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SUMMONING THE BODY THAT ACTS

A Thesis Presented by

BRENDAN MCCAULEY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2016

Studio Arts

SUMMONING THE BODY THAT ACTS

A Dissertation Presented

By

BRENDAN MCCAULEY

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ABSTRACT

SUMMONING THE BODY THAT ACTS

DEGREE DATE MONTH AND YEAR

BRENDAN MCCAUEY, B.F.A., MONTSERRAT COLLEGE OF ART

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Directed by: Shona Macdonald

Seven series of artworks; painted, drawn and performed. These works are presented as affective incorporation exercises, that test modes of aesthetic communication in response to varying political contingencies. The constitutive processes used to develop the work also function as a methodology for my own political radicalization. As an artist I am wagering how to talk, as an activist I am preparing to act. The artworks discussed occur at the crossroads of these desires as enactions of futurity within the subjunctive mood.

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CHAPTER I

A METHODOLOGY FOR RADICALIZATION

A. Introduction

In this paper, I will present and examine a series of seven artworks, both painted and performed, that I have produced over the course of two years, within the University of Massachusetts Amherst Studio Arts Graduate Program. I will be framing them through several theory texts which have influenced them. I will also be looking at these works within the cultural contingencies, such as Occupy and the spring uprisings which provoked their content and shaped their articulations. I wish to present these works not as objects or artifacts of an artist's preoccupation with media, but as experiments or wagers in identification and futurity carried out as political acts or incitements between the artist — myself — and multiple publics. I'd like to measure their success and failure by their ability to operate as affective mechanisms that communicate potentialities. At the same time, I want to recognize that processes developed to produce the work and which deliver me into and through it comprise a ——-methodology of my own radicalization, where I am figuring out how to take a first step into political struggle, how to mobilize a body that is mine and will act, and to do this by building an affective relationship with the bodies of others across time, distance and difference.

The works presented are organized into three sections, marking the deployment of representation, affect and performance as their primary concerns. These works will make use of a number of supporting theoretical discourses and rhetorical platforms in their formulation, which I will note as they are deployed within. There are however, a few discourses that are more central to the agenda of these works as a whole. The first among

them will be Jose Esteban Munoz's re-situation of Ernst Bloch's principle of hope, and anticipatory illumination of art, as well as Agamben's term "potentialities," as methods to invoke visions of the "not- yet-here". Both Bloch and Munoz locate futurity within art and aesthetics, but Munoz goes a step further, bringing these temporalities, through queerness, into the realm of identity. Munoz asks us to actually identify with the future, and suggests that this anticipatory, emancipatory, identity may be rescued from the past. Antonio Negri's take on this is the term "Potenza", by which he means potential-power, a coming into power through art's ability to manifest visions. I'll let him explain-

How can we construct, or simply think, the event, on this abstract terrain which is the only one that we frequent? How can we – I don't say preconfigure, nor do I say preconstitute, but simply have a prior sense of the determined event? How can we approach the exceedance of being, its waiting, its realization?...

To this task of humanity, to this engagement of the intellectual, poetic activity can introduce us ... it reads the future as imagination in act. Potenza of intelligence and of sense; constituent power. It is in fact here that the miracle happens – not in intervention from the outside, the angelic explosion of an incongruous event, but rather a link between the event and history, a construction of the story in coincidence with the event, and in consequence a deployment of the event in story-telling. This new and powerful synthesis is what shows art and poetic movement that they are rooted in being; that they are therefore in a position to determine an exceedance... The artist is the intermediary between collective action, which constructs new being and new significations, and the event of liberation, which fixes this new word in the logic of the construction of being. (Negri, 2011 pg.72)

Within the discourse these four theorists have on art as a site where futures and identities come into being, I'd like to insert Baudrillard's conceptions of simulation, and seduction, and also Veneigem's lesson on roles, to situate this identity construction through art as occurring on an alienated terrain of appearances and artifice, what Negri calls "abstract terrain".

In holding Munoz's futurity identification as the drive and content of the following artworks, and Negri's potency of being as its political horizon, I would like to hold Avital Ronell's construction of the "test" in her work "The Test Drive" responsible for the format the works hold, in their attempt to put Munozian enactments of futurity to the test. I am receiving Ronell's connection of the ideas of *testing* to *protestant* as a role, and then stepping it further into *protester* as an identity. I am also relying on Ronell's conception of test to account for my shifting relation to works as author, facilitator and participant as a "multiple dis-engagement" that produces an "erasure of self that remodulates" in relatedness to truths.

B. Producing Work for a Community in Its Absence

In order to situate the following artworks in relation to their content, and to each other, I will first locate their author's — my — relation to them in the aftermath of Occupy Wall Street. The Occupy movement in its myriad incarnations and subsequent spin off organizations is the formative background from which I have entered into this academic program and is also the instigating moment that hailed the production of these works. While Occupy was presented as, and debated in, the broad media as a standard protest movement, the activity in the camps more closely resembled a convention or conference that simply refused to leave its host. As new models of communication, organization, and distribution were developed among participants they were put to use immediately within the camps, and then traded across national borders, oceans and languages to be redeployed within different contingencies as trial runs for an alternative global society. The encampments and their supporting networks were not protests, they were *test sites*. Occupy's rhetoric and politics aimed outward, but its attention and dedication moved

inward amongst its constituents; its product would not be social change, but a class of people practiced in the labor of change and charged with the vision of globalism and multitude¹ that was the experience of the camps as a collaborative laboratory.

Leaving this experience behind, the primary takeaway for me was proximity as a virtue; the drive to bring people together, the idea that nothing can really start, until the individuals tasked with political struggle are ready to claim a future, and until they can see each other clearly and within a vulnerable entanglement. Within this continuum of looking and feeling that leads to doing; it may be their physical closeness that compels the participants to act. The remarkable, and until therefore totally unavailable to me, ability to talk to a union organizer, a Palestinian exile, a homeless man, a performance artist, a farmer, a lawyer, and a grad student from Spain, all within the same moment, in the open air, and with intention to put whatever ideas were generated into immediate practice, using any available resources if not procuring or producing entirely new resources and systems of support, was moving beyond words. Within this staggering array of people collaborating across difference, I felt empowered beyond my ability as an individual, and also hailed to action from many different places at once. A lot of actions seemed possible, that before had felt impossible; actually they felt not just possible but downright practical. I began to envision another world; The kind of dreaming that would become Occupy's anti-capitalist slogan.

The first difficulty I encountered, while producing culture in the diaspora of the occupy movement, was the sudden distance between its constituent publics imposed by

¹ The Multitude that I invoke here is that of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, as a myriad, unmediated, immanent coalition of groups and individuals relating through difference rather than in spite of difference. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004)

the eviction of the camps, the removal of the very proximity, togetherness and conviviality that fueled the engine of all its potentialities. Unsure of how to get back into that communal space — and of how to reconstitute myself outside of it — I picked up the Occupy tradition of testing and carried it into my artwork, charging it with the task of bridging the space between a community lost, and a new one not yet found. I had moved from a public space where all of my friends were being arrested to an academic place where my interlocutors could not imagine an arrest, could not imagine themselves as the arrested. I wanted to refute this safe, static, stratifying distance, and trouble the distinction between those who are in peril, and thus charged with or made responsible for change, and those who are not. I wanted to replace the othering of not-here, not-now and not-me, by saying “not yet.”

Moving forward, I will look at the first three series of works that I produced in regards to the experience of Occupy and the global anti-austerity movement. Supporting theories of aesthetics, communication and affect, will be touched as they are encountered within the works.

CHAPTER II

ARCHIVE AND REPRESENTATION

In attempting to re-invoke the convivial agitation and cross-pollination that was occupy's founding impulse and perhaps most important contribution; I began to scan through my cellphone photos of Occupy for visual traces. Widening my search I began to move through the cellphone images of other occupiers from different encampments, which had been uploaded to many social media feeds, online archives and occupy produced articles. This effort of looking, collecting, and organizing images of my recent history began to develop as an archive of experience, one that allowed connections in appearance to rise to the surface. While constructing this archive, I began to pick up on visual similarities among the people it contained; not only did protesters from New York and Oakland dress, interact, and agitate similarly, but protesters from other encampments in Tahrir, Gezi and Greece did as well. Policemen in all of these images also wore the similar looking equipment, and fought the activists with similar tactics in similar configurations; perhaps the police emblazoned on a black helmet would change from "police" to "polizei". Beyond the figures themselves, the phenomena of tear gas, firehoses, ambulances, plastic buckets, press badges and a curious proliferation of dogs all presented similarly throughout the images with reliable consistency. It was as if I was witnessing the same spectacular moment from different camera angles. These photographs did not capture much beyond the appearances of those represented, but my interest here was exactly in how they were seen, and how they see each other. I was perhaps also looking at myself again, using occupy as a lens.

A. Conjuncture Snapshots

My first method of accessing and communicating this trans-global network of looking was to construct composite paintings. This initial test was to determine what would happen if one were to look at all of these disparate moments together, at once, as a unity, a conjuncture a multitude; the same way that they appeared to me in the archive. Individuals and objects were selected, out of the archive I had assembled, rendered as careful drawings and collaged together as multitudes on square panels. The figures were embedded to the panel surfaces with intermediary painted gestures of smoke canisters from the same archive, but their environments were left vague beyond an implied ground. So as to make it apparent to the viewer that this was a manipulated construction, the materials were largely left raw. Various markers, such as the police/polizei text, were transported into the new frame intact and given prominence as a sign system. Using these markers and a source list presented as a title card, a viewer could deconstruct the image back into its assembled parts, however the unifying movement of the composition would resist this effort.

Having brought together these political coalitions into a configuration that I could acknowledge without rifling through the archive, I was once again able to recognize the massive umbrella identity of the occupier. What is most important about this identity, and seems to come across in the produced artworks, is that it transfers across difference allowing individuals to overcome isolation and formulate themselves as an instant group that is global and complex, remaining in relation even when broken into parts. Individuals are able to step in and out of this identity in order to make claims and engage a system of power that is similarly global and complex. Baudrillard warns that when individuals are

made responsible for complex global inequalities, the overwhelming nature of the task only produces apathy. This formulation of identity however— as a mobile, and chimeric, vox populi — allows its identifying constituents to break out of that trap.

A question remained, however, as to whether these representations were merely effects of the archiving process, or of my manipulation through it. In attempt to account for this, the second test of the Occupy archive was to leave its assembly and organization in the hands of the viewer. A few new panels were constructed, this time of emptied out, main-street, intersections, sourced from Northampton, Cairo, and Athens. These new panels were built by laying paper drawings on top of sheet metal. A new set of drawn figures were produced, and this time they were left ambulatory, with small magnets attached to their backs. In this new configuration the panels were mounted on a wall with the figures arrayed on a shelf or long podium in front of them.

Viewers encountering this second setup would conduct the experiment themselves within the parameters of the available archive. When selecting the figure of the homeless man, the injured woman wearing a mask, or the woman with shopping bags and children, they must ask themselves; “where does this belong?” and then make a claim in placing the figure. As more figures are placed, relations begin to develop and causal responses are hailed. If the policeman with raised club does indeed belong in Northampton, then who or what is his target, and why? The connections made by participants began to reflect those

found in the collapsing spheres of Martha Rosler's important collage series "Bringing the War Home"², in which the connection between American culture and

America's war in Vietnam is made so directly that atrocities are shown to occur inside of American living rooms alongside of domestic activities, perhaps as domestic activities. I had hoped participants would tilt towards using the images as a play space to test new relations as the global occupiers did. Unfortunately for the test, in many observed encounters the priority of those working the images was on the "correctness" of their placement claims. Some openly feared making a kind of taxonomical mistake, and asked other participants, or myself, if they were "doing it right?"

This second test had succeeded in inviting, and directing, an active thinking exercise in relation to mediatized images, especially when multiple participants would work the drawings together in conversation. However, while relationships between the provided images multiplied, the relation between the participants and those represented within the images actually disappeared. Identification had been thwarted by a negotiation of difference. Perhaps this occurred because of the objectification of the figures, or their reduction to sign-example. Perhaps by placing the viewer outside of the image as an author, they were prevented from entering back into it as a site of experience. I was also dissatisfied with the temporality of the works as being locked into a history, even though their construction was a "live" event. I had arrived at the limits of the work's supporting archive³.

² Rosler, Martha. *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*. c. 1967–72; reprised in relation to the war in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2004 and 2008

³ A similar conflict with what received archives can evoke may be found in a discussion of the artist Onya Hogan-Finlay's interaction with the ONE Archive by Cvetkovich and Halberstam in *Cruising The Archive: Queer Art and Culture in Los Angeles. 1945-1980*.

B. Trouble Topologies

The third test, would orient around bringing temporality and inhabitation back to the fore, by evacuating the archive in favor of the environmental contingencies that it had supplanted. Environment, absent in the first test, would become the subject matter here and an identification would be provoked between it and the viewer, rather than between the viewer and “actor” figures already within it. I turned to landscape in search of what produced the desire of the occupiers to act in the first place, to evoke the circumstances that propelled them towards “another world”.

In my daily travels through the Pioneer Valley, where I live and work, I began to document empty spaces that I would normally have overlooked. These were areas where communities, production and culture used to be, but had long since left, places where effort seemed to fail, and collapse seemed immanent. The American landscape I stitched together was found cast off on the side of a road, dwelling in isolation and desperation. I investigated these spaces by moving through them while snapping pictures on my phone, which were later brought back to the studio. There, I reconstructed their geography as ambitiously large paintings, rendered down to the smallest detail, in the popular American style of the paint-by-number.

When looking back through these fractured places as pleasingly banal paintings, here and there a mark of trauma can be pulled out of the tangle of gestures⁴. However, outside of an isolated moment of danger or two, the spaces of the paintings are largely

⁴ In this claim I am situating the term trauma alongside Benjamin’s “shock of modern life” and Cvetkovich’s configuration of trauma as an insidious everyday affect of a social condition.

open, empty, waiting. In this regard they are similar to Kevin McCarty's "Stages" photographs which anticipate a performance⁵. By instigating alertness, within initially unremarkable landscapes, these paintings attempt to capture a few simultaneous temporalities: a past trauma, a present uncertainty held in limbo, and a future potentiality, which may be the return of the prior trauma, or the acting agent of the trauma. This futurity may also be a break with their founding trauma, these spaces show small signs of transformation, they may yet be saved. The works in this series are formatted cinematically as a widescreen shot. These are spaces to be inhabited by the viewer, not merely witnessed by them. The event that these spaces await may actually be the arrival of the viewer within them.

Because the paintings are ontologically incomplete, in that everything beyond the border of their frames must be filled in by the viewer, including everything behind and inside of the objects presented, they are able to remain "unlocked" in time. As we scan across the image, we account for the anachronism by adjusting the implied context out of frame. So, the object in our current focus is "now", the object our eyes have just passed from is "then" and any area of the painting that we move to next is still in the "not-yet-here". Because the format of the paintings are so wide, and the details of their rendering are too small to perceive in focus all at once, or be understood together, our looking becomes a series of sought encounters, each one imbued with immanency by our gaze.

⁵ McCarty's works are discussed at length by Munoz in chapter 6 of *Cruising Utopia*, 97-113

CHAPTER III

AN AFFECTIVE TURN

The initial arc of tests began with representation, but ultimately I rejected it for fictive imaginings and anticipation of the unrepresentable. Having moved from away from archive, I was called back to the task of representation by the Gaza bombings of the summer of 2014. Media images of the Gazans' calamity flooded into my life, coming to me from everywhere, just as the occupy archive had. To move through the images was heartbreaking; they demanded a response, an accounting. I decided to receive the images as an assignment. I asked myself; "what do the people in the photographs want us to do?"

To answer this question, I first looked to Sontag's "Regarding The Pain of Others" for guidance, and then to Azoulay's "Civil Contract of photography", in its specific dealings with images of Palestinian suffering. Quickly, I became dissatisfied with the texts; I wanted to move beyond regard, beyond ethical-looking, beyond citizenspectatorship, into action, into a physicality that is not a citizenship. Azoulay's formation of potential history sounds promising, but its focus on disarming images that have been used to constitute power does not look forward, only back into the archive as a progressive revisionism; the Gaza war was happening right *now*. Left at a loss, I decided to do what the figures in the photographs were already doing. I decided to dig.

A. Labor; Emotional, Material and Otherwise

In a move from showing to doing, I transferred the emphasis of this next test from product to process. Taking the idea of artwork as labor— usually invoked in the industrial sense, a labor that produces commodities— and then flipping it into an idea of

affective labor. Once again I piled up all of the photographs that had come to me through various social media feeds and newspapers, emails, calls for help and outrage. I began to look closely, carefully, meditatively though each one very slowly, whenever a piece of wreckage became recognizable to me — actionable? ready to be moved? — I would transcribe it in every detail onto a prepared sheet of paper. As the pieces began to pile up from all of the different photographs they would lay over one another as a monumental pile of effort and recognition, ready to be inspected by a viewer. The tone of the line and that of the paper are close enough that one has to be very near the paper to discern the image, and even then you cannot look at the whole drawing at the same time. The content reveals itself slowly, quietly. The shock is gone, the cinema is gone, and with it the ability to recoil or pre-judge. Through a process of searching, a translation is made, from relation as seeing and acknowledging, to relation as a feeling exercise that might re-orient the viewer within the exhaustion and sentiment of the other.

B. Morbid Orienteering

My practice thus far was that of an image-maker; intercepting images to make other images about images. When the Mexican Ayotzinapa students, known as the Iguala 43, were disappeared from their bus in the Fall of the same year I wasn't sure how to pull that event into the work, because there weren't any images to use. In void of imagery I wasn't sure how to communicate, and in the space they left behind I kept encountering myself. I received the story as a site for another affective labor exercise. The test this time lay not in response to a flood of media images, but to absence. How to generate affective culture around the vanished? I again decided to base my response on the affective labor

of protest already engaged in by the families of the disappeared: which was to anticipate a return. This test would be on the ability of affective labor process to maintain a space of inquiry, a relationship would be built through performance and embodiment.

This tactic of protest enacted by families of the Iguala 43, is another cross culture model, received through the Madres de Plaza de Mayo; Argentinian women who searched publicly for family members taken by the military dictatorship between '76 and '83⁶. Even though their missing are presumed dead, the Madres continue to pose the question of their location decades later as a way of maintaining an open social wound that must be attended to, the constant question operates as an anti-archive. I too, would start the next test with a line of questioning recognizable to anyone who might encounter a story like the Iguala 43's: "What if this Happened to me?". I then resituated the question within my environment and posed it as a futurity: "Where will my body be found?"

Holding on to this question, I began to re-frame my relationship with the local landscape. I compiled a list of places from which I might conceivably be taken: the road to my school, my job, a friend's house, my own house, and so on. From these places I would work outwards, on foot, to find the most remote and unobserved areas within the vicinity, places where no one would disturb the ground, and which alert me with a mark of danger; a small orange tag, a mark on a tree, a discarded cell phone. Once uncovered these places become meditative sites where I remain until I am hailed back to the world by a phone call, or a text, perhaps a Facebook message. I remain until I am searched for; someone has noticed that I'm late for work or class, or they might just want to get a drink. These sojourns are sudden interruptions of my daily life, taken at random. Part of

⁶ The history of the Madres is discussed in relation to building political power in the film: *The Take*, by Naomi Klein, Avi Lewis 2004

what's being tested is my social network, my community, its ability to maintain me or my presence. Before I leave, I take a photograph of the site from the initial vantage point of first encounter.

The resulting series of photographs are a report back, a documentation of my fatal daydreaming and prognostication. When presented all together, as grid on a wall, they reconstitute a landscape or geography mapped by the potential of trauma. The performance that they document amounts to a kind of morbid orienteering, modeled for others, a repeatable exercise. That the photographs were presented within the locality drawn by this new map, meant that the sites were recognizable to many of their viewers. Because I am not within the photographs, the images again become an inhabitable stage. Through my absence, viewers cannot ask questions of me, only of the site as phenomena and its labeling as a kind of destiny. A follow-up question becomes; "how could that even happen?". Our shared labor is a bracing and dreaming.

It's important that the temporality of a "morbid orienteering" is in the subjective tense; counterfactual, desiring, about to be. Also, that it is not just in a tense, but also intense and also a tense-ing. The structure of presuming a trauma before it happens, because a trauma always happens, will begin to guide all of the following works and raises important questions concerning Negri's Potenza as a coming into being. What if I said that the body that will be hit later is the same one that you have now? How do you feel about it now? What if I said that the body that is seized, stolen from us later is the same one that you have now? Does your body change if I say that? What will you do?

What happens when we don't just summon up the past in order to carry it forward but actually throw it into the road ahead of us, position it as an immanent crash, and know

having cast it forward that we still have a moment to take a breath, to brace, to think and feel, to pull closer together and get ready to make a move. When we imagine futurities that open we are immediately confronted by what might be required of us by them, we must prepare to step into one of them. Because a trauma happened a trauma will happen, trauma happens. Because I was arrested I will be arrested, I am that which is arrested. What to do?

These last three tests had relied on the absence of a visible figure in order to operate by subjectivizing the viewer's body within them. I began to ask: how could I resituate a seen body within an affective labor exercise, especially when the figure in earlier tests had interrupted affect and inhabitation by arriving in difference or as other? A viewed body that could maintain affective connection, would have to operate as a conduit, one open to incorporation so that we could play the role until it became our own, a subject position where we could "fake it to make it."

I decided that taking the tests from inhabitation— moving and working within an image— to embodiment— which would allow us to do that moving and working within real space, translating the content of the image into the context of the world— could be resolved within performance. But, how do we perform the other? Before I could test this kind of identification I needed to locate a subject that the performances could emerge from: the Iguala 43's bodies were still absent, and the bodies of the Gazans too damaged, the occupiers were still here but their identities shifted too quickly. I needed demonstrative, accessible historical bodies that could be resurrected as our own, and teach us how to live.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMONING THE BODY THAT ACTS

“When people talk about certain things, the self-censorship is so strong that not only certain terms such as ‘revolution’, ‘vanguard’ and ‘communism’ have been erased from memory, but also certain historical names... I don’t really know how the reintroduction of these words and these personalities into the minds of our contemporaries could be done, but I know for sure that it will be beautiful or it will not happen at all. A narrative model must be constructed, and must traverse all the arts, in order to recompose them in the unity of a practical project. I am not sure if the way to be followed is that of great constructive realism or that of punk – desacralizing, antagonistic and proliferating.” (Negri, 2011 pg.62)

After a long search for a subject that could express enaction as an identity, I selected the members of the Red Army Faction guerrilla group, operating in Berlin during the 70's, 80's and, 90's. This was done for two reasons; the first is that the group was comprised of people from all ages, genders, religions, occupations and classes; the group also had many generations of members in its decades of action, with later generations having never interacted with founding members, they perhaps never even met members involved even a year prior to their radicalization. This implied an identification that easily crossed many different social positions, and also persisted, over a long period of time, through many iterations of group knowledge⁷.

The second, more directly applicable reason is that in their writings the RAF members saw themselves within a network of supporting struggles alongside of Tupamaros, Vietcong, Maoists, Sandinistas, Black Panthers and many other groups as a

⁷ Stephan Aust has assembled the most exhaustive account of the RAFs history but his writing is often sensationalist in its reporting, to the degree of being untrustworthy. It also conflicts with many personal accounts by former members and communiques issued by the group itself.

single global revolution. In their actions the RAF trained and coordinated with many other organizations within Berlin, such as anti-war demonstrators and the Socialized Patients Collective, also direct action groups scattered all across Europe such as the French DA, and even farther still, The Palestinian Liberation Organization. The members of the RAF were already enacting the identification and potentiality that the works I had been making intended to provoke. They were recognizing disparate global conflicts in conjuncture with their local, national, and social struggles and reacting to them as imminent threats.

Even when researching individual members, the way in which they transitioned through roles so fluidly was striking: Ulrike Meinhoff as a bourgeois mother, turned journalist, then activist, jail breaker, and ultimately, armed militant; Margrit Schiller as a student turned activist for addicts and psychiatric patients, then an underground transporter and document forger, hunger striker, prison solidarity organizer, and ultimately lesbian rights activist; Gudrun Ensslin a pastor's daughter, then Sunday school teacher, anti-war protester, arsonist, bank robber, urban guerilla, civil rights lawyer, sociologist, and ultimately martyr. In order to capture and communicate the RAFs handling of identity, I decided to intersect the performances at the exact moments in which members were captured and identified as re-enactments.

A. Gudrun

The first performance was structured as a re-enactment of the fingerprinting of Gudrun Ensslin after her arrest. According to accounts Ensslin physically struggled

against multiple officers to prevent this stage of her processing, her guards had to hold her down, and straighten her fingers one at a time to print them, as she fought to the last. For this series three volunteers are recruited as performers, one will play Ensslin's standin, and the other two don non-descript blue work shirts, and take the role of the guards. A replica of a fingerprinting card that approximates the time period and language of the dactyloscopy used is present, along with an inkpad. The performers acting as guards are instructed to obtain a full set of prints, the performer standing in for Ensslin is instructed to prevent them from doing so. They are all cautioned that excessive struggle may result in harm, but not prohibited from struggling in any way they choose. When they agree to proceed, the performance does not end, until all ten prints are on the card, or the guard reenactors relent due to exhaustion or injury.

A full frame camera connected to a strobe kit, is mounted above the performance space and directed down at the surface where the performers' hands will struggle with the inkpad. The camera will fire every other second for the duration of the performance. The resulting images are displayed in sequence in a long line across a wall, so that viewers who missed the original performance can animate the images by walking down the line at different speeds. They can also dwell on single images in order to examine all of the fraught details of the struggle. The photographs produced, are a tertiary product of the piece, the first two products being the performance itself as witnessed by an audience, and the second being the experience produced and received by the performers themselves.

B. Margrit

The second iteration of the RAF re-enactment project takes Margrit Schiller's arrest photo as a site of struggle. During Schiller's arrest, she had a similar struggle to Ensslin's, at the moment of her mugshot, refusing to produce an identifiable photograph of her likeness. The best photograph that the police could acquire depicts Schiller's scrunched up face with closed eyes, flared nostrils and inwardly turned lips, held forward, up, and center by the strained, vice-like hand of an officer. This mugshot is a rare record of defiance within a prison complex that would go on to erase every available aspect of Schiller and Ensslin's existence. In order to proliferate this action, to resurrect its effort, the performances were structured to resemble this surviving document's original situation. A full frame camera mounted on a tripod with a strobe kit, directed as a lone chair against a blank wall.

Performers are recruited in pairs with one standing in for Schiller and the second standing in for the policeman whose hand we see in her mugshot. The Schiller stand-in is instructed to sit in the chair and firmly grasp the back of its frame with both hands. They are instructed to not allow a recognizable picture of their face to be taken. The policeman stand-in is positioned on the left side of the chair and instructed to produce the most recognizable photograph of the first performer that they can manage. Both performers are cautioned that their struggling may result in the injury of eyes or fingers but they are not prohibited from behaving excessively. Both performers are shown Schiller's original mugshot. When the performers agree to commence, their fight ensues for one minute, or

until exhaustion or injury. The camera fires every other second producing a series of thirty photographs.

The resulting photograph is also an arrest, or a seizure, disrupting but also holding the moment as an atemporal object that is always now. The language twist— that a photograph is something that’s taken— is one that I’m leaning into here. The photographs take from time and the figures within it fight against this theft. In their first incarnation, at the Herter Gallery at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the photos were produced live in five instances, over three weeks, against the same wall. After each group of performances, the captured images were printed overnight and then mounted in a line-up, on the wall adjoining the performance site, slowly accumulating over the course of the exhibition, as new performers were “captured”.

These “seizure” performances take part in front of a small audience, from which the performers are recruited. The first of these audiences had arrived unwittingly, as such, to the opening reception of the exhibition, subsequent audiences were classes or groups of acquaintances from the campus. Later audiences encountered the documentation of the previous groups’ struggles before they were asked to perform. After each struggle, the performers are interviewed about their experience, about their feelings before, during, and after the event. The interviews also occur in front of their respective audiences, offering those audiences a second mode of seeing trauma, and perhaps making them culpable — as bystanders — for what they have witnessed in the initial spectacle.

Within the post-performance testimonials, I began to recognize a new trend in the responses. The blue-shirted arresting performers consistently expressed guilt and anxiety afterwards; they also expressed that they had felt worried about injuring their partner both

before and during the exercise. After the event, arresting performers still appeared stressed out and nervous, often with small marks on their hands. They spoke softly and held their bodies still. In contrast to this, the Schiller re-enactors, however red-faced, sweaty, and disheveled they appeared, still held broad grins on their faces, and laughed even as they struggled to catch their breath.

The Schiller re-enactors expressed a kind of exhilaration when interviewed: they spoke loudly about their experience, gestured with their hands, and made jokes. Many of them described feeling a strong anxiety, and seriousness, before the performance, but had fun during it. Selecting the printed photograph from each performance became difficult, as smiles and visible laughing often infiltrated the depictions of violence. After witnessing this occurrence in all twelve instances of the first series, I had to acknowledge that while a frightening prospect in advance, it is enjoyable to resist; to assert one's own body and agency against a forceful authority. The audiences that witnessed these struggles also appeared frightened and reluctant at first, especially after viewing the photographs from previous groups. They found the performances in real time to be exciting however, and it became easier to recruit volunteers after each one.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The last test in this series had begun to constitute a more satisfying circuit than its predecessors, between looking, feeling, and doing. Taking this into account I can now reconceive of the series as a whole, in terms of producing the following sequence of effects: representation, into identification (othering), inhabitation, affect, labor, embodiment, performance, and finally back into identification (incorporation). In retrospect, the tests seem to have come full circle, with the important difference that later tests held trajectories into identification that produced increased and varied engagements and were produced collaboratively. Moving forward in my practice I will continue to test — do we ever stop? — and build on these advances.

A. Concluding in the Subjunctive, Embracing the Incommensurate

It's important to me that these last two works wrestle with identification and representation. But more importantly than that, because they re-enact the moments where Gudrun and Margrit's bodies were intercepted by the state — the place where they crash forward into history — these performances may function as trainings, where we can build affective muscle, anticipate and overcome the fear that prevents political action. Because political action, especially when it's carried out in public, isn't just risky it's also intensely embarrassing. The resulting photographs may be affecting for their secondary audiences, but I think that very little of what's going on in the captured performances is still present within them. Because photographs arrest — because they are arresting — what's on view here is less a method of resistance than an illustration of what's resisted.

Because looking at this performance isn't doing it, is only half of the process, these evidentiary unreal images are mostly only useful to their performers after the fact — as a way to witness themselves in a moment of uncertainty from the other side, as proof that they can make a kind of history.

The struggles that evade the camera do not seek to provoke an affect. They utilize already available affect as a kind of fulcrum to draw capability to the surface of a body. The struggles draw on the fighting feelings that sustain us through the trauma of change, summoning up something that happened as a way to prepare for something that will. I want to develop and hone these feelings of resistance — both emotional and physical— as a way to understand the body as a site of power and connection by maintaining it within the subjunctive mood. Because we are neither here nor there in the subjunctive but kind of everywhere at all times. We are about to have a body somewhere for some reason. We may find a body in the woods that we can drag through the streets. We are never totally dead or defeated in the subjunctive; we are simply *those that* have death to deal with. That seems to me a substantial enough assignment for continued work.

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