemingly reach a zero degree finitude and definition surprisingly disclosing in the process panoply of possible figurations, imaginings and meanings, traversing the visual scene with distortions and projections. The co-presence of restless materializations and moulding, of birthing and dissolution, of the chiasm of the touching touched, and of the reversibility underpinned by the fecund and restless synecdochic figuring of fleshy tropes, cross the conditions of death and of life. The figural sense of the dead-figure may indeed be an image gathered from life and nature – a receptacle without bounds or dimensions; nothing more or less than infinity. Bel thus reads this presence: "Le Roy's 'real' body is osmotic. It represents the world as extension of our body. A Deleuzian body, a 'body without organs;' the matrix body that defines itself through the infinite possibilities of relations that allow its own perceptions."<sup>162</sup>

Le Roy, I propose, re-ghosts the body of appearance. By revealing and even erasing its own figurative structuring, the artist's self-figuration disfigures the entire visual frame. This framing

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<sup>161</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (op. cit.), 60, original emphasis.

<sup>162</sup> Bel, *Crepino gli Artisti*, 85.

stands for figures that do not want to overcome the logic of representation but extend its full potentials; that do not try to substantiate the non-representable but reveal the inconsistency of what really 'matters.' Those figures offer the possibility of twisting and distorting – of processing – the displacement and interruption of the categories of identity, wholeness, time and death. The existential poignancy of these appearances stems from the full acquiescence to the power of mortality: it is in the light of the gravity of death that the intensities of life can re-emerge.

Finally, one last appearance of 'extra-ordinary' and emblematic power. Stark naked, the body on stage begins to crawl, crablike, scuttling sideways, down stage, and back again. This is Burt's reconstruction of this final image: "having undressed, Le Roy progressed in a crab-like posture around the floor, slowly and with difficulty coordinating his limbs to kick over the table and then did another handstand against the back wall."<sup>163</sup> This is the figure I have been end-running around all along; the crab has seized the body but this time the mark it leaves does not appear on the surface of the skin but on the surface of time. This disfigured body travels under the sign of cancer.

The figure of the crab/cancer reappears on the body, and on the page, sustaining a contact, a precarious meeting of sorts between two temporal frames of representation that seem very remote in time. What we find, through the movement between two quite distinct forms (of expression) – the wounded flesh and the disfigured body, Rainer and Le Roy – is a certain kind of animal figuration, or faciality, that provides an opening into the status of performance in relationship to the temporal organisation of an historical archive marked by the synchronicity and co-presence of fugitive mo(ve)ments of contact.

The separate narratives here relayed are bound and ruptured by a wound in time, yet they proceed by gradual displacement through a gentle transmission of some kindred quality kept

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<sup>163</sup> Burt "Revisiting 'No To Spectacle,'" 4.

within the circle of affects that moves them quietly by each other's sides. Here the temporalities of pain, pleasure and desire intersperse, move closer and alongside, at the point of almost touching. They come face-to-face in a temporality where (or when?!) time is not linear and rational but connective and relational. Or, at the very least, their embodied temporality can be felt 'aside' one another, moving together backwards and into the future. These movements hold out the possibility of a temporal crabwalk, as performed by Gunter Grass in his 2002 novel of the same title regarding the symptomatic persistence of a traumatic past: "[d]o I have to sneak up on time in a crabwalk, seeming to go backward but actually scuttling sideways, and thereby working my way forward fairly rapidly?"<sup>164</sup> Thus, the animal, inhuman figuration of the crab becomes the 'face' of time and its connecting and connective narratives.

The encounter between Rainer and Le Roy stages a kind of intra-vision, different but still akin to the simultaneous consideration of the individual, the body and politics in order to understand how the world is affected/affective in the immediate. In Rainer's disfigured narrative and Le Roy's defaced embodiment, there is no distinction between incarnate and figurative vision, two notions which seem indeed to have an 'other' and a finer connection, compelling figures of flesh towards abstract, fictional ones. But one and the other have at least one property in common, in consideration of the multiple appearances they both represent, namely their (in)visibility, their accessibility to the senses.

What concerns me here is that, to borrow an expression from Cesare Casarino: "all points of tangency, of intersection, and of divergence aside – both projects in the end *butt up* against the intractable matter of corporeality. It seems that at the end of time there stands the body and its demands forever waiting to be attended to."<sup>165</sup> Both *MURDER and murder* and *Self*

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<sup>164</sup> Gunter Grass, *Crabwalk*, trans. Krishna Winston (Orlando; Austin, New York, San Diego, Toronto, London: Harcourt, 2002). Due to the loss of this volume, I am presently unable to provide pagination for the extracted quotes.

<sup>165</sup> Cesare Casarino, "Time Matters: Marx, Negri, Agamben, and the Corporeal," *Strategies* 16.2 (2003): 194.



*Unfinished* 'dys-appear' the life and corporeality that is sustained beyond and in the face of precariousness, which can occur as a sudden shock, at times catastrophic, at times apparently trivial. The shock interrupts a 'sense' of time and experience that before seemed linear and stable and, in a touching mo(ve)ments of encounter, the temporal orders upon which their histories are founded fold away, and beside each other.

These parallel figurations perform the conversion of their historical, plural, multiversatile and punctum-like material into the blind spots of a corporeal historicity. Holes beget holes. Hence, they locate it in the figure that exceeds the visual frame and strews sensation with the broken bodies of a precarious and disfigured body politic. They use this critic and critical body, and their polymorphic imaginary, as a bridge between their visions and a structure of feeling, a 'sense' that began to circulate around the body in the 1960s; a now valorised period and a formative epoch for the sourcing and channelling of corporeal practices – their pathos and ethos.

These co-ordinates follow artist intent upon practicing, at their own risk, a body lived – cut off and reassembled – in intense opposition to the monstrous organizations of the 'real,' where the question of life shows its face hidden under the seamy sides of death, raising up to show, with full force, the precariousness of being. History moves too fast after this juncture, or, in Gunter Grass's words: "[w]hat happened next went quickly," perhaps too quickly to fully comprehend its contested temporal stakes. Might it be that these particular mo(ve)ments occupy an "anamorphic" spot that straps its figurations to the linear time of modern history? Or rather, could it be that these still moving bodies inflected (and infected) with one another can still carry the desire to disfigure and reconfigure the temporal boundaries of their inter(in)animations?<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> In *Performing Remains*, Rebecca Schneider, describing the movement of stillness occurring in John Donne's 1633 poem *The Exstasie*, writes: "he tells of lovers lying still as stone statues while their souls intertwine, redouble, and multiply. Here, the live and the stone are inter(in)animate and the liveness of one or deadness of the other is

These speculations attend to some of the effort necessary to take re-presentation of – mainly linear – time to its limits to make its un-working and insensibility visible. The image of the crab/cancer seems here a particularly apt articulation for an expression of temporality that occurs and happens as an alignment between the figures of subjects, bodies and histories constituted as a ‘common’ threat and as an ‘un-common’ sense of time. The spacing of time of ‘besides’ bears every trace of this figurality. Sensation here becomes the method of circulation and transmission of an ethics of feeling and attending that foregrounds self-reflexivity and accountability. The mo(ve)ments of these sensibility live and die only to live along and die beside one and the other; in the face of a body and an other, in a connective inter(in)animation made manifest in and through time.

Rainer’s graphic wounded-ness becomes synecdochic of any number of physical alterations that Le Roy’s body performs. There is no resemblance as such (or analogy) between the wound and the butt-man, but there is instead a relationship of connectivity across time. By turning linear time into temporal synecdoche a white male heterosexual healthy body can indeed morph into the syncope of a white female queer ill one. Perhaps there is still too much whiteness in the way but in this sensate realm this is only a light differential. Thus, these figures can travel together side-by-side in a figurative *pas-de-deux* that does not keep time with the murderous pace of capital. Nor do these moves invoke, paraphrasing Elizabeth Freeman “the desire for a fully present past.”<sup>167</sup>

Instead, one might see, or feel, this dyad of figurations as an instance on an enduring ‘sense’ of co-appearance constructed around possible resonances, vibrations and affinities that can be taken as a template for an ethical practice of figuring and figuring out what remains (almost) touching over time. For Elizabeth Freeman has revealed that political cultures and

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ultimately neither decidable nor relevant” (op. cit., 25). She then proceeds to plant this concept into performance theory proposing performance as “a tool for cross- or intra-temporal negotiation” of what remains ‘still’ vital (31).

<sup>167</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010), 105, my emphasis.

eras do not supplant each other in a neat linear way, but co-exist or infuse each other, complicating any simplistic commitment to political 'progress' or evolvment. Freeman's term for this time crossing is "temporal drag" – with all of "the associations that the word drag has with retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past upon the present."<sup>168</sup> This term is useful because allows us to see and move past the horizontal arrangements of moments inexorably succeeding one another.

The concept of crabwalk retains some of this connective pull and its (queer) performative force ad intersubjective ties. However it transposes its back and forward mo(ve)ments into a spatiality and figurality that one might describe as a choreography; a dance face-to-face. These configurations shed the glamour and excess of timely adornments to maintain an unbound relationality. They move alongside a practice of time as nowhere existing away from bodies and never alienable from their moving – and sometimes 'touching' – infective – and at times infected – histories. They turn to assist one another and make their way back with quivering, scuttling vibrations carrying "the scents and similar exudations of history"<sup>169</sup> that will re-emerge, finally, in some degree transformed into futurity. They carry 'on' an aesthetic and ethic imagination of inexhaustible vitality. Yet, like all temporalities, this one also retains its dangers: that its (possible) static presentation may sink its claws into the folds of time, seizing its depths, metastasising the wounds of history, making it impossible to move forward and on. This is why this is a model of temporality that must be held with 'care'.

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<sup>168</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations," *New Literary History* 31.4 (2000): 728.

<sup>169</sup> Gunter Grass, *Crabwalk*.

## 4. Transform Boundaries: Julie Tolentino's and Ron Athey's Unsettling Fresh-and-Blood Archives

### Plates and Planes: Unsettled Grounds and Transform Boundary

According to plate tectonics theory, the solid surface of the Earth – the crust and uppermost mantle – is made up of moving plates:<sup>1</sup> large slabs of rock whose relative motion determines the landscape features visible across the globe. The driving forces of their movement are a combination of currents and transmissions of energy. Intervening factors are the gravitational variations of the planet and the tidal forces of Sun and Moon. Tectonic plates touch at 'fault lines:' gashes in the Earth's crust where edge-surfaces slowly grind or slip past each other. Most faults lie deep in the invisible recesses of the oceans where the plates shift and rearrange over the molten core of the earth.

The plates' relative motions determine different types of formations. In convergence, the leading edge of a plate meets another plate creating a 'drag' – a downward suction, where one plate is being drawn down or overridden by the other (subduction). Plates diverge at mid-ocean ridges – hotspots in the ocean basins where surfaces move away from each other. This spread forms long, huge cracks where magma and volcanic activity create accumulations that eventually rise and erupt from below, and lie into new formations. Here the crust created is perpetually 'recycled,' creation and destruction occurring simultaneously. Where plates slide or, perhaps more accurately, grind past each other, they determine a so-called strike slip or *transform boundary*. The created compression of forces and inversed tensions are expressed as uplifts and depressions. At these locations no new crust is created and none is destroyed, but all is recirculated in movement.

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<sup>1</sup>Herbert Harold Read and Janet Watson, *Introduction to Geology* (New York: Halsted, 1975); Turcotte, Donald L., and Gerald Schubert, "Plate Tectonics," in *Geodynamics* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Robert S. Dietz, "Continent and Ocean Basin Evolution by Spreading of the Sea Floor," *Nature* 190.4779 (June 1961).

The San Andreas Fault is a well-known and rare example of a transform boundary.<sup>2</sup> Made famous by its shifts and catastrophic ripples,<sup>3</sup> this is the one strip of continental 'flesh' where the crack lines are made visible and felt below the ever dancing feet populating the streets of California, in the United States. The fault is about 28 million years old: it 'began' when the East Pacific Rise, the boundary between the Farallon and Pacific Plates, subducted under the North American Plate near what is now Los Angeles. Sitting on the edge, it runs roughly ten miles deep spreading southwest as far as Mexico and northwest up to Oregon, and it continues to grow.

The motion of the fault planes is mostly horizontal and parallel. These plates keep moving or creeping in different directions and when they brush past one another sometimes they get stuck. As the rest of the plates move, these areas deform and compress like a spring, building up stress in the rocks along the cracks. Their lateral breaking and scraping produce seismic waves that travel through the ground and shake the surface. The longer they stay stuck, the more tension builds, the bigger the telluric impact. In other places, the plates move smoothly past each other; these areas buckle as the earth shifts but the changes are only subtle. However, shifts as minute as a few millimetres can resonate on a large scale.

The Fault and its branches trigger more than 10,000 quakes a year, sometimes the consequences are devastating especially in the Los Angeles and San Francisco area. In these active zones mild tremors are the norm and violent quakes can happen any time. The grinding plates and earthquakes are gradually warping and reshaping the make up of this

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Collier, *A Land in Motion: California's San Andreas Fault* (San Francisco; Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1999); also David K. Lynch, *SanAndreasFault.org*. <<http://www.sanandreasfault.org>>; and Sandra S. Schulz and Robert E. Wallace, *The San Andreas Fault*. <<http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/earthq3/safaultgip.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> Its notoriety comes partly from the disastrous earthquake that struck San Francisco on April 18, 1906, which destroyed over 80% of the city with an estimated death toll of about 3,000 people; the greatest loss of life from a natural disaster in California's history. Although the devastation did not reach the catastrophic scale of, for instance, the earthquake in Tangshan, China, on July 27, 1976 (estimated death toll 655,000), or, more recently, the earthquake and tsunami in Sumatra, Indonesia, on December 26, 2004 (277,898 deaths), the 1906 quake remains one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the United States. For this and other reasons, including its primacy of 'visibility,' this *fault line* persists in the collective (un)consciousness of the Western World as a remarkably primal 'unsettled ground.'

territory; in a few million years, its 'face' will look very different than it does today. Meanwhile the Farallon plate continues to push the boundaries along the bottom of the North American plate, probably destined to sink into the mantle, melt and be recycled; the material rebalanced into new formations, new terrains and dimensions. Nothing will ever be the same.

## Panes and Pains: Unsettled Boundaries and Transformative Grounds

It's a totally dark room.<sup>4</sup> The only source of light is a white beam staring at the intricate markings on the flesh of a stern, swarthy body: tortuous etchings across practiced terrains.

The shape is resting (posing?) naked on all fours, hands and knees pressed on the flat surface of a highly perched table. A shimmering mantle of blond synthetic hair drapes the faceless front of the figure, framed by two equally transparent and reflective glass slabs supporting (guarding perhaps) the end lines of this environ – rear and front twice facing. The impression is that of an archetypal figure, a primeval animal poised on display in an incomplete vitrine, in abeyance before the swarm of heads surrounding the spectacle.

The creature begins to tug at the strands of hair, each stroke echoed by the pounding of the brush on the floor as the action reaches its full extension (intention). The thumbing punctuates the taut refrain of the hollow sound of a drone, stretching time insistently. Another reverberation occurs elsewhere: as the head jerks back against the force of the stroke, the tension sends ripples through the hair that flares up in response: the staring faces imperceptibly flicker and bounce in tune. Moving from horizontal to upright, the figure begins to tease the shiny mass into an impenetrable upward tangle. This inverse action allows for a glimpse of an (in)human face, eyes skewed and mouth agape: a mask of ecstatic pain.

Then, (un)ceremoniously comes the 'reveal:' the wig is lifted as the hands release the pins –

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<sup>4</sup> This incipit is somewhat of a homage to the late performance artist, director and writer Lawrence Steger, whose 1996 work *Draft* opens with the line: "It's a totally white room. No setbacks, no contradiction," as he begins to describe and perform highlights and excerpts from the piece he purports to be doing, as though the 'final,' fleshed-out *Draft* were being enacted elsewhere. Similarly, this emergent account is not fruit of the direct manifestation of an event, but rather, it is a partial amalgam of multi-medial fragments of memories, bodies and text that coagulate into a scene that may be about to happen in the reader's mind's eyes, in some anterior future that I am here recalling. One thing is certain: it never really happened this way. Steger died in 1999, age 37, of complications from AIDS. Whilst he is not immediately present in this writing, his lifework lends substantial backbone to the stories relayed in these pages. On Steger's work, see Matthew Goulish, "The Ordering of the Fantastic: Architecture and Place in the Work of Lawrence Steger," in *Performance and Place*, eds. Leslie Hill and Helen Paris (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 252-69.

surgical needles – that pierced the flesh past the epidermis puncturing the veins. A sudden shift of tone and red comes quickly, flowing in stream over head(s) and face(s), threading sweat, tears, pulviscular matter; demanding attention. As the head comes forward, the body moves, paced and controlled, through a repeated cycle of downward poses and deep lunges that rapidly draw the viscosity deeper. Through torso and legs, the blood resurges under the body in a pool that collects on the glass pane, stealthily placed flat to the ground. The second slab is carefully lifted directly on top of the first, pressing the fluid that seeps and slips under the glass plates. As these are dragged in different directions, slipping and grinding against each other, over the surface of the body, the blood slides into and off the masses. The fluid, as unpredictable as red lava, breaks through the surfaces taking on volcanic force. Things get sticky, like the atmosphere.

This organism of contained and controlled shifts<sup>5</sup> changes the promontories of the scene causing a sudden tremor; a potential space is open by the ‘faulty lines’ of this rapturous vision, at once monstrous and sublime – a Kantian splicing point of horror and wonder. The cataclysmic effects seem to just happen at molecular level. The texture of this emergence takes flesh through a regulatory adaptive system that follows the impact waves received in several direct and indirect (physiological) ways. Responding to these impulses is an involuntary process as the body is there – moved – before one knows it.

A chilly breeze down the spine, a hot flash up the cheeks, the palms are sweaty, the vision is blurred; the breath moves in deep, the heart is pumping, the head is pounding. The system is rapt in the midst of a ‘relative motion:’ a complete set of converging and diverging reactions – and therefore deeply moving – a whole series of hypothalamically mediated colluding and colliding forces where one feeling is being drawn down or overridden by another. Is this a vision in red? Or is this the crimson smell of death? Is this the pull of a red sea? Or is this a

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<sup>5</sup> This is not always the case, with exercises in body manipulations the outcomes can never be fully predicted.



syn(es)thetic assault? Yet, there is no 'real' (physical) danger to this carnal crudity (cruelty?). Tension arising from the proximity to the epicentre of these peristaltic mo(ve)ments is bound to shake but not to break, to 'obliterate' – render indecipherable, efface – and not to 'annihilate' – to bring to nothing, destroy.

But when the organism is ready to recover, there comes the frightful realisation that what just happened has yet to come. A second light comes on over an identical, parallel platform, revealing yet another nude, tattooed, less stout and more sinuous but equally firm figure, poised in attendance; the yellow mane as saturated as the light and air around it. This imperfect mirror image was there all along, suspended in time since before it all began, waiting for the 'good' time, the 'perfect' moment, the right 'feeling' to pass, to begin, again: now. Actions and gestures are repeated and so the inevitable consequences. And where (then?) there was one body brushing, revealing, bleeding, bending, dragging, grinding, slipping and sliding, there are then (now?) two bodies brushing, revealing, bleeding, bending, dragging, grinding, slipping and sliding. In this solitary tango; they 'face' each other and 'do' each other; they 'wait for' one another as they 'wait on' the other, in mutual attendance.

This fine balancing act requires a wilfulness to keep on/in/beside time, together. The slight delays, the imperceptible 'errors,' the syncopated variations and molecular shifts of rhythm, intensity and weight, the unique tonal and modal qualities only return time to the extended surfaces of 'bodies' as spaces of difference (*différance?*) and the vital composition of their relations. In the merger of imperfect reflections and relations, earlier instantiations interface with newer emergences as things come full circle and reach a common end(ing). The frame of this event becomes a basin: a hotbed of tectonic shifts of accumulation, amalgamation and disjunction. Overlapping, eroding, grinding – bodies and histories both move onto unsettled grounds, responsive to the ebb and flow of the bleeding lines of time, and their constant refusal to coagulate and become forever still under the scrutiny of a crystallising vision.

In "Moving to a Hill," Peggy Phelan suggests that the return of the injury, the re-injury – the re-opening of a wound, the re-emergence of pain – is "a repetition [that] doubles the pain because I have both the pain and the memory of it. But as a repetition and recurrence, it cuts the pain in half because I recovered once before."<sup>6</sup> However, there is something defiantly astonishing and exhausting about this particular reoccurrence; the sensation of an unnatural inversion of time moving backward, blood spilling upward, and pain tripling – at least – the cut in the troubling recursion of something that 'we' already know is yet to come but by which we are always found amiss. Staring in the eye of a quake it is easy to feel the pull, hard to keep the balance, as "[l]ooking is often the quickest way to fall."<sup>7</sup> These stereoscopic visions that move from one extremity to the other allow for a free fall into the fault lines of a new emergence that is only visible past the surface but that always returns to it, as a remainder etched onto the skin; a topography of woundedness.

As it happens, this landscape is no more stable than our organism and when its volatile forces collude – or perhaps collide – the last thing we might expect is stability. In the folds of these events we land on a 'suspect terrane';<sup>8</sup> a composite site of deep mystery, a place so enigmatic that it is impossible to determine from what re-move bodies and surfaces drifted together. Instead, like in the American West that provides the backdrop to their histories, such accretionary boundaries compress, buckle, and reshape in a ragged pulse of on-going collisions and responses, constantly threatening to outstrip the human capacity for measurement, prediction, and even recognition.

These tectonic accretions mark a stratified site where form and content, direction and intention, simultaneity and linearity no longer work in productive tension with each other, but

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<sup>6</sup> Peggy Phelan, "On Moving to a Hill," *Women & Performance: A journal of Feminist Theory* 14.1 (2004): 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> In the language of plate tectonics, a 'suspect terrane' is an area or region that is suspected of being a stratified region whose boundary faults have not been identified. See Ailsa Allaby and Michael Allaby, "suspect terrane," *A Dictionary of Earth Sciences*, 1999, *Encyclopedia.com*, <<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O13-suspecterrane.html>>.

rather they expose yet another layer, yet another dimension, that overlaps and melds, frustrating interpretation and demanding that bodies give an account of themselves. That is to say, the breaks, the wounds, the cuts in the scene/seen announce the absolution of the flesh-and-blood from any authority that would seek to become its guarantor. Instead, these crevices can only be figured as lines, or cracks, of dynamic movement where folding and unfolding, making and unmaking, becoming and un-becoming are temporal spaces that one can enter and leave only in the midst. Neither can they become legible until a thin membrane of narrative has been laid open and pulled down to contain the multiple and interfacing histories accumulating beneath the visible surface. And so we shall peel one more surface, strip one more layer, as we begin, again...

## Suspect Terranes

This is, like all others, a story about love and loss, ecstasy and disillusion, dissolution and redemption. An epidemic provides the narrative backbone of a landscape exacted by its deadly reckoning<sup>9</sup> taking up huge blocks of space and time, running deep under the skin, becoming dense and complex, leaving a long trail, behind and ahead. But large-scale, world-changing events also start small. By shifting our attention from the topological 'terrain' – the surface in its vast sameness and (in)quietude – to the local and the temporal, we can learn to read the deeply encoded 'terrane;' the layers of on-going struggle over which "the historic body, the queer body, the AIDS body, the body in the grip of ecstasy or sorrow of death"<sup>10</sup> stretches out, converges and rubs, whilst the sky remains the same, in vigil.

*The Sky Remains the Same* (2008 - onwards) is artist, curator and producer Julie Tolentino's on-going project aiming to generate a 'living archive' of signature performances by artist friends, in her words: "[i]n this work, six different Artists endow signature works onto/into my body as part of a contract and pact (slightly differentiated from a 're-performance' as the focus is on the Artist-to-Artist relationship as well as the oral history of the creation, transference, and currency of the work)."<sup>11</sup> Artists involved include Franko B, Ron Athey, Lovett/Codgnone, choreographer David Rousseve and David Dorfman.

*Resonate/Obliterate*<sup>12</sup> is the first incarnation of these willful endowments. Here, Tolentino takes on the visceral body of work of 'extreme' performance artist Ron Athey by archiving 'in

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<sup>9</sup> In "Uncovered Rectum," Peggy Phelan speaks of "the deadly reckoning exacted by AIDS" (in *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* [London and New York: Routledge, 1997], 79).

<sup>10</sup> This citation is from the blog page for *You Belong to Me: Art and Ethics of Presences* (2009), a series of events celebrating "artists who make their audiences into more than spectators," at Riverside, CA, USA – organized by Jennifer Doyle, Associate Professor of English at University of California, in collaboration with the Sweeney Gallery and the University of California Humanities Research Institute, (*I.E. You Belong To Me*. <<http://ieyoubelongsome.blogspot.co.uk>>).

<sup>11</sup> This and a longer description of the work are available on the artist's website, Julie Tolentino, *Tolentino Projects*. <[http://www.julietolentino.com/TOLENTINOPROJECTS/Performance/Entries/2008/1/1\\_THE\\_SKY\\_REMAINS\\_THE\\_SAME\\_\(on-going\).html](http://www.julietolentino.com/TOLENTINOPROJECTS/Performance/Entries/2008/1/1_THE_SKY_REMAINS_THE_SAME_(on-going).html)>.

<sup>12</sup> This is the event that, in its multiple manifestations, has inspired the assemblage of impressions aggregated in the preceding section. I will shortly expand on this further.

the flesh' his *Self-Obliteration Solo: Ecstatic* (2007).<sup>13</sup> In Athey's contract, he enables the archived event by choosing to perform the work in tandem, immediately after he has completed a cycle of actions and movement (brushing, bleeding, sliding/slipping under a glass surface) from the elected performance score. What initially began as an archivation for Tolentino's "life's duration" has more recently evolved into a larger programme of queer assemblages curated by the duo and including, alongside their own signature piece(s), a wider range of works and activities.<sup>14</sup> Such platform calls up and culls up fellow – established and emerging – artists, possible successors and cultural workers, together with the transitory community of witnesses, to generate and invigorate an activist and resistant space of relay and response, exchange and regeneration.

In "Illicit Transit," Adrian Heathfield reflects on the significance of such activism: "[a]rtistic community is modelled in these enfleshed intertextual relays, as a coming-undone-together, as a transhistorical labour of collaborative passage. It can be invented once again and again,

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<sup>13</sup> *Self-Obliteration Solo #1: Ecstatic* – also known as *Self-Obliteration I* – is one episode in a larger cycle of works that has as many denominations – *Self-Obliteration I, II, and III, Resonate/Obliterate* – as different instantiations incrementally take flesh. This is true in several ways for most of Athey's work where each performance revises or reiterates a previous performance or concern – differently, depending on the location, time duration, and performers involved – in an on-going performative accretion and amplification. Hence, his work should be seen as an expanded movement of (re)iterations and (re)incorporations constantly in flux: as long as the work is enfleshed, the consideration of it can expand to include each of its manifestations. For this analysis, I have drawn on the contamination of sources and inputs coming mainly from my own witnessing of *Self-Obliteration I* and *II* performed in succession as part of 12-hour event *Visions of Excess*, curated by Athey with Lee Adams and programmed by the *SPILL Festival*, London, 2009; and *Self-Obliteration I: Ecstatic, Self-Obliteration II: Sustained Rapture*, and the premiere of *Self-Obliteration III* performed back-to-back as part of the National Review of Live Art's 30th anniversary festival at the Centre for contemporary Arts, Glasgow, on Friday 19 March 2010. Furthermore, pivotal to my analysis of *Resonate/Obliterate* – the re-incarnation of the work with Julie Tolentino and the subject of my previous re-imaginings – have been the video documentation of two separate performances: at the Riverside as part of the aforementioned event *You Belong to Me* in 2009 and the most recent (as of the time of this writing) U.S. presentation at Allen Street Studios in New York City in 2011, as well as the commentary of its production in Berlin in 2009 by dance scholar André Lepecki. See, in order, "The Sky Remains the Same – Tolentino Archives Athey's Self-Obliteration #1," *Vimeo*, February 21, 2009, <<http://vimeo.com/33298226>>; "Resonate/Obliterate/Ron Athey/Julie Tolentino 12.16.11," *Vimeo*, December 16, 2011, <<http://vimeo.com/33845331>>; and André Lepecki, "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances," *Dance Research Journal* 42.2 (Winter 2010). I will generally not distinguish between these sources as they share more similarities in action, dynamic and intent than differences, however, I will note one significant difference: only the performance of *Resonate/Obliterate* at Allen Street Studios in New York City includes a cycle of the self-sodomising fist action present in *Self-Obliteration II: Sustained Rapture*, which follows on Tolentino's first sequence of repetition of Athey's opening course.

<sup>14</sup> For the weekend's performances of *You Belong to Me* (February 21<sup>st</sup>), for example, they included works by Heather Cassils (*Hard Times*), Zachary Drucker (*The Inability to be Looked at and the Horror of Nothing to See*).

through acts of care, continuance and transit.”<sup>15</sup> These links are Julie Tolentino’s explicit points of departure for her archival series, as she writes: “I am looking at the acts of intimacy, ‘mutual recognitions,’ the absolute vitality and spirit that this interaction captures. I aim to give rise to the momentous agreement of a signed contract with another focussed on one’s most precious prize - his own signature performance work. However, this is not about the prize – the performance – instead on the relationship between us, the telling, tale and transferring of the work itself.”<sup>16</sup>

The clear resonances that we can hear in the language of affect and transmission are not a coincidence, but reflect, rather, an on-going and sustained attention toward structures of existence that foreground ‘being-with-others,’ temporality and care. Scholar and commentator Susan Doyle observes that as more and more artists and curators turn to the re-performance of live art ‘classics,’ the collaboration between Tolentino and Athey pushes the boundaries of re-enactment “by showing that such repetitions need not wait for the dust to settle – and that such conversations between artists can unfold in and of themselves in the here and now.” She concludes: “[r]epresentation, here, is a way of being with each other in performance.”<sup>17</sup> The willingness to ‘be-with-the-other,’ I argue, turns into the felt and shared necessity to develop a view toward temporality, care and ‘being-toward-death’ in the context of a body (of) work that exists in inevitable proximity with imminent finality.

Both Athey’s and Tolentino’s practices are constructed around the attention and attendance exacted by this latter extremity. In 1985, Athey came to face “the night side of life” when he learnt that his blood carried the HIV-virus, and thus (publicly) claimed his citizenship in the

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<sup>15</sup> Adrian Heathfield, “Illicit Transit,” in *Pleading in the Blood: The Art and Performances of Ron Athey*, ed. Dominic Johnson (London, Bristol, and Chicago: Intellect Live, 2013), 222. *Pleading in the Blood* is a long-overdue and all-encompassing anthology celebrating the life and work of the artist from the perspective of scholars, collaborators, and artist friends. This volume claims the surviving and enduring history of an artist’s and artistic practice that has long stood at a cautious remove from the official annals of recent art history and its circulation mainly on the account of an ambivalent and reciprocal suspicion and struggle – on the part of the artist and the institutions – to accommodate the opposite extremities of their critical positions and dispositions towards a work that always manifests itself in the margins. Also see Johnson’s discussion on Athey’s archive trouble (37-40).

<sup>16</sup> Verbatim from Tolentino, *Tolentino Projects*.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Doyle in the blog spot for *I.E. You Belong to Me*.

kingdom of the (terminally) diseased.<sup>18</sup> At the time, and for at least a decade on, the diagnosis of AIDS/HIV was treated and traded as a death sentence. Athey's early spectacles of extreme bloodletting, theatrical tortures (culled from sadomasochistic sexual practices) and heavy manipulation of bodily fluids and substance, were conscious attempts to problematise and aestheticise a mortal charge whose direct impact and resonance determined the mixed and often difficult reception of the work. However, amidst the clamour and controversy, what remained undisputed amongst observers, supporters, commentators and detractors was the fact that everyone, including the artist himself, knew, believed, was sure that he would die, any time, soon.

Yet, despite all predictions, the "living corpse"<sup>19</sup> of the nosferatu<sup>20</sup> gay lord of the American suburban twilight scene still remains, un-dead. Almost thirty years on to date, Ron Athey, continues to live, and die a little, surviving his own terminal diagnosis whilst suffering the loss of uncountable friends, lovers, surrogate family members and fellow 'citizens' whose mortal horror was surpassed only by the extreme brutality and tenderness of their lost fights with the 'Plague.' In the introduction to *Pleading in the Blood*, Dominic Johnson records the inevitable change of register in Athey's experience and sensibility following the worst years of the AIDS epidemic noting how: "[i]f his 'plague' works elegize the generation of men and women lost to AIDS by figuring the specific horror of the injured, sick or dying body, his 'post-AIDS' works extend these investments through representations of the wound as a breach in the body, and

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<sup>18</sup> In *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag argues that illness "is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds a dual citizenship in the kingdom of the well and the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place" (op. cit., 3).

<sup>19</sup> This is an epithet that Athey has often used to address his artistic corpus and concerns.

<sup>20</sup> The origin of the word 'nosferatu' is often made to coincide with 'un-dead' or as a synonymous with 'vampire.' An alternative explanation is that 'nosferatu' is derived the Greek nosophoros, meaning 'plague-carrier' or 'disease-bearing.' Curiously, the term is also recorded in Romanian folklore as indicating a lustful species said to be the illegitimate child of illegitimate parents. Shortly after its burial, the creature stirs, leaves its grave, and not only sucks blood but also engages in sexual contact with the living. See the *Vampire Research Society*, <<http://vampireresearchsociety.blogspot.co.uk/2009/02/nosferatu-origin-and-definitions.html>>. I would suggest that Athey is somehow, figuratively, all these things in consideration of the stories yet to be told here.

as a potential rupture in the production of meaning”<sup>21</sup>

“Post-AIDS” is a title that Athey irreverently reclaims<sup>22</sup> at least since 1995 to forward the “bottom ethics” of his enduring strategies, as he states in the interview to which Johnson refers in the above quote:

it’s a case of ‘Still Here’ in the ‘post-AIDS’ era of the cocktail. The living corpse of the *Incorruptible Flesh* manifestations,<sup>23</sup> wrestling the death drive in the *Self-Obliterations*. For me, whether or not these images are front- or back-loaded with the specter of AIDS, it’s still relevant, and representative of life: of learning to love the monster, pseudo-health aesthetics, and the giver of death, anal sex. Hence, bottoms up to the consciousness that the explosive cocktail won’t lay the spirit to rest!<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, Tolentino’s practice is largely and intensely registered within the context of the complex discourses and experiences around race, gender and class as they intersect with the AIDS crises in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>25</sup> In a public conversation with Ron Athey titled “Reciprocal Aesthetics,” she recalls having lived through the same ‘critical time’ as Athey, with the sensation of constantly being disappeared. Born in San Francisco, of Filipino/El Salvadoran descent, a self-defying “non-mainstream queer, feminine-not-masculine,

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<sup>21</sup> Johnson, *Pleading in the Blood*, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Notably, Johnson makes a case for the use of the affix ‘post’ as a definition of a new phase of activism rather than a surpassed consciousness of past, hard-won achievements (see *ibid.*, 33).

<sup>23</sup> This is a performance cycle that forms a further trilogy of works. For more detail see Dominic Johnson, “Perverse Martyrologies: An Interview with Ron Athey,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 18.4, (2008).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 508.

<sup>25</sup> The multiple threads of identity politics in the context of the AIDS crises land in a complex tapestry of racial histories and sexed, class relations. The concept of the ‘gay plague’ acted as a very powerful and ubiquitous metaphor – for the heteronormative, patriarchal, white supremacy aiming to annihilate practices of fluid bodily contact – to explain the spread and transmission of the disease, and as such it underwrote a good deal of the socio-political stigmatisation and pathologisation of (prevalently male) homosexuality. One of the harshest consequences of this interpretative factor was that the widespread contagion amongst members of other minoritarian affiliations and marginalised spheres of society – such as women, lesbians, African American, Asian American, Native American, Latino/a, Arab American, paupers and homeless – fell off the visibility spectrum and into oblivion. In her book *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), Ann Cvetkovich locates the work of political practices grounded in material lives and bodies of those who experienced the trauma of the disease(d) – including people of color, women and/or lesbian bodies and those who gathered around them – to reclaim for these ‘agents’ a site off/for radical in(ter)ventions of desire, resistance and community, and a space of historical and personal loss.



masculine woman,” Tolentino hosts the vivid consciousness of un-belonging in the spheres of physical and social visibility whilst carrying the strange legacy of “being with people when they died,” and “feeling responsible for their presence.”<sup>26</sup>

From her long-term involvement in ACT UP to her work as founder and promoter of the legendary NYC Clit Club,<sup>27</sup> for over two decades Tolentino has incorporated the minoritarian counter-politics of queer sexual subcultures, Eastern healing arts practices, AIDS, and queer cultural activism. To the gruesome realities of the epidemic she responded with the “positively masochistic flair”<sup>28</sup> of symbolic acts of constraint that penetrate, rip, and scar the flesh to demand the time and space to *feel* the ethical possibilities of cultivating queer affinities, in pleasure and pain, and acknowledge what is vital in the composition of such ‘blood’ relations.

In her contribution to Athey’s recent monographic volume, “The Irreplaceable Bodies,” she talks about the resistance and ‘bonding’ at play when bodies are pressed together to exude their politics of survival:

AIDS in its rude wake could turn us to stone, leaving the frozen in place (forever even) while our bodies carried on and learned how to become more useful, useable, adaptable, erudite, articulate. It was as if we already knew it while learning more of its hideous nature. We used words like ‘plague,’ ‘massacre,’ ‘shame.’ We would spend the rest of our lives reacting to and unveiling its global and localized wrath. Ron [Athey], his work, and the tender and *willing* bodies of

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<sup>26</sup> These are excerpts from the dialogue that took place in occasion of the *Performing Idea* international symposium – October 2-9, 2010, Whitechapel Gallery and Toynbee Studios, London – the first installment of a larger project, *Performance Matters* (2009-2013), investigating the shifting relations between performance practice and discourse, event and writing. Complete video documentation of this and all the other related events can be accessed through the Study Room at Live Art Development Agency and at the British Library. I would here like to thank the Live Art Development Agency for providing unlimited and free access to their invaluable resources.

<sup>27</sup> Tolentino has also been a member of the advisory board for the Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender Anti-Violence Project of New York City. She is the co-author of the Lesbian AIDS Project’s *Women’s Safer Sex Handbook*, and was a founding member of ACT UP New York’s House of Color Video Collective.

<sup>28</sup> See the interview with the artist on *Performance Art World*, <<http://performanceartworld.wordpress.com/2010/06/20/julie-tolentino/>>.

his own army of lovers grew up within this radicality.<sup>29</sup>

The tensions resulting from such malleability and radicality relay abrasive legacies of seismic zones where layers of skin and flesh and blood converge and rub against one another producing transpressional intensities and flows that individually assert shared narratives, which eventually emerge into public memory. In respect of the plurality invested in this relay, the energetic field generated by these ruptures – raptures – reveals, as Doyle observes, “how it feels to occupy a position, to be in a specific kind of body, to belong to a certain community, to survive, to experience, or to be asked to embody the experience for others.”<sup>30</sup> This transduction by way of the relation to the other and other bodies compels the recognition of the rarefied temporalities of being and of the fragility, impermanence and mortality of experience – and the understanding of what this recognition means for singular beings. Tolentino takes into account this symbolic milieu when she refers to the consciousness of limits – welcomed, returned to, and exceeded: “[f]ragility, like barebacking, offers what we can live with, what risk is, what protection feels like. These were the economies that illuminate our AIDS. Still.”<sup>31</sup>

*The Sky Remains the Same* multiplies the deep pleasure – with pain – of offering up to the world a bare back, an unswathed crevice that opens on the verge of sense and sensibility. The flesh *and* blood of this archival corps(e) craves the risk and relief of vulnerability and finitude in the form of an abject position that allows one to endure. This ‘monstrance’ represents a willful act to challenge and test the biological and social capacities to host a foreign body in its forms of dispersal and dissipation. It is a mode of passing singular to historic bodies marked with a particular logic of disappearance. It is a kind of energy in transit spreading from the unsettled grounds of a violent scene that is preserved in a sharing out

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<sup>29</sup> Julie Tolentino, “The Irreplaceable Bodies: Resistance through Ferocious Fragility,” in *Pleading in the Blood* (op. cit.), 116.

<sup>30</sup> Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Duke University Press, 2013). I no longer have access to this copy to provide an accurate page number.

<sup>31</sup> Tolentino, “The Irreplaceable Bodies,” 116.

configured as the transmission not of meaning or form, not of symptoms or diagnosis, not of any content at all, but of a practice of future memory without a subject; the transmission of transmissibility itself. Showing the rear-side of a history that gets under the skin, the acts of recurring self-obliteration to which Tolentino lends her body, after Athey, expose the intercorporeality of their 'unworking' as the gift of incomplete sharing, drawing on Jean-Luc Nancy, we could say that:

theatre here no longer means the scene of representation: it means the extreme edge of this scene, the dividing line where singular beings are exposed are exposed to one another. What is shared on this extreme and difficult limit is not communion, not the completed identity of all in one, nor any kind of completed identity. What is shared therefore is not the annulment of sharing, but sharing itself, and consequently everyone's nonidentity, each one's nonidentity to himself and to others, and the nonidentity of the work to itself.<sup>32</sup>

Under those conditions of appearance and in this space of expanded sharing of difference, we can find time that amplifies experience in its *in*-forming potential. But we're getting ahead of ourselves... Let's turn back a little.

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<sup>32</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (op. cit.), 66. I will return to Nancy's theory towards the end of this segment.

## Open Corpus

There are many possible points of entry into Ron Athey's and Julie Tolentino's intricate and generous archival corpus; the wound, the orifice, the scar being only some of the most practiced (breaking and entering) routes. I will here strive to come into it from a more transversal and marginal trajectory, cutting through the coupling of resonating texts that will only touch on these contact points in the attempt to get deeper, not into the subject, but inside the fabric of relational singularities – and pluralities – that keep 'coming up,' together, in the space and time of the body's (re)emergence.

To begin, once more, I feel compelled to acknowledge André Lepecki's analysis of Tolentino's "intensely corporeal" archival project in the context of his exploration of contemporary and experimental practices of re-enactment in performance art, visual art and particularly dance.<sup>33</sup> In his examination, Lepecki posits the notion of the body *as* archive on the basis of the expression of "a specifically choreographic 'will to archive'" that he proposes as "an alternative affective, political, and aesthetic frame for recent dance re-enactments – as well as for their relations to archival forces, impulses, or systems of command."<sup>34</sup>

In his vision, the artistic desire to archive derives neither from an "impulse" or a "drive,"<sup>35</sup> but rather from a capacity to "will" into presence the non-exhausted creative fields of "impalpable possibilities"<sup>36</sup> inherent in a past work. These recollections can then be recognised as occupying an exteriorised and interiorised site of actualisation:

Because of these pressures toward *embodied* actualizations, every will to archive in dance must lead to a will to re-enact dances. Such an indissociable

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<sup>33</sup> Lepecki, "The Body as Archive" (op. cit.). The author here explores Tolentino's project alongside *Urheben Aufheben* by Nachbar and the works of Richard Move related to the dance works of Martha Graham.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>35</sup> The author here reacts critically to Hal Foster's and Jessica Santone's respective positions towards the notion of the archive of performance.

<sup>36</sup> Lepecki borrows this expression from Brian Massumi, see *Parables for the Virtual* (op. cit.), 91.

link means that each 'will' acts upon the other to re-define what is understood by 'archiving' and what is understood by 're-enacting.' This redefining action is carried out through a common articulator: the dancer's body. [...] in dance re-enactments there will be no distinctions left between archive and body. The body is archive and archive a body.<sup>37</sup>

In considering this 'extreme' case of one artist corpo-realising the work of another in the time warp of exhausting repetition, Lepecki's philosophical perspective reminds us that the body is central to the process. In alighting on *excorporations* and *incorporations*, transmissions and alliances as the willful and generous processes underlying Tolentino's tribute, the author's argument resonates with a Deleuzian politics of becoming that affords a "release"<sup>38</sup> of the many (virtual) possibilities of *invention* that rest within the work itself: there must be *somebody* to turn this potential into impossible and compossible actualisations. Ultimately, the analysis leads to the premise of an intensely corporeal relationship of *creativity* with the afterlives of movement, which in Tolentino's case is played out as the (masochistic)<sup>39</sup> excorporation of Athey's gestures:

Through Tolentino's immediate re-enacting of a piece in order to corporeally archive it (for her life's duration), Athey's performance does not disappear into the past but zooms into the all-encompassing field of the possible defined by that indetermination that is a body. Athey's piece rushes into yet to be actualized afterlives, into the multiple, unmetaphorical, objective reality of the virtual incarnated in a body. Tolentino's body becomes the living archive of what, one day, will come back around – as it passes away. Dance.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Lepecki, "The Body as Archive," 31, original emphasis.

<sup>38</sup> From the house arrest Jacques Derrida exemplifies in his reflections on archives as *domiciliation* in Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>39</sup> I will return to the meaning of these self-effacing tendencies later in these discussions.

<sup>40</sup> Lepecki, "The Body as Archive," 34.

In attending to Tolentino's ecstatic re-enactment, I share Lepecki's interest in an archival body that operates directly on the charge of the/a will, but whilst his analysis is firmly grounded on Deleuze's identification of the "will" as a positive, nonreactive force that enables forms of creativity<sup>41</sup> that release the past from command, my considerations will spin out of Sara Ahmed's feminist, queer and anti-racist politics of the will, in all its deliberate fullness, in order to explore the radical agency of what 'comes up' before and against authoritative systems of arrest. These engagements will (to) offer a reading that (of necessity) insinuates itself within the body of Tolentino's archive only to venture elsewhere, to think marginally, peripherally and unexpectedly: to feel otherwise.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 45-6.

## Disturbing Grounds

In her latest research project,<sup>42</sup> Sara Ahmed constructs a powerful willfulness archive by “following around” the figure of the willful subject, tracking where, when and how it is found. Her story/ing begins with a tale, possibly the grimmest of the Grimms' household tales, called “The Willful Child:”

Once upon a time there was a child who was willful, and would not doeth as her mother wished. For this reason God had no pleasure in her, and let her become ill, and no doctor could do her any good, and in a short time she lay on her death-bed. When she had been lowered into her grave, and the earth was spread over her, all at once her arm came out again, and stretched upwards, and when they had put it in and spread fresh earth over it, it was all to no purpose, for the arm always came out again. Then the mother herself was obliged to go to the grave, and strike the arm with a rod, and when she had done that, it was drawn in, and then at last the child had rest beneath the ground.<sup>43</sup>

Ahmed proceeds to unpack the story of the child, of the arm of the child, of the rod that strikes the arm, of the disturbance left in place of the arm as a synecdoche for, respectively, the modes of dissent, resistance, authority, and participation that close attention to willfulness reveals. The story of the feral child unleashes a history of the will of those who refuse to ‘go along’ and ‘get along.’ One definition of willfulness, Ahmed notes, is: “asserting or disposed to assert one’s own will against persuasion, construction or command; governed by will without

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<sup>42</sup> In the following discussions, I will interweave the reading of the following texts all articulating Ahmed’s most recent concerns with the deviant charges brought to bear by ‘willfulness:’ “A Willfulness Archive,” *Theory & Event* 15.3 (2012), <[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v015/15.3.ahmed.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v015/15.3.ahmed.html)>; “Whiteness and the General Will: Diversity Work as Willful Work,” *philoSOPHIA* 2.1 (2012); “Willful Parts: Problem Characters or the Problem of Character,” *New Literary History* 42.2 (Spring 2011); and also “Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects),” *The Scholar & Feminist Online* 8.3 (2010), <[http://sfonline.barnard.edu/polyphonic/ahmed\\_01.htm](http://sfonline.barnard.edu/polyphonic/ahmed_01.htm)>.

<sup>43</sup> Ahmed, “A Willfulness Archive.”

regard to reason; determined to take one's own way; obstinately self-willed or perverse."<sup>44</sup> A willful character can then be called obstinate or perverse if it insists on willing its own way.

Thus, willfulness can become a moral diagnosis: to be willful is to deviate; to have willfulness is to have a bad will, an ill will, to will one's own way is to will the wrong way, such deviance (defiance) of the will must be quenched in the name of getting straightened out: "[i]f willfulness is willing wrong, then one must learn to will right. Willfulness 'comes up' as what must be eliminated from will: perhaps the moral of the story is that the arm must become the rod, the agent for eliminating willfulness, for straightening the wayward part."<sup>45</sup> The lesson to be learnt then is that, since disobedience is "the wrong 'bent' of will," then "straightening the will becomes a moral imperative [that] suggests that the will is already bent."<sup>46</sup>

The history of the will then, Ahmed proposes, could be thought of as a queer history, a history of the wayward, of the wandering, and of the deviant. The stray path of this history is marked with the violence, perversion and dangerous errancy<sup>47</sup> echoed by Athey's and Tolentino's hauntingly deviant bodies.<sup>48</sup> It is in this echo, in this resonance that I think we can encounter and attend to the ghosts of the past – and present – martyrdoms of those whose raced, sexed, and queer difference willfully fail(ed) to conform, comply, or *go with the flow*. We shall then follow some of the forms of incorporation – and excorporation – of will that attest and 'demonstrate' all the willfulness involved in resistance.

Athey's significant body of work testifies to a willingness to explore quite explicitly the wayward desires and pleasures of the subject who fails to follow the rules. His 'bent' on

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ahmed, "Whiteness and the General Will," 4.

<sup>46</sup> Ahmed, "A Willfulness Archive." It is perhaps worth here reminding that the word 'bent' in informal language is used as derogatory term for homosexual.

<sup>47</sup> This term shares its roots with error: to err is to stray from the path of 'justice,' or the 'law.'

<sup>48</sup> The choice of wording here is strictly connected to and determined by the event here re-evoked, namely *Resonate/Obliterate*, which, one could say, does what it says. A resonance, in fact, is an echo – a delayed return (of sound); an incomplete reproduction that, like in the case of the event that here generates the emergence of vibrations, reverberates between distant points – in space and time. What reaches the senses is a phantom effect determined by deviations (of sound waves) that create gaps of, or obliterate, intelligibility. See also Joan W. Scott, "Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 27.2 (Winter 2001): 291.



performance art can be described as a kind of pervert erotic will, often tinged with violence; his stage persona as a fetishist that gives sexual resonance to things animate and inanimate, as a fantasy-ridden maniac wandering and getting lost in the dimensions of unreality, surreality and hyper-reality of flesh and blood, constantly confusing – and confronting – his carnal visions with the reality of his own obsessions. Thus we should grasp the willful position of this perverse child who is taken up with fantasies of (self-)obliteration.

Athey is purported as being the (post-)modern and (post-)AIDS avatar of a long (blood-)line of willful wayward, deviant queer children. Yet, it is necessary to situate his visceral practice within the context of his biography to clarify the extent to which this charge<sup>49</sup> ‘comes up’ against his own life experiences by way of excavating the less evident violence of accounting for his willful turn.<sup>50</sup> Most importantly, at least in the realm of these reflections, Athey’s own grim history allows an insight into how the unique qualities of his corporeal life came to bear so forcefully on his artistic corpus in ways that no conventional hermeneutics could ever relay.

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<sup>49</sup> Using this term, Ahmed notes: “willfulness usually takes the form of a charge. Can what we are charged with become a charge in Alice Walker’s sense, a way of being in charge? If we are charged with willfulness, then we can accept and mobilize this charge” (“A Willfulness Archive”).

<sup>50</sup> For, Ahmed explains, in the liberal tradition of thought, “the violence of accounting for willfulness is less visible,” if perhaps more pernicious (“A Willfulness Archive”).

## Born(e) Again Backwards

Athey's ritualised perversions,<sup>51</sup> evolve around multiple forms of recovery of past memories – visions and echoes – from his childhood years.<sup>52</sup> The central motifs of his pseudo-religious *tableaux vivant* draw blood from the dysfunctional organism from which he burst out. An inventory from the extemporaneous chronicles that he provides in *Pleading in the Blood* makes this seepage all too clear: “[d]uring Joyce’s<sup>53</sup> pregnancy with me, her 19-year-old sister Vena prophesied that I had the calling on my life, and would become a powerful minister. They said that once out of my mother’s body, I was surrounded by a cracking blue force field. So was the sign. I was raised according to the prophecy.”<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere he recounts that: “[a]ccording to this message from the holiest of holies, I was to sacrifice the playthings of the world, in order to fulfil the plans of God.”<sup>55</sup> Perhaps that was God’s will but Ron’s willfulness had a different inclination, but all in good time...

In ‘reality,’ Athey’s family played out its misery in Pomona, “the gateway to the Inland Empire, the furthest suburb east in LA County,”<sup>56</sup> where he was raised<sup>57</sup> together with his siblings by

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<sup>51</sup> I should here clarify that in these discussions the forms derived from the Latin *pervertere*: to overturn, subvert, equivalent, in all their declinations, reclaim both positive and negative acceptations in relation and against social order (as we know it).

<sup>52</sup> The tales of his misadventures in the world of religious zeal and moral beatitude during his early years are reproduced and revisited widely in interviews, critical reviews and meta-texts. While my argument here makes considerable use of this miscellaneous material, I draw mainly on the monographic anthology *Pleading in the Blood*, for its breath of information includes Athey’s own writing of his memoirs.

<sup>53</sup> Joyce was Athey’s mother. She was diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic, manic-depressive, and suffered from severe epileptic seizures. She lived with the rest of the family only intermittently for several years until she was permanently remanded to psychiatric care after she suffered a poignantly traumatic attack, here the description of the accident: “[t]hat particular day was the one and only time I ever remember [Joyce] cooking. [...] After making a trip from the stove to the table, she stopped functioning and stared straight ahead, mumbled noises in an increasing volume while her body stiffened, then trembled, and took off. There was a crash and she dove through the plate glass window. Joyce was lying face down in the garden, still convulsing. I remember there being blood and glass everywhere, an especially thick paste of blood forming in her hair” (Johnson, *Pleading in the Blood*, 47-8). I am sure it is not necessary to point out how this scene is viscerally evocative of the mess of glass, blood and hair in *Self-Obliteration*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>57</sup> Ronald Lee Athey was originally born in Connecticut in 1961. After his parents divorced, his father was denied visitation rights. Soon it became apparent that his mother was not in a fit state to look after her four children (two brothers and two sisters), hence the grandparents relocated the entire family on the edge of LA.

his dominating – dominatrix<sup>58</sup> – ‘grandma’ Annie Lou and aunt Vena. An outcast amongst the outcasts, he recalls: “[w]e were the only white family within a square mile. In the isolation of being whites in a fifty-fifty black and Chicano neighbourhood, my grandmother’s racism isolated us even further.”<sup>59</sup> His painful evangelical Pentecostal upbringing was fruit of his grandmother’s and Aunt Vena’s religious zeal latched on to doomsday fantasies.<sup>60</sup> From his earliest years, Ron was groomed to be the family’s gateway to deliverance. His awareness of himself as different from others was heightened when he attended the ‘bleeding grounds’ of Glory Crusades, healing services and revival ceremonies,<sup>61</sup> where he gave himself over to the affecting rapture of spectacular Gifts of the Spirit: chaotic Tongues, delivered Prophecies, and mostly, oozing Stigmata.<sup>62</sup>

However, his forays into the cultivation of his assignation alternated with the consciousness of a ‘troubled faith’ running deeper than his calling:

One night my whole family was in the living room watching TV. It was the first time the movie *Sybil* [...] was being shown, and I remember having unbearable feelings of embarrassment and shame: because my mother was schizophrenic, heard voices and bore different personalities; because my sister’s female organs were damaged; because Vena’s mother was still giving her weekly, closed-door, Betadine douches in a red-hot, dripping steamy bathroom. All I had known up to that point was that we were the most important family in the world, chosen by

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<sup>58</sup> Athey reports how grandmother and aunt had a ‘strange relationship;’ they shared a bed and Betadine douches. Vena and her mother would regularly go into the bathroom where the latter repeatedly rinsed the other one out with water and the Betadine solution. The artist revisits this incestuous relationship in a graphic rendition of these ‘cleansing’ rituals in the form of a video – *Vena Mea* (2001) in which the role of mother-dominatrix is endowed on artist Sheree Rose who gives fellow Patty Powers a Betadine douche before vaginally fisting her. This video was shown as part of *JOYCE* (2002), Athey’s family saga of matriarchal madness.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>60</sup> Theirs were rather spurious practices often more spiritualist than Pentecostal, which included the scrying of crystal balls, astrology and the interpretation of dreams, regular visits to psychics, as well as automatic writing to channel the spirits. No explanation ever transpired for such anomaly. See Johnson, *Pleading in the Blood*, 186.

<sup>61</sup> These rituals often included the seeping of fluids, one example: cancers miraculously ‘cured’ by being vomited into special bowls.

<sup>62</sup> The spontaneous bleeding in the body parts where the wounds of Christ bled.

God to kick-start Armageddon.<sup>63</sup>

To the dismay of his instigators, Athey turned out to be wild, combative, defiant, and queer. At 15, his messianic spirit began to unravel and, after a near break down,<sup>64</sup> he left his home and the women who indelibly marked his life in a (self-)destructive frenzy to pursue his ‘unnatural,’ deviant passions. In her poetic homage to Athey “Joyce: The Violent Disbelief of Ron Athey,”<sup>65</sup> artist Lydia Lunch writes: “[t]he cycle of abuse changes course only once you have decided to own your self-flagellation, not simply as revenge or repetition of the crimes committed against you, but in celebration as ritual to all that has been *wilfully* overcome.”<sup>66</sup> As urgently as he needed to break free of his subjection, its constraints swiftly became the driving force of his willful turn. Athey’s autobiographical notes on his coming-of-age are harrowing, with a faint vein of self-irony: “I was raised in the realm of God, channelled spirits in an un-Christian-like manner, and walked away daring to be a mystical atheist. In my destruction, I barely survived drug addiction, then recovered and became ‘innocent,’ like an injured child. And then with finesse, aggressively present.”<sup>67</sup>

Athey burnt bright with rage and grief and used his rebellious sexuality as fuel. He toyed with all sorts of transgressive sexual, and in particular sadomasochistic, practices and experimentations. He started to make pockets of freedom that became chasms, using his and other carnal cultures as talismans and unconsecrated objects of revelry:

My schooling after the Armageddon of childhood was in the punk scene, drug experimentation (and addiction), death rock, and the psycho/neuro revelations of industrial culture. As a teen, literature saved my life. I read Genet and Smith and

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<sup>63</sup> Johnson, *Pleading in the Blood*, 42.

<sup>64</sup> Athey suffered from deep self-loathing and suicidal self-doubt. In the video *Ronnie Lee* (2001) – also part of the multimedia presentation for *JOYCE* – features Gene Grigorits as the teenage artist absorbed in a scene of self-mutilation.

<sup>65</sup> Also in Johnson, *Pleading in the Blood* (op.cit.), 194-197.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 194, my emphasis.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

Gide and Sartre and Camus and Burroughs. Later, I read Wojnarowicz and Cooper and Jarman. I adored Pasolini and Fassbinder. I was trying to find something worthy to believe in, to see a precedent, or at least to educate myself into an acceptable reality. It was not going to be pretty, but it was already laid out for me. I had to know this history and feel it. It finally came down to finding living people I could relate to, and new obsessions. Body piercings became my kink. Tattooes saved my life. Modern primitives became a new religion, which quickly turned into a clown show.<sup>68</sup>

Athey transformed himself and resurrected from reared messiah of the suburbs to fallen angel of the underworld, developing a special blood-alchemy with the damaged, the ill fated; the wretched. Sarah Ahmed notes:

The figure of the willful wanderer shares a history with the wretch. Wretched in the sense of vile, 'despicable person' was developed in Old English and is said to reflect 'the sorry state of the outcast.' The sorrow of the stranger is pedagogic not because it teaches us what it is like or must be like to be a stranger, but because it might estrange us from the very happiness of the familiar. There can be unhappiness in the failure to recede. Being willing to cause unhappiness might even turn willfulness into a political cause.<sup>69</sup>

Athey resists yielding his individual will to the pressure to follow the family line and instead asserts his own will as the force leading, unambiguously, to his being seceded from the familiar niche to stray, wander and err away from the right path; the straight path. Hence, this wayward child is destined to be read as the cause of unhappy feelings. Such is the faith and *singularity* of queer children – children who are disinclined from the normative route – and

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 101-2.

<sup>69</sup> Ahmed, "A Willfulness Archive."

which makes them emblematic of a general problem: the dramatically mismatched feelings and movements from different temporalities and from multilayered backward and sideways inclinations: “[t]o break from the bond of marriage or family is regarded as self-willed, as putting yourself before others. We could note as an aside here how queerness is often regarded as self-regard, turning away from the straight path as a turning toward oneself.”<sup>70</sup>

This pivotal turn is a way to face oneself and feel beside oneself; it’s a way of being birthed again, backward. The queer child symbolises yet another significant feature: to be born(e) again,<sup>71</sup> backward from the point of entry into one’s willful (sexual) desire and pleasure, whenever one’s straight destination (designation) has died. These ego-structures happen side by side, in lateral spread. This kind of deferred birthing mechanism makes the hunt for the ‘back matter’ of feelings and desires. Athey proves to be an incarnation – a kind of bent embodiment – of the will’s temporal back-and-forth mo(ve)ments, and sideways slides.

The site from which the artist had begun to derive his sensuous pleasure – the anus – becomes for him a significant topical point, as the giver of (new) life and, in the context of his HIV diagnosis, the giver of death. The anus, as anatomical feature and as metaphorical figure, becomes the extremely active, creative locus of both pleasurable and painful effects as well as of abundant, and abundantly fecund, symbolic matter. Athey’s operations of anality, and corporeality more generally, turn to face his representational life and the willingness to ‘come into his own.’ With a persevering and often perverse ‘self-will,’ the artist puts life through the loop of death, giving death license to spill into the world of the living.

Athey’s anus, functionally alive whilst symbolically dead, typifies the most negatively perverse aspects of his deviation. In the explicit rendering of his rectum’s bent, queer disposition, the

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<sup>70</sup> Poignantly, Ahmed adds: “[w]e could note also how the self-regard of heterosexuality can be concealed under the sign of the general will, because this particular will has already been *given expression* in the general will. Giving up a will that does not have a general expression is what allows you to inhabit the familiar, or to recede into the background. A queer phenomenology can teach us what or who recedes in the generalization of will” (ibid.).

<sup>71</sup> The emblematic climax of Heathfield’s contribution to *Pleading in the Blood* reads: “Athey is bare in a world of others. Being borne again” (222).

artist marks, by way of willful and translative inversion, the regulated rectitude to which its etymology still gives echoing evocation,<sup>72</sup> transferring to the conventionally straightening function of his rectum devastating forms of critically deviant engagements that attend to its active – and passive – work. An erotic of pain and pleasure comes to define much of the depth of the artist's moves, played out as they are in an on-going relationship between the rectum and the anus<sup>73</sup> – the straight and the bent. Emerging from this bottoming absorption, the artist's outlandish vision and imagination is intensely overwrought by the most directly influential figures in his creative life – Johanna Went, Bob Flanagan, Lawrence Steger, Sheree Rose. These lines of affiliation connect Athey to the powerfully forward-thrusting style of Mishima's, Ballard's, Bataille's, Genet's, Artaud's, de Sade's, Wojnarowicz's, Jarman's poetic lines.

Corresponding irregular, ekphrastic, and ecstatic alternate mo(ve)ments of expansion and contraction are the focus and direction of Athey's intentions in order to extract from that focal point some different, and differently prolific outcomes. His own 'solar anus'<sup>74</sup> becomes both the harbinger of pleasure and the guarantor of pain, and the most vivid evocation of what it means to live whilst dying, every day (a little) more. One must figure this chasm, this open wound, around which much of Athey's practice takes flesh, not as a vacant fissure betwixt the interior and the exterior, the self and the other, but rather, as a space *within* the self – the 'cave,' the 'abyss' that splits the self and constitutes it 'beside itself,' marking simultaneously its reciprocally disabling and enabling limits.

Practically determining his status as 'sexually queer' – by offering him recourse to one of the chief avenues of sexual pleasure available to queer men – and as a diseased person – by

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<sup>72</sup> The rectum is the "straight" intestine. Also see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Is the Rectum Straight?: Identification and Identity in *The Wings of the Dove*," in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1993).

<sup>73</sup> *Anus* is Latin for ring, a denomination that evokes its 'bent,' circular shape.

<sup>74</sup> Both his performance piece *Solar Anus* (1999) and the tattoo that figures his anus as the centre of a (black) sun spewing his rays outward are an homage to the work of Georges Bataille, whose essay of the same name provided pivotal inspiration and guidance through his 'dark ages.' See Georges Bataille, "Solar Anus," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

being the marker of a (medical) condition that renders him 'other' than whole or healthy – Athey's guts take hold of his body with a 'monstrous' charge by virtue of expressing the magnitude and finitude of his very survival. This only adds to the monster sense of himself as a willful child obsessed with its own desire, already ostracised as a result of his bent tendencies. The figure of the monster becomes attached to the exact anatomical point where the quality of monstrosity is reinforced and complicated by the ways in which violent and intrusive procedures are visited on Athey's body through various and multiple acts of excretion and penetration. Beyond this, the monster also operates symbolically as one possible monstrosity of the abject qualities of birth and death. In this manner, the monster marks the backward birth that ironically and quite violently ushers in death.

The previously contained will is thus 'plugged' into the dark matter of (homo-)sexuality as something that 'keeps coming up' in all the wrong places. Following Ahmed's vagabond trail, I suggest that Athey's mischievous anus belongs to the same history as the arm in the Grimm story as it protrudes from *beyond the grave*; the history of a willful part that threatens to break the whole: "[a] rebellion is a rebellion of a part. The rebel is the one who compromises the whole, that is, the body of which she is a part,"<sup>75</sup> where the body is intended as the "social body."<sup>76</sup>

By reflecting on the relation between will and willfulness,<sup>77</sup> Ahmed relates this difference, through a series of synecdochic transfers, to the distinction between the rod and the arm; the differentiation between the whole and the part, as well as the separation between the general and particular will: "[t]he particular will names the will of a part. [...] If a part is to have a will of its own, then it must will what the whole of the body wills. The body part that does not submit its will to the primary will of the body causes disorder and mischief. The part that is apart

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<sup>75</sup> Ahmed, "A Willfulness Archive."

<sup>76</sup> Ahmed draws on Mary Poovey's work *Making a Social Body* to consider the 'social body' as an extension of the 'body politic.'

<sup>77</sup> With specific reference to the work of Augustine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, and Blaise Pascal.



causes the unhappiness of the body of which it was a part.”<sup>78</sup>

The willful part is the part that does not submit its will to the will of the whole – the general will – thus threatening the reproduction of an order and compromising the health of the body on which it depends. Willfulness thrives on the force of its separateness from the general will refusing to participate in a scene of death, that is, to perish in order to preserve the life and happiness of the whole. The willful drive responds to the most minimal of human instincts: survival. Hence, the particular/general forms of distinction provide the basis for a social distinction: “[g]iven the social is imagined as a body with parts, then some bodies more than others will be thought as the arms and feet of the social body. The New England reformer Samuel Gridley Howe, for example, describes ‘the laboring classes’ as ‘the feet of society; they support and carry the whole social body.’”<sup>79</sup> But what happens when the feet refuse to be sympathetic and become also arms and hands?<sup>80</sup> The unwillingness to comply with what the general will wills results in the diagnosing<sup>81</sup> of a disorder – a syndrome, if you will.<sup>82</sup>

Ahmed suggests: “[w]illfulness as a diagnosis could be a historical record of moments in which some parts fail in their duty *as parts* to carry and support the whole body. The part/whole distinction becomes a willing distinction: not simply a distinction between part and whole, but between parts, between those who are willing and those who are not.”<sup>83</sup> In the kinship of parts, the anus, like the feet, can bear (bare) the history of the hole that remains

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<sup>78</sup> Ahmed, “A Willfulness Archive.” The willful part thus, I propose, bears a resemblance with the phantom limb I have touched on in the first chapter – the sense of a part that gives rise to affective promptings that cannot be accounted within the will and design of the supposedly ‘whole’ body.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ahmed notes how the workers *in service* are the ones required to provide strong – and willing – arms to carry out the ‘handy’ work.

<sup>81</sup> Ahmed also notes that some parts escape the diagnosis if their will is accomplished by the general will, hence they acquire a certain freedom not to be supportive. She proposes a very poignant example in the much repeated speech act that we must all “tighten our belts,” where those who resist the command are deemed as self-willed, as putting themselves their own stomachs over and above the general interest. On the other hand, the will – and bonuses – of the financiers in the seats of command is purported by the general and greater interest of the presumed necessary capitalist will, thus preventing any judgment of willfulness from being followed through.

<sup>82</sup> This is my word. I do not intend here to pathologise the concept of willfulness but rather to highlight the syndrome as a form of attribution.

<sup>83</sup> Ahmed, “A Willfulness Archive,” original emphasis.

only just a part of the whole; of the bottom of society that denies the general will at the top.<sup>84</sup> It can tell the story of those “who are willing to be willful; who are willing to turn a diagnosis into an act of self-description.”<sup>85</sup>

Athey’s own story is the tale of a willful bottom. Like the willful girl’s arm rises from the grave, so this extremity comes to stand up by standing firm, perhaps in the will to belong, but more radically, in the stubborn refusal to get along, to go along with the flow; ready to endure the extended blow of the rod, or the pushing and shoving of those going the ‘right way,’ yet unwilling to be crushed into a deadened conformity.<sup>86</sup> Rather, it takes a backward rebirth: a renewal and revitalisation of budding possibilities. The ghastly butt rising from the dead, unsettling the ground is surely a very different sort of resurrection than the one propagated by the Christian myths, one that remains un-housed in the institutional terrains.<sup>87</sup> Gasping, longing, moving, this willful part reaches out to connect, to find a way to persist – to resist.

This disturbance in the ground brings forth other accretions; the emergence of other disobedient parts that come to feature, observable, on the surface of historical landmarks.

Ahmed points out: “[a]ctions that aim to reach for their own grounds can be considered part of our willfulness archive.”<sup>88</sup> As she explains, this expression resonates with the stretching of the meaning of the archive, or an evacuation of the archive altogether, for: “[a] willfulness archive would refer to the documents that are passed down in which ‘willfulness’ comes up, as a trait, perhaps even as a character trait.” Such trespass<sup>89</sup> cannot find domiciliation, even when it is put under house arrest:

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<sup>84</sup> Here, I don’t want to reassert but only confuse top/bottom dynamics.

<sup>85</sup> The extended quote reads: “[f]eminist, queer and anti-racist histories could be thought of as histories of those who are willing to be willful; who are willing to turn a diagnosis into an act of self-description” (Ahmed, “A Willfulness Archive”).

<sup>86</sup> In the context of going ‘against’ the flow, Ahmed clarifies that: “[w]illfulness might be bound up in some way with an experience of againstness. If willfulness comes up as “against” it is important that we not reduce willfulness to againstness. It is this reduction, after all, which allows the willful subject to be dismissed, as if she is only going “the other way” *because* she is for being against” (ibid., original emphasis).

<sup>87</sup> Due to the improper nature of his residence (ibid.).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> This term is equivalent to the Latin *transpassare* (*trāns*:- trans- and *passer*: to pass), hence ‘to pass over,’ ‘to pass across,’ *Oxford Dictionaries*, <<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/trespass>>.

To arrest can mean not only to 'cause to stop' but can also be used figuratively in the sense of to catch or to hold. The willful subject is under arrest in coming to appear to a watchful eye, to the eye of the law, as the one who *has* certain qualities and attributes. To be arrested is not here to be stationary: the one who is 'held up' is the one who wanders, who is wayward; who turns up by turning up in all the wrong places.<sup>90</sup>

Athey's willful history can be assembled under the sign of a vagrant archive that resonates 'queer,' surfacing what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick recognizes as inextinguishable: "a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, *troublant*. The word 'queer' itself means *across* – it comes from the Indo-European root – *twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torque* (to twist), English *athwart*."<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the events of the artist's resurgence are 'a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, *troublant*' that seeks to *cut* 'across' perversions and bodies that overlap, rub and converge in fields of political resistance. These fields 'come up' at the fault lines where deviations stratify under the visible gashes:

If willfulness is an attribution, a way of finding fault, then it can also be *the experience of an attribution*. Willfulness can be deposited in our bodies. And when willfulness is deposited in our bodies, then our bodies become part of a willfulness archive. To follow willfulness around requires moving out of the history of ideas and into everyday life-worlds. If we inherit this history, it is a history that gets under our skin.<sup>92</sup>

To negotiate the 'suspect terrane' of this history one requires not so much cognitive mastery, but a sensuously engaged, responsive presence, or what Ahmed calls: "a willingness *to*

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<sup>90</sup> Ahmed, "A Willfulness Archive."

<sup>91</sup> Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, xii, original emphasis.

<sup>92</sup> Ahmed, "A Willfulness Archive," original emphasis.

*assume the sign* of willfulness.”<sup>93</sup> And when ‘queer’ is at stake, this animate involvement often requires the voluntary assumption of stigma, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick poignantly evokes: “the conscious and willful marking of oneself as ‘tainted’ as a particular communicative and performative strategy grounded in visibility politics and practiced in the context of AIDS activism.”<sup>94</sup> Athey’s infected and infecting body of work comes upon the political scene enacting a visitation<sup>95</sup> that finds response and hospitality in the arms of willful strangers. Julie Tolentino’s archival body reaches out with open arms becoming the willful host of Athey’s wayward corpus.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., original emphasis.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Ahmed, “A Willfulness Archive.”

<sup>95</sup> Ahmed notes how visitation can mean a calling upon.

## (G)Hosting the Other

In her provocative study that recuperates the agency of the feminine within the tradition of home-giving/gifting, Tracy McNulty introduces hospitality as the act through which the host constitutes herself in the gesture of turning toward the outside.<sup>96</sup> However, this inversion reveals how the encounter with the strange(r) plays host to something else – the subject's fundamental strangeness and dispossession: "[w]e are 'hosts' to the erotic body, which dwells within us (the organism, the self) like a virus, overwriting the natural logic of the living being and undermining the integrity of the Self."<sup>97</sup>

By a slight deviation/derivation, I propose that Tolentino's habitation provides refuge to the outsider and outcast character of her experience; the willful, infectious strangeness already circulating – wandering – in her bloodstream. With a persevering and perverse will of her own, Tolentino embodies the promiscuous cross-troping of excessive desire and unstable sociality within a remarkable ambit of influence that includes some *enfants terribles* of the 80's avant-garde – her "friends/family:"

Dancenoise, Antony and Johanna + Black Lips at the Pyramid, actions of The Mary's, Art Positive (ACT UP), Lawrence Steger; Nan Goldin, Cookie Mueller, Sharon Niesp, Ray Navarro, Lola Flash, Gran Fury, Felix Gonzales Torres' candy piece and David Wojnarowicz' live readings at St Marks Church and the seminal performances by Diamanda Galas – Plague Mass and Schrei X, performed in complete darkness at PS122 (or was it The Kitchen?) Others: Jarman, Beuys and Joan Jonas's films, David Zambrano, Meg Stuart and Ishmael Houston Jones' dancing; Yoko Ono's Grapefruit, the Marina/Ulay period

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<sup>96</sup> Tracy McNulty, *The Hostess: Hospitality, Femininity, and the Expropriation of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), viii.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv.

(only), Adrian Piper, the ABC No Rio days, then the awe inspiring body of work by Franko B as well as the very early days of Fura Del Baus<sup>98</sup>...

Her sustained treatment of queer, feminist and anti-racist politics operates in a mode of complex, triangulated reciprocity that resists all the 'familiar' seductions with which the ways of power are willing to organize the ways of the flesh. Not distilling *soma* from *eros* from *ethnos*, she animates a tripling/troubling willful charge that takes a wide variety of forms, all of them symptomatic of a certain quality of hybridity associated with a "border" existence that refutes all conventional rhetorics of sexuality, ethnicity, and corporeality.

Debra Levine advances the idea that Tolentino's performance of hosting "comes from what Gloria Anzaldúa calls her '*mestiza* consciousness.'<sup>99</sup> Theorist, writer and activist-scholar Anzaldúa devised her concept – *la conciencia de la mestiza*<sup>100</sup> – as a transformative theory of shifting subjectivities:

The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images of her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts [...] collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war.<sup>101</sup>

By broadening the concepts of mestiza beyond geographic, ethnic, psychological, spiritual,

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<sup>98</sup> And the list goes on in her online interview Tolentino, *Performance Art World*.

<sup>99</sup> Debra Levine, "Queer Pleasures: Julie Tolentino Wood," *Hemispheric Institute E-Misférica*, <<http://hemi.ps.tsoa.nyu.edu/hemi/fr/julie-tolentino-wood-intro>>.

<sup>100</sup> I shall translate this as 'the consciousness of mixed racial bodies' – something that all humans largely share – extending out the deeper metaphorical structure that, in Anzaldúa's writings, transverses Chicana heritage and culture, but already points beyond ethnicity. See Martina Kogeler-Abdi, "Shifting Subjectivities: Mestizas, Nepantleras, and Gloria Anzaldúa's Legacy," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 38.2 (Summer 2013).

<sup>101</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books 1987), 80.

and other affiliations, Anzaldúa's visions create alternative prisms of identities that potentially push realities, through literary and spiritual activism, toward the crossbreeding of cultures: "the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy."<sup>102</sup>

The consciousness of this 'crossbleeding' is embedded, I argue, in Tolentino's very own flesh, and in performance she wears it on her skin. Her stage becomes a 'borderland' of material and psychic communities of bodies that emerge around her presence. This temporary and shifting architecture houses a scene of striking intimacy, Debra Levine artfully sketches this picture in relation to her performance of *For You* and *A True Story About Two People*:

[they] are little hothouses of affective possibility, intimate one-on-one private durational events in temporary structures that squat in larger public art spaces. Positioned in varying degrees of proximity to Tolentino's performing body, the spectator can choose her/his own level of participation and observe him/herself in relationship to the community that emerges around Tolentino's presence. These communities, always shifting and plural, are elective ones.<sup>103</sup>

These environments urge upon the event what I would call a 'poetics of relationality' that necessarily deforms the common of 'community' as an ostensible whole; if only partially characterized by their minoritarian (political) proclivities, her audiences are defined by no other quality than being able to 'feel.' In this vein, Levine proposes: "[c]areful never to prescribe any particular way that an act of intimacy can affect an/other, her work allows each participant to *feel* the ethical possibilities of what can be experienced as beings-in-common in

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., preface.

<sup>103</sup> Debra Levine, "Queer Pleasures."

each ephemeral encounter.”<sup>104</sup>

This very ‘being together’ is experienced as a radical extimacy – Jacques Lacan’s term for the uncanny foreignness within the subject, its non-identity to itself, which threatens its sovereign existence, and that I have been translating in this study as a ‘being-beside-itself’ of the subject. This concept recovers the primary place of ethics to every possibility of dwelling as being proximate to the neighbour – the outside(r) of the self. Ahmed notes how “[a] story of differentiations always begins as a story of proximity.”<sup>105</sup> It is this ‘being-beside’ as ‘being-with,’ I suggest, that willfulness takes or holds up as a place to manifest, to ‘demonstrate.’ Ahmed also marks the radical provenience of this term: “[t]he word “demonstrate” shares its root with ‘monster.’ Together bodies can become monstrous.”<sup>106</sup>

Tolentino’s artistic corpus gets in the way of a residence by ‘hosting’ a certain ‘hostility’ – a monstrous will, if you will – that puts her body in the way, turning her body into a blockage point. In Ahmed’s proposition: “[o]ne could think of the hunger strike as the purest form of willfulness: a body whose agency is expressed by being reduced to obstruction, where the obstruction to others is self-obstruction, the obstruction of the passage into the body.”<sup>107</sup> The artist, I advance, similarly operates creating a visceral and emotional language requiring a ‘binding’ and ‘arresting’ symbolism.

Tolentino’s choreography often emerges in the relation between ritual and contextual constraints and obstructions, and the capacities and tendencies of the body to endure/perform them. In *Cry of Love* (2010) she has a heavy twine wrapped over her face; in *Mestiza-Que Bonitos Ojos Tienes* (1998) her lips are pierced and sewn together with hypodermic needles; in *A True Story About Two People* (2005) she dances blindfolded in a mirror box with a procession of bodies for 24 hours, exchanging contact, odours, and spoken words; in *Honey* –

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ahmed, “A Willfulness Archive.”

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.



*standing* (2012) she has the nectar poured over her open mouth for 4.5 hours, in *UNTITLED (WIND) 16665 Mulholland Drive* (2013) – a recent performance for camera – her face/body is surrounded by a large plastic-sheet that takes hold of it as together they fight the rampant wind of the lower California desert.

The symbolic moves of the artist act on the nature of surviving as a structure that enables us to persist, to persevere. I am interested in trying to bring some of these varying strains into more direct contact with one another as responding to a desire to connect, to form attachments, through erotic and aesthetic operations. One area that is often a fixture/fissure in Tolentino's performance world is an intense focus on the upper extremity of the body – the head, the face, the mouth. From one symbolic form to another, the face is surrounded, the mouth occluded, the eyes covered, the lips sealed, the head bound, the mouth caught in address. In particular, the most polyvalent erotogenic zone turns out to be the mouth as the main locus of restraint and obstruction, release and respite.

The opening of the face becomes the over-determined gaping hole which acts like a conduit with the world determining the levels of inclusion and expulsion; of contact with the 'strange(r)' inside and outside. I want to make a connection here between Tolentino's insistently facial and Athey's perversely anal aesthetic dispositions: there is an intensely carnal thread connecting Athey's 'saturated anus' and Tolentino's 'sutured lips;' between her stuffed mouth and his plugged hole. The red mouth, opening and closing at the seams, like a *wound*, enacts yet other forms of deviation – exhalation and inspiration – that are the constant reminder of a vital and mortal force.

The vacant space left by the parted lips, around which Tolentino choreographs her "obstructions, suffocation, urgency, immersion, isolation,"<sup>108</sup> is akin to the vacancy I referred to

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<sup>108</sup> These are some of the concerns she expresses in the description of one of her latest pieces. See Julie Tolentino, "Past/Upcoming Live Events," *Tolentino Projects*, <<http://www.julietolentino.com/TOLENTINOPROJECTS/Performance/Performance.html>>.

earlier as the 'cave,' the 'abyss,' which appears in Athey's work. The simultaneously metaphoric and synecdochic operation of the abyss(al) in relation to Athey's profound cavity also qualifies for Tolentino's deep split in another significant moment of making-oneself-abyssal. This interstitial space always *in part* necessarily qualifies the status of the other in relation to the self, but also establishes the structural inevitability of the foreign within/beside the self that demands hospitality.

In Tolentino, the signifier that connects these formal points is 'you;' that is, the pronoun, both singular and plural, which, in my view, most potently performs a simultaneously vital and mortal function as the absent suffix or adjunct to every last connective line: *For You* (2003);<sup>109</sup> *Cry of Love -for you; Mestiza-Que Bonitos Ojos Tienes -tu; A True Story About Two People - me and you; Honey – standing -with you...* Julie Tolentino's homage to Athey's life anthology begins with an epigraph:

What is the point? What is the point? What is the point? What is the point? [...]

You. You are the point.

– Patty Smith, *The Coral Sea*, Performance II, Part Six<sup>110</sup>

It is the 'you' that names a complex, perhaps endless, series of absences and presences, starting certainly with the subjects and objects inhabiting (and abandoning) her body – her life – but that in performance extends outside and beyond to include her audience, her temporary community; a population which is called into intimate communication with the artist by the moves that proliferate in the gap, in the absence left by one or another departing friend, lover, comrade, *anyone* that she wishes to hold/host, again, close as she did before, in the pointless

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<sup>109</sup> This was a one-to-one performance where the willing audience had to book an individual appointment to witness Tolentino perform a 15 minute solo dance work created – and adapted – for each single covenant. This performance occurred repeatedly over an 8-hour period, every day for about two weeks.

<sup>110</sup> Tolentino, "The Irreplaceable Bodies," 110.

space between 'me' and an 'other:' the absent *you*.<sup>111</sup>

The 'point of you' is the abyssal point of departure from which the ethic, the erotic, and the aesthetic all line up in Tolentino's work; a line of connection to others. The 'you' hence comes to represent a ghost figure – a certain *virtuality* of a relation to the other – that appears to us, that hails us, that reaches out.<sup>112</sup> The moment of contact – we shall call it love – no longer occurs in the material fulfilment of the willful desire, but in its indetermination *en abyme*, in its continuance *in absentia*. The artist's corpus plays host to this 'foreign' body; her performances are acts of recovery and unfolding, a twofold mo(ve)ment of hospitality – in space and in time – which in turn forges a language of kinship as an irreducible and active contamination.

Tolentino's constructions invite the guest and the (g)host into a mirrored ballroom that frames an experience of being-in-common founded on the basis of an emotional affectivity/infectivity. The principle, the point of these visitations, is of gathering together to occupy space and time to reclaim *a-part*: to demonstrate willfulness, to raise a sound. The artist's (g)hosting becomes a figure/figuration of her queer politics. Her 'wounded' qua figurations of obstruction and occlusion provoke a deviation from the norm that is exposed via the body. To take up these nodes, these disturbances – inflections in orientations – can generate a rhythm capable of giving resonance to willful parts – limbs that can be feet, bottoms, mouths, breasts, arms severed from the (general) will's organic wholeness.

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<sup>111</sup> Probably this you has long been incorporated by the presence of Stosh Fila aka Pigpen, Tolentino's long-term collaborator, lover, fellow-artist, comrade, life-partner.

<sup>112</sup> The ghost here can figure as prosopopeia: the apostrophe of an absent or disappeared (disobedient?) part or (willful) entity. See also previous chapter.

## Monstrous Affinities

There is a kinship of sorts between wilfully inverted parts; a transmissible stigma passed back and forth, its infectiousness sparing no one. Its force can be found in the ethical grounds of survival; its resistance can be met by a deadly price, but even then it remains the most fundamental of human needs – a touch of recognition. Ahmed writes: “[t]he arm that keeps coming out of the grave can signify not only persistence and protest, or perhaps even more importantly persistence *as* protest, but also a line of connection to others.”<sup>113</sup> The persistence of some parts encounters the nonsurvival of others, but rather than returning blow for blow, it is far better to throw away all protection, to redirect all the arm through an act of willfulness, and reach: “reaching up, reaching out, reaching for something that is not yet present, something that appears only as shimmer, a horizon of possibility.”<sup>114</sup>

These possible futures haunt Tolentino’s and Athey’s queer dispositions and monstrous figurations. When the call *of* arms passed over their bodies, they made of contrariness, perversion – the turning aside from what is proper – their own conversion. When their wandering paths crossed, they fell into each other and came together at once. Tolentino’s affinity for Athey was initially induced by Larry Steger, the latter indirectly producing lines of kinship through his writing. Tolentino recalls: “we forged a distance-bound ‘we’ formed by our combinations of duos, driven by unveiling queer underworlds, articulating survival tactics, producing, performing and supporting each other from and within our own well-traded undergrounds: our early acts of be(com)ing political together. Each one of us on a verge”<sup>115</sup>

Through reciprocal cultivation of their talent and creativity, they forged a dynamic enterprise of complex, hybridizing cross-fertilization that eventually produced their intricate, generous

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<sup>113</sup> Ahmed, “A Willfulness Archive.”

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Tolentino, “The Irreplaceable Bodies,” 110.

practice. Tolentino's restraints perhaps posed a considerable counterpoint to the exuberance (emotional, erotic, aesthetic) that Athey clearly brought to his most intensely creative acts, yet they distilled an artistic bloodline run by the camaraderie, the simple happiness of kindness, sharing, the pleasure of loving someone without needing to be a part of them, choosing "friendship as a way of life,"<sup>116</sup> she writes: "[b]uilding on a bond of beloveds and confidantes, we grew into collaborators, co-conspirators, co-directors"<sup>117</sup> – comrades 'in arms,' I would say.

They gathered around them a squad of deviant children with 'unhealthy' feelings and 'unwholesome' bodies – perverts by virtue of their voluntary defection from the empire of the greater, immutable 'good'<sup>118</sup> – and formed a system of affinities independent of social, racial, national or sexual criteria – but perhaps also critical and aesthetic ones (the correspondence of genres and styles did not matter here). Their queer bonds often supplanted, supplemented, or compensated for failed or at least profoundly dysfunctional, even destructive personal (familial) relations.

Together, they moved in response to each other, in acknowledgment of protest *and* pleasure; unlawfully tied, tight, one to the other, for better, for worse, in sickness and in health, until death did them *part*.<sup>119</sup> They burnt with the passionate drama of their exclusions and losses, and spent their bodies to the point of extremity. The extremities of those character that deviate from the norm share in monstrosity, paraphrasing Ahmed: "[w]e might even imagine an

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<sup>116</sup> Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume One - Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 1997), 138. The bonds of homosexual friendship represent "everything that can be troubling in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and companionship, things that our rather sanitized society can't allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force. [...] Institutional codes can't validate these relations with multiple intensities, variable colors, imperceptible movements and changing forms. These relations short-circuit it and introduce love where there's supposed to be only law, rule, or habit." Foucault actually refers to people of the same sex but I am here extending this conception to the 'queer' friendship between people of different sex, thus replacing homorelativity with a largely 'queer relationality.' The bond here is established by sharing in the same willfulness a slantwise relation to the social (orientation) in relation to existing, exactly the kind of sociability I have been trying to make a place for them in these writings. Queerness hence becomes manifested not longer as sexual but precisely as the incipience of a new but as yet unrecognisable sociability lodged (how could it not be?) at the level of the body affected by their 'intersections' rather than a 'natural' predisposition.

<sup>117</sup> Tolentino, "The Irreplaceable Bodies," 112.

<sup>118</sup> Although having a good reason for it.

<sup>119</sup> As in many cases it did.

alternative army of the wayward: hearing in the Shakespearean expression 'hydra headed willfulness' the promise of monstrosity, the promise that like the monster Hydra, who acquires two heads from the loss of any one, the blows we receive will create more disobedient parts."<sup>120</sup>

They invested their (in)versions of sociality and desire into scenes of utopian carnality – nonreproductive, perverse, multisensory, asynchronic, and broody of possibility – and tested their blood-ties through risky, messy encounters brimming with social and psychic abjection, domination, pain and transgression that sexualised and medicalised simultaneously. Their extreme forms of relationality were ripe with an erotic and symbolic transconnectivity which in turn held an abrasive political charge. But from the very beginning, it was all about survival.

Tolentino's eulogy reads:

Activism starts with something known: a bodily experience (a combined knowing and sensing). We were attached to AIDS, by AIDS, and in Ron's work we dominated its hold on bodies by confronting it with 'Athey Trilogy Realness,' played out inimitably by the classed, colored, tattooed, mutilated and gender-queer sexed-up players and self-described freaks: Ronald 'Ronnie Lee' Athey, Brian 'Baby Brian' Murphy, Stosh Fila (aka Pigpen), Clayton (aka Cross), Darryl Carlton (aka Divinity P. Fudge), Julie Fowells (violinist) and me Julie 'Tinytino.' On tour, we offered our regal, primeval bodies, idiosyncratic laughter and rarefied language. Everyone's kink was on the table. [...] We went into and beyond our external bodies: listening, excavating, resisting, redefining – physically drawing each other out with savage care, while linking into our own extant chronicles.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ahmed, "A Willfulness Archive."

<sup>121</sup> Tolentino, "The Irreplaceable Bodies," 115.

One way of retelling this queer story would be to focus in on the table. Ahmed, once again, provides some orientation by opening up a scene of intense family life where a tangible object of social gathering turns into a tangible platform for critical resistance. Around the table, she writes: “the family gathers, having polite conversations, where only certain things can be brought up.”<sup>122</sup> If someone says something you consider problematic and you dissent you have created a problem. Your seat becomes the site of disagreement; by killing the joy of the seated you become the problem you create; you are recognized as a “killjoy.”<sup>123</sup>

The queer ‘army of lovers’ breaks with table manners by ‘putting their kinks on the table,’ hence becoming the figure of killjoys: ‘those who are unwilling to be seated at the table of happiness.’ Unable to keep up a ‘straight’ appearance, they are perceived as the cause of the trouble, as disturbing the peace. In return, they get ‘wound up’ by the wind of disapproval blown into their faces; they become mouthy (and arsey I would add): “to become mouthy is to become mouth, reduced to the speaking part as being reduced to the wrong part;” a part with a will too full. Ahmed notes “[t]he feminist killjoy and the willful queer carry the weight of the spoilt child into the scene of adulthood, as spoil sports, the ones who “spoil” the happiness of others.”<sup>124</sup> Spoiling yet another dinner, causing yet another indigestible appearance, the queer pack ruptures the perfect picture; their ‘blood ties’ are binding with a ferocious undomesticability that has the power to un-do the image of the happy family.

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<sup>122</sup> Ahmed, “A Willfulness Archive.”

<sup>123</sup> Ahmed in particular refers to the figure of the ‘feminist killjoy,’ She began to sketch this characterisation in her book *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>124</sup> Ahmed, “A Willfulness Archive.”

## Faulty Bloodlines

'Queerness' erupts outside the social order of the familiar with a rebutting force, taking apart the happy picture. In "Queer Bonds,"<sup>125</sup> Joshua J. Weiner and Damon Young describe how this dehiscent, corrosive pull away from sociality has been the thrust behind much theory and practice of (homo)sexual politics: "what we might now call 'queerness' – has long been invested as at once the site of a symbolic disruption (which is also an antisocial negativity) and a particular relational inventiveness."<sup>126</sup> This symbolic rupture hosts inside the tear sociabilities that are always made across and through social negativities. The disruptive negativity inherent in deviant sexuality has long been exposed by the powerful and controversial queer criticism of reproductive futurism advanced by Lee Edelman.<sup>127</sup>

In *No Future*,<sup>128</sup> Edelman tells yet another tale of the Child<sup>129</sup> whom he recognises as the figure, and mainly figuration, of the future.<sup>130</sup> Following Lacanian psychoanalytic schemata, he tracks down this image through American politics and culture as the fulfillable wish – and will – of a reproductive futurism that perpetuates the norms of the prevailing social and cultural order – heterosexuality, homogeneity, affluence – purged of its troubling and threatening elements:

For politics, however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order, which it then

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<sup>125</sup> The introduction of the homonymous special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. 17.2-3 (2011). Weiner's and Young's genealogy of queer trajectories provides acute orientation to the slantwise turn of the following argument.

<sup>126</sup> Weiner and Young, "Queer Bonds," 225.

<sup>127</sup> A most powerful and defining contribution to the antisocial thesis in queer theory that began with Leo Bersani's *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), Edelman's polemic resists the 'reproductive futurism' of all politics. He remains the main figure behind the so-called 'anti-social thesis,' see Robert L. Caserio et al., "Forum: Conference Debates: The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory," *PMLA* 121.3 (May 2006): 819.

<sup>128</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>129</sup> Edelman capitalizes the word to emphasize childhood's status as cultural monolith in the symbolic and imaginary registers.

<sup>130</sup> This is indeed another grim story, however very different from Ahmed's in trajectory and outcomes.



intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child. That Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention.<sup>131</sup>

The child, innocence incarnate, full of promise, and destined to fulfil the will of the 'whole-world,' becomes the weapon to stigmatise those who dare to elude the social imperative of sexual reproduction. Hence, queer comes to embody the flesh-and-blood figure of *jouissance*, the death-drive that haunts all (normalising) fantasies of the sexual relation and sexual identity. Edelman proclaims:

*queerness* names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children', the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism. The ups and downs of political fortune may measure the social order's pulse, but *queerness*, by contrast, figures, outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order's death drive: a place, to be sure, of abjection expressed in the stigma, sometimes fatal, that follows from reading that figure literally, and hence a place from which liberal politics strives – and strives quite reasonably, given its unlimited faith in reason – to dissociate the queer. More radically, though, as I argue here, *queerness* attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure.<sup>132</sup>

Lee Edelman's no-future manifesto advocates the queer as the anti-symbol that ruptures the consistency of the symbolic by the negative charge of a sexuality that resists the futurism of any politics. Like others before me, I find these arguments very persuasive and in particular

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<sup>131</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 2–3, italic in original.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

agree with scholar John Brenkman's assessment of their evocative power: "Edelman's articulation of the relation between the death drive and queerness is so powerful and resonant, I believe, because in the AIDS epidemic the confluence of sex and death, which is deeply and ambiguously embedded in all human experience, has taken on an unbearably traumatic and catastrophic form."<sup>133</sup> However, my turn on the innocent child's fate and the perverse queer's fatality takes a critical slant towards the ground of a more activist philosophy. I propose in fact that Edelman's treatment of death-driven perversion as a strategy of anti-social critique can be productively read alongside Ahmed's willful politics of endurance.

The vision of *No Future* reflects yet another familiar picture: just as the queer is made to carry the burden of a saturated will that indeed will drive it to the grave, the child is made to figure a sutured wholeness, immune from the disruptive force of *jouissance*. Edelman's construes theory as:

a particular story [...] of why storytelling fails, one that takes both the burden and the value of that failure upon itself [and] marks the 'other' side of politics: the 'side' where narrative realization and derealization overlap, where the energies of vitalization ceaselessly turn against themselves; the 'side' outside all political sides, committed as they are, on every side, to futurism's unquestioned good.<sup>134</sup>

This wholesome storytelling, I argue, fails when it discards the lesson of the particular story beside it. I here want to suggest that Edelman's treatment of the 'future child' forgets to take the side (and take care) of the 'feral child.' If the innocent child of futurity is pitted against the pervert child destined to the grave the two may indeed share in the same incommensurable abyss and 'come up' the other side, altering the ground, irreversibly. Ahmed's genealogy of

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<sup>133</sup> John Brenkman, "Queer Post-Politics," *Narrative* 10.2 (May 2002): 174–180, 180. Brenkman has authored some of the more caustic critiques of Edelman's thesis deconstructing his psychoanalytical reading and its relations (or not) with politics, however elsewhere he writes: "I have also not challenged his criticism of the figure of the child as futurity, because I find it is very persuasive" ("Politics Mortal and Natal: An Arendtian Rejoinder," *Narrative* 10.2 [May 2002]: 189).

<sup>134</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 7.

willfulness shows how, by all accounts, the will of the child is always framed as potentially willful, or even *is* already willful, already bent.

In the midst of all on-going qualifications, dispositions and designations, the figure and metaphor of the child consistently erupts out of the flat ground of received form(ul)ations, holding the potential to give rise to a deviant arm(y), whose offspring can figure as less than human mouths and butts, or inhuman tables and plates. Willful children can give monstrosity to the bonds that in Weiner's and Young's words "[hold] together something humane and sociable with the objectivity of the inhuman *thing*,"<sup>135</sup> These diverse and diversely queer ties are traversed by the negativity of radical dissociation and distortion and can gather around the unifying sound of a shared 'no,' however, taking the cue from Ahmed: "that does not mean all parts participate in that 'no' in the same way."<sup>136</sup>

An example: the historic avant-gardes of the 1960s, and early 1970s, largely took shape precisely in relation to some negation within the social and in resistance to the humanist vision of the autonomous, positively defined subject of capitalism. For the minimalist movement, the project of extending this radical negativity into the scene of the everyday took over public and private spaces at the increasing volume of a 'no' pervasively resonating through Yvonne Rainer's manifesto<sup>137</sup> imposing on the artwork a purist formalism and a prohibition on any (ecstatic) emotion.<sup>138</sup> The seeds of the same negative charge later spurred the avant-garde desire of the 1980s subcultures in which Athey and Tolentino participated via the ferocious call for "no limit, no rule, no sanity"<sup>139</sup> that governed their manifestations of raw emotional clutter and sensual and thematic excess; their responses appearing under very different conditions of negation, connections and constraints.

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<sup>135</sup> Weiner and Young, "Queer Bonds," 223, original emphasis.

<sup>136</sup> Ahmed, "A Willfulness Archive."

<sup>137</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>138</sup> See my analysis of minimalism's recessive affect in Chapter 2.

<sup>139</sup> Johnson, *Pleading in the Blood*, 22.

Zones of dissent accrete in “the resonances [that] intensify and multiply points of connection in a shared commitment to rethinking the terms of the social through the very labor of traversing its negations.”<sup>140</sup> Not ignoring the differences that exist amongst those positioned under the sign of the ‘no’(-more of the same), queer bonds describe relations that stretch across different forms of deviation and resistance recognizing the polyvalence of those who carry or come under the same sign, for themselves or others. As Edelman insists that “queerness can never define an identity; it can only disturb one,”<sup>141</sup> then this disturbance can run across the field of an activist politics that reanimates in rebellion the sides of those who have been forgotten, foreclosed, or prohibited – or those who stand beside them – by the social world of hegemonic reproductive fantasies.

In her conclusive remarks to the “Queer Bonds” conference, Judith Butler intones: “when we are looking for a ‘queer theory,’ it may be that we can find it precisely as a presupposition of activism, and that we cannot know that theory apart from its enactments,”<sup>142</sup> proving as she motions this address that theory has to be enacted in order to be. Remaining entrenched in his psychoanalytical apparatus, Edelman refuses to engage with this queer activism preferring instead to keep an invariably oppositional and nihilistic stance towards the future, no matter what social order and which figural child are at stake:

Choosing to stand, as many of us do, outside the cycles of reproduction,  
choosing to stand, as we also do, by the side of those living and dying each day  
from the complications of AIDS, we know the deception of the societal lie that  
endlessly looks toward a future whose promise is always a day away. We can

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<sup>140</sup> Weiner and Young, “Queer Bonds,” 224.

<sup>141</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 17.

<sup>142</sup> Poignantly and relevantly, Butler also adds: “Often, when we speak about the stages of AIDS activism, for instance, we suppose that we are talking about a drama that took place within Euro-American contexts, in which the time of crisis is somehow over. But what geopolitical framework allows us to announce the passing of the crisis when it has become the predominant epidemiological problem on the African continent? Surely, the implicit maps and histories that bound our idea of theory, and that seek to separate it from intervention and activism in definitive ways, have to be rethought.” Judith Butler, “Remarks on ‘Queer Bonds,’” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 17.2-3 (2011): 383.

tell ourselves that with patience, with work, with generous contributions to lobbying groups, or generous participation in activist groups, or general doses of political savvy and electoral sophistication, the future will hold a place for us – a place at the political table that won't have to come, as it were, at the cost of our place in the bed, or the bar, or the baths. But there are no *queers* in that future as there can be no future for queers.<sup>143</sup>

What the author does not take into account here is that queerness creates alternative sociabilities that emerge not only *without* sociality, but also 'beside' its known forms of recognition. Weiner's and Young's remark is useful here: "'queer bonds' name a mode of recognition to the side of this deadly epistemology, a laterally constituted togetherness that persists in the face of homophobia, sustains us, and allows queer life to go on."<sup>144</sup>

Edelman, I contend, fails to feel this connectivity and to formulate a "truly political negativity,"<sup>145</sup> and excavates instead only a limited (gay male) archive of queer figures that do not encompass the multiple, incommensurate positionalities and "extrasectionalities"<sup>146</sup> that queer always already names. This oversight has the effect of disconnecting the precariousness of the queer body politic from its ecstatic source of inauguration and innovation in "being as emergence into connectedness,"<sup>147</sup> hence discarding the political significance of being born(e) out of an (un)bounding relationality – that is in this particular story, the kinship of arms and bums thriving away from the familiar rod. The parallel multiplications of these 'new relational possibilities' are articulated within the precarious,

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<sup>143</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 29.

<sup>144</sup> Weiner and Young, "Queer Bonds," 228.

<sup>145</sup> Judith Halberstam moves this objection in the debate on the antisocial thesis, "The Politics of Negativity in Recent Queer Theory," *PMLA* 121.3 (May 2006): 824.

<sup>146</sup> In relation to Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, Weiner and Young coin this neologism indicating that: "[w]hereas intersectionality refers to the way multiple forms of oppression collide in one subject position, extrasectionality refers to the bonds formed between multiple, incommensurate positionalities, which at the limit need not be human" ("Queer Bonds," 232).

<sup>147</sup> Weiner and Young, "Queer Bonds," 225. The authors here quote from Bersani notion of "self-shattering" sexuality, which exists alongside his on-going attempt to find reparative forms of carnal knowledge (often in art). See Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 104.

shifting zones of (dis)associations that emerge to the side of the regimes of sexual and social normativity.

Queer bonds carry the pressure of (negative) affectivities in excess or to the side of legitimacy into the possibilities of positively articulated forms of sociability that convey some of the pleasures of contact, and also some of its benefits. The 'unnatural' allegiances they bring into existence are marked by forms of *being-with* that are also played out in forms of *being-against* that relate the cohesive and corrosive force of 'coming up,' together, 'against' conflict and struggle. Surviving and living-on gain specificity precisely through and in the ways of 'being together' that are always socially tainted with death – the precariousness and finitude that is precondition of life. Notwithstanding, death is not the ultimate negation of the bond, but it is its 'positive' condition;<sup>148</sup> the drive/ing force that presses bodies together 'in sickness and in health,' before *and* after their parting, the negativity or nothingness that affords the very existence and constitution of new relations.

Queer is at once a fraught and inventive sociality that animates an (un)willed proximity – an extimacy – of bodies "coming up" in their "coming against"<sup>149</sup> other bodies, thus allowing their bonds to become apparent "at the meeting of bare lives, whether in ecstasy or in exhaustion."<sup>150</sup> Athey, Tolentino, and their unnatural progeny take up the space of this encounter with all the *jouissance* and exhaustion of their shared affect and eroticism. The

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<sup>148</sup> A positivity that does not come without 'some' pain.

<sup>149</sup> I am here positioned in Ahmed alongside Butler. Ahmed writes: "[w]illfulness as audacity, willfulness as standing against, willfulness as creativity. It is only the practical labor of 'coming up against' the institution *that allows this wall to become apparent*" ("A Willfulness Archive," original emphasis); whilst Butler notes that "the body, invariably, comes into a world it never chose, is handled from the start by those whose names it does not know, and recurrently comes up against an outside world it never made – all these are signs of the general predicament of unwilled proximity to others, of a formation in dependency, an obscurity that marks not only our beginning but our possibility, and to sustaining circumstances that are always beyond individual control. Sometimes the unchosen world is precisely the past we never made, but it emerges again within perceptual life as this 'coming up against' other bodies.

Furthermore, we find ourselves as the kind of beings who others come up against as well; this 'coming up against' is one modality that defines the body. Yet this obtrusive alterity against which the body finds itself is surely linked to that primary dependency which is before and against our will" ("Remarks on 'Queer Bonds,'" 384). The interaction of these terms renders the forms of being and acting with one another, or for one another, and even against one another. This immediately suggests that (anti-)social forms of cohesiveness and abrasiveness can take not only the form of harmonious 'sharing,' but also that of being-against. In fact, it is precisely being-with that is played out also in the forms of being-against.

<sup>150</sup> Weiner and Young, "Queer Bonds," 231.

disturbing negativity inherent to the pressure they exercise on and against the body not only aestheticise and politicise their bonds but insist on their complete and profoundly disruptive intelligibility. These are Tolentino's words: "[p]roud from the gut, like two old, twin-performance, art daddy cronies – even then, in our early days – touching the ache of the radical 'ungraspable-ness' of our love. Along the deep cord of our irreplaceable bodies, we reckon with the faint imprint of memory, (scarcity) of photographs. Each person moving forward with/in us: impressions and nods held deep."<sup>151</sup>

Transferring the stories and visions that animate them, they endow their deviant clan with a crude version of their own perverse will, taking pleasure in their monstrous selves, taking time to confound the boundaries, taking care in cross-fertilising their multiform selves, taking up the tools to distil their bloodline, taking responsibility in the (de)construction of their blood-ties, taking stock of their irreversibility with a sense of obligation bearing even on the dead. And giving, giving, giving, giving, giving, giving absolute, capacious, unconditional, free love – an openness and generosity that resists the stabilised, customary demands of monogamy and homonymy.

These deviant affiliations eviscerate their binding substance in a stream of eroticism, relationality and affectivity that runs against the ideological vein, coagulating into a queer genealogy that perverts the heteronormative trajectory of re(pro)ductive futurism for degenerate ends. These inverted genealogies disseminate not through holy matrimony – or patrimony – but rather through what Whitney Davis calls a "extraconsanguinary mosaic," where the medium of transmission is not (strictly) blood but rather the contamination of art, fantasy, desire, sensuality that consigns its political and ethical sensibility "to posterities that need never even know our names."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Tolentino, "The Irreplaceable Bodies," 117.

<sup>152</sup> Whitney Davis, "Queer Family Romance in Collecting Visual Culture," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17.2-3 (2011): 325.

This is precisely how Tolentino plays and works her project of re-incarnation of Athey's self-obliteration scene, which results fairly explicitly in the production and reproduction of the very conditions of both representing and reconstituting their own coming into being *with* the other. Together, they willfully embark on a scene that bifurcates in the directions of insupportable pain and injury, and radical dissociation; or towards sudden revelation, reciprocal love and solicitude; one's life always, in some sense, in the hands of the other. Their knots of sexual, anatomical, and social transgressions become the source of a meaningful (queer) history of re-generativity and inauguration. The matter of their still-living body of work comes up, fittingly enough, in the form of a 'remonstrance.'



## Willfully (Un)Bound

Athey and Tolentino join at the queer tables around which bodies gather. They take their place by taking the right to squat (on) them with their high activist stakes. Immediately this perversion becomes performative and political. Their appearances have something of an archetypal force about them, in that they are largely stripped of context and therefore hard to pin down. Resembling animals that tend to their own grooming, they can be described as human beasts reared in the economy of pleasure, pain, desire and fear. They 'de-monstrate' their abject status by getting down on all fours, pressing down and folding up to eviscerate a scene of obscene and touching *degeneration*. The acts they perform suggest the ultimate reversal of physiological and sexual values by operating the obvious inversion of entry and exit points, of flow and stagnation.

With respect to the concern with (temporal) progression and (biological) futurity, such moments call into question what it means to 'be-come' by creating a surface of mis-recognition that troubles the distinction between life and death, human and animal, animate and inanimate, sacred and profane. Wrapped up in their bodily erotics, their figures forge a relationship through and in time, charged with physical qualitative (ex)tensions – moods – that render saturation as an atmosphere. Tinkering with the texture of time in its forms of aggregation, dispersion and condensation, they generate a dense and hazy temporal zone where the past has never been (complete), the future is not anymore (yet), and the present time is experienced as a (higher) state of consciousness, with a particular kind of imaginative and erotic value.

This libidinal and liminal sphere disseminates a sense of history infused with tactile pleasures in the joining together of the temporal folds of time through what Freeman calls "erotohistoriography" – that is, "a politics of unpredictable, deeply embodied pleasures that

counter the logic of development.”<sup>153</sup> She writes:

[erotohistoriography] insists that various queer social practices, especially those involving enjoyable bodily sensations, produce form(s) of time consciousness, even historical consciousness, that can intervene upon the material damage done in the name of development. Against pain and loss, erotohistoriography posits the value of surprise, of pleasurable interruptions and momentary fulfilments from elsewhere, other times.<sup>154</sup>

The sexual practices and fantasies of our perverse duo, I propose, create a place and time of elsewhere/when – a utopian nexus of critique and potentiality, available to anyone, where sex and recognition touch and cum together.<sup>155</sup>

Summoning a literary and critical textual body close to the heart of queer, Freeman locates in the figure of Frankenstein a queer progenitor of erotohistoriography. The monster’s very body is an index of temporal heterogeneity – being as it is made up of fragments of dead bodies – and the figuration of “nonreproductive, yet still insistently corporeal kinship with the departed.”<sup>156</sup> Yet, Freeman explains, in the treatment of a less known cinematic text – Hillary Brougher’s *The Sticky Fingers of Time* (1997) – its appearance also comes to suggest the possibility of a sensual connection with futurity. A scene from the film offers a slant twist on the character’s fate: rather than escaping on an ice floe, Frankenstein “splits his stitches and he dies, fertilizing the earth where that little girl grows tomatoes.”<sup>157</sup> This counter-narrative inaugurates a figural mode of bodily dissemination that supplants chrononormative logics:<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, “Time Binds, or Erotohistoriography,” *Social Text* 23 (2005): 59.

<sup>154</sup> Freeman, “Time Binds,” 59.

<sup>155</sup> I am here paraphrasing Juana María Rodríguez’s reflection on Freeman’s concept of ‘erotohistoriography’ in “Queer Sociality and Other Sexual Fantasies,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17.2-3 (2011): 339.

<sup>156</sup> Freeman, “Time Binds,” 60.

<sup>157</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 60.

<sup>158</sup> Freeman elaborates the concept of “chrononormativity” as the binding temporal synchronization of bodies for the purpose of generating socially meaningful productivity. Via this regulation, dominant temporal frames become embedded in ordinary bodily tempos and routines such as the life course, the time of the home and hearth, and/or the

Though [Frankenstein] seems to inseminate the little girl (for his body fluids will indirectly enter the orifice of her mouth when she eats the tomatoes), he transcends both the supposedly natural pain of childbirth and the cyclical time of reproduction. Like Walt Whitman, he disseminates himself. Together, his body and the act he performs with it suggest a historiographical practice wherein the past takes the form of something already fragmented and, 'split,' and decaying, and the present and the future appear equally porous.<sup>159</sup>

I propose here that Athey and Tolentino engender a similar 'underground kinship' of enfleshed bonds that subvert the normative flow of reproductive legacies. In *Resonate/Obiterate*, Athey is, in more than a sense, behind Tolentino, by turns inspiring, instructing, and initiating her into the carnal ways of artistic dissemination. Imbibed with blood, his brutal monstrosity becomes absorbed in playing with, stretching, deforming and thereby deconstructing his singularities revealing the corrupting influence of contagious perversion. This dynamic extends to encompass a (self-)inseminating momentum of such intensity that, we can say, infects her body. The (full) will of one is thus propagated in the other, one's conviction included in that of the other, as seeds of dissent are formed.

Indeed this saturated scene seems to be a kind of deterritorialized ground that becomes particularly broody in the context of cultural transmission. Athey provides here, in Freeman's words: "a model of dispersed and but insistently carnal continuity."<sup>160</sup> Replacing 'continuity' with 'contiguity,' I here posit the materiality and maternity of his flesh as hosting the lives, the memories of others who came and went and who are somehow returned in ecstatic mo(ve)ments of binding rupture. In "By Word of Mouth: Ron Athey's Self-Obliteration,"<sup>161</sup> Tim Etchells notes how the artist's work figures as "a kink, rupture or knot in time – a portal, open

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time of reproduction through social structures and power relations. She deploys this term as a critical tool for a political analysis of how the capitalist version of time works to organise bodies in normative processes.

<sup>159</sup> Freeman, "Time Binds," 60.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>161</sup> Also in Johnson, *Pleading in the Blood* (op. cit.), 226-233.

wound or orifice through and out of which stories, cultural tensions, echoes and quotations pass,”<sup>162</sup> and are passed on. In this sense, his monstrous body, to paraphrase Freeman, “is not a ‘body’ at all but a figure for relations between bodies past and present, for the insistent return of a corporealized historiography and future making of the sort to which queers might lay claim.”<sup>163</sup>

Julie Tolentino lies beside Athey on the ground of this futurity. She willfully provides a space in which his comrade’s activism can reside, occupying an exteriorised site of identification; a space in which affect tramps the road of the past with the will to move forward. Her performance body becomes a host, a synecdoche for home, in Tolentino’s own words – a “living archive” for her life’s duration. Adrian Heathfield suggests that:

In this notion, flesh is thought as a vessel for the historical transport of past times or lives that were always incomplete, and already iterative and non-original. The archival would then be practiced somewhat following Michel Foucault’s thought, as a rigorous mode of reinvention [...]. The archive then is not simply a static repository of traces of lives, nor is it solely an institution, architecture or collection nominated as such, but rather a diffused cultural system moving between occurrences, the corporeal, the textual and the artefactual in an on-going state of flux. A living archive would involve the assertive incorporation (in building, things or bodies) and reanimation of such historical traces not as recovery of a knowable and locatable past, but rather as a generous and generative act.<sup>164</sup>

Tolentino generously offers as vessel that ambiguous, tentative, precarious, ever-changing space we all inhabit – the body. By hosting the echo that Athey shakes up with inseminating

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>163</sup> Freeman, “Time Binds,” 60.

<sup>164</sup> Heathfield, “Illicit Transit,” 220.

violence, Tolentino incorporates the willfulness that must speak through her own organs via resonances that generates new possibilities for perception, feeling and expression. Exteriorising this heteropathic identification through masochistic ecstasy – in the etymological sense of being outside or beside oneself (*eksta-sis*) – her excorporations appear as obliterated symbols circumventing nihilism by incorporating the wound, the cut, the abyssal as a lack of signification that provokes new images, new desires, new figures that bridge this lack without overcoming it. Rather than leading to deathly reconstruction, her bold assimilation points instead to a vital afterlife central to artistic creativity.<sup>165</sup>

Indeed, these perverse forms of dissemination propose a sustainable economy of affective relays in relation to both artistic practice and social rituals via the construction and circulation of figures of kinship that replace family ties. André Lepecki registers these social choreographies within the logic of the gift that expects no return (of the same):

This is one of the political acts re-enacting performs as re-enactment: it suspends economies of authoritative authors who want to keep their works under house arrest. To re-enact would mean to disseminate, to spill without expecting a return or a profit. It would mean to expel, to ex-propriate, to excorporate under the name of a promise called giving. In other words, re-enactments enact the promise of the end of economy. They make dance return, only to give it away – as an author's blood spilled twice for the sake of self-obliteration.<sup>166</sup>

Described so explicitly the artistic body's critical afterlife only opens further the aporetic space of increasingly complex and paradoxical enfolded operations where carnal elements are not simply put together in a 'before' and an 'after' but rather, stand alongside in a relation of

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<sup>165</sup> As noted by André Lepecki in his work on the afterlife of dances.

<sup>166</sup> André Lepecki, "The Body as Archive," 35.

reciprocal determination and in the space of (temporal) boundaries ruptured by their movements of will(full) power. The (re)incorporation of the sensate, binding spots of their sensible ethics – the gaping holes of wounds, mouths and orifices burning with an ache, a yearn, a desire to be filled up – share the fate of the monster’s and the girl’s connective and connected endings:

Our monster’s bodily gesture [...] relocates the hole: the little girl, his ‘audience,’ will have her hunger satiated directly by the tomato and indirectly by his blood, which also carries the DNA of multiple dead. Of course, her queer hunger for tactile contact with the past is open to [...] charges of historicism, the ugly twin of vulgar homosexuality. But the monster’s wounds themselves pass over from his pain to her satisfaction, his openings to hers, without having to necessarily become either lack or presence. The monster’s transfer of energy across time appears not as masculine sacrifice but rather as a gender-undifferentiated but nevertheless localized bodily effusion: in short, holes beget holes.<sup>167</sup>

Rubbing up their extremities against the reflective surface of their shared histories, Athey and Tolentino bring to the table a certain ‘bottomhood’ (that ‘gives back’) and ‘headiness’ (that ‘gives a-head’)<sup>168</sup> that produce performative abyssal conditions resignifying their social bonds. These dispositions recast the value of what Juana María Rodríguez calls being “servicial:” attentive and responsive to desires of others.<sup>169</sup> Rodríguez notes that “a social and sexual position that takes pleasure in being attentive to the needs of others cannot, and should not, be read as an unconscious adaptation of the social sacrifice demanded by reproductive futurity,” but rather it should be recognised as one’s “willingness to acknowledge and respond”

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<sup>167</sup> Freeman, “Time Binds,” 62-3.

<sup>168</sup> This latter term tries to reconnect the value of these abyssal forms to Tolentino’s lesbian activist politics.

<sup>169</sup> “Servicial” as “servile” or “of service.” In “Queer Sociality,” Juana María Rodríguez considers the abject spaces of bottom-hood and femininity as modes of critical resistance (338).

not in the name of a naturalised servitude but of a generosity of spirit.<sup>170</sup>

This mutual consideration and taking care emerges as a mode of critical 'openness' to the other that valorises the conditions of a queer politics. Enacting the transference of power from top to bottom, *and back*, these deeply perverse scenarios confound the construction of giver and receiver, author and recipient, and the instance of command and arrest, in what comes to figure as the ecstatic submission of one person to one's own willful desire to regard the other. We might read this sociality through a culturally inflected impression of the pervasive brown of Tolentino's (racial-feminist-lesbian) politics on the brown of Athey's (queer-disabled) ethics that push against the slant mirrors of a queer body politics casting "a brown-on-brown interface of erotic power."<sup>171</sup>

It is through the imperfect mirror of their extreme, self-inflicted gestures, reflected in turn on the opaque surfaces of shifting planes/plates, that the binding force of their aesthetics intersects with desire, power and history. In 'Turn the Beat Around: Sadomasochism, Temporality and History,' Elizabeth Freeman, speculating on the Marquis de Sade's fiction through Simone De Beauvoir's writing, reflects: "the Sadean sadist [...] fails to 'coincide' exactly with her own movements when she sees them in the mirror, while the masochist uses the mirror to avoid merging with his own emotions; otherwise, 'freedom and consciousness would be lost in the rupture of the flesh.'" This technique of visual (and spatial) distantiating has the arresting effect of producing:

a temporal noncoincidence between action and result that, in turn, makes possible the awareness of the body as object. Here, the S/M mirror scene introduces an interval, a liberating gap between an effect and the 'self' as its cause. The time of proprioception and the time of visual apprehension compete

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 337-8.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 344. I here operate quite graphically Rodríguez's colorful quote to point to the superimposition of marginalities in the dark face of race positioned alongside the dark (butt)face of homosexuality.

with one another, and their syncopation enables the estranged consciousness crucial to 'freedom.'<sup>172</sup>

*Resonate/Obiterate*, I propose, frames an analogous cubist structure of feelings and perceptions aestheticising materiality and temporality in tandem as embodied, syncopated organisations. Tolentino and Athey stretch out their carnalities diachronically to the point they are both behind and beside themselves through synchronic, lateral spread of backward and forward views. The result is a temporal asynchrony of moving suspensions, shadows of becomings, and oddly bent identitarian dispositions that reach toward the reflective surface of pleasure in self-obliteration. From the uncanny friction of heads and tails, mouths and butts, fluids and plates this deviant pair exposes a tender sense of their raw, queer binds whilst showing the full power of practices of (re)binding the body's time to engender sustenance, consciousness, and potentiality that take their own time to be made. Tolentino's send off to Athey reads:

Our saturated bodies serve individually as perfectly-inadequate living archives worthy of a leather-daddy boot shine, a perfect reunion-by-slow-dance in a mirrored ballroom, or maybe just a messy blow job. Small momentary acts to make us perfect – never fully repeatable. The undeniable iconic centre was crowded with beautiful, fearless instigators. Our decaying bodies, which bear the traces of our (forever and absent) comrades, along with Ron's emblematic and indelible marks on our culture and our private lives, prove that we all need time – and take time to be made. A toast to our molten glass lives: thin and forever hosting our great potential to break.<sup>173</sup>

Playing on the edge of physical dissolution between in and out of (e)motions, these bodies

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<sup>172</sup> Both in text and long quote from Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010): 139.

<sup>173</sup> Tolentino, "The Irreplaceable Bodies," 117.



spend their willfulness to the point of physical exhaustion, which disaggregates the sensorium with a particular kind of untimeliness. These ecstatic bodily rhythms disrupt normative modes of feeling and be-longing in time generating new mo(ve)ments of freedom. In “the historically specific elements of its theatrical language, and in using the body as an instrument to rearrange time,” Freeman writes, “S/M becomes a form of writing history with the body in which the linearity of history itself can be called into question, but, crucially, the past does not thereby cease to exist.”<sup>174</sup> Rather, this “somatized historical knowledge” reanimates an encounter with history potentially able to take up materials of a traumatic past and remix them “in the interests of new possibilities for being and knowing.”<sup>175</sup>

Gaining pleasure from cruel blood-letting, Athey and Tolentino stage a form of reenactment that attends to the (re)experience of a non-death that ticks with the foreboding that comes from past ailments. Their collective history is an erotic mode that suggest that: “historical memories, whether those forged from connecting personal experiences to larger patterns or those disseminated through mass imagery, can be burned into the body through pleasure as well as pain.”<sup>176</sup> Their deliberate (sado)masochistic perversions suture the traumatic affects of a particular kind of queer history to the *jouissance* of survival. The same ‘unnatural’ suture binds the ends and extremities that sway toward discredited forms of knowledge – such as AIDS and S/M – betraying their own will to instigate pleasure and reparative possibilities for the future.

Hence, *Resonate/Obiterate* offers up for witnessing the perverse temporality of inclinations, oddities and back and forward bends where the past has never been (complete), the future is not anymore (yet), and the present figures as the temporal punctuation of a passing in abeyance. This coveted sense of time resembles Derrida’s inability to speak of the past of the

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<sup>174</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, 139.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>176</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, 162.

present for a future that is always “to come.” “[t]he alterity of the ‘unconscious’ makes us concerned not with horizons of modified – past or future – presents, but with a ‘past’ that has never been present, and which never will be, whose future to come will never be a production or a reproduction in the form of presence.”<sup>177</sup> This is a strange kind of future, one in which our experience is willing to venture elsewhere, where our unknowing stands a chance to be transformed into something else.

The duo’s temporal enfleshments turn the ordinary dimensions of time ‘beside themselves.’ Monsters of the grotesque and the sublime, they move us into new realms of being, new living forms of epistemological and political imagination, but also a fully corporeal one that takes on a language and a sense that extend it to its very limits, forever discovering new resonances within itself. An artistic imagination of this kind is capable of generating and regenerating meaning through the living power of the body that undergoes creative mutations and transformations. Their perverse (hi)stories can transmute natural time into a specifically inhuman time, irreducible to chronological ‘clock time.’

*Resonate/Obiterate* eviscerates the experience of such ‘inhuman’ time, where the moment of one’s death – the obliterating of temporal horizons – is also the arrival of an asynchrony – and anachrony – that destroys the self-identification of the subject and exposes the shattering condition of the self, which, in the artists’ terms, is not devoid of a certain pleasure. Mapping this body of work onto a willfulness archive can move our political and activist sensibilities towards an ethical inversion away from received frameworks and towards the unfamiliar temporalities of the between-ness of hospitality givers. These trans-individual forms of solidarity forge social relations that cut around and off familiar ties opening up the chain for other future possibilities.

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<sup>177</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 413.

The wayward children of the ‘underground’ arts take us back to the future of political tables that hold the promise of alternatives to futurity. Their slant dispositions cut to the heart of a will to stray, wander or err as a way to differ and disturb that which is to-come; futural but not beholden to a clear tripartite temporality; not yet but already. Bestowing upon its workings this *raison d’être*, *The Sky Remains the Same* maintains (of necessity) Athey’s own kind of ‘dissociative sparkle’ that revives the flame of the spectres of death, the ethics of difference and the politics of friendship. This be-holding is a form of be-longing<sup>178</sup> that opens the space for the arrival of the unprecedented event of a return to appear on the hither side of time, to err in repeating that which came before, and to continue to push for what could take place tomorrow.

Athey/Tolentino’s archival corpus becomes a receptacle for queer history, borrowing from Freeman, one can say that “what she receives is not transmission of authority or custom but a transmission of receptivity itself, of a certain pleurably porous relation to new configurations of the past and unpredictable future.”<sup>179</sup> Her forms of incorporations and excorporations do not preserve, arrest, hold the subject of history into a sealed off crypt,<sup>180</sup> but rather temporarily host its affect within her leaky, hole-y vessel that takes the shape of what Bracha L. Ettinger has called “transcriptum” – a liminal space of passage, a “transport-station of trauma”<sup>181</sup> where “self-fragilization” might occur.<sup>182</sup> In a process of trans-subjective encounter, of “co/in-habit(u)ating,”<sup>183</sup> the artist hosts the ghost – the lost – of an other in her own kernel, whilst

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<sup>178</sup> For a fuller exposition of the value of this term in relation to the politics of sociality see here the first chapter.

<sup>179</sup> Freeman, “Time Binds,” 64.

<sup>180</sup> Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok theorize the ‘crypt’ as a mental space that results from a traumatic loss without memory. See “Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation,” in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>181</sup> See Bracha L. Ettinger, “Art as the Transport-Station of Trauma,” in *Artworking 1985-1999* (Ghent-Amsterdam: Ludion and Brussels: Palais des Beaux-Arts, 2000). 91-115.

<sup>182</sup> See Ettinger, Bracha L., “Fragilization and Resistance,” *Studies in The Maternal* 1.2 (2009), <<http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/documents/Bracha1.pdf>>.

<sup>183</sup> Ettinger writes: “[c]o/in-habit(u)ating is inseparable from the subjects’ affecting one another and being thus transformed while creating a joint borderspace for their transgressed subjectivity-as-encounter, at the price of their being dispersed (into partial subjects) – but not split, and assembled (into amalgamated temporary identity via joint hybrid objects) – but not fused.” Bracha L. Ettinger, “Traumatic Wit(h)ness-Thing and Matrixial Co/in-habit(u)ating 1,” *Parallax* 5.1 (1999): 93.

excorporating “the lifting of the world’s hidden memory from its outside with-in-side.”<sup>184</sup>

The transgenerational transmission of the traumatic affect, starkly evidenced in the case of “transposition” – the uncanny experience where the past reality of the parent seeps into the reality of the child so that trauma itself is transmitted<sup>185</sup> – is here supplanted by the living breath of a face-to-face, mouth-to-mouth, body-to-body archive that accommodates a “transferential encounter through which the blockage of meaning that is the immemorability of trauma can be processed without the usual risks of Orphic voyeurism, inured familiarity or sublime pathos.”<sup>186</sup> In this fragile extimate zone of potential sharing with-in the trauma of the other, the echo of subjectivities, histories, and sensibilities brought into tune with each other can resonate the possibilities of *an afterlife* capable of making history.

Hence, Tolentino/Athey’s transductive experiment in *alive* memory refuses the idea of a will to self-consciously share the wound in an empathic moment in which a transferential contamination of the same trauma might come about. As Herman Rapaport suggests in his re-reading of Derrida’s *Archive Fever*: “one does not simply inherit or share the trauma of others; one encounters trauma as something that is Other on a horizon that is and is not predictable.”<sup>187</sup> In a brutal scene of self-effacement, one body is re-opened by the violence of an appeal from the other, an address that, following Derrida, “has been opened up on the basis of some traumatizing event, by an upsetting question that doesn’t let one rest, that no longer lets one sleep [...] and because it nevertheless resists the destruction begun by this traumatism.”<sup>188</sup> The memory of the traumatic histories of the flesh requires a watchfulness or vigilance that does not let one rest under the ground of wholesome body politics.

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<sup>184</sup> Bracha L. Ettinger, “Transcryptum: Memory Tracing In/For/With the Other,” in *Matrixial Borderspace*, ed. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 167.

<sup>185</sup> The concept of ‘transposition’ was first introduced by psychoanalyst Judith Kestenberg. However, my analysis draws primarily of Griselda Pollock’s reading of Kestenberg’s theory in Griselda Pollock, “Dying, Seeing, Feeling: Transforming the Ethical Space of Feminist,” in *The Life and Death of Images: Ethics and Aesthetics*, eds. Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willson (London: Tate Publishing and Cornell University Press, 2008).

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>187</sup> Herman Rapaport, “Archive Trauma,” *Diacritics* 28.4 (1998): 76.

<sup>188</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Points: Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 381.

As such, the eventfulness of the trivalent reflexive experience of obliterating and resonating, and back again, has an effect on the present of carnality both as something that has already happened – the evidence of a prior coming to pass – and the foreboding awareness of something ‘to come,’ once more. Both Athey and Tolentino have to ‘deal with’ and ‘work through’ this traumatism. However, at the same time, through repetition – as Freud teaches us – they try to get control of it while keeping “alive” without forgetting completely and without letting themselves be totally annihilated by it. It is between these two perils that their archive of un-dead willfulness survives and advances. Its summoning gestures are not a simple recollection, but a reconfiguration of experience that, like traumatic diegesis, disconcerts all our usual understandings of forgetting and memory and opens up new possibilities in the future to come, as Derrida puts it:

Memory is not just the opposite of forgetting [...] to think memory or to think anamnesis, here, is to think things as paradoxical as the memory of a past that has not been present, the memory of the future – the movement of memory as tied to the future and not only to the past, memory turned toward the promise, toward what is coming, what is arriving, what is happening tomorrow.<sup>189</sup>

Tolentino’s re-enactive body is precisely about the re-remembering of something that is to happen tomorrow in a future anterior ‘willed’<sup>190</sup> into existence by the (g)host; the trace of self-obliterating trauma, the remainder of a deviation and a disturbance in memory. This (g)hostly archive houses a repetition in which the (self-inflicted) ‘wound’ is inherently inscribed in a form of dissolution without return – of the same – that yet preserves the desire for a disseminal affirmation of an uncertain futurity “capable of being released as pleasure rather than simply being repeated as incomplete mastery over pain.”<sup>191</sup> This ‘end’ registers an openness to a

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>190</sup> This term retains both the past and future (participle) tenses, and their prolific encroachments.

<sup>191</sup> Freeman, “Time Binds,” 64.

future in which the work of 'getting on' as 'getting over' are effaced from a deviant history, which instead is left with *le mal* – the pain and the ecstatic *jouissance* – that necessarily accompanies change in thinking and feeling. Ultimately, the trauma/affect is not passed on directly from one person to another but is relayed, as if by remote control, through technologies of poetic and aesthetic wit(h)nessing predicated on a being-with-the-other as being-in-compassion.

## Sharing No-thing

When pressed together, Athey's and Tolentino's bodies become repositories preserving larger blocks of time and space than the stories they alone inhabit, traversed and thereby transformed into blood-bound carnalities that undo (patri)linear narratives and affiliations. But however vast the scope of their binds, they are formed by their singularities; layers of skin and flesh held together, each membrane a surface that is folded and bound to form the compressed strata of life, patiently inscribing the present moment atop the thin crust of the world, past and future. These comrades in arms strand further apart beyond the rationality of cold, dried-up histories and slip inside the relationality of the warm, dark abysses of the lived and sensed to create alternative (sexual) spaces where their bodies become re-marked by a "sociality of the most intense order – a place where bodies not only touch but are pushed and pulled into one another, a coming undone predicated on a coming together,"<sup>192</sup> with and beside themselves.

These are terms of existence that have gathered up momentum and that have played a significant role as pivotal themes in these writings. To summon up their aesthetic and ethical relevance in relation to the vast account of the artistic moves here registered, I will briefly turn to the work of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, in closing. In *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy considers the condition of being as always a *being-with* the 'you' of an other in essential coexistence, he writes: "[b]eing cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another,<sup>193</sup> circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularly plural coexistence."<sup>194</sup> This fundamental structure of existence carries significant implications for any understanding of self-hood, and, consequently of the unfolding, the event, of meaning:

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<sup>192</sup> Rodríguez, "Queer Sociality," 339.

<sup>193</sup> In the original French this is: *être-les-uns-avec-les-autres* that translates literally as "being-the-ones-with-the-others." See Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (op. cit.), 194, note 2.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, original emphasis.

There is no meaning if meaning is not shared,<sup>195</sup> and not because there would be an ultimate or first signification that all beings have in common, but because *meaning is itself the sharing of Being*. Meaning begins where presence is not pure presence but where presence comes apart [*se disjoint*] in order to be itself *as such*. This “as” presupposes the distancing, spacing, and division of presence.’<sup>196</sup>

The notion of being-with is signalled as a relation that makes itself felt as the coinciding proximity and distance of an ‘I’ and ‘you’ – an extimacy using Lacan’s term – where the you is not only someone resembling me and appearing to me as an other self, but it is essentially someone *with* whom I am, who supports my being, yet forever remaining distanced from and alien to me. This opens a deep metaphysical gap that makes the human being ultimately a stranger.<sup>197</sup> It is precisely this simultaneous proximity and distance that makes the ‘I-you’ relation a fragile and delicate matter as carrying “a fundamental sign of our strangeness as humans, a mark of the constant crossing over, the mutual intrication and distancing, in the fundamental structure of the ‘self.’”<sup>198</sup>

Spatial distance and proximity, like in Ahmed’s case, plays for Nancy a significant role in the organisation of social relations. Elaborating his understanding of the singular plural as a fundamental ontological and metaphysical principle, he discusses the manner in which the ordinary experience of relating to the alterity of the other person reveals a singularity that is, always already, part of the plurality of a ‘we’ – a crowd, a city, a people. This conception marks the emergence of a supra-individual entity that is constituted not only by I-you relations

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<sup>195</sup> Nancy uses the French verb *partagé* which means “to divide” or “share out,” as expressed in the closing of Chapter 1.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, original emphasis.

<sup>197</sup> Nancy significantly notes: “Then again, we say ‘strange,’ ‘odd,’ ‘curious,’ ‘disconcerting’ *about* all of being” (*Being Singular Plural*, 10) a description that comes very close to the definition of ‘queer.’

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.



but also by part-to-whole relations.<sup>199</sup> But ultimately, what makes meaning possible is neither the infinitesimality of an undividable selfhood nor the unified homogeneity of a public space but, rather, what Nancy calls *a transindividuality*; a singularity “indissociable from its being-with-many.”<sup>200</sup>

This dialectics of dissociative association, sets out a question of the ‘between:’ the ‘with’ of the relation *is* in between I and you, and always implies an in-between. The between both connects the two figures to one another and prevents them from coming together in a common substance: “[e]verything, then, passes *between us*. This ‘between,’ as its name implies, has neither a consistency nor continuity of its own. It does not lead from one to the other; it constitutes no connective tissue, no cement, no bridge.”<sup>201</sup> This reference suggests that the between is literally a *no-thing* of relation and association; it signifies a condition or a change – an exchange even – *within* the related forms that can only be ‘estimated’ *outside* the elements to which it refers.

It is only with the arrival of the third element that the spectrum of social relations is played out in its full complexity. The *no-thing* emerges, yet again, as an event or an occurrence that expresses the *negative* aspect in the determination of the bond between the social dyad. The ‘third’ ultimately abolishes the sociality of the ‘two’ by tearing apart the fabric of bonded-ness that gives an illusion of immortality insofar as the ‘social whole’ – family, fatherland, nation, etc. – lives on. The term that crucially limits and shapes this self-sustaining relation, I argue, is the *no-thing par excellence*: death. Death lies between me and you. Death is an interruptive force that stands between one and the other, always already precluding the possibility to come together in a ‘common’<sup>202</sup> being/bond.

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<sup>199</sup> Such relations have occurred and reoccurred, in the course of these analytical compositions, in the guise of different sets of synecdochic transfers.

<sup>200</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 32.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, original emphasis.

<sup>202</sup> And by this, I also intend normative.

Nancy explores this linkage of communion with death in his work *The Inoperative Community*. According to Nancy, community is made up of *nothing*; the community is a “groundless ‘ground’” – of nothing but the sharing of finitude, the exposure of singularities before and in the face of nothing.<sup>203</sup> Therefore, the being-with is sociality marked with death, the finitude ‘in the face of’ the individual you and I. Death ultimately obliterates – effaces – the relation, however, its figure is not a mere negation of the bond between I and you, but it is also its positive condition; as a negativity or nothingness death belongs innerly (and outwardly) to the ‘life’ of the relation – its existence and constitution. Standing in-between any social or individual formation, death is intimately tied to ‘life.’

Tolentino’s, and Athey’s artistic dispositions are grounded in – and intimately tied to – these structures of “transindividuality,” alterity and difference, “spacing and division of presence” that are fundamental to their experience of “being-with-one-another.” Their archival collaboration is the plastic, intracorporeal transposition of what I have suggested is Tolentino’s ethic, erotic and aesthetic point of departure and the abyssal, and abysmal, condition of being, with others; because her world begins its turn with *you*: “the trace of the strangeness that comes like an open intimacy, more internal than any intimacy, deep-set like the grotto.”<sup>204</sup> Through gestures directed towards the other, the two artists make space – between tables – to convey the distance of their laterally constituted togetherness. On parallel jets, they eschew the lateral signifying effects of desire and pain, of wanting to hold on to what has only come to pass, in-between. Together, they face the limits and limitations of their finitude and they are born(e) again, backward and forward, through the hands of the other.

Their representation has nothing to do with a reproduction, it is not simply a recollection, rather, it is an opening towards a presence always-already there and always there again,

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<sup>203</sup> See Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (op. cit.), 26–31.

<sup>204</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, trans. P. Kamuff (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 70, original emphasis.

relentlessly exposed before them, between 'I and you,' and beside ourselves. Their acts are willing to trace the shadow of a particularity painful and dramatic mo(ve)ment – that we shall call traumatic – in history that loses its grounding with the common domain of the 'familiar' and the known; the unrepresentable, unspeakable, unfigurable revealing of death in flesh-and-blood. Tying eroticism and brutality to the negation that (syncopated) repetition represents they form the 'uncommon' being together of a radical dissociative association – un-bonded-ness – that gradually extends, through eternal circulation, into affirmative operations:

Circulation goes in all directions: this is the Nietzschean thought of the 'eternal return,' the affirmation of meaning as the repetition of the instant, nothing but this repetition, and as a result, nothing (since it is a matter of the repetition of what essentially does not return). But it is a repetition already comprised in the affirmation of the instant, in this affirmation/request (*re-petitio*) seized in the letting go of the instant, affirming the passing of presence and itself passing with it, affirmation abandoned in its very movement. It is an impossible thought, a thinking that does not hold itself back from the circulation it thinks, a thinking of meaning right at [*a meme*] meaning, where its eternity occurs as the truth of its passing.<sup>205</sup>

The translators to this edition aptly note how *a meme* refers to a crucial relation that is one of being right next to, right at, or even in, without being wholly a part of.<sup>206</sup> The wasteful time of repetition hence becomes the time regained in the 'touch of meaning' that emerges 'besides itself.' The condition of the individuation, of meaning, *is* something besides itself, for, "[w]hat is a singularity, if not each time its 'own' clearing, its 'own' imminence, the imminence of a 'propriety' or propriety itself as imminence, always touched upon, always lightly touched:

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<sup>205</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 4, original emphasis and parenthesis.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 194, note 3.

revealing itself *beside*, always beside.”<sup>207</sup> In confusion, wonder, pain, inevitable resistance, nostalgia, loss and dread, as well as in our moments of most liberating pleasure, not to say joy and surprise, ‘we’ become plural, able to be, and feel, beside ourselves in ways that will to be narrated.

The theatre of blood of this odd pair unravels in the passionate throws of this relation – beside – in the internal and ecstatic resonance of a system of (dis)individuation, as Rei Tarada points out: “people with passion are viewed as ruptured, beside themselves (as the saying goes), as going beyond their proper ‘subjectivity.’”<sup>208</sup> This theatre is agent of a relation that forges polysemy by entering into a line of lateral incorporation using sight, sound, smell, gestures, movement, posture, fluidity and friction, conscious as well as non-conscious ways of doing with one’s own body, which keeps itself together by virtue of keeping in touch with the other, without ever touching: “[a]ll of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation; moreover, it is the heterogeneity of surfaces that touch each other. *Contact* is beyond fullness and emptiness, beyond connection and disconnection. If ‘to come into contact’ is to begin to make sense of one another, then this ‘coming’ penetrates nothing; there is no intermediate and mediating ‘milieu.’”<sup>209</sup>

Athey and Tolentino take great pleasure and joy in the pain of a ‘coming’ together<sup>210</sup> that penetrates no-thing, proliferating in what I would call an ‘erotoethics of resistance.’ Their physical condition of ‘untouchability,’ their connecting blood-lines that are never shared, make of touch an experience of mutual attention and care; “the *interlacing* [*l’entrecroisement*] of

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<sup>207</sup> Nancy continues, in brackets: “[b]eside himself [‘a cote de ses pom- pes’], as the saying goes. The comedy of this expression is no accident, and, whether it masks an anxiety or liberates the laughter of the ignorant, it is always a matter of an escape, an evasion, and an emptying out of what is closest, an oddity presented as the rule itself” (*Being Singular Plural*, 7-8).

<sup>208</sup> Rei Tarada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the ‘Death of the Subject’* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 171.

<sup>209</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 45, original emphasis.

<sup>210</sup> In “Shattered Love,” Nancy writes: ‘to joy is not a fulfilment, and it is not even an event. Nonetheless it happens, it arrives – and it arrives as it departs, it arrives in departing and it departs in the arrival, in the same beat of the heart. To joy is the crossing of the other. The other cuts across me, I cut across it. Each one is the other for the other – but also for the self. In this sense one joys in the other for the self: to be passed to the other [...] Joy makes felt and lets go the very essence of the sharing that is being’ (In *The Inoperative Community*, 106).

strands whose extremities remain separate even at the very center of the knot.”<sup>211</sup> What is at stake in this encroachment is a separation, an opening that emphasizes the reciprocity of co-production, of co-presence in the spacing of singularities: “an access that is, then, ‘inimitable,’ un-transportable, untranslatable *because* it forms, each time, an absolute point of translation, transmission, or transition of the origin *into* origin.”<sup>212</sup> This fissure, this cut, this wound of constantly renewed rupture hosts the potential to activate desire, to love by sharing nothing, and to move *us* beyond binaries and into ‘willed’ futures:

‘The horizon of the infinite’ is no longer the horizon *of the whole*, but the ‘whole’ (all that is) as put on hold everywhere, pushed to the outside *just as much as* it is pushed back inside the ‘self.’ It is no longer a line that is drawn, or a line that will be drawn, which orients or gathers the meaning of a course of progress or navigation. It is the opening [la brèche] or distancing [l’ecartement] of horizon itself, and in the opening: us. We happen as the opening itself, the dangerous fault line of a rupture.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 5.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 14, original emphasis.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, xii

## Enraptured

The tectonics of the event-emergence relating to non-linear, far-from-realised, and dissipative structures of relational processes acts through forms of displacement that allow new configurations to become visible. Its mass of seemingly chaotic, unbridled elemental passions is endowed with a self-organising capacity producing spontaneous order. The face of surfaces that seems unconnected emerges from a *transform boundary* where the contact between surfaces is often so forceful an opposition that it leads to ruptures, which cause slab windows to open, as other parts fall away. The patterns of these collision and response and the temporal relations of its implied tectonics indicate there is no negativity, there is instead potentiality where time does not have a prior existence as (historical) frame within which genesis and transformation takes place, but is the expression of the dimensionality of being in processes of *be-coming* and *be-longing*, with other forms of being and non-being, in inflected and infecting ways: “[c]om-passion is the contagion, the contact of being with one another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness.”<sup>214</sup> We have to be willful to share these rapturous mo(ve)ments between *us*, between us all: the dead, the living, and non-living things. I hope that between these pages I made this necessity ‘felt.’

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., xiii.

## Becoming Grounds

These writings around the wound began with a scene of evacuation extracted from the second part of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, in which the void of Mrs. Ramsay's sudden disappearance into the night rubs against Mr. Ramsay's, and the readers', empty gestures of apprehension. Yet the long passage immediately preceding this brief parenthesis already slips these unobtrusive human phantoms into the atmosphere produced by the natural cycles of days and seasons, as they envelop the empty abode of the Ramsay Family:

The nights now are full of wind and destruction; the trees plunge and bend and their leaves fly helter skelter until the lawn is plastered with them and they lie packed in gutters and choke rain pipes and scatter damp paths. Also the sea tosses itself and breaks itself, and should any sleeper fancying that he might find on the beach an answer to his doubts, a sharer of his solitude, throw off his bedclothes and go down by himself to walk on the sand, no image with semblance of serving and divine promptitude comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul. The hand dwindles in his hand; the voice bellows in his ear. Almost it would appear that it is useless in such confusion to ask the night those questions as to what, and why, and wherefore, which tempt the sleeper from his bed to seek an answer.<sup>1</sup>

In the time-lapse of night and change, in the sequence of life and death, the cosmic theatre of nature and elements only retain the vague markers of human presence as its shadow makes a fugitive semblance of appearance in the folds of temporal conditions. As a consequence of the virtual obliteration of human forms, it here appears that authorial metaphysics – or rather anti-metaphysics – tends towards a natural order of undomesticated unrest.

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, 1989), 128.

Caught in this atmosphere, I am immediately reminded of the 'earth-body work' of Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta. Similar conditions of violent changes in landscape and heritage can be felt at the heart of her practice at the intersection of performance, sculpture and image. Nature, time, and the seasons emerge as the focal elements of her conception; their cycles of destruction, creation, recursion and transformation appearing as the main generative agents, and ones of particular significance for the artist. Speaking about this work, in which her body becomes impossibly intimate with the landscape to the point of becoming transposed into it, she said: "I thought about it as having nature take over the body, in the same way that it had taken over the symbols of past civilizations. Nature is really the most powerful thing that there is."<sup>2</sup>

The physical traces of her work *with* the earth – with blood, wood, grass, flowers, leaves, algae, mushrooms, pebbles, ice, fire, wax and gunpowder – become eloquent etchings of the intimate and wounded events of her life in which the personal is deferred into an expression of bodily engagement with primal elements and materials. Her early experience of exile from Cuba and her subsequent being relocated – or, more poignantly, feeling dislocated – in America are complicatedly entangled with an embodied, heightened sense of (up)rooting, (dis)placing and (un)settling. Yet, her artistic response to being 'un-housed' is not to memorialize her *feeling* for home but to disseminate, disperse and dissolve it into instances of connectivity and kinship with spaces and landscapes. Mendieta's attempts to reimagine corporeal relations – including their violent expressions – take undomestic(ated) forms that expose her broader formal and aesthetic project of creating significant, uncanny no-(man's)land of 'belonging,' equally bereft and spirited.

Mexico, a country for which the artist felt a visceral affinity, was the location of her first *Siluetas*, or silhouette – the incipient form of what later became an inchoate series of burial and

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<sup>2</sup> Ana Mendieta, *Traces*, exhibition guide (London: Hayward Gallery, 2013).



regeneration sites. Here in 1973, at the Hotel Principal in Oaxaca, the artist staged one of her most exemplary works: *Untitled (Mutilated Body on Landscape)*. This event is thus resumed in Jane Blocker's reconstruction of its photographic documentation: "[i]n a gruesome tableau, she lies on a parapet like a corpse at a crime scene [...]. A white sheet, over which blood has been poured, covers her small body; a large cow's heart sits heavily on her chest."<sup>3</sup> Blocker retraces an essential connection of this figuration with the sacrificial economies of the two dominant traditions of Mexico – Catholicism and Aztec culture – where blood always substantiates, making possible beyond death, vitality and community.

More specifically, she explains, Mendieta's public performance is an attempt to reimagine and represent the story of the founding of Tenochtitlán, the modern-day Mexico City: "[i]n one version of the story, Cuauhtlequetzqui, seeking a homeland for his people the Mexica, challenged Copil the wise magician to battle. Defeating Copil, Cuauhtlequetzqui cut out his heart and instructed his minion to go and bury it among the canes and reeds. From the buried heart, a Red Prickly Pear grew, and in that place the city was built."<sup>4</sup> For Blocker, this vision "of the body in pieces, of the body deformed" figures the non-reproductive (body-)part that severed from its putative organic site in the male body becomes metonymically displaced elsewhere – as the heart of the female womb:

both organs are roughly triangular vessels made of muscle through which blood is expressed, living and dying told. This bleeding is an 'expletive' that, as in the original meaning of that word, 'fills out' the male body, broadens its meanings and association with the womb, which gives birth to the Mexican empire. This work is a body-to-body transmission.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst Blocker's account of Mendieta's blood spectacle points towards the expletive functions

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Blocker, *What the Body Cost: Desire, History, and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 121.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

of bodies and body parts as tropes for aesthetic fecundity – as a mode of transmission of life re-membered – I am here more interested in excavating the transformative and regenerative relations that ‘make sense’ of such ‘bloody’ recirculation.

Alphonso Lingis’ gripping account of life, death, rebirth and spiritual transformation in “Tenochtitlán,”<sup>6</sup> records how the Spanish and the Mexica drew very conflicting value from the supreme religious act of the shedding of human blood. Catholicism and the Aztec religion share, in fact, a similarly sanguinary belief system, only, “on the pyramids of Tenochtitlán, sacrifice had nothing to do with human salvation, nor with attainment of deathlessness through death. The Aztec religion was a religion not of eternity but of time. All the deities were units of time. Each day had its deity, each day was a deity, a deity was a day.”<sup>7</sup> In the face of the immense nothingness taking over the nocturnal skies in cycles of arresting force,<sup>8</sup> the Aztecs found a theology – a cosmology – of the most pressing order: to sacrifice (part) of themselves in order to liberate, to “fill out,” the motion contained within their bodies. Hence, they “poured forth their blood in order to give to the most remote astral deities, suspended for a night in the voids, movement.”<sup>9</sup> The charged properties of blood allow for time to pass in cycles of death and life, partaking in the nature of the material and cosmic world:

Aztec sacrifice was not at all for our salvation, for the salvation of the Mexica, the people of Anahuac, "The One World," or of the human species. Its purpose was cosmic and not anthropocentric; with the volcanic obsidian dagger the human blood is released for the sake of the cosmic order or, more exactly, in order that the diurnal gods rise and fall, that the divine trajectories of time rush to their extinction. The blood that makes our bodies move themselves is

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<sup>6</sup> This forms part of his collection *Abuses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Lingis, *Abuses*, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Many Mesoamerican cultures followed the 52-year (spiritual) calendar of solar-galactic cycles. In fear that the universe would collapse after each cycle if the gods were not strong enough, the Aztecs performed ceremonies of sacrifice at the end of each cycle in order to appease the deities.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

released from them in order that time and not the stasis of eternity be.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, the author recognizes divergent aspects in Christian sacred life: “[i]n Christendom sacrifice is required by original sin;”<sup>11</sup> the state of existential exile in which all humans are implicated not by the deviation enacted by individual choice but by the ‘performance’ of an unelected deviant nature. Lingis notes: “[o]ne’s sinfulness is not a property [...]; it is an antiproperty, it is the willed defection of will in which one is conceived and conceives,”<sup>12</sup> for, in the words of Saint Paul: “I do not the good that I wish, but the evil that I do not wish, that I perform.”<sup>13</sup> In this def(l)ection, human flesh re-turns to human flesh as the state of sin that it re-enacts via the self-regenerating compulsions of its own sensual nature.

Performative and receptive flesh is thus inscribed within a ‘deadlock’ contract where its carnal nature is destined to be washed away by the nullifying power of death, which returns sacrifice with immortality. It is within this process of nullification, Lingis explains, that the un-saveable flesh renders salvation possible within a “divine economy of redemption”<sup>14</sup> that drives a life in which there is nothing left to save into rewarding deathlessness: “[t]he value of our carnal substance is measured by the infinite value of the flesh of God sacrificed to redeem it and by the infinite series of earthly goods to be sacrificed for its unending mortification. It is the money of the city of God.”<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, flesh is the currency through which the individual participates in the history of a people and its political economy.

In a very different trajectory, Lingis notes, the use of the flesh by the Aztecs entails the denaturalization and desacralization of the self, which would then exist as a sovereign singularity, rather than as an instance of a particular nature:

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 15-6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Lingis, *Abuses*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 19.

This religion assigns to man the most exorbitant destiny ever conceived in any system of thought. The destiny their religion assigned to the Egret People requires an existence that has broken with that of homo politicus, homo economicus, an existence no longer a subject of, and a value in, reproduction and production. Such a human existence is no longer commanded by a nature that maintains itself – no longer commanded by universals without (incarnated in the individual in the form of the instinct to reproduce the species) nor by self-regenerating compulsions of one's own sensuous nature. The Aztec sacrificial offering is an existence that realizes absolute singularity.<sup>16</sup>

Lingis traces the cause of such singularity in the practice of sodomy found amongst the Aztecs.<sup>17</sup> Rather than a proscription of homosexual conduct, sodomitical association comes round the back of religious and juridical laws as a *willful* deviation and pollution of reproductive and regulatory principles:

Sodomy, determined in the juridic discourse, civic and canonical, of Christendom, is conceptualized not as a nature but as an act, a transgression of divine, human, and natural positive law. [...] sodomy is antinatural. It issues not from an unconscious compulsion but from an intellect that conceives the law and a will that determines to defy it; it derives from libertinage and not from sensuality. Sodomy is the use of the erected male organ not to direct the germ for the propagation of the species nor to give pleasure to the partner but to gore the partner and release the germ of the race in its excrement. It attacks the human species as such. Not only does it invert the natural finality of organs by which we came to exist; it is directed against the imperative to maintain the genus which every positive law, every universal, must presuppose. It is the last

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>17</sup> As well as in the Mayas of Cape Catoche, the Cempoalans, the Xocotlans, the Tlascalans.

limit of outrage under the eyes of the monotheist god, God the Father, that unengendered principle of all generation and absolutized formula for the normative.<sup>18</sup>

Sodomy concerns an autonomy that makes use and abuse of itself, rather than being bound within a naturalized and/or politicised identity. Its potential for life escapes value and thus the hold of sovereign power, hence excreting a community of pure singularity, beyond any prescribed limit of finality and exclusion:

[sodomy] is the act that isolates, that singularizes absolutely. Positively, sodomy is the crime in which sovereignty is constituted and resides. It is the act, unmotivated and unjustifiable, that posits the singular one, the monster. This singular, singularizing act can only be incessantly repeated, rending the monotheist time of universal generation, conjuring up a cosmic theater without order or sanction in which trajectories of time rush to their dissipation.<sup>19</sup>

This determination cannot be expropriated of its conditions for existing: its force, its affect, its labour, its body, its meanings, rather, it circulates always in the space-time of contact of its autonomy with communal forms of life – the spilling of blood into the cosmic void:

the supreme act on the pyramid of Uitzilopochtli was the sacrifice of this sovereignty in order that the gods exist, that the trajectories of time run their course. We should not say: that the cosmos turn, for there was precisely not, without blood, an order that would maintain the terrible dispersion of the heavenly bodies in the immensity of the nothingness. Sacrifice of the monstrous sovereignty in order that the universal dispersion be a cosmos. In

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 13-4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 14.

order that the movements of time depart.<sup>20</sup>

The incipient uselessness<sup>21</sup> of this sacrifice is marked by the monstrous value of what I would call a 'cosmic' kind of love (a love without objective or finality of restitution or retribution), a love that can only subsume singularity in universality.

In tracing the circulation of blood narratives – and the incurring destabilization of value economy and sovereign power – we find that in the Mesoamerican tradition it is 'queer' and monstrous sodomy the praxis through which bodies are given a new, non-utilitarian use and for which sacrifice is made necessary. For the sake of 'cosmic love,' the Aztec consecrates its excessive, incalculable value in the face of the "more than one is,"<sup>22</sup> that is, the absolute (useless and wasteful) value *par excellence* – the child elected amongst its peers who: "ascended the great pyramid, lay spread-eagled on the sacrificial stone for the black-faced priests to open his breast with obsidian daggers to pull out his heart, and for the nobles to partake of his flesh and blood. Not a nourishment, human flesh with human flesh: Eucharist of Quetzalcoatl, the departing one."<sup>23</sup>

For Lingis, it is in this visceral encounter between the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world that blood participates in a carnal economy that exceeds exchange and accumulation. The flesh of the (infant) body enters into a relationship (an economy)<sup>24</sup> with the world via the agape cuts (the wounds) in its surfaces and boundaries, which enact the collapse of domestic will – of house arrest – and its governability. Please allow one last, long quote:

An infant is tubes disconnected, corpuscle full of yolk put out of the fluid

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 23-4.

<sup>21</sup> Lingis notes: "[t]he sodomist perversion, as perhaps every perversion, is a perversion of the rationale of economy; the exchanges can no longer continue by way of compensations, The sodomist phantasm put in the place of the possible utility of the human organism does not have the phenomenal form of value, exchange value; it is an unevaluatable value. The perversity lies in the inexchangeability of the sodomist position" (*Abuses*, 23).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 24-5.

<sup>24</sup> From French via Latin from Greek *oikonomia* 'household management,' based on *oikos* 'house' + *nemein* 'manage,' *Oxford Dictionaries*, <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/economy?q=economy>>.

reservoir of the womb, gasping, gulping free air, pumping, circulating fluids. The disconnected tubes are open to multiple couplings, multiple usages. A mouth is a coupling that draws in fluid, but can also slobber or vomit it out forcibly; that babbles or cries, can pout, smile, spit, and kiss. From the first the mouth that draws in sustenance also produces an excess, foam, slaver, extends a surface of warm pleasure, an erotogenic surface in contact with the surface of the maternal breast. The coupling is not only consuming, of sustenance, but productive, of pleasure, spread, shared. The anus is an orifice that ejects the segments of flow, but also holds them in, ejects vapors, noise, can pout, be coaxed, refuses, defiles, and defies. And spreads its excesses, producing a warm and viscous surface and surface effects of pleasure. The excrement is waste and gratuity; it is the archetypal gift, which is a transfer without recompense, not of one's possessions, one's things, but of oneself.<sup>25</sup>

Flesh becomes porous, open to pleasurable and painful transfusions with its environ; its vulnerability dispersing its singularity into the universe, which it affects and which affects it. Through the absolute value of sacrifice, blood is drawn from this permeable structure into the flesh of the cosmos, which is in turn compelled to move (beyond the individual self) into an un-resting temporal order. This relation underpins the desire for a form of sociality in which there is a world in common, and which Lingis calls a "mortal community."<sup>26</sup> Its rational basis relies not upon a dominant morality and law but on a shared vulnerability of flesh that interrupts the production and reproduction of something in common. The possibility of this 'sense' of community is premised on the singularity of a sacrificed sovereignty that shares with the universe its mortal injurability.

Finally, returning to Mendieta's 'earth-body work' and her sanguinary vision, I suggest that

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<sup>25</sup> Lingis, *Abuses*, 19-20.

<sup>26</sup> Alphonso Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1994).

similar affective dimensions of the flesh – and blood – re-circulate in the mo(ve)ments of connection with the surfaces and intensities of the ‘earth-world’ – the body lain, etched and dissolved in stone, grass, water; exposed to the elements and the landscape that grasp the space of the body as a kind of present-absent trace. Her figurations concede that the body exists intertwined, enmeshed with the flesh of the world rather than as either subject or object; its boundaries or surfaces are permeable, able to be moved, touched and opened by forces – and knowledges – that are not its own. Hence, Mendieta’s experience of the ruins of Tenochtitlán, I contend, draws not so much the outline of an embodied re-enactment that returns a blood(y) history, but rather it expels the invisible quiver of something (removed) that permeates the flesh – call it cosmic love.

The artist is moved by the reverberations of a singularity that exceeds value with the *more* than one is, an excess willfully given away for no return. Her liminal experience of travelling across places and cultures generates a spatio-temporality in which she becomes connected with, and differentiated from, the vulnerability and mortality of ‘other’ bodies, through a vision mediated by an affective landscape – a geography of cosmic relations. Through these associations, the soil is not the object of abuse by regimes of human production and creation, rather it is the body that is assaulted through a deliberate attempt to deface and obliterate<sup>27</sup> the human into the natural elements. What is fascinating in the event of the *Siluetas* is that the body is (literally) grounded in a kinship with the being of earth expressed in the time of duration of their enmeshment; a duration that is re-accessed with every last trace: a performance, a sculpture, an image, a film; but also a season, a murmur, a wind, a fog, a drop, a swarm, a grain, a flame of intensity.

In this kinship or affinity, animate and inanimate matter is engaged in some corresponding bio-aesthetic striving in which the multiplicity of the human form and the non-human, the

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<sup>27</sup> I would like to note once more, how this verb here is intended to mean ‘to make invisible or indistinct; conceal or cover,’ and not ‘to destroy or erase.’



animal and the vegetable, the conscious and the unconscious, as well as movements, qualities, tendencies and intensities are, to use Lingis' words, "not yoked to some conscious goal or purpose that is or can be justified in some capitalist program for economic growth or some transcendental or theological fantasy of object-constitution or creativity seated in us."<sup>28</sup> This epistemological shift away from an anthropocentric view in the face of 'things' marks a sense of the possibility of an 'inhuman' community of being, free of any essential conditioning, or principle of function and form, inclusion and exclusion, tied in the common destiny or work of the whole. Instead, it constitutes the conditions for the being-together of existences circulated as vibrant and vital matters; a system of nested networks that includes all forms of life, always more. Adrian Heathfield thus describes the regenerative sensibility of Mendieta's earthy corpus:

The anthropocentric status of art is displaced by a vision of human production as only one aspect of a living system of earthily creations. These works might be better read and as interactions between the land and the gestures and traces of a woman; invocation of the vibrant relations and flux of all earthily elements including the flesh of the human animal. The land is touched carefully here, caressed, in order to let the incessant and exalting transformation of things speak: murmurs of a radical ecological consciousness.<sup>29</sup>

This light touch generates an ethical moment in which the flesh and mortality of the body is felt in tender contact with the soil whose own wounds are moving and touching with a still life that has the power to un-rest desire, belonging, and com-compassion. To the (still) roving question: 'Where is Ana Mendieta'?<sup>30</sup> Or, where is her trace, what is left of her? I would offer this possibility: she remains (still) moving where she belongs – *together with* earth: more than

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<sup>28</sup> Lingis, Alphonso, "Bestiality," *Symploke* 6.1 (1998): 58.

<sup>29</sup> Adrian Heathfield, "Embers," in *Ana Mendieta: Traces*, ed. Stephanie Rosenthal (London: Hayward Publishing, 2013), 24.

<sup>30</sup> See Jane Blocker, *Where is Ana Mendieta?: Identity, Performativity, and Exile* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999).

life between them.

These stories have followed the desire to know with the wounds, cuts and voids that filter a sense of the mo(ve)ments of life's passing. Excavating 'some' affective and aesthetic dimensions of events at the intersection of the human and the non-human, I have questioned the attention exacted by the interactions, vitalities and forcefulness of the *being-with* of all matter, beyond matter. I call the intersectionality of these energetic transfers *symbiotic* – as 'living together' – drawing meaning from its root – *sumbios* 'companion.' This fundamental relationality finds echoes in Haraway's notions of "companion species" and "significant otherness." Her words resonate with much of what I have traced across these pages:

Through their reaching into each other, through their 'prehensions' or graspings, beings constitute each other and themselves. Beings do not preexist their relatings. 'Prehensions' have consequences. The world is a knot in motion. [...] There are no pre-constituted subjects and objects, and no single sources, unitary actors, or final ends. In Judith Butler's terms, there are only 'contingent foundations;' bodies that matter are the result. A bestiary of agencies, kinds of relatings, and scores of time trump the imaginings of even the most baroque cosmologists. For me, that is what *companion species* signifies.<sup>31</sup>

Like Haraway, I have tried to emphasise "emergence, process, historicity, difference, specificity, co-habitation, co-constitution, and contingency"<sup>32</sup> as the conceptual markers of the relationality that we find in (the face of) all 'things' – becoming agents as "neither wholes nor parts."<sup>33</sup> Perceiving the human as one entity living 'with' and 'beside' the cohort of organisms and objects of the world, as always more-than-one, foregrounds the co-implication of longings

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<sup>31</sup> Haraway, Donna. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press 2003), 6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

and vulnerabilities that have nothing in common except their fugitive flights from all forms of capture and assimilation – e.g. colonialism and anthropocentrism – of difference-as-antagonism or as a justification for ontological violence and its multiple forms of exploitation. The regard and attention for the one(s) beside the self advances an extimate politics of “significant otherness” oriented to “on-the-ground work that cobbles together non-harmonious agencies and ways of living that are accountable both to their disparate inherited histories and to their barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures.”<sup>34</sup>

The politics of giving more than one is, of taking on the debt (or sign) of the other; of playing host to fugitive (moments of) life,<sup>35</sup> disturb the terrain of our temporality uprooting all possible and impossible movements and affects. Their (re)composed intensities materialise and actualise their charge in the event of relation, which I have here called performance. This flesh-and-blood archive of strange and wondrous – and wandering – forces convey heterogeneous ontologies, logics, geographies, choreographies, kinetics, and aesthetics that we can use to rethink all human and nonhuman co-present becomings and interconnected sensibilities that emerge even before they are (re)performed.

The phantoms of our experiences tell the (hi)story of a life in constant motion that can be revisited and re-accessed as a sort of ‘alive-performance of existence’ – an ‘attunement’ in the fleshy logic of affects pervading all aspects of life. This sensibility translates into a theoretical inflection that can be defined as a vitalistically tinged practice of an ‘athleticism of sensation’ – the beginning of an ethics of ‘being-with-out’ that ‘dys-appears’ what is really left of us. What sets apart the experience of witnessing fragmentation is a special form of ‘doing without’ (an image) out of an anomalous necessity that results in an extimate standing ‘beside oneself’ observing, paying attention, attending to oneself as well as the other, and judge how this

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>35</sup> Stefano Harvey and Fred Moten brilliantly examine these themes in the *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe; New York; Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013). The scope of these final remarks only allows to gesture to their indebtedness to this work; a debt that remains open.

distance or vicinity in experience affects us.

Ultimately, if there is one thing that 'we' – so-called humans – all have in common is that one-day we will all be cripples; we will all meet the wound and then the void, without exceptions and in different ways. Then, each one of us, in our own particular way, has reasons to understand their existence as the necessity to become 'affectively entrained' – attuned to receive and respond to the experience of the other, to feel the responsibility to and care for the other, especially those 'other' who know and remember – as broken as they are – the different and better possibilities of being human.<sup>36</sup> These possibilities remain between us.

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<sup>36</sup> I am indebted here to philosopher Peter Sloterdijk's considerations in "Only Cripples Will Survive," in *You Must Change Your Life*, trans. Wieland Hoban, Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2013.

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