REPERFORMANCE

A DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the relationship between reenactment, performance art, and the document. Seminal performance artworks from history can now only be accessed through their documentation; this paper explores the effect this may have on reperformance, as well as how it can be utilised, particularly through a discussion centred around my own practice, and Marina Abramovic’s Seven Easy Pieces. This conversation takes place through the lens of a number of prominent performance art theorists, such as Peggy Phelan, Amelia Jones, Philip Auslander, and Christopher Bedford.

In this thesis and through my practice, I also use and adapt Jacques Derrida’s theory of the archive of the body proper, which can be found in his paper ‘Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression’. My paper extends Derrida’s writings on the archive of the body proper, and explores the ways in which performance art, and reperformance encompasses them, putting forward that within performance artworks, the wound can also operate as a document.

My thesis accompanies five video works, each of which reperforms a performance artwork from history; Chris Burden’s Shoot (1971), Marina Abramovic’s Rhythm 10 (1973), VALIE EXPORT’s Action Pants: Genital Panic (1969), and Mike Parr’s Drip Blood from Your Finger onto the Lens of a Camera... Until the Lens is Filled with Blood (1972) and Have a Burning Match Dropped onto Your Bare Chest (1973).

Through this process of reperformance, I explore the ways that documentation can function within performance art, and the myriad ways it might be accessed and continually appropriated by contemporary artists.
DECLARATION

The following Declaration, signed by the candidate:

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the degree of Masters of Fine Arts, Visual Arts except where indicated in the Preface,

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) the thesis is 11,273 words in length, exclusive of words in tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices as approved by the Research Higher Degrees Committee.

Signed:

Georgia Banks
I AM TRULY OVERWHELMED BY THE AMOUNT OF SUPPORT I HAVE RECEIVED THROUGHOUT THIS UNDERTAKING. I OWE SO MANY SO MUCH. I CANNOT THANK YOU ENOUGH

EDWARD COLLESS

MARK SHORTER

KATE JUST

STEPHEN HALEY

SANJA PAHOKI

CHRISTOPHER BANKS

GRAHAM BANKS

MOLLY BANKS

LUKE CALARCO

JACKY T

LAUREN ABINERI
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Dear and most highly esteemed,

I feel an inner need to speak to you directly and to have the audience eavesdrop, as it were. When this compulsion (for it is not merely a caprice) I cannot fully articulate, even to myself. I know only that this fiction which I somehow do not feel to be fictitious enables me a mode of speech which has hitherto not been possible, but which now becomes imperative because we have reached a time of reckoning. All this will probably strike you as impudence, but you will indulge me. Though I shall invite you to respond, I shall not pretend that what follows does not remain essentially a monologue. But it is a monologue addressed directly to you. In what is at issue here, indeed has been so all along, we both have an equal stake. Therefore in speaking of performance artists I shall not say ‘they’. I shall say ‘we’. Dear Burden / EXPORT / Abramovic / Parr, I have done my best with reperformance, and know it is not adequate, at most a prolegomenon, at worst a series of wrong tracks. You have noticed, I trust, that I have not tried to pry any of your secrets out of mere curiosity. If I have at times attempted to recover fragments of your life, especially those that relate to your artistic identity, it has only been for the sake of a better understanding of the conscious intention of your work. I have not rummaged through your life in search of flaws; your achievement continues to pursue me ‘like an unlaid ghost’. Therein lies my question to you: Why you? Why do you continue to haunt me? What is it about you, your work, that has compelled me to dedicate myself to you? There must be some reason, a way to make sense of this seemingly inexplicable commitment I have made to you. Of all the artists in all the world why did I choose you? Please tell me, I promise I won’t reveal your answer to anyone.

1 This text is a rewriting of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s ‘Monologue With Freud’, the final chapter of his book, ‘Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable’. Please see Postscript for the original text.
CHAPTER ONE
THE ART OF MEMORY

“MEMORY, LIKE HISTORY, IS A CREATIVE ACT” – LAUREN SLATER

“LIVE IN THE PAST, BUT DON'T REMEMBER TOO MUCH” – ROGER ROSENBLATT

“WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, I COULD REMEMBER ANYTHING WHETHER IT HAPPENED OR NOT” – MARK TWAIN

Reenactment is everywhere. From civil war reenactments to Elvis impersonators, the reenactment is a hugely pervasive and popular part of contemporary culture. In this chapter, I will be exploring the relationship between reenactment and performance art, particularly seminal performance works from the 1960s and 1970s. There has been a surge towards reperformance within the contemporary performance art scene, with both established and emerging artists working within this field, as well as the development of a critical dialogue, in an attempt to understand reperformance. Performance art has its own set of issues pertaining to the concept of reenactment; for example within reperformance you are not engaging with an event, rather with an artist’s work, and so how much authority, or authorship, do you have over its recreation? There is also the question that if an artist has not seen a performance work live, have they then not experienced the work? If so, how does one interact with and reenact this work, which they have never seen? In order to understand reperformance, first we must understand reenactment.

In his essay ‘Once More… With Feeling: Reenactment in Contemporary Art and Culture’, American curator Robert Blackson identifies four forms of ‘copying’: simulation, repetition, reproduction, and reenactment. Blackson describes simulation as being an artificial scenario, which is constructed in order to prescribe a potential future outcome, such as lunar landing simulations, which were used to ascertain and
prevent potential problems. Reproduction, Blackson says, is the act of creating an image of the original, or to imitate. Of the four modes, he cites repetition as the most similar to reenactment but says they differ in that reenactment is concerned with the past; he describes repetition as being ‘stuck in’ the present, and is more akin to habit, such as superstitious or ritualistic actions. Reenactment has not become such an extensive aspect of society simply because it engages with the past; reenactment “is distinctive in that it invites transformation through memory, theory, and history.” In other words, according to Blackson, the key and most compelling component of reenactment is that it may diverge from the authenticity of historical fact, and draw from personal memories, experiences, desires, and motivations.

This divergence from fact provides the space for reenactment to actively engage with and potentially affect change from within the original event. English artist Jeremy Deller’s *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001) (Figure 1.1), a performance concerned with the British miners’ strike of 1984-85, achieves this through using the subjective experiences and memories of people that were actually involved in the event. Deller’s film was primarily built upon the memories of miners and police officers involved in the strike, rather than what would be considered more factually reliable information available, such as newspaper articles or documentary footage. Through doing this, Deller allowed personal experience to operate as the driving force behind the work, and enabled participants to “act outside the historical script determined for them” and to create “an epilogue to the experience.” Deller’s work expands the history of the event through reenacting it; the experiences of the participants in the original strike are now altered by their involvement in Deller’s work.

Not all artists use reenactment as a way to implement variations of an event, rather they employ it as a tool to demonstrate the effect it can have on people’s perception of original events. Israeli born artist Omer Fast’s *Spielberg’s List* (2003) (Figure 1.2), is a video interspersed with footage of both Auschwitz concentration camps, and constructed sets of concentration camps from the film *Schindler’s List* (1993), in

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3 Ibid., 29.
4 Ibid., 33.
5 Ibid.
Figure 1.1: Jeremy Deller, *The Battle of Orgreave*, film still, 2001
Figure 1.2: Omer Fast, *Spielberg’s List*, film still, 2003

Figure 1.3: Pierre Huyghe, *The Third Memory*, film still, 2000
which it is impossible to discern the difference between which camps are genuine, and which are Hollywood film sets. Fast’s video incorporates interviews with Holocaust survivors who also played extras in *Schindler’s List*, who speak about their experiences of both concentration camps and film sets. Their stories seamlessly jump between harrowing, real-life experiences as survivors and of meeting Liam Neeson. Thus, the viewer’s conception of truth and story telling become substantially blurred. French artist Pierre Huyghe’s *The Third Memory* (2000) (Figure 1.3) also illustrates how reenactment can question the accuracy of history, through American John Wojtowicz’s memory of his 1972 bank robbery attempt, an event that inspired and has been immortalised in the 1975 film *Dog Day Afternoon*. Huyghe’s double-channel video installation shows both footage from this film, and footage of Wojtowicz, twelve years since the robbery, recounting details of the experience. Throughout his tale, it becomes clear that this film about his life has irrevocably altered his own memories of the event. Both of these works demonstrate the potential that reenactment has to explore historical alternatives of an event, through the power of subjective experience, and emotional memory.

**The Presence of Absence**

One of the key elements of reenactment is that it specifically relates to an event through memory and subjectivity. For this reason, reenactment in the field of performance art becomes problematic, as most artists working within reperformance did not see the performances they are reenacting, and therefore do not have any memories pertaining to them. Contemporary audiences can only access historical performance art through documentation such as stills and video footage. In the opinion of American performance scholar Peggy Phelan, this means we have not experienced the work, as performance art can only exist in the present, and “cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.”6 This raises the issue of whether an artist can in fact reenact a work if they have not experienced it. Phelan believes that a performance work only exists in the moment that it is occurring, in its liveness, therefore any documentation that exists of it is

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secondary, and is not the work. Therefore, according to Phelan’s standard for performance art, our experience of the work – which can only be through documentation such as still images, video footage, first person accounts, interviews with, and statements made by the artist – is not as authentic an experience as viewing it live. According to Phelan’s argument, our understanding of the work is inherently unsound, and there is no way we could successfully reenact a performance artwork.

American art historian and performance art theorist Amelia Jones has often written on performance works that she has only had access to through documentation. Jones contends Phelan’s position, arguing that the liveness of a performance should not be valued over its documentation,

While the experience of viewing a photograph and reading a text is clearly different from that of sitting in a small room watching an artist perform, neither has a privileged relationship to the historical ‘truth’ of the performance.  

Jones argues that although viewing a performance live gains the viewer a specific knowledge of the work, this knowledge should not be considered more legitimate than the knowledge that can be acquired through the study of a performance’s documentation. Both interactions contain a level of subjectivity, and elements such as prior knowledge of the artist, as well as historical, political, and social contexts can influence a viewer’s understanding of the work, regardless of whether they experience it live or through documentation. Jones also says that she believes performance works she has seen in the flesh are essentially viewed through a ‘memory screen’, that our recollection of a work is no more authentic than an image or a video.

The fallibility of memory was the subject of American cognitive psychologist Dr. Elizabeth Loftus’ 1993 experiment ‘Lost in the Mall’, in which Loftus recorded the effect of implanting false memories in participants. Loftus presented each of the participants with four childhood memories, one of which – being lost in a mall – was

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8 Ibid., 12.
fictitious.\textsuperscript{9} The participants were then asked to describe and elaborate upon these memories. According to the results recorded, a significant number of participants were able to discuss the false memory in detail.\textsuperscript{10} This experiment indicates that a memory of a live performance work is in no way more authentic or reliable than viewing the work through its documentation, therefore, engaging with a performance work through its documentation is an equally valuable approach. If we think of the memory as a document, in which we have potentially edited and changed the true nature of events, then engaging with a document such as a photograph or a video is, in a way, like engaging with a memory that is not our own, and as such the space for interpretation is equally valid.

\section*{As if From a Score}

The documentation of a performance work provides artists with equal – although different – potential for reinterpretation as a live experience. An important figure, due to her prominence in this field, is Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic. Her 2005 performance, \textit{Seven Easy Pieces}, took place over seven days in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and subsequently has shaped the discourse of reperformance. \textit{Seven Easy Pieces} consisted of Abramovic recreating six iconic works from performance art history; Bruce Nauman’s \textit{Body Pressure} (1974), Vito Acconci’s \textit{Seedbed} (1972), VALIE EXPORT’s \textit{Action Pants: Genital Panic} (1969), Gina Pane’s \textit{The Conditioning, First Action of Self Portrait(s)} (1973), and her own \textit{Lips of Thomas} (1975). She also created a new work for the show, \textit{Entering the Other Side}. When speaking on her intentions for the work, Abramovic describes her role as that of an ‘archeologist’;

One often had to rely on testimonial witnesses, poor quality video recordings, and photo negatives. Due to the dire conditions of performance art documentation,

\textsuperscript{9} Dr. Elizabeth Loftus collected the true memories used in this experiment through conversations with the participants’ parents, in which these relatives would provide Loftus with three actual events that took place in the participants’ past, when they were approximately 5 or 6 years of age. Loftus told participants she had spoken to their parents, and that they were the source of all four of the events she presented to them and asked them to elaborate upon, one of which was a false, or ‘implanted’ memory, of being lost in a mall.

these substitutable media never did justice to the actual performances. The only real way to document a performance art piece is to reperform the piece itself.11 Abramovic is saying that these works contain some historical truth that can be excavated from the documents, and reproduced within a live art context. In Seven Easy Pieces Abramovic, like Phelan, values the liveness of the work, positing that the only way to experience the original work as a contemporary audience is through a second live performance of the work, as close the original as possible.

I would liken Abramovic’s process to reproduction: the act of creating an image of the original.12 In his paper ‘Magic and Images / Images and Magic’ American poet, essayist, and critic David Levi Strauss says, “image is straight from the Latin ‘imago’, related through the root to imitari, ‘to imitate’, so an image is an imitation.”13 Abramovic is working with the documentation of the works that is available in order to reproduce – or to restore – what she considers to be the most important element of these works; their liveness. Although Abramovic’s interest would seem to lie purely in the liveness of the work, throughout Seven Easy Pieces Abramovic was dedicated to producing images documenting her performances. Abramovic hired French-American cinematographer and film director Babette Mangolte to film the events; the output of which was a high quality DVD, which is available for purchase. In fact, the quality of this document was at times given precedence over the live audience’s experience, as cameras would be in the way of, and ultimately effect and audience’s viewing of the work. Analysing American artist Bruce Nauman’s Body Pressure (Figure 1.4) – and Abramovic’s subsequent rendition (Figure 1.5 – 1.6) – we can come to see more clearly the relationship between Seven Easy Pieces and reproduction. Body Pressure, a text piece produced by Nauman, is a set of instructions for viewers to press themselves against a surface. Whether or not the viewers actually acted out these instructions was of no particular importance – the instructions themselves were the work. Abramovic’s reperformance of the work was all about this action; she is creating images of a work that arguably were never supposed to be. The ambiguity surrounding Nauman’s Body Pressure is an essential

Figure 1.4: Bruce Nauman, *Body Pressure*, text work, 63 x 40 cm, 1974

Press as much of the front surface of your body (palms in or out, left or right cheek) against the wall as possible.

Press very hard and concentrate on the image pressing very hard.

(the image of pressing very hard)

Press your front surface and back surface toward each other and begin to ignore or block the thickness of the wall. (remove the wall)

Think how various parts of your body press against the wall; which parts touch and which do not.

Consider the parts of your back which press against the wall; press hard and feel how the front and back of your body press together.

Concentrate on tension in the muscles, pain where bones meet, flashy deformations that occur under pressure; consider body hair, perspiration, odors (smells).

This may become a very erotic exercise.
Figure 1.5: Marina Abramovic, *Body Pressure*, performance still, 2005

Figure 1.6: Marina Abramovic, *Body Pressure*, performance still, 2005
part of the work, which Abramovic nullified through her absolute desire for both liveness, and the subsequent documentation, to be given precedence within the work.

Abramovic has said that an original performance work can be read like a score, and recreated in the same way one would replay a piece of music, much like an orchestra replaying Bach. This is something Abramovic has cited as a proposed model for how reperformance can continue into the future,

In this manner, I can open a discussion about whether we can approach performance art in the same way as a music composition. Can we treat the instructions of the performance like a musical score – something that anyone who is properly trained can re-play?  

The 2013 exhibition 13 Rooms, facilitated by Kaldor Public Art Projects, and curated by Swiss critic, curator, and art historian Hans Ulrich Obrist, and German curator Klaus Biesenbach, embraces this idea. 13 Rooms was presented at Pier 2/3 in Sydney’s Walsh Bay. The exhibition was comprised of thirteen discrete spaces for performance. Although the works were not all reperformances, they all used actors in the stead of the actual artists of the pieces (with the exclusion of collaborative performance artists Clark Beaumont’s Co-existing, which was performed by the artists for the first time as a part of 13 Rooms). While not all of the works in this exhibition follow this model, a number of them, including American video and performance artist Joan Jonas’ Mirror Check (1970) (Figure 1.7), were reperformed in a way where the actors were viewed as stand-ins for the original artist, in the same vein as Seven Easy Pieces.

While the way in which 13 Rooms reperforms works such as Mirror Check (2013) (Figure 1.8) demonstrates how Abramovic’s pedagogy for reperformance is being adopted and used within a larger performance art culture, it also highlights some of the issues that arise when treating performance as a score. The first of these issues is

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15 It is worth noting here that for her MOMA retrospective, ‘The Artist is Present’, Marina Abramovic employed numerous performance artists from her organisation ‘The Independent Performance Group’ to reperform her own, as well as her and Ulay’s, early performance works.
Figure 1.7: Joan Jonas, *Mirror Check*, performance still, 1970

Figure 1.8: Joan Jonas, *Mirror Check*, performance still, 2013
that there is no room in this rendition for a new interpretation of the work – something Abramovic cited as essential for reperformance. The actors in *Mirror Check* were told to try to recreate the original work as closely as possible. This leads us directly to the second issue: the fact that these actors had no artistic agency reduces the role of the female performer to something akin to a nude. When Jonas performed this piece in 1970, the work was concerned with entering a feminist discourse surrounding the female body, and female empowerment through reclamation of her own form. The women reperforming were not given any power, and their bodies were somewhat ironically being claimed in the name of Joan Jonas.

Abramovic has made it very clear that her intention in *Seven Easy Pieces* was to recreate the original in as much detail, and with as much accuracy, as possible. However, there was one very distinct exception, where Abramovic broke from the parameters she has advised for reperformance artists, that being the reperformance of her own work, *Lips of Thomas* (Figure 1.9). In her reperformance of *Lips of Thomas* (Figure 1.10), Abramovic aligned her process much more with reenactment than reproduction. This is because she was exploring personal experience and memory through the original work, and was working within the structure of *Lips of Thomas* to explore a number of facets of her artistic and personal journey. Abramovic first performed *Lips of Thomas* in 1975. In the original work, Abramovic ate one kilo of honey with a silver spoon, and drank one litre of red wine from a crystal glass, which she proceeded to break in her right hand. Abramovic then carved a five-pointed star into her stomach with a razor blade, knelt and whipped her back, and then lay upon a cross made from blocks of ice. A heater suspended above the cross pointed at her stomach caused the star shaped wound to bleed profusely, while the rest of her body became frozen. Abramovic remained in this position for half an hour, until audience members interrupted the piece by removing the blocks of ice from beneath her.

In the reperformance of the work, although the actions primarily stay the same, there are a number of divergences. Abramovic’s reperformance of *Lips of Thomas* is a

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16 Abramovic is wearing the shoes she wore during her final collaborative performance with long-term partner German artist Ulay. Ulay and Abramovic started this work, titled *The Lovers*, on opposite sides of the Great Wall of China. They then each walked to the centre, at which point both their collaborative and romantic partnership was considered over. Abramovic also had the stick she had used during *The
Lovers, and a hat that her mother had worn in 1943 when she fought against the Germans in World War II. During the reperformance of Lips of Thomas, Abramovic wore the hat, tied a bloodstained white square of fabric to her walking stick and waved it like a flag of surrender, while a recording of Serbian actress Olivera Katarina singing My People Sleep a Deep and Lifeless Sleep. This same recording was used in Abramovic’s 2005 work Balkan Erotic Epic, a video based on the erotic nature of much of Balkan folklore.
Figure 1.10: Marina Abramovic, *Lips of Thomas*, performance still, 2005
reenactment because it is actively concerned with personal memory, much like Jeremy Deller’s *The Battle of Orgreave*, her work demonstrated the transformative power reenactment can have. The objects Abramovic employed in the reperformance all relate to her practice or her personal life – or both – either way they are all of personal importance, and they all mark significant moments in her own history. In a sense, Abramovic is using the work as a reenactment of her own personal journey as a performance artist. *Lips of Thomas* is being used as a vessel; it is being expanded to encompass everything that has happened in her life, and in her career. When Abramovic reperformed this work, she was not trying to reproduce the original piece like she was with the works by the other artists, rather she was using it to engage with her own self, her own work, her own history.

**A Space for Possible and Yet Unthinkable Performances**

Artists such as Italian collaborative couple Eva and Franco Mattes – aka 0100101110101101.ORG – have used Abramovic’s premise that an original performance can be used as a score. However, rather than prioritising the live act, they have adapted it, and found a way to use reperformance as a platform from which to explore other forms of the performative body. Eva and Franco Mattes may treat the original work like a score insomuch as they do not stray from the ‘script’ of the original work, however, their work adapts and extends this idea, using it as a tool to explore the role of the virtual body within visual arts. *Synthetic Performances* (2006 – 2010) (Figures 1.11 – 1.13) is a series in which Eva and Franco Mattes reperformed works such as Joseph Beuys’ *7000 Oaks* (1982), Gilbert and George’s *The Singing Sculpture* (1973), Vito Acconci’s *Seedbed*, Marina Abramovic and Ulay’s *Imponderabilia* (1977), Chris Burden’s *Shoot* (1971), and VALIE EXPORT’s *Tap and Touch Cinema* (1968 – 1971), using ‘avatars’, on the virtual world website Second Life. Although the Mattes are not changing the original events they are creating a space within the original work from which they can investigate their own ideas, which primarily concern the relationship between art and the internet. The couple have created other works using Second Life, such as *13 Most Beautiful Avatars*, and made work through sites such as Chatroulette.
Figure 1.11: Eva and Franco Mattes, *Synthetic Performances (Seedbed)*, performance still, 2006-10
Eva and Franco Mattes, *Synthetic Performances (Improbrabilia)*, performance still,
2006-10
Figure 1.13: Eva and Franco Mattes, *Synthetic Performances (Tap and Touch Cinema)*, performance still, 2006-10
American artists Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley also used reenactment as a means to open a dialogue regarding issues other than those expressed by the original work. In their video work, *Fresh Accconci* (1995) (Figures 1.14-1.15) pornographic actors hired by Kelley and McCarthy reperform Vito Accconci’s *Focal Point* (1971), *Pryings* (1971) (Figure 1.16), *Contacts* (1971), *Claim Excerpts* (1971), and *Theme Song* (1973) (Figure 1.17). While Kelley and McCarthy’s renditions of these works followed exactly the score of Accconci’s performance videos, *Fresh Accconci* subverted the sexual nature of the original works, in order to open a discourse surrounding body art of the 1990s. Kelley and McCarthy believed that at this time, particularly in the Los Angeles art scene, body art had become little more than highbrow erotica. By removing the very real human forms of Vito Accconci and his partner at the time, Kathy Dillon, and replacing them with highly glamorous, made up, physically attractive pornographic actors, Kelley and McCarthy redirected the dialogue from one of grotesque desire and sexual transgression, toward the vapidity of body art of their own era.

These themes – the virtual body in the case of *Synthetic Performances*, and body art of the early 1990s in the case of *Fresh Accconci* – were not a part of the fabric of the original works. Though the reperformances followed the ‘score’ of the original work, they also created a space for their own issues and ideas. The works have been taken in a direction that would have been unthinkable when viewing the original work, and they were literally given a second life. It is also worth noting neither of these works represent the works as live; Mattes’ work was performed online, and Kelley and McCarthy’s work is a video; this abstracts their process even further from Abramovic’s pedagogy for reperformance.

**Ontology of One’s Own**

As reperformance develops, the issue of the document becomes more and more convoluted; if I were to reperform *Body Pressure*, do I return to the original, or do I look only as far as Abramovic? Although we have seen how reperformance can operate on a subjective level by engaging with personal memory, we are yet to determine how an artist could reenact another artist’s work, and we are yet to locate the subjective experience of that action. Coming back to Amelia Jones’ paper
Figure 1.14: Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley, *Fresh Acconci*, film still, 1995
Figure 1.15: Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley, *Fresh Acconci*, film still, 1995
Figure 1.16: Vito Acconci, *Pryings*, film still, 1971
Figure 1.17: Vito Acconci, *Theme Song*, film still, 1973
‘Presence’ in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation’, Jones says that one of the reasons experiencing a performance work through documentation may be advantageous is that we are able to identify patterns within the art world at that time, that are only made visible retrospectively. Through understanding the discourse surrounding a work, Jones believes we will have a better understanding of it. American curator Christopher Bedford extends this idea, saying that this discourse is in fact the work. Bedford uses performance artist Chris Burden’s Shoot to draw attention to what he calls “the ontology of performance”\textsuperscript{17}, by which he means these early performance works have taken on a life of their own within contemporary art and culture, outside of what they initially were. On November 19, 1971, at 7:45 p.m., at F Space, Santa Ana, California, performance artist Chris Burden had his marksman friend shoot him in the arm with a .22 long rifle. What remains of this work today are a few seconds of video footage, and some grainy black and white photographs. Bedford argues that this documentation, when combined with “art history, art criticism, art practice, and even popular journalism all participate in the extension and reproduction of performance art in the public sphere and are, therefore, in the absence of a conventional ‘object’, as potent and performative as the originary work.”\textsuperscript{18} Bedford goes on to say that any reperformance of Shoot, “through the function of discourse, […] become performances through time that reflect the shifting imperatives of art history and more broadly (and importantly), the ideologies of the social worlds in which they intervene and of which they ultimately become a part.”\textsuperscript{19} In other words, the work does not exist as it once did. It cannot, it will not. Even if the original artist were to reperform the work, it would be different, because it has evolved into an entire dialogue. Everything that has happened since the work has now become a part of the work.

Performance works from the 1960s and 1970s have become a force unto themselves. As such, to claim that the original ‘live’ performance should be prioritised over its documentation is highly problematic. I am proposing reperformances that work with the ontology described by Bedford are reenactments. The reason for this is that we are

\textsuperscript{17} Abramovic, "Reenactment. Introduction," 11.
\textsuperscript{18} Christopher Bedford, "The Viral Ontology of Performance," in Perform, Repeat, Record, ed. Adrian Heathfield and Amelia Jones (Chicago: Intellect Ltd., 2012), 78.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
engaging with the work as it exists in the present, and therefore with our personal experience of the work. The live act – and the documents of the live act – have been absorbed into this ontology, and the authenticity of our experience as performers who have not seen the original work should no longer be in question. Indeed, our experience of this ontology is equally valid, as the experience of someone who happened to see the performance live. The subjective memories and experiences of performance will always be inherently different. By connecting to the work through such a personal discourse, a reperformance artist is able to affect change from within the work, and to write themselves into these performances’ ontologies.
Austrian performance and video artist VALIE EXPORT’s *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (Figures 2.1 – 2.2) is a particularly interesting piece to discuss with regard to reperformance, as there is a certain mythology surrounding EXPORT’s iconic work. In 1969, VALIE EXPORT purportedly marched through the aisles of a pornographic cinema in Munich, wearing a pair of jeans with the crotch cut out, toting a rifle. EXPORT’s intention was to confront the men in the cinema with real female genitalia, as opposed to the ‘product’ being presented to them on the screen. What remains of this action are a number of images of EXPORT, sitting both in her studio and outside, holding the gun, staring aggressively into the barrel of the camera. These photographs were not taken during the performance, nor do they try to recreate the events of the performance; rather they act as an embodiment of the theatrical objective of the piece. There are also a number of accounts of the action that EXPORT has given; in 1979 EXPORT stated the work was as described above. However, twenty years later, she stated that there was no gun. Then in 2007, EXPORT indicated that the theatre might not have been pornographic.\(^\text{20}\) It is also worth noting that in 1970 EXPORT published one of the images from this piece in an anthology of Viennese Actionist works, along with a text from the planning stages of the work containing the note ’sollte’, the German term for ‘should happen’. However, ‘sollte’ can also be read as an imperative.\(^\text{21}\) Due to these varying accounts of the work, and the inconsistency between the story of the action and the documentation, we cannot possibly know what form the performance took, or whether it actually happened at all. All of this indicates that VALIE EXPORT was interested in using *Action Pants: Genital Panic* to create a new space for performance art documentation, by playing with the function of the performance art document. *Action Pants: Genital Panic* raises the question, when there is a departure between the performance and the document, where is the artwork located?


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 101.
Figure 2.1: VALIE EXPORT, *Action Pants: Genital Panic*, performance still, 1969
Figure 2.2: VALIE EXPORT, *Action Pants: Genital Panic*, performance still, 1969
When it is difficult to substantiate where a work lies, or whether a work took place, the reperformance of that work becomes potentially problematic. Thus, the question of whether Action Pants: Genital Panic should be reperformed as a live performance or a photographic series is raised. It also becomes an issue of whether one can reperform a work that may not have happened. Marina Abramovic spoke to these issues when addressing her own experience reperforming this work for Seven Easy Pieces (Figure 2.3),

"Genital Panic is a great contradiction in terms of the issue of ‘live’ versus documented performance because [EXPORT] also made the photograph in her studio and there are lots of different images of the poster. And she wouldn’t give me any clear answers when I asked her about it."²²

Abramovic’s interest in reperformance lies primarily with recreating the original event as accurately as possible. However, this became difficult for her when reperforming Action Pants: Genital Panic, as there is no documentation of the event, and EXPORT would not grant her access to the exclusive archive of her own experience. As a result, Abramovic chose to reperform the images of Action Pants: Genital Panic. In her reperformance, Abramovic wore a leather jacket and the patented crotchless jeans – an outfit that matched EXPORT’s – she held a rifle, and sat with her legs spread and her face stony. Occasionally Abramovic would shift her position slightly, as though she were moving through the positions EXPORT adopts within her photographs.

In her essay, ‘Can Photographs Make it so? Repeated Outbreaks of VALIE EXPORT’s Genital Panic since 1969’, American art historian and theorist Mechtild Widrich points out that by reperforming these images Abramovic’s work is in direct contention with her pedagogy of reperformance: namely, that an authentic version of a performance can be excavated, retrieved, and restored through recreating it within a live context. She dubs Abramovic’s interaction with EXPORT’s work a performative monument, or a ‘denkmal’, which is a German term for remembrance and

Figure 2.3: Marina Abramovic, *Action Pants: Genital Panic*, performance still, 2005
memorialising. Abramovic was not able to discover some historical truth of the live event *Action Pants: Genital Panic*. As a way to consolidate the incongruities within the work, she used the documents that were available to her and recreated them within a live context. Much like a monument, her ‘tableau vivant’ establishes a new, public – and live – version of EXPORT’s photographic work, using her body, her presence, in an attempt to mediate the document and “the imagined historical gesture of the action.”

**Performing Mythology**

Arguably, whether or not the performance in its original description occurred should not be our primary concern with a performance such as this. The story of the work – true or false – and the mythology of the work is an equally valid aspect of its ontology, as valid as any concrete documentation would be. In his essay, ‘The Performativity of Performance Documentation’, American critic and author Philip Auslander describes two different modes of performance art imagery: ‘documentary’, and ‘theatrical’. He defines the documentary category as being the traditional style of performance art documentation, in which the artist performs, and stills or moving images are taken, and are exhibited or archived as a form of evidence. The theatrical category consists of what is commonly referred to as ‘performed photography’. Auslander explains theatrical performance as being,

Cases in which performances were staged solely to be photographed or filmed and had no meaningful prior existence as autonomous events presented to audiences. The space of the document (whether visual or audiovisual) thus becomes the only space in which the performance occurs.

As an example of theatrical performance, Auslander uses French artist Yves Klein’s *Leap into the Void* (1960) (Figure 2.4), an image of the artist jumping face first from a second storey window. Auslander cites this as theatrical performance for a number of reasons. Firstly, Klein had no audience present during the making of the work, apart

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24 Ibid.
Figure 2.4: Yves Klein, *Leap into the Void*, gelatin silver print, 26 x 20 cm, 1960
from some friends and a photographer – although it is unclear whether these friends were there as witnesses of a performance or a photo shoot. In addition, it is suffice to say what they saw on the day is not what we see in the finished work. This is because during the shoot the act of jumping was repeated several times in order for Klein to achieve the desired facial expression, and during the jump Klein used a protective net that is not seen in the work, which is in fact a composite of two different photographs.

At first, documentary and theatrical performance would appear to be mutually exclusive, disparate forms of work; if a performance must have an autonomous existence, of which the documents merely represent, then these images are secondary to the live event. Therefore, works such as *Leap into the Void*, which did not originate from a live event would not be considered performance at all (hence the term ‘performed photography’). However, Auslander argues that if as an audience we now experience the works through the documents available to us, then “the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such.”\(^{26}\) When you read EXPORT’s photographs as existing as theatrical performance, the fact that we question the existence of an original performance becomes a part of the work itself. Taking this idea further, the statements EXPORT has made about the performance also act within the field of theatrical documentation. Whether these statements are true becomes unimportant, as they are now a part of the performance; in other words, the photographs and the mythology surrounding the work are the performance.

**The Absence of Presence**

One aspect of this that has not been examined is why VALIE EXPORT chose to create this disjoint between the performance and the documentation. One of the aspects of performance that EXPORT plays with through *Action Pants: Genital Panic* is presence. As we know, American performance scholar Peggy Phelan strongly believes that a performance work only exists as it is happening, and that documentation of a performance work does not accurately capture the work, as performance is defined exclusively by its liveness, by its presence. American critic and art historian Amelia Jones has countered this idea, saying that engaging with a

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\(^{26}\) Ibid., 51.
performance through documentation, while a different experience, is equally valid, and that each experience has its own advantages. VALIE EXPORT extends Jones’ position, demonstrating that not only does an audience not need to be present to experience a performance, but also neither does the artist, or even the performance work itself. EXPORT shows us that a performance can be present in its absence, rather than in spite of it – the mythology of Action Pants: Genital Panic relies on the absence of the live action.

Action Pants: Genital Panic also substantially shifts the relationship between a performance and its documentation. Consider EXPORT’s Tap and Touch Cinema (Figure 2.5), first performed in 1968, preceding Action Pants: Genital Panic. In this performance, EXPORT wore a box around the upper half of her body, with a pair of curtains across the front, underneath which she was topless. EXPORT walked the streets, inviting passers-by to insert their hands into the box and to feel her breasts. The images available of this performance are what Auslander would refer to as ‘documentary’ – they operate as evidence of the work, they portray the work as it happened. For contemporary audiences, these images are how we access Tap and Touch Cinema, the performance will always only be discussed in reference to its documentation. While Action Pants: Genital Panic is also discussed in reference to its documentation, as an audience we are aware that they do not portray the original event. Therefore, the performance maintains a certain level of autonomy from these images, it is not anchored in evidentiary documentation. That is not to say the images are not an integral part of the work, for without these photographs Action Pants: Genital Panic would only exist today as a story, and as a story we would have no reason to question its authenticity. In this manner, the discrepancies between the images and the story of the work create a space for doubt, and therefore perpetuate the mythology of the work.

Fear is a Loaded Gun

The images of Action Pants: Genital Panic and the story of the live action are connected through their disconnect. The points of difference between them perpetuate the mythology of the work. There are, however, signifiers within each that navigate these differences, and operate as a way to indicate that they are to be read as one
Figure 2.5: VALIE EXPORT, *Tap and Touch Cinema*, performance still, 1968 - 1971
work. The first of these signifiers is VALIE EXPORT’s attire, namely the crotchless jeans she is wearing. The second is the gun. On this matter, Widrich posits,

> The machine gun brings the potential aggression of the encounter with the audience in public space symbolically into the picture, appropriating the signs of sexual aggression (generally coded as male) for the female protagonist; in the photographs EXPORT returns the putative gaze directed through her genitals with a feminist appropriation of an obvious phallic symbol. For the reading audience this prop was and is the necessary cue, providing the tension within the picture that performs and thereby instantiates the tension of the movie-theatre action.  

In a way, the gun traverses the space between the images and the live action. It does not in any way confirm an action took place. Rather, the gun is used to interpret and transfer a certain violence the story of the action, reiterating EXPORT’s intention of the piece.

My reperformance of this work, *Panic* (2015) (Figure 2.6), opens with a tight shot of my pubis and upper thigh, I am standing with my legs clenched closed – the triangular shape of the pubis echoing EXPORT’s crotchless jeans. I proceed to carelessly remove my pubic hair with a straight razor; the area is nicked throughout and blood is smeared across the pubis. The nudity in *Panic* diverges significantly from EXPORT’s *Action Pants: Genital Panic*; EXPORT’s nudity is aggressive, something which is mirrored through the phallic presence of the rifle, whereas the nudity in my work is more akin to that of classic images of passive femininity. The opening image of the work is of my legs sealed shut, inviolable; any aggression or violence carefully contained. The violence then manifests in an act against the self through the process of hair removal. In contrast to EXPORT’s violent altercation with the presumably male audience in the theatre, which is projected outward, the violence in *Panic* is projected inward.

In *Action Pants: Genital Panic* VALE EXPORT is pointing her gun – be that a real gun or a metaphorical one – into the face of the audience. VALIE EXPORT is sitting

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Figure 2.6: Georgia Banks, *Panic*, film still, 2015
in front of you, standing in front of you, marching toward you. She is pointing a gun at you, and she is saying look at me, look at my genitals, look at my gender. I dare you. In Panic, I am metaphorically taking EXPORT’s gun – and everything it signifies – and I am pointing it at myself. The straight razor becomes my loaded gun, and the audience cannot prevent me from using it on myself any more than they can prevent EXPORT from directing her rifle at them. Action Pants: Genital Panic creates anxiety in the viewer through an outward projection of violence, be it real or symbolic. Panic produces an alternative anxiety in the viewer by turning that violence back on the self.

Through Action Pants: Genital Panic, VALIE EXPORT drastically shifts the relationship between performance art and its documentation. Rather than operating as evidence of an original action, EXPORT's photographs and varied accounts of the event differ considerably, and in doing so complicate the origin of the work. Through the absence of any proof of the original action, EXPORT deliberately mythologises the work, playing on the space between the images and the performance, which is where Action Pants: Genital Panic is located. My reenactment not only engages with this space, it also stretches and extends it, and plays with this disconnect. I do not attempt to reproduce Action Pants: Genital Panic as an image, in the vein of Abramovic, because choosing one version of the work as being ‘true’ disregards the broader purpose of the work and mythologies it plays upon. Instead, Panic attempts to position itself within the work’s mythology and the space of difference it produces. It connects itself to Action Pants: Genital Panic through its signifiers – such as echoing the triangular shape of EXPORT’s crotchless jeans – primarily through the metaphor of the gun, and the violence and panic it represents. My work reperforms and redefines EXPORT’s gesture, turning the violence inward and producing a new panic that the audience might struggle to watch.
CHAPTER THREE  
THE WOUND IS ALL  

“OUR SCARS ARE INVOLUNTARY WORDS IN THE OPEN BOOK OF OUR BODY” – GUILLERMO GOMEZ-PENA  

The relationship between reperformance and the document is complex. A reperformance relies upon the documentation of the original, and it works tirelessly toward recreating it, in an attempt to reify, and in some way preserve it. However, such a handling of our history is bound to have consequences. In his lecture ‘Archive Fever, A Freudian Impression’, French philosopher Jacques Derrida argues that the archive is inextricably linked to Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud’s theory of the death drive. Derrida says, “there is no archive without consignation in an external place which assures the possibility of memorisation, or of repetition.”²⁸ If repetition is key to the archive then so is destruction, for as soon as something is repeated it ceases to exist in its singular form; it can only exist in relation to its repetition, effectively it has been destroyed through its multiplication. This is also true of reperformance; the original piece, once reperformed, can only be considered in dialogue with the reperformance; it has ceased to be what it once was and never will be again. For example, the works performed in Marina Abramovic’s Seven Easy Pieces now only exist in dialogue with her renditions. To continue with this, if the original work has been destroyed, what stands in its place is a new work that operates in symbiosis with the reperformance. Moreover, as the reperformance cannot exist without what it has just destroyed, it now stands to remember something that does not exist, a memory that “defies the arrow of Aristotelian time.”²⁹  

Although the death drive is omnipresent within the archive – as Derrida says, ‘archiviolitchic’, set in stone – it does not declare itself as such. Instead, this latent destruction ironically operates in tandem with a burning desire to collect and to collate, to protect and preserve. Derrida explains the death drive as something which,  

Eludes perception, [and is] never present in person, neither in itself nor in its effects. It leaves no monument, it bequests no document of its own. As inheritance, it leaves only its erotic simulacrum, its pseudonym in painting, its sexual idols, its masks of seduction: lovely impressions.\textsuperscript{30}

And so, it is this desire, this burning passion, this fever, this fire, which masks the destructive nature of the archive. With attraction masquerading as the overriding force, the death drive becomes indiscernible. Desire and destruction collapse into one another, and while they never become the same they remain connected, like two sides of the one coin.

Let’s think back to Marina Abramovic’s reperformance of \textit{Body Pressure}; there’s an archive fever surrounding the way in which she is producing and reproducing images – both with her body pushed against the glass, and in its intricately detailed documentation. This work – indeed all of the reperformances in \textit{Seven Easy Pieces} – effectively demonstrates the relationship between the archive and the death drive. As American art historian Amelia Jones points out,

Abramovic has become the new author-name through which all of the performances she claims to be authentically returning to their artistic origins are coming to mean and be valued. This is signaled by the fact that, for at least two years after \textit{Seven Easy Pieces} took place, if one initiated a search on Google images […] of [the original works] to find information about [them], from 2005 to 2007, most of the images on the first page of the search results were of Abramovic re-performing the piece[s] at the Guggenheim.\textsuperscript{31}

Abramovic’s intention, her burning desire, is to preserve these works, to ensure them a place within art history through creating dialogue, to bring them back to the foreground of consciousness, and to restore to them what she believes to their key quality – their liveness. However, through archiving these works she has subtly destroyed them. Of course, the original documentation of these performances still

exists, but the archive of the work that has changed, because its discourse has been altered. The manner in which it exists in relation to the world has changed.

**Performance Artist as Archive**

Through the death drive, the act of archiving destroys what it seeks to save. However, Derrida identifies two definitive types of archive: the exterior archive, and the archive of the body proper. The exterior archive refers to what has been discussed in this paper until this point; all and any documents pertaining to an event, such as still and moving images documenting the original action, as well as articles, interviews, catalogue essays, etc. This exterior archive can be collected, and collated, and is used as a substrate on which the work now sits. The second archive Derrida describes is the archive of the body proper. The archive of the body proper cannot be collected – its physical manifestation exists only in the flesh. The archive of the body proper refers to an archive that occurs upon the body – wounding, scarring, carving, and stretching the human form. Not all forms of wounding the body would be considered an archive of the body proper; rather it is a type of wounding that refers to a cultural position. For example, a tattoo with cultural significance places the receiver of the tattoo into a context, into a history. Tattoos such as these are often used as initiation, and signal acceptance into a group.

Derrida says that the archive of the body proper, “leaves the trace of an incision right on the skin: more than one skin, at more than one age.” In this quote, when Derrida refers to ‘more than one age’ he is not simply saying that an incision would remain with one person as they grow old, but rather he is saying that this incision remains with us across generations. The example that Derrida uses is the ritual of circumcision within Judaism. When a boy is circumcised, it signals that he belongs to a community of men that have all undergone the same initiation; the wound carries across bodies. This incision into the skin of one child stretches across time to encompass all generations preceding, and all that come after. Derrida describes this as being an inheritance – the cutaneous mark carried from one father to the next. It marks an acceptance into the fold. When the wound is the document, through repeating this

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document, one is entering an archive of shared experience. The archive of the body proper is collated through the memory of a shared physical experience.

Performance art is remarkable in that from a work two archives manifest. The first being the exterior archive – which is what we have been discussing up until this point and is the archive Abramovic’s reperformances are concerned with. The second is that of the body proper, where the artist’s body itself houses the archive, and carries the mark of the work. Suffice to say these archives intersect – they are both derived from the same action – but each deals with a very different form of the document, and offers us a different way to understand the original work. The exterior archive could be seen as evidence of the original action or event. Images or videos are purposefully taken as proof of the work having taken place. For this reason it is always dependent upon the original event – it is anchored to it. When discussing Seven Easy Pieces, Abramovic describes herself as an archaeologist. Archeologists dig through the layers of sediment until they find their artefact; navigating the exterior archive is like reaching back through the layers of information, through time, always reaching for the point of origin, hoping to pull it through. The exterior archive exists in a sort of state of stasis, frozen in time by its constant reference to the originary event. The archive of the body proper, however, is a consequence of action. It is in flux, as it evolves with the body of artist. Wounds heal, scars fade, but the site of the archive – the artist’s body – remains ever present, and so this archive never quite becomes a relic, an artefact of the past as the exterior archive does. To see the scar is to remember the wound as if new. As a document it changes every day, heals a little more. It is a living document, forever evolving.

As we have seen, when it comes to the exterior archive, the road to destruction is paved with good intentions. One is compelled by a desire to reach through time, to keep a moment whole and safe; in their effort to hold onto this moment, it crumbles in their hands. The archive of the body proper, however, cannot be pinned down, dated, and chronicled. The wound is a document that changes every day. It lives with the artist and it dies with the artist. Because the archive of the body proper cannot be collected or protected, the urge to do so does not colour our engagement with it. With the absence of the driving force of preservation, we find the absence of the death drive. The archive of the body proper is not concerned with a point of origin as it
stretches across time like a second skin, a membrane. To access a work through the archive of the body proper is to access its past, its present, and its future.\textsuperscript{33}

\textbf{Extending our Skin}

One of the defining features of Derrida’s archive of the body proper – which he discusses exclusively with regard to circumcision – is the location of the wound. The wound, which defines and connects a society and which crosses more than one skin, at more than one age, taking place upon the phallus. The same can be said of numerous initiation rituals that use wounding; the site of the wound is paramount. However, within performance art the site of the wound is not the same nor is the action through which the wound is caused. These variants potentially problematise the notion that performance art engages with an archive of the body proper. However, I would say that it is not the location of the wound but rather the way in which the body is wounded in performance art that grounds it within the archive of the body proper. In his novel ‘Ethno-techno’, Chicano performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Pena writes that as a performance artist,

\begin{quote}
Our body, not the stage, is our true site for creation and \textit{materia prima}. It’s our empty canvas, musical instrument, and open book; our navigation chart and biographical map; the vessel for our ever-changing identities; the centerpiece of the altar, so to speak. […] Our body is also the very center of our symbolic universe – a tiny model for human-kind […] – and at the same time, a metaphor for the larger sociopolitical body. If we are capable of establishing all these connections in front of an audience, hopefully others will recognise them in their own bodies.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

Here Gomez-Pena identifies the wounding that locates performance art within the archive of the body proper. It is that an artist’s body is used as a site, and as a material to be symbolically inscribed upon. Although the location of the wound may be abstracted in this process, the approach to the wound and the way in which the wound is utilised is what defines performance art’s archive of the body proper.

\textsuperscript{33} This is not a concept that Derrida presents within ‘Archive Fever’, rather it is an idea I have developed from Derrida’s theory of the archive of the body proper, and the relationship between the death drive and the exterior archive.

**A Case Study: Show the Hole (1980) vs. Shoot (2014)**

In 1980, Californian artist Chris Burden performed a work titled *Show the Hole*:

> Using black velvet curtains, I constructed a small private room in the entranceway of the theatre that was being used to present the American performances. I sat in this small room with my name above me in white letters on the wall. One at a time, I received each person from the audience waiting outside. As each person entered I addressed them [...] and asked them in a cordial manner to “Please sit down”. Then, looking at them I said, “In 1971 I did a performance in which I was shot in the arm”. Finally, I would roll up my sleeve and as I pointed with my finger at the scar in my arm, I would say, “The bullet went in here and came out there”. Each spectator was alone with me and physically close to me. I received approximately 300 people, but because each person took about one-half minute, some people had to wait in line up to 3 hours.35

In this reenactment of *Shoot* (Figures 3.1 – 3.2), Burden engaged exclusively with the archive of the body proper. He did not rely upon any artefacts from the exterior archive of *Shoot*, such as still or moving images of the event. Furthermore, the ‘script’ that he read to each visitor was in no way coloured by his subjective experience of when the work took place – how he felt, what he was thinking, or what his thoughts on *Shoot* had been over the past nine years – it was based only in the barest facts: who, what, when, where, how. The wound does not portray the original event, like images or video. It is, however, a document of the event having taken place. It is the *consequence* of the original action. One of the key elements of the archive of the body proper is the way it operates within the history of the event. Unlike the exterior archive, the wound stands alone as a document that is not tainted by memory, or stuck in the past. The images documenting *Shoot* portray the exterior archive of the work, they are the *evidence* of the original action. Whereas the wound portrays the archive of the body proper, it is the *consequence* of the action.

Figure 3.1: Chris Burden, *Shoot*, performance still, 1971
Figure 3.2: Chris Burden, *Shoot*, performance still, 1971
Like Show the Hole, my reperformance of Burden’s Shoot, also named Shoot (2014) (Figure 3.3), accesses the original work through the archive of the body proper. Shoot is a video in which I had two small pieces of my arm removed; these wounds are in the same place, and are the same size and shape, as Burden’s bullet wounds. My video did not try to recreate the events that took place within Burden’s original work; I was not shot in the arm and I made no attempt to resemble Burden’s physical appearance, such as mimicking the clothes he was wearing – the wound is the only connection between Burden’s work and my own. My own wounds were produced using a cylindrical blade, which was pushed into the flesh, rotated, and removed twice – one for Burden’s entry wound, and the other for the exit wound. While the act of being shot takes seconds, I extended the wound, so that it took about a minute and a half. As if in slow motion, the weapon entered the flesh, pierced it, and the ribbons of blood made their way across the skin. Within this extended moment my body became, as Gomez-Pena states, a canvas, onto which the wound is painted. My body became a book, into which the archive of the body proper was written. My reperformance of Shoot engaged with the archive of the body proper not only by repeating Burden’s wound, but also in the way I used and wounded my own body. The body became purely representative; it was not simply my body – it was also the vessel for the wound, for the archive of the body proper of Shoot. The wound was also the entire visual experience of the work; the video framed tightly on my forearm. In the still and moving images available of Burden’s work you do not actually see the bullet piercing Burden’s flesh, and the stills are mostly post-shooting, with Burden sitting nursing his arm, a look of shock on his face. My work refocused the action, zooming into the wound – honing in on the element of the piece that is most relevant.

The changing of the size of the wound, the way in which the wound was acquired, and the significant shift in duration demonstrate that I am not merely reflecting or repeating the archive of the body proper, rather I am actively playing with it and testing its boundaries. When Burden performed Show the Hole, almost ten years after Shoot, he was asking whether the wound was still a relevant document. I have argued that it is. However, my research has extended upon Burden’s query by asking whether the wound is still relevant when it is carried across bodies, across time – both literally and metaphorically. I have tested and stretched numerous aspects of the wound, and
Figure 3.3: Georgia Banks, *Shoot*, video still, 2014
have found that through all of this, my own work does still enter *Shoot’s* archive of the body proper.
CONCLUSION

Why do artists reperform? For Marina Abramovic, reperformance offered a way to restore what she believed to be the most important element of the original works, their liveness. Artists such as Eva and Franco Mattes, and Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy, saw reperformance as a way to investigate issues of the body that were prevalent to their own discourse, such as the virtual body, and the erotic body. My own interest in reperformance stemmed from a desire to investigate my relationship with the original works. Because I approach reperformance through a lens of subjectivity, my work differs from other practices surrounding reperformance in a number of ways.

As a contemporary audience, we can only access performance artworks from history through their documentation. This documentation usually takes the form of video or images that display the events of the original work, and are often seen as being evidence of a work that can no longer be experienced. Within reperformance, while the document is the way in which the work is accessed, it is the performance event that is being reproduced. Marina Abramovic’s Seven Easy Pieces searches for a historical truth within each of these works. In this scenario, the historical truth is located in the original work, but can be found through the documentation. In this pedagogy of reperformance, the document is treated as an artefact, or a clue. Although the reperformance relies upon the document, it is used as a way to access and reperform the event it represents, rather than as a work in its own right.

Because I engage with reperformance through the ontology of the work, part of which is my relationship to it, my treatment of the document varies from this model. My relationship with these works has been formed through the document, as that is the way I have experienced the work. Therefore, for me, they are the work. Rather than using the document as a stepping-stone toward the original event, my work reperforms the document. There will always be discrepancies between a performance work and its documentation; the event will never be wholly captured. While reperformance such as Abramovic’s work toward filling those gaps, I view those spaces as a fully functioning part of the work as it exists today and incorporate them into my practice of reperformance. Without the pressure of trying to ‘fill’ these spaces
with the true events of the original performance, they become a place for interpretation. The document becomes malleable, tensile, and so much more than just proof that something happened. The way it can be reperformed becomes open to interpretation.

When a reperformance is constantly referring back to the original action of a work, although the reperformers are using their own bodies – or their virtual bodies in the case of the Mattes’ – their actions are dictated, or pre-determined, by the actions of another body, by the original performer. They must operate within the confines of the actions the first performer made. However, as my own practice looks to the document as the work, I am not constricted by the original performance in this way. Rather, I navigate the works through the use of my own body. This can be seen clearly through both Abramovic’s and my own reperformances of VALIE EXPORT’s *Action Pants: Genital Panic*. In lieu being able to ‘excavate’ the original performance, Abramovic reperformed the images available of the work, reproducing them in a live context. Abramovic replaced EXPORT’s body with her own, but the action, or lack thereof, remained the same. As my own reperformance accesses the work through its discourse, and through its mythology, I am able to use my own body to navigate and extrapolate upon the themes within the work.

As much as exploring the malleability of the document by engaging with it through my own subjective experience, this paper and my practice looked toward expanding the definition of the performance art document to including the wound. Through Jacque Derrida’s theory of the archive of the body proper, I explored wounding within performance art, and how it can be interpreted as an archive. By carrying the wound across bodies, I used myself as the site for an archive of the body proper. In this sense, my body now reads as a sort of biological map of the works I have reperformed. By engaging with reperformance through my own body, I have created a space for myself within the works.
POSTSCRIPT I
EXCERPT(S) FROM MONOLOGUE WITH FREUD

Dear and most highly esteemed Professor Freud:

Four lectures on your ‘Moses’, but for what remains I feel an inner need to speak to you directly and to have the audience eavesdrop, as it were. Whence this compulsion (for it is not merely a caprice) I cannot fully articulate even to myself. I know only that this fiction which I somehow do not feel to be fictitious enables me a mode of speech which has hitherto not been possible, but which now becomes imperative because we have reached a time of reckoning. All this will probably strike you as impudence, but you will indulge me. The notion of speaking to someone who is not there is not entirely alien to you, as ‘The Future of an Illusion’ attests, and there your interlocutor was pure invention, whereas you are real, and, for me, curiously present. Though I shall occasionally invite you to respond, unlike you I shall not pretend that what follows does not remain essentially a monologue. But it is a monologue addressed directly to you. In what is at issue here, indeed has been so all along, we both have, as Jews, an equal stake. Therefore in speaking of the Jews I shall not say ‘they’. I shall say ‘we’. The distinction is familiar to you.

Dear Professor Freud, I have done my best with the ‘Moses’ book, and I know it is not adequate, at most a prolegomenon, perhaps a ‘historical novel’, at worst – a series of wrong tracks. Lest you think me falsely modest, let me add immediately that where I have failed or missed I am far from accepting the entire blame. Once, in discussing the difficulty of psychoanalysing Goethe, you observed, “this is because Goethe was not only as a poet, a great self-revealer, but also, in spite of the abundance of autobiographical records, a careful concealer”. As a concealer you have, of course, outstripped your hero, and as for the records, some of your more zealous epigon have stationed themselves, like gnostic archons, to bar the way to the hidden knowledge. None of this had made it easy for the serious student of your work (I emphasise your work; your life – only to the degree that it is implicated in your work. The rest is of concern to your biographers).

You have noticed, I trust, that I have not tried to pry any of your secrets out of mere curiosity. If I have at times attempted to recover fragments of your life, especially those that relate to your Jewish identity and some of which I believe you
suppressed, it has been only for the sake of a better understanding of the conscious intention of your work, thinking that you yourself would want it that way. I have not rummaged through your life in search of flaws. Those uncovered by others in recent years have not affected my engrossment in your uncommon achievement, which continues to pursue me “like an unlaid ghost.”

... 

Please tell me, Professor. I promise I won’t reveal your answer to anyone.

- (81-82, 100)
POSTSCRIPT II

FILE LIST: FINAL EXHIBITION DOCUMENTATION


File 2: Georgia Banks, *Shoot (Installation View)*, Still, 2015


File 4: Georgia Banks, *Rhythm (Installation View)*, Still, 2015

File 5: Georgia Banks, *Drip*, Video, 0:55, 2015

File 6: Georgia Banks, *Drip (Installation View)*, Still, 2015

File 7: Georgia Banks, *Drop*, Video, 3:33 2015

File 8: Georgia Banks, *Drop (Installation View)*, Still, 2015


File 10: Georgia Banks, *Panic (Installation View)*, Still, 2015
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Author/s: Banks, Georgia

Title: Reperformance: a dedication

Date: 2015

Persistent Link: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/59559

File Description: Reperformance: A Dedication