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Indexical Embodiments: Sensory Cinema and/as Historical Reenactment

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor
of Philosophy

in

Communication

by

David Andrew Rice

Committee in charge:

Professor Lisa Cartwright, Chair
Professor Patrick Anderson
Professor Zeinabu irene Davis
Professor Brian Goldfarb
Professor Bennetta Jules-Rosette
Professor Roddy Reid

2013

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2013

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A segment of Chapter 1 is under review at *Body and Society* and may appear in 2014.

A portion of Chapter 2 and the Conclusion is under review at *Visual Anthropology Review* and may appear in 2014.

A portion of Chapter 3 is under review at *Senses of Cinema* and may appear in 2014. A second part of Chapter 3 is under review at *Body and Society* and may appear in 2014. A third section of Chapter 3 is being prepared for submission to *TDR: The Drama Review*, and may appear in late 2014 or 2015.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Indexical Embodiments: Sensory Ethnography and/as Historical Reenactment

by

David Andrew Rice

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

University of California, San Diego, 2013

Professor Lisa Cartwright, Chair

This dissertation considers unresolved questions of the indexical real in documentary studies, drawing from media phenomenology on cinematic embodiment,

feminist performance theory on liveness, and affect theory as critical angles on the observational tradition and sensory ethnographic film. The rise of digital imagery provoked a crisis in documentary cinema theory starting in the 1990s. The easy pliability of images constituted of digital code seemed to counter the analog photograph's supposedly mechanical, indexical imperative to represent actual-world objects, exposing shortcomings in neo-Marxist positions arguing for the documentary's clout to stand as material evidence of historical events. Starting from the premise that documentary production and reception are subjective experiences rather than artifacts of a recording technology, this dissertation theorizes the documentary real as an affective charge in the body elicited through the subject's contingent, ephemeral perception of contact with history in objects, films, gestures, and performances. Case studies consider this phenomenon in the production and reception of time in sensory ethnographic films (or sensory cinema), documentary films and journalistic reporting on "cultural awareness" embodied simulation training in the post-2004 US military, and race and media use in the early 2000s historical reenactment of a lynching that originally occurred in Georgia in 1946. I conclude that the impetus toward mobility and immersion in digital culture reflects the internalization of the cinema apparatus into everyday perception and consciousness, and I suggest that the logic of reenactment informs both the production and reception of observational and ethnographic films in this context.

Introduction



Figure 0.1: Photograph entitled “Metropolitan Orpheum, Los Angeles, 1993” by Hiroshi Sugimoto. *Theaters*, Hiroshi Sugimoto. Copyright has been obtained.

The bright, white light emanating from the screen of the darkened, art-deco movie theater represents a peculiar sort of documentary image. While the duration of a photographic exposure is usually a fraction of a second, this need not be the case, and it is not here. Photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto’s shutter remained open for the duration of an entire film to make this image in 1978. “As soon as the movie started,” he recalled, “I fixed the shutter at a wide-open aperture, and two hours later when the movie finished, I clicked the shutter closed. That evening, I developed the film, and the vision exploded

behind my eyes.”¹ He might not have been describing the making of this particular photograph, but it hardly matters. Sugimoto used his camera to reenact this vision dozens of times over the ensuing decades in movie theaters all across the United States, building a visual ethnography of theater spaces as a by product. The vision of light is always the focal point of the image, and completely illegible as “a film” in the ways we are accustomed to seeing one. The layers of light and shadow accumulated on the photographic negative’s emulsion over the time of the exposure create a white screen as the film’s documentary record. To cross the terms of film theorist Mary Ann Doane and performance theorist Peggy Phelan, the “indexical mark” of the film is “unmarked,” not as a blank screen, but as a screen of total presence.² The “film body,” to use film phenomenologist Vivian Sobchack’s term for the cinema’s capacity to objectively express perception and intention and so approach phenomenological “being,” here ceases to move or express. At an exposure of this extended duration, the film is bereft of even the illusion of contour, depth, or subjective expression. It becomes a dead film body, vividly present and yet incomprehensible to those who regard its representation in Sugimoto’s photograph. But the film’s presence as light exposes residues of theater space—gilded arches, rows of seats, a pool of reflected light on a wooden stage before the screen—that usually remain invisible during the live screening of a film.

The photograph might also be read as a metaphor for inverting Jean-Louis Baudry’s apparatus theory in the postmodern age. Baudry likened the cinema’s moving

¹ Hiroshi Sugimoto, “*Theaters*,” <http://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/theater.html> (accessed June 10, 2012).

² Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993); Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

images to the illusionistic shadows that played on the wall of Plato's cave that distracted viewers from perceiving the apparatus of light and ideology that produced them.³ Regarded at the duration of Sugimoto's exposures, a film ceases to be shadows on the wall of a modern Platonic cave, and begins to serve as the material source of illumination. The "truth," or "the light" from which we perceive meaningful affective sensations, notions of collective identity, and new philosophies of time is at least in part the surface of the cave wall, not the projector that roughly shares the camera's point of view. Seeing the film in such a way requires the peculiar affordances of the camera combined with the subjectivity of an artist driven to literally expose his own "near-hallucinatory vision" over and over again as documentary representations for others to behold. The photographs are simultaneously objective, indexical records of film screenings that once happened, and, collectively, an externalized representation of a state of mind—a performance only realized as a photograph. The work reflects a consciousness that has internalized the mechanics of the camera.

Decades removed from their creation, my interpretation of these films-as-photographs is a different kind of performance. I want to understand the relationship between documentary and performance in a world that is far more saturated with cameras than it was in the late 1970s, and far less invested in the physical space of the movie theater. This is not to say that the forms, conventions, and desires associated with the cinema have disappeared. As film theorist and philosopher David Rodowick argued in *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007), what has remained across time, genre, and medium in

³ Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 286.

our relationship to moving images “is a certain mode of psychological investment—a modality of desire if you will.”⁴ If, as feminist film theorist Anne Friedberg suggested, going to the movies once signified a way to momentarily transcend the difficulties of repetitive physical labor or household confinement like a trip to the shopping mall, the cinema remains significant in a digital culture as a model for negotiating everyday activity that includes work in an affect economy.⁵ If we take documentary to have at its core a mission to make sense of everyday reality and perhaps to change it, then documentary theory must consider this internalization of the cinema apparatus in the digital everyday. I glean from these assumptions two directions for research, both suggested by Sugimoto’s photographs. First, documentary theory must consider embodied activity like reenactment as a kind of documentary practice, both when there are and are not cameras present. Second, performance theory must grapple with the idea that the “lived body” itself, to use a term employed in Sobchack’s phenomenology, has become an instrument of registration that “acts” like a documentary record, often for cameras.⁶ Rebecca Schneider suggested the direction of inquiry I am pursuing in her monograph on reenactment, *Performance Remains* (2011):

Can a trace take the form of a living foot—or only the form of a footprint?
 Can a gesture, such as a pointing index finger, itself be a remain in the
 form of an indexical action that haunts (or remains) via live repetition?
 This is to ask: what is the time of a live act when a live act is reiterative?

⁴ David Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 22.

⁵ Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁶ Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Schneider intends here to trouble notions of the uniquely singular quality of live performance oft celebrated in performance theory, but her questions also frame the body's reiterative practices through language used to describe the ontology of photographic media in film theory: the index, the footprint, haunting. Rather than centering these qualities in the image, Schneider associates them with human activity. In each of my case studies, I pursue a question about the emergence of the sorts of concerns that Schneider poses here. I contend that these concerns that have much to do with the internalization into consciousness of the affordances and constraints of digital media. What does it mean to document a serial event?

This dissertation engages these directions by bringing into dialog two areas of critical practice: *sensory ethnography* in documentary film and *embodied reenactment* in performance. I consider the intersections of these areas of critical practice through the lenses of documentary practice and theory, performance studies, and the critical media theory organized around the concept of *indexicality*. In his proposal for a semiotic system, late 19th century American philosopher Charles Peirce described “the index” as a sign that bears an existential bond with its object.⁷ Indexicality, a term used to describe this sign relationship, was adopted as a concept into film theory by Peter Wollen's interpretation of mid-20th century French film theorist Andre Bazin in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1972), and then into documentary theory by Bill Nichols, Phillip Rosen, Ivone Margulies, and Laura u Marks starting in the early 1990s.⁸ Bazin proposed that the

⁷ Charles S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 98.

⁸ See, for instance: Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972); Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts*

photograph “shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction,” a proposal, in other words, that the photograph is indexical because the mechanical action of the camera physically imprints the image of the world in front of the lens on the film emulsion at the moment of exposing it to light.⁹ During the early 1990s, a period during which film studies was strongly inflected with Marxist materialism, documentary theorists including Nichols adopted this use of the concept of indexicality because it emphasized the material basis of the film image and its status as evidentiary traces of the historical world. The emergence of digital recording technologies posed a challenge to this way of thinking about documentary theory. If digital images are made of the same binary data as computer simulations, in this line of reasoning, then they index an easily manipulated computer code rather than a unique moment of past time. They cannot function as documentary evidence in the same way. The question of the indexicality of the digital image thus composed remains unresolved in the field of film and media studies.

In this dissertation, I propose to consider the concept of indexicality in documentary theory through the lens of performance studies. I focus in particular on two sets of practices to develop this concept: the branch of nonfiction filmmaking dubbed

in Documentary (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Ivone Margulies, *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press., 2003); Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

⁹ André Bazin and Hugh Gray, *What is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 14.

sensory cinema, a group of practices that include sensory ethnographic filmmaking, observational cinema, participatory cinema, and intercultural cinema;¹⁰ and embodied reenactment, a collection of performance practices across the domains of performance art, media archeology, living history, ritual commemoration, documentary filmmaking, and psychodrama in which performers act out historical events with the aim of working through a personally traumatic experience, producing a collective identity around the shared interpretation of an historical moment, or learning about embodied historical experience by simulating archaic material and technological constraints in the present.¹¹ I

¹⁰ See articulations of these forms in David MacDougall and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, *Transcultural Cinema* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998); Jean Rouch and Steven Feld, *Ciné-Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Teshome H. Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982); Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*; David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*; Beryl Larry Bellman and Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *A Paradigm for Looking: Cross-Cultural Research with Visual Media* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Pub. Corp., 1977); Bennetta Jules-Rosette, Cristin McVey and Mark Arbitrario, "Performance Ethnography: The Theory and Method of Dual Tracking," *Field Methods* 14, no. 2 (2002): 123-147.

¹¹ Significant works include: Jay Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1984); Richard Handler and William Saxton, "Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in 'Living History'," *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 3 (1988): 242-260; Jim Cullen, *The Civil War in Popular Culture: A Reusable Past* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema* (Berkeley (Calif.); London: University of California press, 2005); Adam Blatner, "Morenean Approaches: Recognizing Psychodrama's Many Facets," *Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama & Sociometry* 59, no. 4 (2007): 159; Scott Magelssen, *Living History Museums: Undoing History through Performance* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2007); S. Magelssen, "Rehearsing the 'Warrior Ethos': 'Theatre Immersion' and the Simulation of Theatres of War," *The Drama Review: TDR*. 53, no. 1 (2009): 47-72; Jonathan Kahana, "Introduction: What Now? Presenting Reenactment," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 50, no. 1-2 (2009): 46-60; Iain McCalman and Paul A. Pickering, *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn* (Basingstoke:

propose that this branch of documentary film is itself a kind of reenactment in its concern with understanding the past through the re-enlivening of historical artifacts, which may include ways of seeing from behind the camera. And I suggest that reenactment is, likewise, a kind of documentary film in which performers “play” the indexical traces of the historical world on mental analogues of cinema screens as they perform.

Sensory cinema is an experimental media production practice and academic research agenda dedicated to exploring via ethnography or the representation of memory the affective and bodily dimensions of human experience. Indebted to the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the sensory turn of the late 1980s and early 1990s in cultural and visual anthropology, and ideas about observational and participatory nonfiction filmmaking developed in the direct cinema and cinema vérité movements of the 1960s and 1970s, sensory cinema scholars such as Jean Rouch, Colin Young, Bennetta Jules-Rosette, David MacDougall, Lucien Castaing-Taylor, Dai Vaughan, Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, and Sarah Pink contend that visual and aural media can communicate ideas about embodiment that are difficult to convey in writing. Observational cinema, a form developed by filmmaker-philosopher Colin Young and his students in anthropology and film production at UCLA in the late 1960s, describes a filmmaking practice in which the cameraperson attends to the everyday lives of subjects as a passive presence in their company rather than as a director provoking

Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol; Chicago: Intellect, 2012).

subjects to behave in certain ways.¹² Editing follows the logic of the filmic documents so that finished films echo the narrative trajectories that camerapersons discovered in the lives of the people they filmed. Observational cinema tends to eschew voiceover, music, acted scenes, and montage editing so as to maximally communicate the visual and aural perspective of the filmmaker while navigating a foreign culture. Participatory ethnographic film, as defined by Rouch and later Young's student and American visual anthropologist MacDougall, aims to build on the principles of observational cinema but incorporate the subjectivity of the filmmakers and their encounters with subjects into the process of filmmaking. This conceit has led MacDougall and Pink to espouse a form of cinematic engagement with ethnographic subjects that is at once performative (filmmakers and subjects create the reality through the process of collaboration) and intersubjective (the finished film is acknowledged to exist between filmmaker, subject, and spectator, emplaced in different spatial and temporal contexts).¹³ Developed through written reflections on filmmaking practice published in *Principles of Visual Anthropology* (1975) and journals like the *Visual Anthropology Review* and the *Journal of Visual Studies* in the 1990s and 2000s, the agenda of sensory cinema as practiced in anthropology emerged as a reaction against two dominant presumptions of the field in the late 1980s: first, the subordination of audiovisual media to the written in the aims of

¹² Colin Young, "Observational Cinema," in *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, ed. Paul Hockings (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 99; Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*.

¹³ Rouch and Feld, *Ciné-Ethnography*; MacDougall and Castaing-Taylor, *Transcultural Cinema*; MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*; Sarah Pink, *The Future of Visual Anthropology: Engaging the Senses* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006); Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (Los Angeles; London: SAGE, 2009).

maintaining anthropology as a scientific discipline; and second, the privileging in cultural anthropology of semiotic interpretations of culture over research that aimed to communicate the researcher's perceptions and phenomenological experiences in the field.

Intercultural cinema, a category of cinematic production described by Laura Marks in 2000 and intimated by Third Cinema scholars like Teshome Gabriel in the early 1980s and Hamid Naficy in the 1990s, refers to the work of diasporic filmmakers living in the West who make use of the prosaic objects in the landscape to evoke memories of their home countries. Though premised on conceptual rather than empirical grounds, Marks argues that intercultural cinema seeks through sounds and images to reach "haptic," sensual forms of connection between filmmaker and audience.¹⁴ In this way, the intercultural cinema she names is sensory in its effect, though not anthropological in its methodological orientation. Filmmakers have often been displaced from their ancestral homelands for political or economic reasons, and cannot return. They, like the diasporas with which they identify, must work with the images and objects of their new places of residence. Lived experience rather than the camera's proximity to subjects constitutes the primary ground for understanding audiovisual representations as evidence of historical events. Intercultural cinema is indexical insofar as cinematic objects touch particular viewers' memories of traumatic experience. Shared affective responses function to identify a collective.

¹⁴ Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. See also Chapter 6 "A Pedagogical Cinema" on Postliberation African Film in Brian Goldfarb, *Visual Pedagogy: Media Cultures in and Beyond the Classroom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 163.

Analytic Framework of the Dissertation Project and Chapter Summaries

The dissertation is organized around three major ideas within the framework of indexicality: the problem of the indexical trace within documentary theory in an era of simulation, the relationship between live performance and sensory cinema production, and embodied reenactment as an intervention into the theory behind sensory cinema practice. This conceptual framework develops over five chapters. The first positions why I am considering indexicality through the lens of performance in an era of digital media and nearly ubiquitous simulation; the second considers historical reenactment as a research methodology and a practice of everyday life in what Jean Baudrillard called the “simulation society.” Chapters 3-5 are case studies that flesh out the concept of indexicality in what I consider to be sites of contestation with regard to the possibility of indexical signs: digital cinema, historical reenactment, and embodied simulation. All three focus on media-performance contexts of the post-2000 United States, and engage questions about the mediated, affective experience of loss through the practices of documentary camerawork, reenactment performance, and spectatorship. Continually tacking between documentary and performance theory, and documentary and performance practice, I assess indexicality across these case studies as the material traces of performance activity.

I engage with authors who take up the unresolved question of the indexical trace from a phenomenological perspective and who theorize the trace as it registers on and through the bodies of those who experienced trauma. These authors include Bazin, and North American documentary film theorists writing about embodiment and the cinema in the 1990s and early 2000s, including Sobchack, Marks, Margulies, Akira Lippit, and

Janet Walker.¹⁵ Walker has argued that representing trauma presents a paradox for documentary.¹⁶ The authenticating, indexical signs of a traumatic experience, like repression, forgetting, mistakes in memory, and psychic reenactments manifested in physical ticks or gestures, “are generally considered to undermine the legitimacy of a retrospective report about a remembered incident,” Walker said, but retrospective reports about events constitute the evidentiary grounds for the claims of documentary films made in the realist tradition.¹⁷ Nonetheless, photographic images may expose traces of the conditions that produced traumatic experience in surprising and nuanced ways, thus serving as evidence of an event that exists prior to representation. This causal connection between the past event and the photographic inscription complicates Baudrillard’s notion of the precession of the image in an era of simulation. While this bond can powerfully affect viewers who perceive suffering or trauma in documentary images, however, film does not function without a context of interpretation. Particularly in the digital age, which has facilitated the easy manipulation of images, we must rethink the connections between photographic technologies and documentary meaning. Reenactment reopens the question about the relationship between the trace and the body. Participants in a

¹⁵ Bazin and Gray, *What is Cinema?*; Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*; Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*; Margulies, *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*; Vivian Carol Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press., 2005); Walker, *Trauma Cinema*; Malin Wahlberg, *Documentary Time: Film and Phenomenology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

¹⁶ Walker accepts the American Psychological Association’s definition of trauma as her starting point, as “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster” that frequently results in shock, denial, emotional strain, and repression.

¹⁷ Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, 4.

reenactment do not directly experience a traumatic past, but in performing a simulation of it, become the carriers of its felt traces. These traces register *through* their embodied reenactment *in the midst of performance* rather than *on* filmic material. In the context of pervasive simulation, I suggest that the problem of the trace be addressed through the concepts of performance and duration.

Simulation is a term that has designated the routine operations of computing technology since the 1950s; a philosophy of mind influential to historian Robin Collingwood, affect theorist Silvan Tomkins, and 2000s neuropsychology (described in the work of Alvin Goldman); and a concept in critical theory associated most prominently with Baudrillard to describe how a society functions when continuously reproduced representations of reality end up short-circuiting the possibility of experiencing reality as a condition that precedes its representation.¹⁸ According to the OED, simulation was first used to signify the “attempt to deceive,” or “a false assumption or display, a surface resemblance or imitation,” like the play of light and shadow on the wall of Plato’s cave. Between the end of World War II and the rise of computing in the 1950s, however, simulation took on a second, more value neutral connotation, as “the technique of imitating the behaviour of some situation or process (whether economic,

¹⁸ See, for instance, N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Alvin I. Goldman, *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Alvin I. Goldman, "Mirroring, Simulating and Mindreading," *Mind and Language* 24, no. 2 (2009): 235-252; Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

military, mechanical, etc.) by means of a suitably analogous situation or apparatus.”¹⁹

Simulation in this vein connotes the process of modeling events or potential events in the actual world virtually, usually through the adjustment of variables in computer programs, so as to understand, prevent, encourage, or control a range of possible future outcomes. Simulation theory, a category offered by Sean Cubbit in 2001 to encapsulate a strain of neo-Marxist thought that developed between the 1960s and 1990s in the work of Guy Debord, Baudrillard, Paul Virilio, and Umberto Eco as a revision of pre-World War II Frankfurt School Critical Theory, centers on questions of the nature of exchange in a post-industrial society, and focuses in particular on the role of communications technologies like television, computing, and military surveillance tools in the transformation of everyday life.²⁰ A simulation, in this way of thinking, produces only iconic signs; simulated signs index an endlessly replicable code rather than an original object or event.

Simulation has been a particularly resonant concept within film and media studies, both because of claims that the cinema itself functions as an apparatus of simulation, and because the growing place of moving images in everyday life since the development of video technology in the late 1960s seemed to suggest the emergence of a simulation society. Because cinematic practice commodifies experiences as media objects and then extracts value (economic, political, military, and cultural) through their distribution in a sign economy, Baudrillard argued that the content and message of any

¹⁹ Oxford English Dictionary, "Simulation," Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/180009?redirectedFrom=simulation#eid> (accessed June 12, 2012).

²⁰ Sean Cubitt, *Simulation and Social Theory* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2001).

given media object made relatively little impact in the trajectory of its underlying code, toward a world organized around models rather than interpersonal experiences.

Baudrillard was particularly skeptical of the phenomenological method, suggesting that its focus on individual consciousness failed to acknowledge the “*directly and totally* collective” nature of consumption in a society saturated with advertising and images of fantasies. “No theoretical analysis is possible without the reversal of the traditional givens,” he claimed in *Consumer Society* (1970), “otherwise, no matter how we approach it, we revert to a phenomenology of pleasure.”²¹ Baudrillard revised and reconsidered many tenets from his early writing later in his career, but he did not revisit phenomenology as a means for exploring the relationship between the body and collective life. Considering documentary as an embodied reenactment, or an embodied, shared “mode of consciousness,” to use Sobchack’s term,²² rather than a genre of film, a type of media-making practice, or an alibi for simulation, suggests new trajectories for documentary theory that avoid the challenge of the digital to older ideas of the indexical trace as filmic imprint, while calling into question Baudrillard’s tacitly masculinist, metaphorical writing about “the body” as an instrument of simulation. Embodied reenactment performance, in this light, serves as a promising area of research (both as subject and method) for exploring the complications and possibilities that arise when groups of individuals “play” code derived from historical documents or unarchived collective memories, and become for one another the signs that index a shared past.

²¹ Jean Baudrillard and Mark Poster, *Selected Writings* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 46.

²² Vivian Sobchack, “Toward a Phenomenology of Nonfictional Film Experience,” in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, eds. Jane Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 241.

The first chapter develops the concept of *intersubjective indexicality* through an analysis of film studies and documentary theory centered on the idea of indexicality, and performance theory that evaluated (sometimes implicitly) the relationship between the performing body and documentary practices. I argue that intersubjective indexicality, unlike the aspect of indexicality that Peirce associated with scientific tools (including cameras), starts from the subjective experience of perceiving certain marks, stains, inscriptions, or movements as directly connected to the activity of passed time. This kind of indexicality, I propose, takes form in consciousness as a startling, almost involuntary sensation at the moment of perceiving a sign understood to have been created by the accumulation of labor or activity that occurred in the past, but that remains essentially unknowable in the present. I articulate this sensation using the affect theory developed by mid-20th century American psychoanalyst and behavioral psychologist Silvan Tomkins. I also consider how the concept of duration relates to the perception of indexicality for both creators and spectators in time based media like documentary film and performance art, and engage with the theories of Nichols, Doane, Rodowick, and Phelan, and performance theory on liveness and documentation from the 2000s by Phil Auslander, Patrick Anderson, Amelia Jones, and Rebecca Schneider. I suggest that the methodology and ethical orientation of Sobchack's phenomenology offers a fruitful framework for making sense of these affectively charged moments of perception.

Chapter two considers embodied reenactment as both a subject of research and a research methodology in the fields of simulation theory, sensory ethnography, and the cultural history of the United States. To theorize the intersection between the sensations of individual participants in reenactments and the role of reenactment in producing

collective identities, I draw from Emile Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) to frame reenactment as a practice through which rites and beliefs recursively accumulate upon one other, much in the way that Durkheim theorized the formation of religious aura. Using Baudrillard's theory of simulation in a consumer society, I flesh out the problem that the proliferation of signs and photographic images poses to upholding boundaries between the sacred and the profane, or between simulated reality effect and sensation of reality. I suggest that work in sensory ethnography and cultural history centered on the question of embodiment offers a way to approach this complex question.

Chapter three develops the theory of the intersubjective index through a study of observational aesthetics and duration in three sensory ethnographic film projects: *Lunch Break* (2011) by multimedia visual artist Sharon Lockhart, *Sweetgrass* (2009) by sensory anthropologists Lucien Castaing Taylor and Ilisa Barbash, and *Bombay Beach* (2011) by music video director Alma Ha'arel. All three of these projects take the subject of white American masculinity in decline as a central concern, and all three debuted in the wake of the recession of 2008. They may be read in light of that event, though none were conceived with an awareness of its imminence. I bring into dialogue the written film theory of visual anthropologists and filmmakers Rouch, Young, MacDougall, Castaing-Taylor, and Grimshaw and Ravetz, whom advocate for sensory ethnographic filmmaking as an academic discipline concerned with questions of embodied knowledge, with the phenomenological film theory of Sobchack and Marks, who suggest that the lived embodied experience of a spectator's gender, age, race, nationality, class, etc. will align with some cinematic aesthetic sensibilities better than others. In the midst of a groundswell of writing about the "crisis of masculinity" and the erosion of the American

Dream in the post-industrial United States, I relate the durational aesthetics in these three projects to theories of masculine embodiment. Against the backdrop of ubiquitous and fast-paced digital media, I consider the camerawork employed in these films as a kind of reenactment performance. While *Lunch Break* and *Sweetgrass* express a durational aesthetic reminiscent of 1960s and 1970s structural film and observational cinema, *Bombay Beach* was conceived with the pace and form of a music video in mind. These divergent aesthetic orientations produced different expressive engagements between filmmakers and subjects, and therefore differently inflected affective affordances for viewers of the finished films. Gender scholars Jacqueline Moore, Michael Kimmel, and Lyn Hymowitz write about masculinity in relation to historically specific social, cultural, and technological forces that shape the contours of the labor market. I touch on their theories to analyze the gendered meanings of shot duration as communicated by these three films in the post-2008 context.

Chapter four explores indexicality in an embodied, three-dimensional simulation environment, the “cultural awareness” training scenarios used in the US military since 2004. I argue that these training simulations are already documentary works in the sensory cinema mode; they produce what I call a *cinematic system phenomenology*. They draw creatively on recent historical events in Iraq and Afghanistan to craft narrative scenarios that can be lived in the present by trainee American soldiers, while imagined as future possibilities after they deploy. I ask how and when it is that different participants understand indexical connections to arise out of their performances, and how the sedimentation of these performances over time created the grounds for new kinds of indexical bonds. Adapting a strategy used by Anne Friedberg in *Window Shopping*:

Cinema and the Postmodern (1993), I argue that these simulated environments work on the premise that participants have internalized the conventions of entertainment media to such an extent that they effectively have something like a screen in their heads upon which their experience in the three dimensional simulation can play. At the same time, these simulations are also cybernetic systems designed to compel participants to feel in specific ways. What does it mean, then, that this simulation scenario itself has been the subject of hundreds of written documentary reports and several documentary films? This chapter draws from my own ethnographic data gleaned from two visits to the base, interviews I conducted with ten participants including soldier trainees, tactical trainers (war veterans who now operate the simulations), scenario planners, public relations officers, and Iraqi-American, Afghani-American, and generic role players who perform as civilians, insurgents, and local government officials in simulations. I also draw from over 250 journalistic reports written about the base between 1990 and 2009 and the documentary film *Full Battle Rattle* (2008), which followed a unit of American soldiers through the course of their two-week training rotation at the Fort Irwin National Training Center.

Chapter five explores indexicality in the performance of a different kind of historical trauma than war—the trauma of lynching in the American south. I draw from archival sources, ethnographic observation, and interviews with Georgians who annually reenact a specific incident: four lynchings that took place at the site of a bridge in the town of Monroe in Walton County, Georgia on July 25, 1946. On that date, a white mob abducted and brutally murdered George and Mae Murray Dorsey and Roger and Dorothy Malcolm, common law couples who were residents of the community. In 2005 activists,

descendents of the lynched families, and other community members, black and white, initiated an annual ritual of reenacting the lynching scene at its original site. This annual reenactment has been surrounded by controversy locally. The event's organizers propose that the re-enactment has effectively reignited a movement to bring the members of the lynch mob who remain alive to justice for their crimes. For participants in the reenactment and spectators, the event can serve as a means to work through the lingering trauma that clings to the site of the event and its contested local historical accounts. Questions of the psyche concerning consciousness, the unconscious, race, and trauma relative to the real "that has been" of an event and the realism of its reenactment are crucial to this chapter. Participants performing as perpetrators, bystanders, and victims have described the strange dreams they have in the days before and after the event, and at least one man who has played a perpetrator claims to have had no memories of the event the day after performing his role.²³ These effects on the unconscious suggest that even though the participants in the reenactment did not experience the lynching firsthand, some are nonetheless showing symptoms commonly thought to index the lived experience of trauma. This chapter further fleshes out the cross-temporal and intersubjective nature of indexicality that will be at issue throughout this text. As well, I will be using those concepts to discuss the role that video recording plays both in amplifying the performance's discursive goals and shaping the kinds of residual traumas it produces.

²³ Mark Auslander, "Holding Onto Those Who Can't Be Held': Reenacting a Lynching at Moore's Ford, Georgia," *Southern Spaces* (Nov. 8, 2010b), <http://www.southernspaces.org/2010/holding-those-who-cant-be-held-reenacting-lynching-moores-ford-georgia> (accessed 9/2/2012).

Chapter 1: Intersubjective Indexicality

Performance as a documentary practice

What kind of an index is the skin upon which representations are inscribed in performance art? Though a screen in a cinema theater is white and square, infrequently touched by human hands, and static, the skin is no such screen—and in performance art, the surface tends to be other than white or square. It is moving, contorted, or pulsing. It is brown, tan, black, curved, flat, ripped, emaciated, and scarred. It is the surface of human flesh, and as variable and vulnerable as flesh is. When it is adorned for display, flesh does not cease to be what it is, even if, as performance scholar Peggy Phelan suggested, performance inevitably “involves the addition of something other than ‘the body.’”²⁴ As phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty and film theorist Vivian Sobchack have suggested, such additions exist in contiguity with the flesh, indexing the “lived body” as both perceiving subject and expressive object. Displaying the skin as object and subject, the performer beckons interaction with those who behold it. At moments, as art critic Amelia Jones has observed, the performance compels intersubjectivity, the production of a form of agency that neither performer nor spectator could have produced singly. In the fleeting moments where this intersubjectivity evokes the oppressions of cultural history that imprint themselves on the skin, the gesture of the performer, or the landscape in which the performance is embedded, they also *become documentary*, evidence of historical events projected upon a surface.

²⁴ Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 150.

In this chapter, I propose a new theory of the index that draws from documentary film theory and performance theory, which I refer to as *intersubjective indexicality*. The concept of indexicality within most documentary film studies writing references the mechanical nature of the photographic camera which is meant to ensure that the photographic image functions as evidence of historical events.²⁵ The idea of intersubjectivity in performance theory describes the shared responsibility between performers and spectators for the unfolding existence of a performance in the present, usually in reference to performance art that compels spectators' participation in shaping the performer's actions.²⁶ In the pages that follow, I frame indexicality as a quality that

²⁵ When I use the terms documentary studies and documentary theory, I am referring mostly to the body of scholarship that has been produced by members of the Visible Evidence group since the early 1990s. Visible Evidence is the largest scholarly organization in the world focused on questions pertaining to documentary. While the positions within the group's key essay collections vary widely as to the meaning of digital and photographic images vis a vis the status of documentary, most continue to foreground moving images made with cameras as the objects of study. Key works include Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*; Michael Renov, *Theorizing Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Jane Gaines and Michael Renov, *Collecting Visible Evidence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Margulies, *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*; Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006); Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real II: Documentary: Grierson and Beyond* (London; New York, NY: BFI ; Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

²⁶ Since 2004, there has been a substantial impetus within Visible Evidence to expand the field of documentary studies to better account for emerging documentary practices in art, popular culture, ethnography, and social organizing, particularly in relation to digital culture. See: Alexandra Juhasz and Jesse Lerner, *F is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing* (Minneapolis: Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2007); Gail Pearce and Cahal McLaughlin, *Truth Or Dare: Art & Documentary* (Chicago: Intellect, 2007); Kahana, *Introduction: What Now? Presenting Reenactment*, 46-60; Belinda Smaill, *The Documentary: Politics, Emotion, Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Elizabeth Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

also must be considered in light of performance activity and labor in documentary film and performance art, the central domains of focus in documentary theory and performance theory respectively. I build on the concept of intersubjective indexicality in the next chapter to theorize the significance of reenactment performance as a documentary practice in the digital era for both documentary theory and performance theory.

Here, I refer to the concept of intersubjective indexicality to consider moments within a performance (which may include the spectator's performance of viewing a film) in which the dynamic between subjects (which may include performers, documentary filmmakers, documentary subjects, and spectators) evokes an imagined reality based not in direct personal experience, but in memories of the past that may be drawn from experiences with written, filmic, or photographic historical documents. This affective experience is catalyzed by some combination of the movements of the body, an individual's ability to access affectively comparable events in memory, the dynamic between performers, the physical grounds upon which the performance happens, knowledge of historical sources informing the performance, and the arrangement of props or costumes. Intersubjective indexicality produces an ephemeral awareness of betweenness—between self and other, past and present, struggle and play, performance and everyday life, acting and spectatorship—that startles the subject into thinking about the stubborn endurance of something beyond the self. In developing this theory of intersubjective indexicality, I am using the theory of intersubjectivity based on the concepts of empathic identification, affect, and object relations drawn from Lisa

Cartwright's *Moral Spectatorship* (2008). I am also touching on psychologist Silvan Tomkins' concept of the Surprise-Startle affect and engaging with Charles Peirce's concept of the index as it relates to documentary and performance theory. Like the experience of looking at an analog documentary film, spectators to performance art perceive the gap in time between the present in which they live and the registrations of history inscribed upon a recording surface—the performers' bodies rather than an external screen. In live performances, the bodies of subjects function as documentary indices during the time of the performance, ironically, *by performing*.

This chapter makes two interlocking points. First, I show that in film studies historically the concept of indexicality has been, for the most part, grounded in an analysis of technologies of mechanical inscription. This approach has been central to much documentary theory and film theory. I propose that this approach is extremely useful for keeping in mind the materiality of live performance as well as the spectatorial experience of recorded film, which is after all a live experience. But it has the shortcoming of not offering a means for adequately understanding the condition of embodiment experienced by the subject who perceives or performs. This limitation with respect to the perceiving subject compelled documentary theorists such as Bill Nichols, Jane Gaines, and Brian Winston to identify a crisis in theory when digital technologies, which transposed recorded information into easily manipulable digital code, began to displace analog. Gaines referred in her introduction to *Collecting Visible Evidence* (1999) to what Nichols called the “indexical whammy” that analog documentary film enjoyed over fiction to ask the question that simulation technologies seemed to pose to a field grounded in the evidentiary status of film: “If it can no longer be said that

documentary has reality on its side, what can be said of it?” While acknowledging that “much is at stake” in “giving up the rhetorical clout that comes with the claim of ‘evidence’ of the real,” Gaines suggested moving documentary theory forward through the concept of resemblance, or iconicity, and leaving behind “the impossible claim to indexicality.”²⁷ Essays in *Collecting Visible Evidence* on computer simulations, digital animations, and Sobchack’s film phenomenology opened the field of documentary studies to a rich range of possibilities for considering how it was that mimetic technologies came to connote “reality” within specific discursive regimes. Three major strands of subsequent documentary theory that eschewed indexicality, which I identify below as grounded in the concepts of resemblance, interactivity, and autobiography, suggest theoretical positions tacitly in line with Phelan’s understanding of performance. Hinted at as a domain of inquiry but left untreated in documentary theory, however, was the mimetic technology of embodied performance,²⁸ a case, as I explain below, in which I am more hesitant to give up on the concept of indexicality. I will argue below, following Sobchack’s critique of Baudrillard, that there is something troubling to the claim that bodies in the process of performing simply resemble reality iconically, like avatars in a computer simulation.

²⁷ Jane Gaines, “Introduction: ‘The Real Returns’,” in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, eds. Jane Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 6.

²⁸ Gaines noted that “despite the emphasis on documentary as hard, cold fact, as propaganda and social problem, as a ‘sobering’ discourse, it is also a discourse that elicits a particular kind of fascination, a fascination with the workings of mimetic technologies, only intensified by their spectacularly successful illusionism.” In this way, the use of the motion picture to convey information about reality visually “is on a par with performances, natural phenomena, curiosities, and technologies that play on similarity—from Civil War reenactments to flight simulators, from fossils to death masks.” *Ibid.*, 8-10.

The limitation of the concept of the index that I identify, I will suggest, can be traced back to Peirce's concept of the index. This is the component of his tripartite semiotic system in which he foregrounds certain kinds of objects—including the photograph—that exist in contiguity with their sign. Peirce also offered powerful insights about the index as intangible, ephemeral, and process-oriented. However, most of the examples he used to describe the concept of the index refer to the essences of objects in the world, leaving too general a conceptualization about processes of perception in the subject. True to his era, in theorizing a semiotics that could account for perceptual experience as well as language, he presumed an ideal perceiving subject. The orientation²⁹ of subject to object had no explicit place in his theory of the existence of indexical signs. I make the case that this limitation, adopted into documentary film theory most notably through the early work of Nichols, left us with a concept that could not adequately serve the field, as became more apparent with the digital turn. I therefore propose a theory of indexicality that draws from performance studies as well as from film phenomenology to better understand the place of the perceiving subject. I suggest a phenomenological approach to theorizing the index in film studies as well as in live performance that draws on the film theory of Sobchack, whose work on embodiment has

²⁹ Orientation is a term for which I am indebted to queer theorist Sara Ahmed, who focuses on the axis of sexuality to theorize a way of practicing phenomenology that avoids the pitfalls of universalizing the processes of perception. Ahmed uses the term orientation to mean “how it is that we come to find our way in a world that acquires new shapes, depending on which way we turn.” Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1.

not yet fully been taken up in documentary film theory.³⁰ I also touch back to the theory of intersubjectivity drawing from Cartwright's work on empathic identification, affect, and the concept of working through, which offers a provocative direction for film phenomenology.³¹

Second, I posit that duration, a concept addressed in film theory as a key component of the indexicality of film by authors such as Andre Bazin, Mary Ann Doane, and David Rodowick with reference to the film medium itself (which is projected over time), may be further investigated in light of performance activity and labor. In the chapters that follow, I consider the duration of a performance activity or labor that occurs in instances such as the production, editing, distribution, and interpretation of documentary film, performance art, and reenactment performance. Perceiving duration as indexical in this way is different from perceiving the indexicality of duration through the length of shot on screen. Rodowick, for instance, discusses duration as indexical because the time of the shot is the same for subject and spectator even though they exist in different times and spaces. They share a temporal experience in this limited way. This is not the case for the ways we perceive the duration of labor or performance activity, which almost always exceeds the duration of a spectator's engagement with the film or performance event itself. In these cases, spectators perceive duration of time or repeated activities through signs that touch the bodies of the laborer/performer indexically, *while*

³⁰ Several notable exceptions include: Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*; Juhasz and Lerner, *F is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing*; Wahlberg, *Documentary Time: Film and Phenomenology*.

³¹ Lisa Cartwright, "The Hands of the Projectionist," *Science in Context* 24, no. 03 (2011): 443-464; Lisa Cartwright, *Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

also symbolizing processes that extend in time beyond what the representation offers. In this way, the signs that index the duration of performances or labor also index an absence. These signs suggest histories that we as spectators cannot know with great specificity about the subjects we aim to understand in the present of our viewing.

For example, Patrick Anderson's writing on Turkish hunger strikers suggests this dual relationship between index and symbol. Over time, the bodies of the civilian hunger strikers index their own processes of starvation, and so come to symbolize solidarity with prisoners who are also striking against the abuses of the state.³² Their collective is intersubjective and largely imagined, as the strikers outside the prison cannot interact with those incarcerated within, but it is also literally constituted of lost flesh. Within media studies, Cartwright's article "The Hands of the Projectionist" (2011) intimates a similar direction with respect to labor. She writes about perceiving the indentations on a 19th century, pre-cinematic projector as indexical traces of "everyday and routine empirical contact" between the projectionist and this instrument. She perceives this reiterative labor in the present and in the moment of interpreting meaning from the indentations on the projector itself, which signify the longstanding everyday practice that created them. The indentations document a life's contact with the projector; Cartwright perceives them in the comparatively brief time she spent looking at the projector as an archival object. But Cartwright cannot experience the history of use that created these

³² Patrick Anderson, *So Much Wasted: Hunger, Performance, and the Morbidity of Resistance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010a), 110.

indentations by looking at them. She must *imagine* the repeated work that left these indexical traces on the projector box.³³

Perceiving this duration can be startling; it shifts the perceiver's affective regard for the activity and the person doing it because it suggests a history and materiality beyond perception. At its base, this affective shift is ethical, empathically tied to the past life activity of another human. To pay attention to the labor of another in this way demands both empathy and humility. The indexical signs of labor and performance activity suggest an experientially unknowable history that stimulates the imagination to consider the passing of time, or time that has passed. Here, the concept of duration in the medium of film that Rodowick offers leads to a similar conclusion—and one at odds with understandings of documentary as primarily iconic. In *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007), an exploration of the place of film studies in a digital world, Rodowick reflected that “what we have valued in film are our confrontations with time and time's passing.”³⁴ Film was most significantly a medium of time rather than space, for Rodowick, because it was the temporal component that allowed for—even demanded—spectators to consider loss and the passing of time to which the analog film could testify.

I propose that duration is a key aspect of film theory of the image and the index, but it is also a central concept in documentary film practice among those who are practitioners of sensory ethnography such as Jean Rouch, David MacDougall, and Lucien Castaing-Taylor.³⁵ Further, it is a concept that is in fact shared with both reenactment

³³ Cartwright, *The Hands of the Projectionist*, 443-464.

³⁴ Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, 73.

³⁵ Lucien Castaing-Taylor has also published writing under the name Lucien Taylor, most notably the introduction to *Transcultural Cinema* (1998). Throughout my dissertation, I

performance and performance art, in many cases. This will be demonstrated in the chapters throughout this dissertation. In the pages of this chapter below, I will show where there are affinities across these fields around the concept of duration. However, in brief here, I will note that aesthetics³⁶ in all of these practices includes the time taken to perform an activity or create a finished work. In sensory ethnographic film theory, to make one point that will be analyzed in depth in Chapter 3, the duration of a shot is thought to accumulate toward a surge of affect in the spectator who imagines a discovery about the pace of subjects' everyday lives, the cultural forces behind the reiterative nature of certain gestures, or the concept of time specific to the world in front of the lens. "By devoting more time to those being filmed," summarized visual anthropologists Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz in *Observational Cinema* (2009), "viewers were also given the means by which to respond actively to situations presented in the film. . . . The challenge [for filmmakers] was to seek out revelatory moments, those flashes of connection between what would otherwise be lost to flux."³⁷ Such affective sensations, I suggest below, can be read through Tomkins' system of affects, as momentary startle responses that lead the subject to reconsider their relations to the represented world. These iterations of surprise, reflection, and integration build on one another, with one providing the framework for others in future moments of the film. Extended on screen

refer to the name associated with the particular publication that I am discussing. The reader should note that "Taylor" and "Castaing-Taylor" refer to the same person.

³⁶ In using the term aesthetics here, I do not mean the criteria for judging beauty, but rather the reasoning behind the formal choices that comprise the look, style, and feel of the film or performance. While not always successful, these are the elements through which makers attempt to communicate their intentions, points of view, or discursive orientations in a given cultural and historical context.

³⁷ Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*, 118-9.

duration provides one aesthetic strategy for simulating for modern spectators senses of time alternative to the ones they experience in their own lives.

I briefly engage with an approach that Taylor advocated for documentary in his introduction to *Transcultural Cinema* (1998). Situated in the context of the late 1990s, Taylor's essay argued that the kind of observational cinema that developed in the 1970s, which included participatory and dialogic forms that aimed to create more self-reflexive representations of "being there," offered aesthetic strategies to "rescue documentary from its deathbed" in an era of accelerating simulation. While acknowledging that observational cinema practice presented poor options for representing the psychic or the intimate in everyday life, Taylor insisted that filmed reenactment performance was an inadequate substitute for observed record and autobiography too self-absorbed to retain the critical distance necessary to judge the most important details for representation. Reenactment performance was "pre-observational in spirit, even if its resurgence is post-observational in its historical moment," he stated. Fourteen years on from the publication of Taylor's essay, with the "hypermediatization of society" that he feared far more entrenched in everyday practice, I want to reconsider his disavowal of reenactment and autobiographical forms of representation.³⁸ While I appreciate the clarity with which Castaing-Taylor framed this position, and agree with the idea that observational film can exceed spectators' preconceived typologies and challenge ideologies, I disagree with the argument that reenactment is reactionary because its history in documentary filmmaking predates observational modalities. If reenactment performance has emerged in some

³⁸ Lucien Taylor, "Introduction," in *Transcultural Cinema*, eds. Lucien Taylor and David MacDougall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 7, 10, 17.

recent strains of documentary theory and practice, it is not in the same way or for the same reasons that it held a place in the tradition before. Throughout this dissertation, I show how and why this is the case.

I draw from performance theory on liveness and disappearance associated with Phelan, Amelia Jones, Phil Auslander, Rebecca Schneider, and Anderson to consider how the subject comes to an awareness of duration in engaging with performances that are ephemeral events. I bring this into conversation with Rodowick's theory of duration and the image, which refers to the same kinds of concepts—loss, duration, confrontations with time, time's passing—that Phelan identified as the ontology of performance in her seminal essay “Representation without Reproduction” in *Unmarked* (1993). Though critical of recording technologies like film, video, and writing that constrained performance to the economy of reproduction, Phelan embraced the effort to “restage and restate the effort to remember what is lost” through description, which Rodowick does in *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007) in relation to the discipline of film studies.³⁹ Phelan did not use the term indexicality, but she seemed to be describing a phenomenon in her experience of analyzing performance art that was very much in keeping with the qualities that Peirce ascribed to indexical signs, and that Bazin, Doane and Rodowick attributed to the photographic ontology of film. Phelan insisted that performance was different from film because performance subverted the drive toward mastery that the conventions of photography seemed to promise. But the qualities that Rodowick and Doane identified with analog photography, writing in the early 2000s, were presence-as-absence and contingency, not mastery—concepts also central to Phelan's ontology of performance.

³⁹ Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 147.

“The disappearance of the object is fundamental to performance; it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered,” Phelan said, prefiguring Doane’s concept of the index as a “hollowed-out sign.”⁴⁰ Anderson’s work on self-starvation performances conceived in accord with Phelan’s ontology read the “hollowed-out sign” as it registered in the (lack of) flesh on the performers themselves, who “demonstrate the productive plenitude of disappearance as an index for radical, and radically situated, political presence.”⁴¹ Read within Phelan’s logic, moreover, Rodowick’s elegy for film may figure the hundred-year history of the medium as a long performance for an audience of the present, startled to become aware of its passing. Or, alternatively, reading Phelan through Rodowick, the constellation of ideas about presence and the awareness of time passing may indicate the internalization of the cinema apparatus into the logic of the everyday, often made manifest through performance. Phelan suggested as much herself in an essay about the documentary film *Paris is Burning* (1990), in which she observed that the protagonists, Harlem drag queens who perform as white women in drag balls, “manage at once to be the screen and the creators of that image.”⁴² I interpret these points of intersection to suggest thinking about lived bodies interacting in performance in time as significant indexical instruments of the digital age. Intersubjective indexicality, I argue, is at the core of performances that function as documentaries.

⁴⁰ Ibid; Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*, 82.

⁴¹ Anderson, *So Much Wasted: Hunger, Performance, and the Morbidity of Resistance*, 25.

⁴² Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 111.

Indexicality Reconsidered

“Are digital media indexical, and if so, what are the terms of that indexicality?” asked Doane near the end of her introduction to a 2007 issue of the feminist journal *differences* dedicated to exploring Peirce’s concept of the index.⁴³ Throughout the issue, it is a contested question. Braxton Soderman’s analysis of the indexicality of algorithms stressed that “concentration on the loss of indexicality in digital film studies threatens to obscure new positive relations between digital images and indexicality,” and film theorist Tom Gunning flatly dismissed the “nonsense that has been generated specifically about the indexicality of digital media” as detrimental to creating a cinema theory grounded on the perception of movement on screen, regardless of medium or the process of producing the cinematic object.⁴⁴ But Doane was more hesitant to give up on the idea of film as a medium characterized by its uniquely indexical relation to the world it represented. In spite of the practical displacement of film by digital media, and popular unconcern about the differences between the two, Doane asserted that “an emphasis upon film’s chemical, photographic base now serves to differentiate the cinema from digital media and repeatedly invokes indexicality as the guarantee of a privileged relation to the real, to referentiality, and to materiality.”⁴⁵ The digital was the antithesis of the indexical conceived as historical trace, she argued, because the medium aimed toward convergence, toward the erasure of media rather than the specific affordances and

⁴³ M. A. Doane, “Indexicality: Trace and Sign Introduction,” *differences* 18, no. 1 (2007a): 5.

⁴⁴ Braxton Soderman, “The Index and the Algorithm,” *differences* 18, no. 1 (2007): 175; Tom Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality,” *Differences*. 18, no. 1 (2007): 31.

⁴⁵ Mary Ann Doane, “Indexicality and the Concept of Medium Specificity,” *differences* 18, no. 1 (2007c): 143.

limitations of a medium. “For the digital exudes a fantasy of immateriality, in contrast to the fantasy of referentiality of the indexical,” she said.⁴⁶ Yet Doane identified in Peirce’s writings a second way of thinking about the index, beyond the metaphor of the trace. In its ideal form, the index was simply a “this” that carried no content beyond sheer presence at the particular moment of the subject’s apprehension of a material but unknowable aura, what Doane called a *deixis*. “Hence, the ‘real’ referenced by the index is not the ‘real’ of realism, which purports to give the spectator knowledge of the world,” Doane explained. “The index is reduced to its own singularity; it appears as a brute and opaque fact, wedded to contingency—pure indication, pure assurance of existence.”⁴⁷ In this second aspect, the index is also performative. The *deixis* hails the “this” into the subject’s attention, and in doing so “does exhaust itself in the moment of its implementation and is ineluctably linked to presence.”⁴⁸ While the aspect of the photographic image as trace testified to the historical existence of the objects depicted on film, the frame itself served as an index in this second aspect, as a *deixis* focusing attention in the present. Doane suggested that in film studies treatments of indexicality as photochemical trace, this performative aspect of the indexical sign as Peirce conceived of the concept “is frequently forgotten.”⁴⁹

Perhaps in part this has to do with the fact that Peirce wrote about the photographic camera specifically as a scientific instrument on par with the weathervane or the plumb bob rather than as an expressive prop for the performing body. In “The

⁴⁶ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 135.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 136.

Theory of Signs” (1895), Peirce briefly analyzed the photograph as an example of a complex sign. Photographs resembled the objects to which they referred, but they were not simply icons because photographs existed in indexical contiguity with the objects they represented:

Photographs, especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive, because we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature. In that aspect, then, they belong to the second class of signs, those by physical connection.⁵⁰

Peirce understood the process of composite photography, in which multiple negatives were seamlessly spliced together to make one image, but downplaying the subjective, expressive dimensions of photography was in keeping with the enthusiasm of the late 1800s, a moment in which social science disciplines staked claims in the academy as inheritors of the natural sciences.⁵¹ What was useful to discern from observation was not anecdote, but “physically forced” patterns that evidenced universally applicable truths about human experience. Many of the examples that Peirce provided to illustrate his concept of the index—the bullet mold, weathercock, sundial, barometer, plumb bob, yardstick, etc.—were mechanical tools used to measure natural forces and decode such patterns. The indexical relation of tools to the forces that shaped them in turn exerted their own kind of force on the thoughts of the subject regarding them. “We

⁵⁰ Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, 106.

⁵¹ Brian Winston and Hing Tsang, "The Subject and the Indexicality of the Photograph," *Semiotica* 2009, no. 173 (2009): 453-469.

are forced by the law of the mind” to think that the weathercock points in the direction of the wind, Peirce stated.⁵² Subjectivity had little to do with it.

Doane’s *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (2002) posited that this way of thinking about the cinematic apparatus was one symptom of a transformation in the meaning of seeing in the late 19th century that influenced Peirce’s semiotic philosophy. Doane connected Peirce’s ideas about indexicality to growing cultural suspicions about the inadequacy of human vision to perceive the world accurately. Debates in that era about the possibility of representing movement and duration, Doane observed, “indicate that the issue here is one of representing what we *cannot* see—time.”⁵³ Doane argued that the invention of archival technologies like cameras, museums, typewriters, and phonographs were imbricated in the emergence of a new way of seeing time in the world that was invested in “the contradictory desire of archiving presence.”⁵⁴ The tools of science had the power, it seemed, to preserve for reflection the instantaneous events of everyday life that before had passed unrecorded. Doane described how 19th century scientific belief in the concept of the afterimage, the idea that the human retina retained the ghosted contours of the seen on its surface after exposure to light, both explained the eye through the metaphor of the camera and testified to the imperfection of the eye as a documentary apparatus. The film camera recorded sequences of images without such flaws. Doane found that Peirce’s writing considered the relation between presence and thinking through the logic behind the concept of the afterimage. Thought was a kind of afterimage of perception, held in the mind for

⁵² Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, 109.

⁵³ Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*, 89.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

reflection while the senses processed other, less striking perceptions. The indexical sign was closest to the sensation of instantaneous presence for Peirce, but as such, Peirce argued that it was also furthest from human thought. Any thought, like the afterimage on the retina, existed only through an interval of time and with the enabling co-presence in consciousness of other thoughts. Because the indexical sign existed in contiguity with its object, it seemed the most objective of his sign categories, and therefore the least human. It had no existence itself outside of the thing to which it referred. Peirce's index was therefore a sign, in Doane's terms, "evacuated of content; it is a hollowed-out sign."⁵⁵ The very inhumanity of the photographic index also promised its validity, rationality, and potential, ironically, to *make present again* the irrational, idiosyncratic, and inexplicable qualities of living that escaped conscious perception or memory.⁵⁶ If film was a "hollowed-out sign," then it functioned for spectators like an opening through which one might behold the indexical traces of the historical world. It could make past time palpable in the present. This was a conceit, as I expand upon below, that organized documentary theory in the early 1990s. In this way of thinking, film could reenact in the theater past moments or events that spectators had not experienced personally, and so

⁵⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁵⁶ Doane developed this idea further in a subsequent article, "The Object of Theory" (2003), about the attraction of the concept of indexicality in film in the context of a modernity dominated by "highly technologically mediated rationalization." In her reading of Paul Willeman's work on cinephilia, Doane insisted that what cinephiles came to value and believe in about the indexicality of the film was the medium's capacity to represent contingency, the traces of life beyond the control of direction, *mise-en-scene*, or the performativity of roles: "the lure of contingency is that it seems to offer a way out, an anchoring point for the condensation of utopian desires. It proffers itself as a way out of systematicity." Mary Ann Doane, "The Object of Theory," in *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, ed. Ivone Margulies (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 85.

draw them into new ways of conceiving their relationship to “the world” and their capacity to change it. The medium promised the spectator the capacity to transcend the everyday self through this relationship of responsibility with representations on screen.

Accepting this basic understanding of the photographic camera’s indexicality led film and new media theorists like Rodowick to group together the evidentiary status of the photograph and the cinematic film in contradistinction to the plastic arts like painting and sculpture. Reflecting upon the differences between an historical painting and a photograph of a similar event, Rodowick insisted that a “rightly or wrongly, we assume that the photograph itself functions as a primary historical document” whereas “it would be difficult to take any painting or sketch of this event as anything but a subjective interpretation or an imaginative likeness, regardless of the artist’s efforts to be ‘objective.’”⁵⁷ Indeed, he noted that the cinema had long been considered a “mongrel medium” because the photographic recording process seemed to defy the conventional understanding of aesthetics in the 19th century, the idea upon which art criticism had divided its domains and conceived of its objects.⁵⁸ For Rodowick, these sentiments associated with evidence and mechanical instrumentation remained central to the way we perceive the medium of film. “Despite all self-consciousness about the possibility of altering or falsifying photographs,” he said, “the photographic frame will always limit the range of subjective inventiveness and intentionality in the way that a canvas does not.”⁵⁹ In this way of thinking, the indexical legacy of the cinema belongs primarily to the photograph, the camera, and the aspirations to preservation of the historical past, and not

⁵⁷ Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, 61.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

to the performance of an artist-camera operator who creates with the affordances of the tools in mind.

Yet as Doane intimated in her observations about *deixis*, Peirce suggested a second way to think about indexical signs that had less to do with scientific instruments than with the subjective sensation of being startled by particular perceptions. Peirce offered one particularly useful example in this regard: “I see a man with a rolling gait. This is a probable indication that he is a sailor.”⁶⁰ Although striking as a description of the relation between a repetitive labor practice and the compelled effect on the motility of the body, the “rolling gait” suggests Peirce’s historical context of the late 1800s rather than a timeless natural law. It is no longer clear what a “rolling gait” is, if it were in the late 1890s, and it is less certain that a contemporary American observer of the phenomenon would associate the movement with this distinctly 19th century working class, maritime occupation. Furthermore, we might wonder whether the other sailors at the docks would have identified this man’s gait as rolling, if indeed he were a sailor, or if it might simply have been the way “we” walk.⁶¹ What Peirce was pointing to here was an experience that was mildly startling for him, an encounter with difference that compelled him to imagine an explanation. This subjective experience depended upon Peirce’s reading into the “performed” but historically conditioned movements of another subject,

⁶⁰ Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, 108.

⁶¹ Peirce wrote incisively about this phenomenon of perception in relation to a scientist working in a lab. Anticipating Latour by seventy years, he observed that the scientist “has had his mind moulded by his life in the laboratory to a degree that is little suspected. The experimentalist himself can hardly be fully aware of it, for the reason that the men whose intellects he really knows about are much like himself in this respect.” *Ibid.*, 251.

an intersubjective encounter. Peirce expanded at greater length shortly thereafter on this kind of indexical sign:

A rap on the door is an index. Anything which focuses the attention is an index. Anything which startles us is an index, in so far as it marks the junction between two portions of experience. Thus a tremendous thunderbolt indicates that *something* considerable happened, though we may not know precisely what the event was. But it may be expected to connect itself with some other experience.⁶²

The surprising suddenness of these indexical signs—the rap at the door, or the thunderbolt—compels the perceiver to attend to it. Applying this aspect of indexicality to the domain of film viewing experience, a spectator may perceive *something* as striking as the rap on the door. It is perhaps a detail that other viewers—or the filmmakers themselves—might not have noticed. But without the perceiving subject to experience this *something*, this indexical sign will not emerge as the film plays. Within this framework, we may theorize an indexical relation inhering in the felt, bodily sensation of a spectator⁶³ as much as Peirce’s photograph, weathervane, plumb bob, or bullet mold. We may also consider the possibility that the presence of moving images, however horrific or sensational their contents, may not in themselves produce the sensation of their indexicality in a particular viewer.

Doane rightly emphasized that the concept of the indexical trace has served as a bulwark within film theory—and implicitly, within documentary film theory—against the threat of easy manipulation and the convergence of genre, media, and distribution

⁶² Ibid., 108.

⁶³ I would add the categories of cameraperson, film editor, and live performer to this schematic, as well. Experiences of spectatorship, in many cases, are foundational for learning how to embody these other roles. I analyze the affective aspect of indexicality in camerawork and reenactment performance in Chapters 3-5.

platforms in the digital era.⁶⁴ Whereas media convergence facilitates the production of symbolic communication, indexical signs remind us that something more stubborn, brute, and difficult to assimilate into codes on screens still exists. But in its *deictic* aspect, indexicality is a relational quality, not a set of facts, and when screens and photographic images constitute a staple of everyday life, the nature of indexicality changes.

Photographs are more often banal than wondrous, as commentators in the 19th century described them being, and the tricks of manipulating photographs are commonly understood. The frame in the screen focuses attention, but it does not necessarily mark a “junction between two portions of experience,” or indicate that anything considerable has happened. Indeed, in “Banality in Cultural Studies” (1988), Australian cultural theorist and self-acknowledged “media baby” Meaghan Morris suggested the opposite in an anecdote about an unexpected interruption in her own television viewing. “This was not catastrophe on TV—like the Challenger sequence,” Morris reflected of the incident, “but a catastrophe of and *for* TV. There were no pictures, no reports, just *silence*.”⁶⁵ It was the absence of televised indices of catastrophes in other places, in other words, that indexed *something* catastrophic looming in Morris’s own locale. The loss of the television signal, the indexical trace of catastrophe, worked on Morris performatively by evoking the sensation of liveness, the visage of her own disappearance, and “something like a

⁶⁴ Doane, *Indexicality and the Concept of Medium Specificity*, 128.

⁶⁵ Meaghan Morris, “Banality in Cultural Studies,” in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 14-43.

truth.”⁶⁶ What startled her was an affective sense of *deixis*, the unknown series of historical events that enabled this moment of silence and mortality in the present.

I suggested in the opening of the chapter that this kind of startling indexicality might be partially theorized through Silvan Tomkins’ system of affects.⁶⁷ An American psychologist working in the traditions of psychoanalysis and behaviorism, Tomkins dedicated his career to determining, “empirically, the conditions under which messages become conscious, and the role of consciousness as part of a feedback mechanism.”⁶⁸ Tomkins suggested that the affects worked in tandem with the drives, and argued that the individual retained some measure of conscious control over the behavior that the affects shaped. The affect system intensified the sensational interplay amongst drives, perceptions, memories, and thought processes, but were not beholden to any of them in particular.⁶⁹ Tomkins understood the affect system as a living organism that grew more complex over time, gaining density with experience. Affective responses to stimuli informed conscious thought, which in turn changed the way the affects functioned. Tomkins identified Surprise-Startle, one of nine affects in *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (1962, 2008), as a “circuit breaker” to experiencing the flow of time as continuous. He

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁷ I draw from Tomkins’ affect theory in greater depth in Chapter 4 of the dissertation. Tomkins’ work was most prominently adapted into cultural studies by Eve Sedgwick and film studies by Lisa Cartwright. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Adam Frank and Irving E. Alexander, *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Cartwright, *Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child*.

⁶⁸ Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition* (New York: Springer Pub., 2008), 3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xvii.

described the surprise-startle affect, metaphorically, as a generally neutral response to “any visitor to consciousness who has overstayed his welcome.”⁷⁰ In documentary film production, film viewing, and performance, being startled often results from sensations that lead to a heightened awareness of the represented Other or an unknowable interval of time that has passed. We might think of this “visitor to consciousness,” as Tomkins called it, as an understanding of the world shaken by what has just been experienced in an encounter with a film or performance event. The experiencing subject must attend “momentarily to that massive, dense feedback from the startle response,” in Tomkins’ terms, with “an increasing gradient of neural firing” that allows for the integration of new information about the world into consciousness.⁷¹ This affective sensation leads to different interpretations, depending on the preexisting frameworks through which a subject might make sense of it, which may suggest in part why theorists coming from different disciplines describe similar sensations differently. Intersubjective indexicality refers to a moment of startling realization that happens suddenly—but not upon seeing the sign, at least in Peirce’s sense of the sign. The trigger for this kind of indexicality may need time to reveal its indentations and scars, the marks of duration and human touch. And it must resonate with the frameworks a subject brings to their perception. Tomkins posited that the nine affects he named were innate to human biology, but he left room to consider how different cultural and historical contexts might inflect their manifestations, an important opening for film theory concerned with the historically contingent relationship of subjectivity to images projected on the screen.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 274.

⁷¹ Ibid., 273-4.

Interestingly, though ideas about connections between indexicality and transcendence in film studies are often traced to the 1950s essays of Andre Bazin, some of Bazin's writing on the meaning of documentary focused less on what was visible in documentary images than what was absent from them.⁷² It is true that Bazin's writing on the ontology of the photographic image pointed to an innate human desire to transcend death—a “mummy complex”—rather than the influence of a culture industry, as central to the popular fascination with realism in the cinema.⁷³ And Bazin identified the

⁷² Bazin's ontological theory of the cinema is well trodden ground in film and media theory on indexicality, and so I only mention several key engagements with Bazin here. Peter Wollen first connected Bazin's writing on the ontology of the image to the index within Peirce's triad of semiotic signs in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1974). His analysis was influential, but Tom Gunning has suggested that it was also too reductive of the nuances in Bazin's theory, which was open to iconic resonances. Another notable work on Bazin and indexicality is Philip Rosen's *Change Mummified* (2001), which he followed with his essay “History of Image, Image of History” in *Rites of Realism* (2003), edited by Ivone Margulies. See: Bazin and Gray, *What is Cinema?*; Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*; Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality,” 29; Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory*; Philip Rosen, “History of Image, Image of History,” in *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, ed. Ivone Margulies (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 42.

⁷³ Bazin and Gray, *What is Cinema?*, 9. While beyond the scope of this project to conduct a full consideration of the meanings of realism and interpretations of Bazin's theory within cinema studies and filmmaking practice, it is important to reference this debate. I interpret Bazinian realism signifying an aesthetic order, rather than a discursive one, that strove to distill transcendent feelings of connection to the world outside of the theater in the cinema viewer. Strongly influenced by his experience viewing Italian neo-realist films of the 1940s and 1950s (Rossellini's in particular), he outlined in his writings a set of formal principles through which this connection to the transcendent real might be secured (long takes, the use of non-actors, shooting on location rather than a set, deep focus, etc.). While overly invested in essentialist concepts of an ideal spectator, Bazin's theory of realist representation remains an important one in this tradition of scholarship. For commentary on Bazin and indexicality, see; Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*; Daniel Morgan, “Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics,” *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 3 (2006): 443-481; Mary Ann Doane, “Indexicality: Trace and Sign”; For a provocative argument against this pairing, see: Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality.”

mechanical nature of the camera as central to the medium's unique capacity for realist representation, as the realistic appearance of the world on the screen was less determined by artistic intention than the realistic appearance, for instance, of the world on a painter's canvas. Without using the term indexicality, Bazin argued that something of the world transferred directly to the photograph, irrespective of its "documentary value" to communicate symbolic ideas clearly.⁷⁴ The photograph "actually contributes something to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for it," Bazin claimed.⁷⁵ In his review of the Thor Heyerdahl film *Kon Tiki* (1950), however, Bazin offered a different kind of analysis. *Kon Tiki* documented the voyage of a team of Norwegian adventurer-archeologists who built balsa wood rafts and followed ocean currents across the Pacific to demonstrate that pre-Columbian South Americans using similar technology could have populated the Polynesian Islands. In his review of the film, Bazin observed that the banal details that the scientists recorded during their reenactment voyage and included in their film testified to their actual struggle during the most dramatic moments of the trip that prevented them from filming. "The missing documents are the negative imprints of the expedition—its inscription chiseled deep," he wrote.⁷⁶ In this particular instance, it was the absence of photographic images that startled Bazin into an awareness about the historical experiences of the people depicted on screen. The images present pointed suggestively to disappearance for Bazin, to the dangerous conditions of labor that prevented the performance of recording and left dramatic events to the spectator's imagination. In this intriguing case, Bazin was not looking at the film through the realist

⁷⁴ Bazin and Gray, *What is Cinema?*, 14.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.

lens that emphasized verisimilitude, visibility, and the legacy of the plastic arts. He was using a performance studies approach to discuss the documentary value of *Kon Tiki*.

What was visible on the film indexed labor that could not be seen.

Nonetheless, the idea that the analog camera's indexicality could capture and preserve visible history provided a powerful argument for the need of a documentary theory distinct from the apparatus theory and psychoanalytic film theory developed to analyze ideology and desire in fiction film in the 1970s and 1980s. In *Representing Reality* (1991),⁷⁷ Bill Nichols argued that if fictional cinema was like the iconic play of shadows on Plato's cave (as Baudry had suggested in his seminal 1974 article on the ideological effects of the cinema apparatus), then documentary could be its opposing light of truth. Nichols staked his documentary theory on the claim that documentary film moved spectators through the rational consideration of authoritative evidence, coupled with viewers' thirst for knowledge, social justice, or discovering ways of life that challenged their assumptions of what was natural or right. He made the case that in documentary film, the image was not a simulation of reality, but an inscription of reality

⁷⁷ The influence of Nichols' work on the emergence of the Visible Evidence group and documentary studies as a field in the early 1990s was considerable. When Visible Evidence first met in 1993, Nichols claimed that his book *Representing Reality* (1991) was the only reasonably current theoretical monograph on documentary available. Subsequent works by Michael Renov, Jane Gaines and Renov, Alex Juhasz and Jesse Lerner, Diane Waldman and Janet Walker, Stella Bruzzi, Tom Waugh, Brian Winston, and Elizabeth Cowie, to name just a few, developed this field in many more directions, but most books on documentary still start their literature reviews with *Representing Reality*. His phrase "discourses of sobriety" has become synonymous with a certain way of regarding documentary, and his *Introduction to Documentary* (2001, 2010) remains the most widely used textbook in the field. All of this is to say that Nichols' early theoretical work stands in here for a certain widely shared orientation in documentary theory toward its object of study. Nichols' subsequent scholarship has also theorized what he called "performative documentary" and films that employ reenactment.

itself. Nichols asserted that the “distinctive bond between a photographic image and that of which it is a record” lent photographic images a unique relationship to the historical world that could enable them to communicate “discourses of sobriety” in a public sphere that appealed to conscious thought rather than unconscious desire.⁷⁸ In Nichols’ view, psychoanalytic theory was not applicable to documentary film because desire and fantasy did not play a part in the rational consideration of documented reality. He insisted that despite the fact that documentary used much of the same film grammar as its fictional counterparts and screened in the same venues (thereby similarly interpellating its viewers as passive tourists to the world on screen), apparatus theory was not applicable because the indexical nature of the camera ensured that the images on screen were traces of the historical world rather than ideologically suspect copies of it. Nichols located this foundational point, suggestively, in the analog technologies on the wane at the moment of writing his book, adding in a footnote that digital image creation “renders this argument for the unique, indexical nature of the photographic image obsolete.”⁷⁹ Because digital camcorders immediately transformed the light coming through the lens and striking the chip into its simulation as binary data, this line of reasoning followed, it would be impossible to detect deft manipulations to digital imagery added in post-production. Moving images stored on a hard drive existed in the same digital form as the computer code that drove software programs and comprised animation sequences. Digital images simply did not have a tangible, observable material existence like the exposed role of film, the close study of which could reveal tampering. Therefore, the use of digital

⁷⁸ Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, 5.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 268.

technologies undermined the authority of the photographic image to represent truth, and thus threatened documentary's claims on representing reality.

The erosion of faith in the indexicality of the photographic image led to new directions within documentary theory grounded on other premises, notably those of *resemblance*, *interaction*, and *autobiography*. Documentary theory focused on the cultural significance of resemblance in the digital era, associated with Jane Gaines, Tom Gunning, Brian Winston, and Alex Juhasz and Jesse Lerner, turned from the aesthetic analysis of film rhetoric to questions of reception, everyday life practices, simulation technologies, and the material culture that informed social understandings of documentary. Juhasz and Lerner's edited collection on the mockumentary genre *F is for Phony* (2006) reexamined how the "formal elements of documentary" reappropriated for fiction projects (defined by their use of scripts, actors, staging, and the like) complicated practices of reception. "Fake documentaries are at least in part fiction films, but we receive them as in part like a documentary," Juhasz explained. "Documentary comes into being at the point of reception."⁸⁰ Brian Winston's *Claiming the Real* (2008) attacked the Griersonian definition of the documentary form, "the creative treatment of actuality," as a "fractured foundation" that had always operated in the public sphere as a form of censorship. Winston insisted that documentary should be "merely or significantly, a record of a film-maker's subjective interaction with the world," pointing to animations, computer graphics, "documusicals," visualizations of poetry, reality television formats,

⁸⁰ Juhasz and Lerner, *F is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing*, 8.

and predictions about the future (in so-called “conditional documentaries”) as exemplars of a “post-Griersonian” documentary trend.⁸¹

Theorist-practitioners Marsha Kinder, Seth Feldman, Natalie Bookchin, and Matt Soar studied and made interactive documentaries starting in the late 1990s, which included computer games modeled on the historical world, database documentary forms that enabled the user to negotiate their own way through a narrative by selecting from discrete chunks, and participatory “crowd-sourced” documentary projects like Perry Bard’s *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake*, which allows participants to upload their own remakes for shots of their choosing from Vertov’s film. A computer program draws from this ever accumulating database of user clips to randomly curate a continually updated, finished version of the film online.⁸² By leaving some level of the editing choices in the hands of the user, the subjective selectivity of the documentary production process remained in the foreground of the viewing experience. Viewers became aware, in other words, that they were not seeing a definitive account of a documentary story because they saw at each step how many of the details or pathways they did not choose to follow. The narratives that viewer choices created were usually

⁸¹ Winston, *Claiming the Real II: Documentary: Grierson and Beyond*, 290.

⁸² Though dynamic, versions of these projects can be explored online. See the following for details: Marsha Kinder, “The Labyrinth Project,” University of Southern California, <http://dornsife.usc.edu/labyrinth/> (accessed June 10, 2012); Matt Soar and Florian Thalhofer, “Korsakow: Dynamic Storytelling,” <http://korsakow.org/> (accessed June 10, 2012); Perry Bard, *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake* (England: Cornerhouse, The Bigger Picture, Ongoing since 2007); Seth Feldman, “On the Internet, Nobody Knows You’re a Constructivist: Perry Bard’s *The Man with the Movie Camera: The Global Remake*,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 53 (Summer, 2011), <http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/index.html> (accessed June 10, 2012); Natalie Bookchin, “Current and Recent Projects,” <http://bookchin.net/projects.html> (accessed June 10, 2012).

characterized by thematic repetitions, unexpected juxtapositions, the sense of alternative, or even endless, narrative possibilities, and a lack of closure—qualities that Marsha Kinder, writing in 2002, thought to be liberating from the ideologies of time embedded in classical narrative film structures.⁸³ Cindy Poremba, writing about the “simulation as index” in the documentary game *JFK Reloaded*, argued for a shift in concepts of indexicality from photographic inscription to algorithm in digital contexts. She likened the game player, who assumed the position and goals of Lee Harvey Oswald carrying out the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in the game, to a “forensic investigator” “engaging the historical record” by playing.⁸⁴

Theorists like Nichols, Michael Renov, Stella Bruzzi, Elizabeth Cowie, Nichols, and Janet Walker focused on the emergence of autobiographical and performative modes of documentary film production.⁸⁵ First person filmmaking became especially prominent in the 1980s and 1990s with works, referring to the American context, such as *Sherman’s March* (1986), *Tongues Untied* (1989), the short films of Sadie Benning, the videos of Lynn Herschmann, and the political films of Michael Moore, to name just a few. These were documentaries that explored the historical world, and invested their claims to

⁸³ Marsha Kinder, “Hot Spots, Avatars, and Narrative Fields Forever: Buñuel's Legacy for New Digital Media and Interactive Database Narrative,” *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2002): 2-15.

⁸⁴ Cindy Poremba, “Frames and Simulated Documents: Indexicality in Documentary Videogames,” *Loading... 3*, no. 4 (2009): 7, <http://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/viewArticle/61> (accessed June 10, 2012).

⁸⁵ See, for instance: Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*; Walker, *Trauma Cinema*; Bruzzi, *New Documentary*; Bill Nichols, “Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject,” *Critical Inquiry*. 35, no. 1 (2008): 72; Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real*.

authority to represent it, through the lens of a fragmented, performed, contradictory self, demonstrated reflexively inside the diegesis of the film or video. The indexicality of the photographic image, in these cases, was less significant to the communication of truth about the documentary subject than the perspective of the filmmaker crafted through performance, confession, voiceover, and editing. Renov's sustained engagement with the functions of documentary poetics and their relation to the "desire to know," in *Theorizing Documentary* (1993), *Resolutions* (1995), *Collecting Visible Evidence* (1999), and *The Subject of Documentary* (2004), exemplified this strain of theory.⁸⁶ Renov wrote about documentary films made by socially marginalized subjects that focused on domestic life, therapeutic working through, personal identity exploration, and individualized political awakening to make the case that subjective documentary accounts could add more richly to public knowledge and critical reflection than their expository and observational counterparts. While "celebrating subjectivity in documentary" as a corrective to what he saw as the limitations of documentary forms that aspired to objectivity, Renov acknowledged that his theory and the trend that he identified in the work of these filmmakers, was in part due the fact that "the digital has so undercut our faith in the indexicality of signs."⁸⁷

What is significant about these three strains of theory is that they all moved toward the idea of documentary as performance as Phelan conceived the latter concept, and gestured toward the body as a medium akin to film. The user of the interactive documentary became aware of the disappearance of history, in theory, by recognizing

⁸⁶ Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*, 7

⁸⁷ Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, xvii, xxiii.

what they lost with every choice they made about which clip should come next. The writing on autobiographical documentary filmmaking bears a good deal in common with that of Jones' writing on performance art, which shifted the locus of art production from the canvas to the skin. And the writing on documentary as resemblance, starting with Gaines' essay in 1999, suggested that "acting" could function as documentary. To make this case, Gaines consciously contradicted the critique of realism so trenchant in modernist film theory of the 1970s and 1980s. "Ordinary people learn through yielding to their fascination," Gaines explained, and indexicality was not a concept that the masses needed or cared to understand in their explorations of reality. In any case, if the technology used to make moving images could not be trusted to "tell the truth," then "technologies that play on similarity" and invite documentary knowledge might include everything from "tourist attractions, circus sideshows . . . performances, natural phenomena, curiosities, and . . . Civil War reenactments."⁸⁸ Documentary was not a form that enjoyed a privileged relation to reality, but rather one that served as a subcategory of simulation, which, in the terms of Baudrillard, produces resemblances without originals. While I concur that the body in performance suggests a promising site for considering documentary, I am wary of grounding this practice in a theory based on resemblances, a position I articulate further in the ensuing section.

Interestingly, media makers intensely interested in questions of contiguity between lived experience and documentary record have argued that digital recording technologies afforded them advantages rather than crises. This perspective offers a different way to theorize the meaning of analog to digital transition. Leaving aside for

⁸⁸ Gaines, "Introduction: 'The Real Returns'," 8.

the moment the fact that viewers experience a finished film differently from its makers, and that any given film exists in time and in relation to other films and events that inflect its received meanings, I want to point out several comments made by Albert Maysles, dubbed the “father of direct cinema” in an interview with Liz Stubbs in 2002. When asked how he felt about digital recording processes, Maysles enumerated twenty seven ways that shooting on digital video could “serve all the purposes that I’ve always had much, much better” than film.⁸⁹ He discussed the advantages of the flip out screen of the video camera over the eyepiece of the film camera in terms of his capacity to make eye contact with subjects and better empathize with them in sensitive social situations. He praised the fact that he could shoot more footage much more cheaply, thereby increasing his chances of recording moments that would represent his subjects spontaneously and compassionately. He said he could take more chances experimenting with the aesthetic form of his work, and was no longer beholden in the same way to institutional financing to make it. While his assertions that the observational style allows him “to get closer to the truth rather than distant from it” open up the can of worms that led to so many incisive critiques of the direct cinema ethos in the 1970s-1990s (whose truth? To who’s advantage? To what end? When and where is it true and why there?), it is worth noting that this avowedly empirical documentarian characterized the transformation to digital video in terms of empathy, proximity, and liveness rather than sobriety, scientific authority, and post-production manipulation.⁹⁰ For Maysles, contiguity had less to do

⁸⁹ Liz Stubbs, *Documentary Filmmakers Speak* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002), 11.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

with the ontology of recording surface than with the manner of interpersonal performance the technology could afford.

Considering the question of indexicality through the lens of performance offers new ways to theorize the materiality of documentary representations across analog and digital platforms, centered on the experiencing body in time. Several promising directions have emerged within film studies. Indebted to developments in Third Cinema and the theory of 1970s post-colonial film scholars like Teshome Gabriel, Laura Marks' *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000), theorized intersubjective contact as the location of indexicality in the experimental, "haptic cinema" produced between 1985 and 1995 by artists living in diasporic communities in the West. Usually forced to leave their homelands because of political repression, state violence, war, or economic hardship, these filmmakers existed between cultures, carrying the memories of traumatic experiences in their bodies. They lived far from the places where the violence had occurred and amidst people who did not know or understand what they had been through, but Marks showed how these filmmakers found ways to represent their histories using the objects, landscapes, and ways of living that their diasporic places of residence afforded them. Marks argued that these symbolic objects, represented on screen, indexed shared histories between makers and spectators of the same diaspora. While official histories in host countries tended to exclude diasporic populations from consideration, certain "fetishlike or fossil-like" objects gleaned from these places could speak to the filmmaker's experiences of hardship elsewhere.⁹¹ The indexical contiguity resided in the shared histories of the spectator and filmmaker to

⁹¹ Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, 93.

which the symbolic image pointed. “The moments when memory returns and stories can finally be told are moments when a collective begins to find its voice,” Marks said.⁹² These visceral experiences derived from the social rather than individual quality of memory, the evocation of which came as a surprise to viewers living in contexts where everyday landscapes tended to lack cues for triggering collective memories. Marks argued that the filmmaker’s choice to use analog or digital recording technologies was not particularly relevant to the emergence of this indexical relation.⁹³ “I believe it is more appropriate to talk about indexical and nonindexical *practices* than indexical and nonindexical *media*,” Marks stated.⁹⁴ Marks suggested that there was a recuperative dimension to audiovisual techniques that centered on buried or silenced histories, tactility over visual distance, and political critique. These features gesture toward an ethic of reenactment through documentary film practice.

Other film studies approaches emphasized the importance of reiterative experiences of movement and labor in theorizing indexicality. In his 2007 essay, Tom Gunning positioned his theory within the Bazinian tradition but averred from what he

⁹² Ibid., 64.

⁹³ In subsequent writing, Laura Marks pursued the question of the ontology of the digital image to the mechanics of electrical pulses, seeking out a material basis for the existence of the digital. “What I question in the current rhetoric about the loss of indexicality in the digital image is that it assumes a concurrent loss of materiality of the image,” she wrote. Marks argued that digital recording, while not the same as the analog recording process, still demonstrated that pathways of electrons materially registered the world in front of the camera in a way analogous to the indexicality of the photograph. While I accept that it is crucially important to reexamine assumptions about materiality in the digital age, Marks’ work on intercultural cinema is more relevant to the argument I am making here. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, 163.

⁹⁴ Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, 253.

called the “diminished concept of the index.”⁹⁵ Because the physiological effects of perceiving motion on screen and motion in a three-dimensional space are more or less the same, Gunning argued, we should ground the ontology of cinema in the phenomenological experience of movement rather than photographic technology and its purported indexical relationship to the historical world. In an intriguing twist on this Bazinian concept of the index, Cartwright focused on the labor of the 19th century projectionist, indexically inscribed on a physical projector box carried from town to town as stains, indentations, and worn down crank mechanisms, to theorize the index not as a singular event, but as a long, repeated process of labor “projected” onto the instruments of projection where hands touched them to produce light on the screen.⁹⁶

Finally, new directions in the tradition of sensory cinema ethnographic filmmaking associated with Rouch, MacDougall, Dai Vaughan, Taylor, Bennetta Jules-Rosette, and Grimshaw and Ravetz tack near to the temporal emphasis of performance in the way they theorize the use of the camera to depict everyday life. Given the centrality of liveness, co-presence, and duration to sensory ethnographic filmmaking and writing about filmmaking practice, I suggest in later chapters that we consider these practitioners through the lens of performance. Indexicality in this vein is more connected to a set of filmmaking practices than the particulars of mechanical-digital inscription, and has as much to do with duration (of individual shots, of the amount of time spent in the field, of the years the cameraperson-anthropologist has spent observing everyday life) as medium. Moving images demonstrate their contiguity to the world in front of the lens because they

⁹⁵ Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality,” 31.

⁹⁶ Cartwright, “The Hands of the Projectionist,” 443-464.

follow aesthetic principles that limit editorializing by the cameraperson or editor. Loosely guided by Bazin's concept of realism in the cinema, sensory cinema filmmakers tend to prioritize the long take, deep focus, and an ethic grounded in attending to subjects' everyday life as an attentive follower. Indexicality is not simply a technologically produced fact, but a product of the work over an extended period of time by a filmmaker to earn the trust of both subjects and his or her viewers to stand in for them as a representative, mediating witness. From this perspective, Taylor, like Maysles, dismissed the distinction between analog and digital that generated so much debate within critical theory. "Film is photochemically permeated by the world, and analog video electrically infused with it. The indexicality of ethnographic film makes it open-ended, and thus susceptible to differing interpretations in a way anthropological writing is not."⁹⁷ The value of following these aesthetic principles, Taylor held, resided in the ways that they revealed perceptual details about social worlds that neither the filmmaker, subject, nor viewer could have foreseen at the moment of recording. While they acknowledged the necessity of selecting images to record and subjects to follow, they insisted that the indexical link between camera and the world was defined primarily by semiotic excess rather than fixed meaning; a filmmaking process that allowed for such excess to remain in the film honored the richness and dignity of everyday life.

In discussing sensory ethnographic filmmaking as a modality of performance, however, it is worth bearing in mind Phelan's critique of "ethnographic law" which "insists that the film will function as the liminal figure who sutures 'them' to 'us,'" and

⁹⁷ Lucien Castaing-Taylor, "Iconophobia," *Transition* 6 (1), no. 69 (Spring, 1996): 75.

positions spectators as acquisitive outsiders to the culture on screen.⁹⁸ In keeping with what Grimshaw called the “ocularcentrism” of visual anthropology, there has been a tendency in sensory ethnographic filmmaking forms to follow events that take place in socially active or picturesque, outdoor venues.⁹⁹ The appeal in the West of the most enduring films in this tradition—like *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Jaguar* (1955), *The Hunters* (1955), *Dead Birds* (1964), *The Wedding Camels* (1980), and *Black Harvest* (1992), to name just a few—comes in part from the films’ tacit nostalgia for lives and cultures enmeshed in everyday struggles against natural elements, often in the face of looming encroachment by the forces of modern life that the cameras represent. Daily life that takes place in corporate office parks, bland bedrooms, isolated cubicles, medical clinics, spaces in front of computer screens and television sets, museums and archives, or imagination does not usually lend itself to this structure of desire, but these are spaces in which important aspects of everyday life in digital culture occur. While the emphases on attending to everyday life practices through filmmaking, empathically respecting cultural difference, and suggesting screen duration of single shots as indexical signs offer compelling starting points for a theory of indexicality in the digital era, I explore in the ensuing sections theories of indexicality in film experience and performance that aim at accounting for less observable, picturesque, measurable domains.

⁹⁸ Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 102.

⁹⁹ Anna Grimshaw, *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Duration, Disappearance, and New Media: Revisiting Phelan's Ontology

Performance studies, since the publication of Phelan's *Unmarked*, has oriented a major strand of its scholarship around the concept of disappearance. In a society where "material equals value," Phelan asked, "what would it take to value the immaterial[?]"¹⁰⁰ For Phelan, the ontological claim on disappearance within performance seemed to offer a politics resistant to the idea that visibility equaled power. Drawing from Lacan's theory of subject formation, Phelan sought out the invisible traces of formative psychic events that might be gleaned through close readings of representations. She also claimed to be writing toward "a more ethical and psychically rewarding representational field" than an identity politics that circumscribed meaningful representation to stereotypical markers of non-white, non-male visibility in the public sphere. Sexual and racial difference could (and did) powerfully inhabit an "unmarked" representational field, the field of the Other. Theorizing its contours meant sidestepping the "usual traps of visibility: surveillance, fetishism, voyeurism, and, sometimes, death."¹⁰¹ Watching bodies wither or change over time in live performance continually reinforced the fact of death's continuity with living and the illusion of preservation upon which the circulation of images seemed to prey. Phelan described her concept of performance as disappearance, in other words, as antithetical to her understanding of the documentary tradition in theory and filmmaking, even if documentary work was often a necessary part of broadly sharing the concepts behind a particular instance of performance art.

¹⁰⁰ Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 5.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

Given this orientation, it is striking that the performance art example that Phelan analyzed most closely in her oft-cited essay “Representation without Reproduction” shares qualities with the filmic examples that Doane and Rodowick describe in characterizing indexicality in film studies. Phelan proposes that liveness and disappearance are the central ontological concerns of performance. She focuses on *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)* (1987), a performance and installation by Angelika Festa that took place at The Experimental Intermedia Foundation in New York. Festa, Phelan explains, had situated herself inside of a number of white sheets loosely wrapped around a pole installed in the gallery at a forty-five degree angle from the ground. Her body hung suspended in the air in a way that “seem[ed] to evoke images of dead mummies and full cocoons.”¹⁰² A black cushion near the bottom of the pole supported Festa’s feet, which were pictured in close-up on a body-sized, live video projection adjacent to the pole. A smaller video monitor on the opposite side of the pole looped a video of the “embryology of a fish,” and facing her, a monitor played a time-delayed video that was documenting the performance (the location of this camera and its point of view was not discussed). Festa’s eyes were covered with silver tape so that she could not return the gallery visitor’s gaze; she remained motionless and silent inside of the sheets, inaudible except for her breathing throughout the twenty-four hours of the performance.

Phelan interpreted the performance as an allegory for suspension between the oppositional binaries that tacitly informed Western metaphysics—“birth and death, time and space, spectacle and secret”; this was the unstable, between-space in which “a

¹⁰² Ibid., 153.

woman' can be represented" in a patriarchal culture.¹⁰³ Festa's still, wrapped body seemed to conflate birth and death, martyr-like spirituality and corporeal matter, presence and absence, and given-to-be-seenness and invisibility. Phelan was intrigued by the way that this performance refused tropes that figured the female body as the object of the gaze by becoming object-like. Festa had given up all of the qualities of movement, speech, and gaze that constituted means of communication in the performing arts in order to achieve what Phelan called "a direct and unmediated Presentation-of-Presence." Festa's body seemed to figure in Phelan's writing as a kind of sign without a code. "The spectator's inability to meet the eye [of Festa] defines the other's body as lost," Phelan explained. The spectator "must gaze instead at the wrapped shell of a lost eyeless body."¹⁰⁴ Like a "hollowed out sign," Festa's embodied performance, we might say, aimed to reproduce the stillness, objectivity, and hollowness of the analog photograph.

To present *this* performance as the scaffolding for a statement about the ontology of performance as antithetical to that of recording technologies thus poses something of a paradox: to perform toward disappearance is to internalize and project a vision of one's own body as a photograph. Phelan regarded the technologically produced photograph suspiciously, especially the "'belong to me aspect' of the documentary tradition" which connoted preservation, rationalization, objectification, and neocolonial mastery—the opposite of performance in her ontology.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps Festa's stillness, which attempted to avoid the problems of objectification associated with the image of the female body, testified to the violence that the image-as-metaphor had already wrought upon women's

¹⁰³ Ibid., 153.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 162, 156.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 158.

bodies in an economy of reproduction. To sit as still and as passively as a photograph until the body itself started to decay from thirst and hunger constituted a form of resistance to this economy. At the same time, the visage of Festa's bound, blind, silent, suspended body startled Phelan into considering Festa's pain empathically, through her own body's residual discomfort at projecting herself onto the performer and receiving nothing of her subjective engagement in return. Phelan imagined the duration in this uncomfortable position to produce pain and the physical loss of flesh. While seeming object-like, Festa was not an object, but a living, breathing body. Phelan explained, in more general terms, that part of the allure of displaying "the body in pain" in performance art was this capacity to exceed metaphor by its appeal to metonymy. Her description of metonymy is nearly synonymous (metonymous?) with Peirce's concept of indexical signs:

Metonymy is additive and associative; it works to secure a horizontal axis of contiguity and displacement. 'The kettle is boiling' is a sentence which assumes that water is contiguous with the kettle. The point is not that the kettle is *like* water (as in the metaphorical love is like a rose), but rather the kettle is boiling *because* the water inside the kettle is. In performance, the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of 'presence.' But in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents something else—dance, movement, sound, character, 'art.'¹⁰⁶

In the same way that Peirce was struck by the man with the rolling gait, Phelan located the power of performance art in the fact that the body of the performing subject and the representations that adorned her existed in contiguity. Representation in performance art *was not* simply metaphorical *because* the body of the performer existed in indexical contiguity with the representation throughout the duration of the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 150.

performance. The spectator of performance art, like that of documentary film in the theater, could not experience the subject's pain; this nonreciprocal relation "call[ed] witnesses to the singularity of the individual's death," Phelan claimed, and asked the spectator "to share that death by rehearsing for it."¹⁰⁷ Particularly in performances of long duration like Festa's, the visibility of the body in pain functioned as *evidence of stakes* that demanded the spectator's attention—a staple of documentary rhetoric tacitly inscribed into the ontology of performance. "The spectacle of fatigue, endurance, and depletion" called out to the spectator *to look at what remained* in order to sense that which passed or escaped visibility, like the time that produced bodies hollowed of flesh.¹⁰⁸ This was a process analogous to what Doane conceptualized as the value of contingency in film spectatorship. "Indexicality would appear to ensure the availability of the particular, the singular, the unpredictable—in short, the antisystematic—within the cinematic domain," Doane stated.¹⁰⁹ Phelan perceived Festa's performance as a startling moment charged with affect when it occurred. In her own ongoing interpretation of *Untitled*, Phelan came to experience Festa's literally "mummified" condition—her presence-as-absence—as personal transcendence akin to what Bazin had termed "the mummy complex" at the center of desire for images of the real. In looking at Festa's body, Phelan experienced "a movement of accretion, excess, and the recognition of plenitude of one's physical freedom in contrast to the confinement and pain of the performer's displayed body."¹¹⁰ Phelan interacted with Festa in this live performance,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 152.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 162.

¹⁰⁹ Doane, "The Object of Theory," 82.

¹¹⁰ Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 163.

charged with the affective energy of the body-as-indexical sign, like a cinema spectator in the documentary mode. She also suggested that Festa drew the spectator into an unequal relationship in beholding her for refusing to engage in "that customary visual exchange" between performer on stage and theatrical audience. "Here the spectator becomes a kind of performer," Phelan observed.¹¹¹

It is interesting to compare Phelan's conception of duration in performance art with Rodowick's insightful treatment of duration in film and digital media. In *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007), Rodowick suggested that the emergence of the digital would displace the modernist desire for knowledge *in time*, realized through watching a film unfold on screen, with a postmodernist desire for control *over time*, achieved by manipulating information. Genre was less important to Rodowick than medium, in this regard. Film in its fiction, documentary, and experimental forms engaged its spectators in an "ethics of time" in which duration experienced in the present through the moving image in the theater indexed a duration that the camera recorded in the past. He suggested that the return to questions about the ontology of film in the late 1990s and early 2000s, questions to which classical film theorists like Bazin and Kracauer dedicated much of their writing, came at an historical moment when we collectively sensed the kind of loss that would accompany the transition to digital media:

In both fiction and nonfiction cinema, the aesthetics and the ethics of film are closely linked to historical powers of documenting and witnessing wherein the camera confronts the prior existence of things and people in time and in space, preserved in their common duration. The renewed interest of film theory in indexicality is characteristic of how, in the era of digital simulation, we are becoming resensitized to the powers of

¹¹¹ Ibid., 161.

photography and cinema, especially since this experience is now practically lost—it is already *historical*.¹¹²

While showing how the forms and conventions of film inform digitally produced cinema, Rodowick argued that the ontology of the digital challenged the possibility of communicating duration in quite the same way, at least through moving images. Interactive media formats offered users the tools to manipulate algorithms and create their own imagined worlds; time may pass, but this did not lead the user to recognize past time as a duration or of singular historical events. Desire in the digital ontology aimed for control of information and time instead of knowledge about the historical world.¹¹³ The price of such power, Rodowick asserted, was a kind of dematerialization: “matter and minds have become ‘information.’”¹¹⁴ In this context, though we constantly seek “new ways of acknowledging other minds, without knowing whether other selves are behind them,” we also embody a “form of monadism in which there is no present other than mine, the one I occupy now; there is no presence other than myself.”¹¹⁵ What we might conclude from Rodowick’s analysis, given the centrality of the idea of history in documentary theory, is that the ontology of the digital negates the possibility of documentary because it does not afford the communication of duration. The digital event displaces duration with sensation. I would suggest, rather, that what Rodowick called the virtualization of film led the experience of duration and the ontology of film toward other media, like embodied performance (which Rodowick did not mention as a possible inheritor of the indexicality of film studies).

¹¹² Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, 74.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 172, 175.

“Most so-called new media have been imagined from a cinematic metaphor,” Rodowick claimed in the opening of *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007).¹¹⁶ Given the striking similarities between Phelan’s reading of Festa’s live performance and the indexicality argument in film studies, we might follow Rodowick by considering live performance as a subcategory of “new media” in which duration plays a central, albeit different, role in communicating an event that compels witness. While present to the performance, spectators exist in the same time as the performer, similar to the way Rodowick describes a spectator viewing a single shot in a film indexing the duration experienced by subjects in front of the camera. But a twenty-four hour performance like Festa’s precedes the presence of a spectator and continues on after the spectator leaves. What a given spectator sees is a fraction of the entire duration of the performance. In that comparatively brief span of time, a spectator may perceive “marks” of a longer time that has passed in sunken flesh, a drooping head, eyes that appear glazed over, and the like. What is significant about duration in this moment of encounter is the perception of time passing *through* inscriptions on the performer’s body. The spectator perceives this duration of time virtually (the time required to produce sunken flesh symbolizes looming death), but also empathically. Phelan understands the marks on Festa’s body as indexical of the duration she has passed without eating, drinking, or looking. The liveness of the performance event in which a spectator sees a performer who willingly approaches death frequently compels the spectator in turn to pass time afterward in thinking about the encounter. Phelan’s extended analysis of Festa’s performance, clearly the product of repeated consideration of its striking appearance, testified to this second kind of duration.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., viii.

She said that the liveness of the performance event, and the co-presence between performer and spectator, produced a “maniacally charged present” that documentary versions of the event could not replicate.¹¹⁷

Phil Auslander offered a critical perspective on the relationship between “new media” and Phelan’s performance ontology. He argued that it was technological mediation that produced the very concept of liveness rather than the other way around. The live performance was not given to be recorded (or not) by cameras, microphones, etc.; rather the invention of recording technologies enabled liveness to emerge as a concept distinct from living. “The live can exist only *within* an economy of reproduction,” he stated.¹¹⁸ It was the proliferation of media production technologies that increasingly produced performance as a sensible subjective orientation. Thus, for Auslander, Phelan’s claims that live performance could exist outside the politics of reproduction and the visible inverted the historical order of things. Even Phelan’s reading of *Festa*, Auslander pointed out, ignored the fact that recording technologies played a central role in the performance. Performance art was often staged for cameras, even when a live audience was present, so as to be able to enter the economy of reproduction to secure future jobs, win grants, participate in the art world, etc. His conclusion for Phelan’s proposal for performance as oppositional (here echoing Castaing-Taylor’s contemporaneous critique of reenactment) was stark: “In the economy of repetition, live performance is little more than a vestigial remnant of the previous

¹¹⁷ Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 148.

¹¹⁸ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 54.

historical order of representation, a hold-over that can claim little in the way of cultural presence or power.”¹¹⁹

I would suggest, rather, that the powerfully photographic description of Phelan’s experience of Festa’s live performance indexed a process of psychic integration of the cinema apparatus rather than naivete about the pervasiveness of simulation. Auslander offered the interesting idea that the call to value the immaterial could only emerge in an economy of reproduction, and so Phelan’s framing paradoxically understated the material value of disappearance in a simulation society. I add that focusing theory on embodiment and the unconscious can still trouble the ideologies behind technophilic ways of thinking. Auslander pointed to the use of cameras in Festa’s installation as evidence of a shortcoming in Phelan’s interpretation of liveness within this performance. It is true that Phelan focused primarily on the enigmatic presence of Festa’s body in her interpretation of *Untitled*, but throughout *Unmarked*, Phelan engaged with her questions about disappearance through the analysis of films, photographs, videos, television programs, and other audiovisual media. Phelan’s performance ontology had less to do with the presence or absence of media technologies than with articulating a way of seeing that valued subjectivities and identities that did not lend themselves to visual representation. These concerns were about the possibility of theorizing subjectivity beyond the categories of identity politics. At the margins of a dominant regime centered on the premise that visibility equals power, Phelan made the case that paying attention to less visible, more subjective experiences of embodiment was an ethical responsibility.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 46.

Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003) charted a middle course between the poles of performance as disappearance and performance as reproduction, arguing that a repertoire of gestures, actions, and sensibilities retained as a bodily memory remained after a performance that was not recorded by audiovisual recording devices. Protest performances like those of the Madres in Argentina both drew upon this repertoire and further developed it for use in future performances. If the archive was rooted, as Derrida noted, in the "archon," the Greek term for the head of state, if documents were used primarily to control and occasionally oppress the people within the state's jurisdiction, then the repertoire drew its strength from shared experiences amongst resistant subjects that did produce remains, even if they were not filed within official state repositories.¹²⁰ Pushing this line of performance theory further in her study of reenactment, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (2011), Rebecca Schneider framed the body itself as a medium for documentary production that drew upon the archive to achieve the sensation of otherness. She asked a pointed question for performance scholars invested in the concept of disappearance and its presumption of linear time: "If we consider performance as 'of' disappearance, if we think of the ephemeral as that which 'vanishes,' and if we think of performance as the antithesis of preservation, do we limit ourselves to an understanding of performance predetermined by a cultural habituation to the patrilineal, West-identified (arguably white-cultural) logic of the archive?"¹²¹ At the same moment that documentary theory

¹²⁰ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

¹²¹ Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, 97.

approaches performance as a promising object of study, in other words, Schneider's performance theory offered the idea of liveness as a modality of documentation or preservation. Lived time becomes central to the reinscription of history in the present.

In keeping with feminist psychoanalytic modes of criticism and theory of the early 1990s, Phelan tended to describe Festa's work in the disembodied voice of the art critic. She provided a distanced and formal account of the elements of the display, moving from one element to another without an account of the body of the writer. The text does not offer an explicit sense of her embodied experience with it, though elements of this may be inferred. This is not to fault Phelan's approach, but to note that the psychoanalytic theory of the period had not yet provided a set of methods or theories to account for the intersubjective experience of the body of the writer or any other spectator with the body of the performer and the elements of her work in space and time. Later works model ways in which to mark the writing such that it reads as performance, as we see in the writings of Sobchack. This mode of writing is, essentially, a form of documentary performance. These marks suggest the oneness of the seeing, then reenacted as an experience for the reader, who empathically identifies with the particularities of the voice and the time in which the voice came to be, in just this way. The writerly mark (not to be confused here with the visibility of an identity category) is both a reenactment, and indexical. I suggest that this example of writing as performance came about in an age of simulation in which the presentation often precedes experiences of a real. In other words, the writing as performance is not "real" so much as it is subjective, etched in its own time and in contiguity with the hands that crafted the words.

Flesh, Ethics, and Narcissism: Indexicality in phenomenological film and performance theory

Writing in the phenomenological tradition that she returned to film studies, Sobchack framed documentary as a subjective mode of experiencing a moving image work.¹²² The indexical quality of documentary originated from the “perceptive body” of the viewer during a film screening at moments when it sensed something that resembled or resonated with its own lived experience. “In this sense, the perceptive body is always also not only an iconic sign but an indexical sign,” she wrote.¹²³ She bracketed the questions of genre and mechanical reproduction as outside of her analysis. The production of documentary started in the experience of the spectator rather than the form and rhetoric of the content on screen. Instead of defaulting to the position of apprentice to the filmmaker behind the camera, the spectator in this strain of theory embodied an “interobjective” relationship—that is, a relationship grounded in the existential nature of flesh as both lived subject and material object—with the “film body” emanating from the screen. What was significantly documentary for a spectator was the “charge of the real” or the “same world sensation” that she felt poignantly at particular moments of a screening experience.¹²⁴ In this theory, the genre classification, methodology of production, and subjectivity of the media maker associated with a particular work did not necessarily bear on the spectator’s consciousness of it as documentary. The indexicality at the heart of documentary production originated not from “the world,” but from the

¹²² Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*; Sobchack, “Toward a Phenomenology of Nonfictional Film Experience,” 241; Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*.

¹²³ Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, 75.

¹²⁴ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, 258.

“lived body” of the spectator who experienced a film. The film as it played intersected with the carried traces of experience in the body of the individual spectator, creating indexical connections in ways that neither filmmaker nor spectator could have anticipated beforehand. Documentary was not a genre, but a state of consciousness elicited by a viewer’s subjective response to film experience.

While the end product of Sobchack’s work process was written rather than filmic, her methodology and goals bear striking similarities to those followed by the sensory ethnographic filmmakers I described above. Like the filmmakers, Sobchack responded to the world in front of her—the cinema screen—rather than leading it. She argued that this choice reflected her “trust in the value of experience, and also in the phenomenological method and what insights it can provide.”¹²⁵ When viewing a film, she waited for moments that struck her as viscerally poignant, and then kept mental notes on the sensations flowing through her body as a quasi-distant observer of herself as they occurred. In her “production” phase, Sobchack wrote out these experiences in the faith she would find “a more general experiential structure that anybody might inhabit,” usually about perception in our media saturated culture.¹²⁶ At the same time, she crafted ways to “mark” her particular body (a word also used by MacDougall to describe the presence of the cameraperson in ethnographic records) in the writing itself. This was not an ideal spectator she offered as her subject, but a humorously self-deprecating version of herself, alternately scared of horror movies, sympathetic to the suffering of rabbits (but not locusts) for the sake of a film, or attracted to a handsome young prosthetist “generally

¹²⁵ Scott Bukatman, "Vivian Sobchack in Conversation with Scott Bukatman," *Journal of E-Media Studies* *Journal of E-Media Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 3.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

positioned around crotch-level as he knelt to tinker with my titanium knee” (the last in a welcome and ironic counterpoint to Baudrillard’s nihilistic technofetishism).¹²⁷ As a starting point for creating subjectivity and insight, Sobchack simply trusted her eyes as the filmmakers trust the lenses of their cameras. This was a significant difference, however. Whereas ethnographic filmmakers in the digital era still tend to presuppose a world “out there” that was knowable to some extent through empirical recording with cameras, Sobchack started from a point of profound distrust of metanarratives, the indexicality of photographic media, and the correlation between filmmaking method and documentary value in a postmodern context. While MacDougall suggested that his kind of filmmaking practice might “in the end turn out to be nothing less than the empirical arm of phenomenology,” Sobchack grounded “‘affect’ and anything we might call a ‘moral stance,’” rather, in the body’s “capacity to bleed and suffer and hurt for others.”¹²⁸ If the goal of ethnographic film was to transcend cultural differences through visual representations of encounter, then Sobchack’s was rather to emphasize film-viewing experience *as* a kind of encounter approachable through fine-grained, autoethnographic study.

Considering the subject matter of Sobchack’s first book, *The Limits of Infinity: The American Science Fiction Film, 1950-1975* (1980), it is worth parsing out how and why much of her later writing focused on documentary and everyday life. *The Limits of Infinity* was one of the earliest film studies treatments of the science fiction genre, and the first to defend the value of science fiction film for enabling spectators to consider the

¹²⁷ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, 168.

¹²⁸ MacDougall and Castaing-Taylor, *Transcultural Cinema*, 272; Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, 213.

meaning of the unknown. Sobchack argued that the crux of the science fiction film was a paradox, a tension between the wondrous, inexplicable, alien phenomena depicted on screen and the “documentary coolness” of the camera lens that could behold them without a jolt.¹²⁹ “What we move toward, thirst for, in such films, what fulfillment we find in them is in the cinematic realization of an *imaginary action* occurring in what seems to be documented *real space*,” she wrote.¹³⁰ Against the then prevailing theory of science fiction film, Sobchack held that this thought provoking paradox enabled spectators to consider the unknown or the strange, an argument mirrored in Gaines’ 2002 article on “everyday strangeness” in documentary.¹³¹ In documentary, the tension that Sobchack described was inverted; what we thirsted for in documentary was an *unimagined action* occurring in what we knew to be a *cinematic space*. Both involved an engagement with otherness aimed toward expanding or challenging what we held to be possible.

In her expanded edition of the book *Screening Space* (1987), however, Sobchack revised her earlier position in a chapter on science fiction after 1975. Borrowing heavily from Jameson’s essay “Postmodernism and the Logic of Late Capitalism,” Sobchack attempted to show the dangerous decline of science fiction, as the genre blurred indistinguishably with the category of fiction. If aliens were “beings like us,” she suggested, then science fiction was no longer concerned in the same way with grappling with the meaning of the unknown, or with possibilities for subjectivity outside of what

¹²⁹ Vivian Carol Sobchack, *The Limits of Infinity: The American Science Fiction Film, 1950-75* (South Brunswick, N.J.: A.S. Barnes, 1980), 143.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹³¹ Jane Gaines, “Everyday Strangeness: Robert Ripley's International Oddities as Documentary Attractions,” *New Literary History* 33, no. 4 (2002): 781-801.

was already known. Instead, the unknown in science fiction had become a commodity circumscribed within the logic of late capitalism, celebrating the convergence of the human with the machine, the human with the non-human. Alienation, in other words, was revealed as a foundational human condition in the world of the 1970s and 1980s cultural West, and the increasing comfort with aliens and machines in science fiction films mapped this cultural change in cognitive processing and subjectivity. “The logic of late capitalism has radically transformed both the structure of our social lives and the aesthetic character of our cultural representations,” Sobchack concluded.¹³²

Yet science fiction scholar Andrew Gordon pointed out in a review of the book that Sobchack seemed to “delight in rummaging through the trash heaps of post-World-War-II American pop culture, celebrating the omnipresent evidence [she] uncover[ed] there of entropy and decay.”¹³³ There was something altogether too pessimistic about the argument, he said, for the lack of urgency displayed in the book’s form. Sobchack’s next effort, *The Address of the Eye: A phenomenology of film experience* (1992), marked a significant departure from totalizing critique, instead arguing for the radical subjectivity of film spectatorship as a form of phenomenological engagement with the world. Unlike proponents of psychoanalytic and neo-Marxist film theory, which framed an ideal spectator, respectively, as beholden to unconscious desire or false consciousness, Sobchack posited the film playing on the screen as a kind of *viewing subject* with agency and variability in the moment of screening, and she conceptualized the screening of the

¹³² Vivian Carol Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (New York: Ungar, 1987), 244.

¹³³ Andrew Gordon and Vivian Sobchack, “Science-Fiction Film Criticism: The Postmodern always Rings Twice,” *Science Fiction Studies* 14, no. 3 (1987): 391.

film as a generative performance rather than an empirical instantiation of alienation in modern society. A “thick and *radical description* of experience is a turn toward articulating not only another kind of bodily being,” she argued, “but also a healthy and adult polymorphousness, a freedom of becoming.”¹³⁴ Film theory originating in the scientific language of semiotics and structuralism evacuated historical contingency from the meaning of screen texts—and also, for Sobchack, from embodied experience. She felt that the phenomenological method lent her a compelling angle from which to return flesh to the study of cinema.

Part of this task entailed confronting a strain in simulation theory of the type associated with Jean Baudrillard that figured the body itself as another instance of simulation code in postindustrial, media saturated societies. *Carnal Thoughts* (2004) featured a revised version of an article Sobchack had written in the mid 1990s in response to Baudrillard’s subversively technophilic review of the J. G. Ballard novel *Crash* (1973). Ballard described *Crash* as “a warning against that brutal, erotic and overlit realm that beckons more and more persuasively to us from the margins of the technological landscape,” but this was not the way that Baudrillard chose to read it.¹³⁵ Indeed, Ballard himself left some doubt about the relationship between his own methodology in writing it, and the moral stance he articulated twenty years after its publication. Echoing the logic for turning towards autobiography in documentary filmmaking, Ballard declared that the writer in postmodernity “knows nothing any longer,” and so had to assume the world a fiction and rely on “the contents of his own head” to “invent the reality” on the

¹³⁴ Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, xv.

¹³⁵ James Graham Ballard, *Crash* (London: Vintage, 1995), 6.

page.¹³⁶ The postmodern inversion of imagination with reality that threatened the possibility of morality led Ballard to create alternative ethical worlds that he seemed to find both appalling and necessary to consider. *Crash* was a “warning” perhaps, but he also called it “an extreme metaphor for an extreme situation, a kit of desperate measures only for use in an extreme crisis.”¹³⁷ Against the backdrop of a world in which statistics and dry science have eliminated danger, chance, and accident from social life, *Crash* narrates the lives of people who are sexually aroused by participating in car accidents, and fantasize about having intercourse with automobiles as they crash. The sensation of pain, as in Phelan’s account of Festa’s performance, is an index of the characters’ living, the closest thing they have to a moral center.

In his review of the book, Baudrillard declared *Crash* “the first great novel of the universe of simulation,” and used it—as a technology—to intervene in an old philosophical discussion about the relationship between humans and machines.¹³⁸ While Marx and McLuhan figured technology as extensions of the organic body, *Crash*, in Baudrillard’s reading, inverted the relationship: “technology is the mortal destruction of the body—no longer a functional medium, but the extension of death. . . the explosive vision of a body delivered to ‘symbolic wounds,’ of a body confused with technology in its violating and violent dimension.”¹³⁹ To Baudrillard the writer, the idea of the equivalence of the body and the automobile appealed; he spent several paragraphs describing various kinds of scars as “sexual organs” and contemplating the death of

¹³⁶ Ibid., 5-6.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹³⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 119.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 111.

affect, psychology, and desire in this “sexuality without precedent.”¹⁴⁰ He celebrated the resemblance of this range of possibilities to the rituals of scarification, initiation and torture amongst “savages,” for whom, Baudrillard asserted, sexuality was one of many modes of symbolic exchange.¹⁴¹ He analyzed the accident and its role in a society that had effectively short-circuited the possibility of events beyond its control. Death, the one exception, came to be the object of desire, and so approaching it became charged with eroticism for the characters in the novel. “Everything is reversed,” Baudrillard wrote. “It is the Accident that gives form to life, it is the Accident, the insane, that is *the sex of life*.”¹⁴²

Baudrillard the writer seemed to claim that this inversion outpaced the limitations of functionalism and morality, and raised the question in the mind of the reader about the earnestness of his claims. The persona behind the writing considered the implications of *Crash* through a suspiciously technophilic gaze: “is it good or bad? We will never know. It is simply fascinating, though this fascination does not imply a value judgment.”¹⁴³ We do not know if this was, in fact, Baudrillard’s opinion; the writer here was an imagined creation much like Ballard’s visions. The voice was so absorbed in its own daring—with attendant proclivities toward a violent masculinity—that it seemed to demand the reader’s anger who could not imagine herself so “unmarked.”

Sobchack obliged in a response to Baudrillard’s review, “Beating the Meat, Surviving the Text” (2004), in which she framed his body-in-theory as representative of

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 112.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 115.

¹⁴² Ibid., 113.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 119.

the “repressed or disavowed lived body of the post-modernist.” While she said she had difficulty in imagining the antiseptic language used to describe car crashes and intercourse in the novel as sexy, she acknowledged that Baudrillard, at least on the page, “gets off” on “all the symbolic and sacrificial practices that a body can open itself up to—not via nature, but via artifice, simulation, and accident.” She attributed this provocation to a consistent stylistic feature in Baudrillard’s writing, in which he personified the hyperbolic, extreme end of the objectification of the body that he took to be endemic of technological encroachment into everyday life in the West. Baudrillard systematically denied “his body” as a living entity that felt pain, Sobchack argued, when he described “the body” as a theoretical concept. “Where, in all this erotic technofantasy, I asked at the time, was Baudrillard’s body?”¹⁴⁴

Sobchack insisted that the “lived body” that sensed the world and experienced pain had to serve as the basis for any form of ethics that sought to recognize the dignity of human life. Baudrillard’s radical objectification of his body as “‘pure’ sign” thus performed a kind of amputation: “That is, Baudrillard’s body finds its erotic pleasure located only in the jouissance of semiotic play, its pain only in writer’s block.” Since Sobchack first read Baudrillard’s review of *Crash* while recovering from surgery to remove a cancerous tumor from her leg—a process that ended with its literal amputation at the thigh—she felt particularly angry about the recklessness of Baudrillard’s disregard for bodily pain. For Sobchack, this epitomized “the scandal of metaphor.” “I wished the man a car crash or two, as well as a little pain to bring him (back) to his senses,” she quipped. She could not embrace the idea of the posthuman, or imagine a meaningful life

¹⁴⁴ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, 166-7.

in which she was a servant of the technologies that extended her flesh. “My prosthesis has *not* incorporated me,” she asserted. In spite of the seemingly increasing reversibility between simulation computation and human consciousness, Sobchack insisted that the drive for immortality implicit in this technological enhancement of the flesh functioned, quoting Donna Haraway, to “produce death through the fear of it.”¹⁴⁵

This ethical stance against the totalizing absorption of flesh into the machine then begs for an explanation of what it is that these technological extensions *do* to embodiment. How, in other words, do the tools of simulation change human perception? What extensions do they enable, and what ways of perceiving the world do they obscure? The blind man’s cane, for Merleau-Ponty, “becomes an extension of his sense of touch. . . becoming invisible as cane and ‘visible’ as body.” Sobchack suggestively likened this cane to her own prosthetic leg, or to the scientist who extended his vision by looking at objects under a microscope. We might as easily extend this idea of extension to the documentary filmmaker’s camcorder. These examples demonstrated, in the terms of philosopher James Berry Jr., “the human body’s talent for extending itself beyond its objective boundaries” by incorporating technology *as* self. This “amplification of the body,” however, also entailed a “deformation or transformation” that produces in perception “the concomitant *forgetting* or *masking* of other possibilities.” There was a tension, in other words, between the desire to incorporate these technological extensions transparently as components of one’s “natural” body and the desire for the transformation that the technology affords. Philosopher Don Ihde argued that this contradiction between

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 167-70.

desiring bodily extension without acknowledging the role of technology in bringing about this transformation, in fact, “secretly *rejects* what technologies are.”¹⁴⁶

Sobchack acknowledged that she desired to incorporate the prosthetic leg into her body without thinking about it, but she insisted that she had no illusions about the limitations of her flesh. And here her argument took an intriguing turn. Following Merleau-Ponty’s lead, she argued that these “various perceptual technologies” like her prosthetic leg, her computer, and her reading glasses were components of her “lived body.” These objects granted her “the *material premises* and, therefore, the *logical* and *ethical* grounds for the intelligibility of those ethical categories that emerge from a bodily sense of gravity, finitude, and (dare I bring it up again) pain.” It was in the interstices between her flesh and her capacities to move and act in the world that the concept of “lived body” came to have significant meaning for Sobchack. The lived body was not an abstract concept or an objective thing, but rather referred to the historically situated, specific capacities of a particular sensate being, and the subjectivity that interpreted those sensations. To disavow these limitations, she continued, dangerously figured embodiment (“the body that we *are*”) as a form of slavery (“the body that we *have*”).¹⁴⁷

Such conflations were dangerous for Sobchack because objectified, abstract concepts of the body could not experience empathy, affection, or care. The body in theory of Baudrillard was thus distinctly masculinist, self-loathing, xenophobic, and hostile to the idea of aging. The “heady sensation of having ‘beat the meat’” was thus a form of “‘false’ consciousness,” out of touch with the fleshy, material premises that make

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 171-2.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 172-4.

bodily extension or transformation worth pursuing. Moreover, Sobchack noted, the goal of “beating the meat” was not simply to disavow the physical body, but, ironically, to *return to it* in Ihde’s formulation, “*to reclaim experience through the flesh.*” Baudrillard desired this return to sensual experience, Sobchack concluded, and his “dizzying protechnological rhetoric” functioned only as a form of fatalistic self-deception. Musing on how her prosthetic had changed her subjectivity, Sobchack wrote that she appreciated more now the “fragility of [her] flesh” as the material basis of ethics and morality. Flesh, then, named the relationship between the body as a material object and the body as a material subject that could perceive as sense and recognize in others a material contiguity with itself: “the capacity to bleed and suffer and hurt for others because it can sense its own possibilities for suffering and pain.”¹⁴⁸

Sobchack’s writing in *Carnal Thoughts* powerfully demonstrated the ethical value of folding one’s sense of subjectivity into film theory, and offered a nuanced foundation for considering documentary as a personal reception practice that need not involve the presence of cameras. Her orientation as a feminist film studies scholar who extended her style of phenomenological analysis into other aspects of everyday life led her to a different way of working than phenomenological documentary filmmakers like MacDougall and Taylor. This approach afforded her the space to offer insights about activities that tended to elude visual representation, like the different ways of thinking involved in writing with pens and pencils. Yet perhaps out of her well-founded distrust of externally directed empiricism, or her radical embrace of the value of difference, Sobchack rarely represented the phenomenological experiences of others as evidence in

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 176-8.

Carnal Thoughts. She frequently engaged academic phenomenologists, film theorists, films, and the products of consumer culture, but the few instances in which she referenced an interpersonal interaction (a conversation, email exchange, interview, etc.) were included almost as a kind of ironic commentary on this staple of documentary practice. She cited emails from a friend who was undergoing plastic surgery in a chapter about “having our eyes done” as a metaphor for mass media culture, referenced an “interview” she conducted with the five year old son of her neighbor about the differences between scribbling and drawing, and, in a less self-consciously ironic move, recalled noticing that spectators in the theater of *Contact* who “rustled and murmured” at seeing the reappropriated image of a Clinton news conference as evidence that “most viewers” deemed the film’s attempt to heighten “verisimilitude and credibility to ground its science-fictional premise” to be a failure.¹⁴⁹ Sobchack’s adherence to the phenomenological method, which yielded a great number of provocative insights about the relation between bodies and technologies, has led some critics to accuse her of solipsism.¹⁵⁰ This is a danger inherent to the phenomenological method, and of autobiographical representation more generally. But one could also make the case that this attention to consciousness and the senses of the self is also the primary value of phenomenology, in spite of the risks. Sobchack’s use of the phenomenological method, the ethical stance it implies, and the subjective orientation toward documentary that her writing suggests are rich and welcome starting points for the questions I am posing about intersubjectivity, which is not an obvious concept to pair with phenomenology. If

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 259.

¹⁵⁰ See, for instance: Wahlberg, *Documentary Time: Film and Phenomenology*.

phenomenology focuses attention on a singular subjectivity, how can it also suggest insights about the space between two or more subjects during moments of interaction? When is a film on screen a “film body” that draws out an intersubjective encounter? How does this encounter differ from that between a spectator and a “literal body” performing as both self and representation in performance art, and so rendering the skin as though a screen?

In applying Sobchack’s method toward the analysis of contemporary art, art critic Amelia Jones has encountered and reflected upon a similar kind of tension in body art and later in performance art that incorporated video recording technologies into performances.¹⁵¹ Jones argued that the sounds, gestures, and movements of the artist’s body performing in these representations index the flesh of the artist, but that the meaning of this charged contiguity remained open to myriad interpretations. Without a unified external object to behold as manifestation of the artist’s intention, the spectator of a body art performance is invited to identify with the performer as in the dynamic of the stage play or the narrative film—commercial forms excluded from the domain of high art in traditional art criticism. But in appearance and action, the performer in body art does not hew precisely to the rules of classical Hollywood cinema or the theater. This instability is central to theory about strategies of critique in body art, in which the subject represents a fractured, polymorphous, performative self as the object of the work. The body itself serves as a surface, like a screen, for the representation of social archetypes and for the projection of the spectator’s and artist’s desires. Positioning the artist’s body

¹⁵¹ Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Amelia Jones, *Self Image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

itself as the surface upon which identities, marks, and social norms might play radically opens the question about the very possibility of indexicality as a concept. If the body constitutes the screen of simulation, then spectator, artist, and representation of performance enter an interpretive dynamic in which there seems to be no external source of validation for one interpretation over another, and no single original object to which the representations ultimately refer. Body art indexes flesh, but renders for consideration a code that realist aesthetics hides beneath its polished surface. The formal structure of these performances foregrounds the collapse of subject into object, and object into subject. The work hails the spectator to identify (or not) or empathize (or not) within this narcissistic feedback loop.

The question of narcissism as a political strategy remains unresolved within this tradition of practice. In Freud's terms, narcissism in adults refers to the overvaluation of a subject's investment in the self as an erotic object, to the detriment of his or her capacity to empathize with others. Aiming to achieve their ego ideal (the reenactment of the subject's childhood unity, for Freud), the narcissist enters a vicious cycle of overestimation of his or her abilities, followed by the frustrating failure to live up to them, which triggers the defense mechanism of turning further inward.¹⁵² Cultural theorist Christopher Lasch identified this pathological interpretation as a fundamental cultural condition of the late modern United States in his *Culture of Narcissism* (1979), pointing to the decline of social and religious institutions, the rise of impersonal bureaucracies, an increase in possessive individualism and the fear of death, and the

¹⁵² Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1914), 545.

inclination to replace human relationships with commercial forms of realist representation. Lamenting what he saw as a loss of community, family, and relations of care that resulted from these changes in American culture, Lasch centered attention in particular on the ideals of masculinity he imagined to have upheld principled, communally-focused everyday life in prior eras: “As the ‘organization man’ gives way to the bureaucratic ‘gamesman’ — the ‘loyalty era’ of American business to the age of the ‘executive success game’ — the narcissist comes into his own,” he wrote.¹⁵³ Not surprisingly, Lasch’s commentary read to Jones as reactionary, his critique of commodity culture, pop art, and experimental theater invested in nostalgia for a lost patriarchy.¹⁵⁴ Yet feminist scholars were not in agreement on the virtues of body art and performance art emerging in the 1970s. Writing from a feminist perspective, art critic Rosalind Krauss critically identified live video art in the 1970s as operating through the medium of the artist’s narcissism. “What the patient comes to see is that this ‘self’ of his is a projected object, and that his frustration is due to his own capture by this object with which he can never really coincide.”¹⁵⁵ Proper therapy, she continued, led to the subject’s breaking out of this cycle by identifying and coming to terms with a real history, thereby achieving growth and change.

Jones has argued, against the attacks of feminist art critics like Krauss and Griselda Pollack, who criticized body art as another manifestation of naïve essentialist

¹⁵³ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1978), 44.

¹⁵⁴ See, for instance, Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, 261-2 on Lasch’s critique of the Living Theater of the late 1960s and Andy Warhol’s reappropriation of the objects of mass culture.

¹⁵⁵ Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” *October* 1 (1976), 58.

realism, that body art and video art perform their critique by visibly working through narcissism, here figured as an affirmative expression of being by bodies traditionally marginalized from representation in the art world. The bodies represented in the work index themselves and social archetypes simultaneously, working through the points of intersection and difference in the time of the performance. Jones argued that the instability and disturbance of the subject are “endemic to late capitalist commodity culture,” and that in this context, body art productively serves the ends of those who “have every stake in dislocating the mythological, transcendent self of modernism.”¹⁵⁶ Fractured subjectivity had always been the lot of “object beings who otherwise form the outside to the domain of the subject,” she continued, and so she celebrated the possibilities of body art to challenge normative ideas about gender, race, family, sexuality, the boundaries of proper art, etc. not as a way to recover a lost whole, but as a means for displacing the idea of wholeness with fleshy, breathing, vulnerable, contingent body-subjects offering themselves for myriad interpretations.¹⁵⁷ If art production had historically disingenuously positioned itself as disinterested and outside of the crass influence of capital, and art criticism as invested in expert explications of the meaning of form, then the very presence of these bodies *as* the art subject/objects constituted an irruption of norms. Narcissism was the medium through which these subject-bodies worked through the histories of tacit violence that had excluded them from consideration as artists.

¹⁵⁶ Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, 48-9.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

For Anderson, there is a distinction between the frames of body art and performance art worth articulating, as it reflects the difference between analyzing performance from the perspective of an art critic and a performance studies scholar. Whereas Jones prefers “body art,” a moniker that figures the performing body in the gallery space as an art object more or less like a painting, photograph, or sculpture, performance theorist Anderson prefers “performance art,” which suggests that the activity of performing, invested as it is in the disappearance of the body and the temporal experience of a uniquely intersubjective moment between performer and spectator, is antithetical to objectification. Or at the least, as he demonstrated in his study of self-starvation performances, transforming this experience into commodities for exchange embeds death—the end of the performance, visibly seared into images of gaunt faces, and viscerally present in descriptions of bodies wasting away—into their circulation. Objects are not the object of performance studies, in his terms, but rather the process of flesh wasting away, which compels affective response from the beholder. His study of self-starvation pushes this ontology of performance to its limits. “Self-starvation conceptually and methodologically obtains its significance as cultural practice not simply in gesturing toward absence,” he says, “but in viscerally and affectively summoning us to bear witness to the long, slow wasting away of human flesh.”¹⁵⁸

Taken together, the theory of Sobchack, Jones, and Anderson suggests something surprising about the body. Sobchack’s trust in her own eyes and the phenomenological method, and her insistence, following Merleau-Ponty, that the body is a subjective object

¹⁵⁸ Anderson, *So Much Wasted Hunger, Performance, and the Morbidity of Resistance*, 2.

and an objective subject at the same time, suggests that the body has become, in fact, the technology best suited to understanding the sensation of time passing in the digital era. This is also the position of Jones' writing in performance studies, in which the body functions as a screen upon which a spectator may project their own fantasies and desires, a "clock" that measures time by the disappearance of flesh, and a subject that may regard spectators in a variety of ways. The analog camera, as an instrument for making the passage of time visible, also required movement. Without movement, there was no fascination to looking at the moving image. Where the subject that was traditionally in front of the lens and moving becomes one that is static before the screen, the camera loses its capacity to reveal surprising, startling affects that lead to knowledge, and with it, its cultural status as a machine that produces evidence. As Sobchack's writing demonstrates, the machine best suited to this task is the human viewer of the cinema, who reperforms the most "moving" subjective experiences of a film or media object in writing, marked as her own through anecdote and aside and held out as an offering to others. To have faith that this method will reveal insights about postmodern perception is a testament to tacit assumptions about the homogeneity of viewers, the performance of marked difference aside. The camera, mechanism for producing the hollowed out sign that defined the 20th century transformation of consciousness, has been internalized. This is also suggested by the movement to autobiographical and performative modes of documentary filmmaking, which employ the camera not to see "the world," but to see the way that I see, to index subjectivity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced how the concept of indexicality adopted into documentary film studies deemphasized subjectivity in order to make the argument that analog photography bore a relationship of contiguity to the visible world in front of the lens. Some notable exceptions notwithstanding, the field in the early 1990s tended to accept or reject the indexicality of film/video as a scientifically valid technology of inscription, tacitly framing the cinematic arts in contradistinction to plastic arts like painting and sculpture instead of the performing arts. The index-as-inscription argument that meant to separate documentary from the claims of psychoanalytic film theory and apparatus theory also forced documentary theorists to rethink theoretical foundations with the transition to digital platforms. This turn in theory did not reflect the thoughts of many documentary filmmakers themselves, who embraced the digital as advantageous to their representational goals. Considering indexicality through the lens of performance activity and labor, while retaining the sense of historicity associated with the photographic index, aligns with the project of early 1990s performance theory on disappearance in its concern for intuiting the invisible roots of visible traces in representation. This kind of indexicality also strongly resonates ethically and methodologically with the phenomenological understanding of documentary that Sobchack practiced and theorized in her writing starting in the late 1990s. If we theorize documentary as concerned with evoking in the present an imaginary of histories that we cannot see, then performance may become an indexical documentary practice, even without any cameras present. The body of the performer in the presence of others (be they spectators or other performers) functions as representational object, perceiving subject, and indexical sign of lived

history simultaneously. To consider body art or performance art practice as a kind of narcissism misunderstands the location of subjectivity and the kind of indexicality that operates in these exchanges. In the words of Jones, “body art confirms what phenomenology and psychoanalysis have taught us: that the subject ‘means’ always in relationship to others and the locus of identity is always elsewhere.”¹⁵⁹ The body haunts space, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, as the indexical sign haunts time.

Intersubjective indexicality refers to moments of perceived touch between two entities in a representational encounter. At least one of these entities must be a perceiving being. The second may be an object, a moment in a film, other performers, other spectators, an environment, or a passed duration of time that the first perceives. The second represents the lived experience of an other in relation to the first, but rather than yielding to the perceiving subject as knowledge of the Other as the Same, the second exceeds comprehension. The perceiving subject experiences the simultaneous sensations of “it must have been” and “but yet I cannot know.” Such experiences elicit a central tension in postmodern thinking, between the desire for knowledge of reality and a structure of consciousness that disavows its possibility. If we are aware of the role that desire plays in producing our perceptions of the real, of the violence that universal notions of history wreak upon the bodies of the unmarked, of the ways that language, ideology, and social forces determine our subjectivities, then we cannot simply engage with a documentary representation as naïve believers in its veracity (though at times we may accord ourselves this way in practice). We glean in the present from nuanced detail in representation the affective charge of absent history. Certain objects, like photographs,

¹⁵⁹ Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, 14.

may afford the experience of affect more generally than others, but at base, indexicality connotes a relationship that begins in the body of the perceiving subject. At stake in intersubjective indexicality is not objective evidence, but the shared, recurring experience of remaking history.

This starting point inverts the location of documentary production traditionally assumed in documentary film theory. Instead of studying documentary films to decode the rhetoric of authenticity embedded in the moving image, the phenomenological approach theorizes a form of consciousness that perceives moments in everyday life as documentary. In these moments, we perceive signs in our sensorium that enable us to imagine passed time. As I argued above, these signs point to the absence of the labor or performance activity that produced them. While the moving image lends itself to presenting us with these kinds of signs, we should not limit theoretical inquiry into the spectatorship of documentary cinema.

In the ensuing chapter, I build on this concept of intersubjective indexicality to theorize reenactment in filmed and performed evocations of historical events. I see reenactment as a promising domain for establishing this kind of documentary theory. As a performance that often engages multiple participants who are mutually responsible for the event, reenactment poses a challenge for the phenomenological method. How is it possible to apply the insights of phenomenology to a scenario that involves multiple subjects, moving about in space, performing roles while also exploring unexpressed psychic terrains? Must we discount the things people say about their experiences to such an extent that we confine phenomenological analysis to the self and the object? We may posit, as Sobchack rightly does, that the flesh is objective, resistant to simulation by its

brute presence, indexing existence. But the flesh is a document unlike any other. To make sense of the social experience of cultural objects like films and performances demands a return of some sort to the empirical of the interpersonal, and engaging with all the potential ethical pitfalls and problems of representation associated with this kind of work. The disciplines of sensory anthropology and performance studies offer methodological models.

A segment of Chapter 1 is under review at *Body and Society* and may appear in 2014.

Chapter 2: Embodied Reenactment as a Method of Historical Research

This chapter considers embodied reenactment as a method of historical research and engages literatures in the fields of simulation theory, film and performance phenomenology, sensory ethnography, and cultural history. I focus in particular on literature that theorizes the relationship between the artifacts that evoke “the past” as a focal point for attention, and the production of knowledge in the present. By artifacts, I mean to include filmed images and the motion animating the intentionality of vision behind the camera, theatrical props, smells, archival objects, the act of following archaic rules for movement or behavior, and the performances of other participants in a reenactment. The accumulation of these various artifacts in a reenacting event adds to the affective intensity of participants’ experiences, if not necessarily the isometric correspondence between present and past sentiments. The central question of this chapter focuses on whether or not this sensation of connecting with the past through performing, or the desire for contact expressed through the ritual of reenactment, might be considered as a source of historical evidence on par with documents for the purposes of academic research. I ask what kind of knowledge the embodied reenactment of historical events produces in the postindustrial context of the United States, and how this knowledge compares with the kind produced by the written or filmic interpretation of historical events.

The presumption of the body’s validity as an evidentiary medium has grounded the use of embodied reenactment as a research tool in the domains of cultural anthropology, cultural history, and sensory cinema since the 1970s. Reenactment is by

definition a mimetic doubling, a remaking of one's own body as that of an imagined other. In this regard, reenactment is a subjective experience that can be considered a new iteration of "possessive individualism," insofar as participants in reenactment are "having" rather than living an experience of otherness as they perform.¹⁶⁰ But historical reenactment presumes that the physical constraints associated with *being* a human body allows for the transmission across space and time of certain elements of other lives such that bodies in the present might momentarily touch something about past or displaced actualities. The constraints of being bodies that experience gravity, pain, loss, movement, and love, in this way, are enduring even when emerging technological regimes and transformations in relations of production seem operationally determined to negate such corporeal concerns. I propose that in an era dominated by written documents and what Baudrillard called "the code," this sentiment of embodied contiguity with historical persons and events evokes an affective power like that associated with collective religious rites in Emile Durkheim's sociology. I draw from Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) and Maurice Halbwach's *On Collective Memory* (1992) [1950] to flesh out this connection. Historical reenactment produces the sensation of foreign spirits, forms of motility, or ideas coursing through participants' bodies as they perform for one another, even if they have never themselves directly experienced the actions they play. Like a documentary film that mediates between an original event and the experience of a viewing spectator, a reenactment produces what Laura Marks called a "third thing" in the body of the performer that could not have come

¹⁶⁰ Handler and Saxton, "Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in 'Living History'," 242-260.

into existence without the imagined original event and the reenactor's subjective channeling of its meaning.¹⁶¹ Evoking the contiguity aspect of the index, performance theorist Rebecca Schneider suggested that “times touch” in reenactment, and proposed that the bodies of reenactors themselves can function as historical documents as they perform.¹⁶² Though ephemeral, embodied reenactment can be understood as an act of production in this way.

I consider the meaning of reenactment relative to two other terms that designate mimetic activity: practice and simulation. Whereas “practice,” to use the framework outlined in French critical theorist Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), might include any number of activities performed time and again by specific individuals or groups of individuals, these are rarely understood as historical reenactments at the moment of their execution, though indeed that is what they are. The power of de Certeau's theory of tactical practice was premised on the fact that we tend not to be conscious of our own practices, enacted in the present as reiterations of past behaviors or habits, as historical events. They are pure expenditures, like live performances. We might say, equally, that the changes in practices that we cannot perceive, or tend not to perceive because they happen so gradually, constitute a wealth of “lost” knowledge. To consider such practices as having a sense of dignity and political import is to render them historical. The project of social and cultural history associated with de Certeau, in fact, is to render usually tacit habits, practices, and norms available as forms that change over time, and so have the power to transform themselves and their

¹⁶¹ Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*.

¹⁶² Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*.

practitioners into the future. While the medium of writing embedded a tension into this project (the act of writing essays, in a sense, cut against the ontology of tactics as ephemeral as de Certeau defined them), I would contend that it is not a coincidence that de Certeau developed this research paradigm across the same period, from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, that academic historians in the United States largely turned from political to social and cultural subjects in their writing about the past. The emergence of everyday life contingencies as a subject worthy of research was not simply aiming to fill a gap in the archive. It was a symptom of a broader and ongoing transformation in Europe and North America in the dominant perceptions of labor and value in light of a burgeoning visual, digital cultural milieu—what de Certeau called “the cancerous growth of vision” endemic to a disciplinary society.¹⁶³ I consider anthropologist Victor Turner’s argument for reenactment pedagogy and historian-reenactors influenced by mid-20th century British history theorist Robin Collingwood, such as Jay Anderson, Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb, and Iain McCalman and Paul Pickering, to evaluate the turn toward “extreme history” via reenactment in the historical profession.

The concept of simulation, for which Baudrillard and Guy Debord’s writing serves as a paradigmatic theory, focuses in particular on the role of communications technologies like film and television, computing, and military surveillance tools in the transformation of civic life.¹⁶⁴ Many of these questions developed in the thinking of early post-structural social theorists in France in the years before and after the general strike of

¹⁶³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xxi.

¹⁶⁴ I explore the military aspects of simulation in chapter four. There, I consider at greater length the simulation theory of Paul Virilio and James Der Derian, which centers on the concepts of speed and scale in military technologies released on the mass market.

May 1968, which provoked a number of difficult questions for orthodox Marxist thought. Why was this revolt led and sustained by students, supposedly the first native, passive dupes of the television era, as opposed to workers, who settled more quickly with factory owners after winning concessions? Given the control over public airwaves by a commercial elite, how did the spirit and ethos of revolution erupt so quickly? What was the meaning of this movement that dissipated months after its enthusiastic beginnings, and seemed to become a commodity like any other, with the publication of books about its leaders and the circulation of its signs as new forms of capital? Most broadly, were consumers tactical operators practicing survival akin to the “tricks and imitations of plants and fishes” in the midst of natural threats, or were they the “prey of objects as defined by the code”?¹⁶⁵ Though both de Certeau and Baudrillard struggled with such questions continuously in writing between the late 1960s and the 1980s, they came to opposite conclusions. Baudrillard’s writing toward the concept of simulation, which is filled with insights about desire and the political economy of signs, the differences between language and code, and the detachment of objects from survival needs in a post-industrial, image-saturated social context like the United States and Western Europe after 1968, raises important questions about how to theorize embodied relations critically without recourse to the traditional Marxist emphasis on use value and industrial labor.

Sensory cinema scholars contend that overly critical, “iconophobic” assessments of the photographic image, like those of Baudrillard as well as many cultural anthropologists, played a key role in preventing theorists of culture from engaging with

¹⁶⁵ Baudrillard and Poster, *Selected Writings*, 7; Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xx.

everyday embodiment in a substantial (i.e. cinematic) way, even as they yearned to do so.¹⁶⁶ Sensory cinema scholars include David MacDougall, Sarah Pink, Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, and Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Ilisa Barbash. They argued that beholding the excess of expressive information inevitably inside the cinematic frame as a spectator better approximated the sensation of embodiment and contingency than the written word, even if these experiences were not the same as co-presence to profilmic events. Sensations gleaned from cinema spectatorship were necessarily informed by the historical events projected on screen while also experienced in the present. Following this conceit, I frame sensory cinema production and spectatorship as a kind of performative, reenactment practice, though I distinguish between the experience of motility and co-presence at the center of embodied reenactment from the mental reenactment afforded to spectators of a sensory cinema film. I engage at greater length with the specifics of expressing embodiment through sensory cinema aesthetic choices in the ensuing chapter. Here, I explicate the lineages of scholarly work that inform sensory cinema practice, and identify a place for this argument for filmmaking as a mode of critical scholarship that works in tandem with reenactment performance.

As lived rather than objective forms of knowledge, everyday life practices tend to escape the archives that have traditionally served as the foundation for dominant history, but embodied reenactment does not operate at the level of discourse. Reenactment experience, though inherently subjective, affords a compelling lens for translating embodied sensations into a kind of new knowledge. When we isolate particular practices up for consideration, we who cannot escape the stream of continuous time try to

¹⁶⁶ Castaing-Taylor, "Iconophobia," 64-88.

syncopate our present with the past that we identify. We make this past that “had been” as if “being”—a present rather than past time—to exist with us in our present. When we do this, we stage practice as indexical, as contiguous with a time that has passed, and identifiable, if not exactly replicable, in the present. Reenactment as a research method requires both the naming of an interval of time as passed, and the imaginative consideration of that interval in the time of the present, which may not match in an isometric temporal relation to the interval being considered. This said, we must be aware as well that reenactment itself constitutes a “new event.” Repeated time and again, reenactment can become a practice, submerged into the realm of the tacit or the unconscious—or, perhaps, that vaguely imperial logic of operations that Baudrillard called “the code.”

Simulation and Everyday Life Theory After 1968

Witnessing the revolts of May 1968 in Paris changed the way that de Certeau practiced his writing, first as a commentator on the events (which earned him fame in France) and later as a scholar trying to understand the unconscious, radical potential embedded in everyday activity. “Something happened to us. Something began to stir in us,” he reflected that August of 1968. “From everywhere emerged the treasures, either aslumber or tacit, of forever unspoken experiences.”¹⁶⁷ Student protests and worker strikes against the war in Vietnam, the high unemployment rate in France, and the limitations of existing pension plans crippled the French economy and threw the national

¹⁶⁷ Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard, *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), vii.

government into a state of crisis, and seemed to have emerged from nowhere. Looking out at the streets of Paris, returned to peaceable bustle by August, de Certeau reenacted in his mind the events of May, the things that had occurred on this or that corner. For him, something in the air had changed, and for participants and onlookers alike, the appearance of normalcy thinly veiled the invisible, radical undercurrents that needed only a spark to coalesce again. He recognized that the activity in the streets of Paris was not comprehensible by any of the institutions that traditionally claimed political or intellectual authority. The streets were alive with a spirit that had no clear goals, no unified purpose, and in beholding the events, de Certeau wanted to understand what sort of reasoning held them together. What sort of politics did these revolts make manifest?

The Practice of Everyday Life followed nearly a decade of research on this topic, and set an agenda for theorizing this unspoken, scattered kind of reasoning. “The goal will be achieved if everyday practices, ‘ways of operating’ or doing things, no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity,” de Certeau stated in the introduction.¹⁶⁸ He suggested that this body of theory might serve as the complement to critical theorist Michel Foucault’s explanation for the emergence of disciplinary society in the wake of the Enlightenment, articulated in his *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Whereas Foucault argued that from the 1600s onward discipline in modern societies increasingly controlled bodies via the expansion of the division of labor, bureaucratic institutions, and scientific classification, de Certeau wondered how “an entire society resists being reduced” to disciplinary norms.¹⁶⁹ Understanding resistance in daily activity

¹⁶⁸ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xi.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xiv.

thus meant recalibrating the targets and methods of analysis deployed by Foucault. De Certeau discussed “consumer production,” or the ways that consumers made use of goods and services, as a starting point. He noted, for instance, that studies of television production and viewer behavior, staple questions of empirical communication studies of media effects, failed to account for how people actually watched television. What did consumers make or do with the time they spent in front of a television screen?¹⁷⁰ Because there was no place for consumers to articulate these activities and their meanings, they remained submerged, unknown. He compared the consumer’s ways of operating to the expression of cultural difference amongst Native Americans following the Spanish colonization in the 15th and 16th centuries. In spite of the “success” of this conquest, Native Americans reconfigured the meanings of laws, representations, and orders forced upon them through interpretations unanticipated by the system and for which the ruling regime could not account. “The strength of their difference lay in procedures of ‘consumption,’” de Certeau concluded.¹⁷¹

Examples like these compelled de Certeau to reconceptualize what constituted “the act of speaking,” and consequently, what kinds of activity counted as political. The art of “making do,” or transforming the representations produced by a dominant logic

¹⁷⁰ Birmingham School cultural theorist David Morley studied this phenomenon several years later in his seminal book of reception analysis, *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (1986, 1993). He conducted interviews with families of different classes in the greater London area about why they watched television and what they tended to do while watching. His findings suggested just how heterogenous these uses could be. Television viewers said watching television facilitated parent child conversation, helped them cope with the loss of a job, and, implicitly, reinforced or challenged gender hierarchies within the household. David Morley, *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (London [u.a.]: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁷¹ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xiii.

according to one's own interests or needs, he considered as akin to shadowy acts of speech, an "antidiscipline." Unlike the statistical models of empirical social science, which located norms through the classification of large data sets, de Certeau's study of everyday life required attending to tactical practices, the idiosyncratic expressive activities performed in such a way to avoid detection by a disciplinary state. Carried out in ephemeral spaces, tactical activity tended to be unorganized, unarticulated, opportunistic, and hidden behind the appearance of complying with disciplinary norms. A tactic could neither secure future advantages from a fixed place, nor demarcate a position separate from a dominant other. In spite of the timelessness that de Certeau ascribed to tactical practice, in other words, there was no base from which a tactic could "prepare its expansions."¹⁷² A tactic, like live performance, exhausted itself in the moment of operation, and was dependent on the context in which the opportunity for execution arose, like the chance amble down an unexpected path, daydreaming while reading a book, the reappropriation of a turn of phrase, the poaching of company equipment for personal use, the art of cooking, the unexpected evocation of a memory, etc. He pointed out that attempts to make some small portion of these fleeting practices legible for systematic analysis changed their form irreparably. These were no longer *lived* activities, but reproducible representations of life that had already passed. "Transforming action into legibility," de Certeau pointed out, thus "causes a way of being in the world to be forgotten."¹⁷³

¹⁷² Ibid., xix.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 97.

Yet judging from de Certeau's own struggle with the problem of legibility, played out in every chapter of his book, he never quite settled on a way to study everyday life without either violently transforming it, or failing to come to terms with differences in everyday living. How is it possible to write about daily life without destroying the sensation of living it, but yet still communicating something about its meaning? Articulating a set of shared potential meanings for these unconscious everyday activities, after all, was to serve as the basis for new kinds of collectives to form across ostensibly diverse social, economic, and demographic groups. In his introduction to *The Everyday Life Reader* (2002), theorist of everyday life Ben Highmore returned to this theme time and again. Everyday life theory had the potential to "find new commonalities and breathe new life into old differences," but also seemed to require forms of scholarship that would lead "our most cherished *theoretical* values and practices into crisis."¹⁷⁴ He discussed the theoretical potential of novels, poetry, and stream of consciousness writing, as this kind of work more closely mirrored embodiment, or "the sensuous feel of culture" than "resolutely ideational" critical theory.¹⁷⁵ For valid skepticisms suggested about the nature of the image, however, neither de Certeau nor Highmore questioned the *medium* of writing itself as the vehicle for articulating a theory of everyday practice. Simulation theorists like Debord and Baudrillard argued for the inherent immorality of the image in the strongest terms.

While de Certeau and later the Birmingham School for Cultural Studies theorized how political resistance might be practiced in everyday life in a disciplinary society,

¹⁷⁴ Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 30, 32.

simulation theorists focused instead on the political economic ramifications of emerging technologies that commodified experience through the photographic image. Debord, a forerunner of simulation theory and influential participant in the events in Paris in May of 1968 as a leading member of the avant-garde Situationist International, posited in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1965) that social relationships were no longer mediated through the industrial mode of production, but through spectacles that circulated in the social through images. Spectacles were image commodities that produced apolitical forms of consciousness by catering to sensation, desire, tropes of dramatic realism, and the expansion of the market for unnecessary luxury items. “*Fragmented* views of reality regroup themselves into a new unity as a *separate pseudoworld* that can only be looked at,” he observed.¹⁷⁶ Evoking Plato’s critique of mimetic art, Debord lamented what he saw as a historical progression of value in the public sphere from *being* to *having* through the development of capitalism, and then from *having* to *appearing* in his own nascent “society of the spectacle” in the late 1960s. “Real life is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle, and ends up absorbing it and aligning itself with it,” he argued.¹⁷⁷ Whereas the Enlightenment understanding of knowledge presumed a progression powered by relations of production—culminating, in orthodox Marxist thought, in the proletarian revolution—the rise of the image in mass media alienated proletarians from the social bonds and responsibilities they developed through their shared experiences as industrial laborers, and instead interpellated them as individuated consumers. “The spectacle is the stage at which the commodity has succeeded in *totally*

¹⁷⁶ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 1.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

colonizing social life,” Debord claimed. “Commodification is not only visible, we no longer see anything else; the world we see is the world of the commodity.”¹⁷⁸ A key insight that Debord offered about this process of totalizing commodification was that it hinged upon a tension in modern societies between productivity and the expansion of capital. Technologies that enabled the expansion of productive capacity also objectively reduced the need for human labor to produce the same amount of a good. Yet instead of reducing the amount of time that subjects under capitalism worked, the system increasingly employed laborers to work in sectors of the economy centered on increasing consumer demand, most prominently in the fields of advertising and marketing. “Increasingly extensive campaigns are necessary to convince people to buy increasingly unnecessary commodities,” Debord argued.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, this kind of labor tended to be less physical than factory work, and so demanded workers who could sit relatively still at a desk for long periods of time. Perhaps most significantly, these changes suggested that the exchange value of commodities bore little—if any—relation to Marx’s concept of use value, the socially necessary labor time required to produce a needed commodity in the industrial era.

In a sequence of books written between 1968 and 1981, Baudrillard continually reassessed the concept of use value, transforming the concept in his own mind from a sacred cow of Marxist thought to the key alibi for the reality principle at the center of the “simulation society.” Whereas Debord lamented the society of the spectacle as a particularly powerful purveyor of false consciousness about labor invested in the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 11.

production of goods, Baudrillard centered his early analyses on consumption, first in *The System of Objects* (1968) and then in *Consumer Society* (1970). Both of these books apply Durkheim's analysis of the totem to the pervasive consumer goods that Baudrillard saw as structuring the perception of needs in consumer society. There was no such thing as a normative set of human needs, for Baudrillard, except the need for difference, for differentiation amongst individuals and groups within a society. In *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard pursued the question about whether the relations between humans and advertising constituted a language. He introduced the idea that this object/advertising system "has the simplicity and effectiveness of a code" that aimed "to convert us all" through the operations it enacted.¹⁸⁰ Still a Marxist, Baudrillard reframed production through the lens of consumption, which he theorized as the "*systematic act of the manipulation of signs*."¹⁸¹ Consumption, in this manner, contributed to production by enacting the social labor of differentiation amongst groups in society. "At all levels, the status of the relation/object is orchestrated by the order of production," he said. "We rejoin here, in its conclusions, the formal logic of commodities analyzed by Marx: needs, affects, culture, knowledge—all specifically human capacities are integrated in the order of production as commodities and materialized as productive forces in order to be sold."¹⁸² Baudrillard claimed that to attempt to mitigate and normalize consumption, as Marxist analyses like Debord's implied was necessary, was to deny "the very project of life." Exchange value, in this light, was the product of the social labor of consumption and display. There was a tension, as he saw it, between the desire for difference that

¹⁸⁰ Baudrillard and Poster, *Selected Writings*, 19.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 22.

consumption seemed to promise and the social conformity, in terms of practice, that consumption actually produced.

Baudrillard had worked out most of his theory by the time he published *The System of Objects* (1968). Over the next thirteen years, though his claims on social life for what he called “the code” expanded, and though he left behind the central tenet of Marxism—the “use value” of a good derived from its equivalent productive labor—Baudrillard retained two central ideas from his earliest book. First, he argued against the ideology of economic rationalism, or the idea that consumption and the circulation of signs determined needs within a given society. Second, he suggested a critique of classical Marxism, developed more fully by the publication of *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976), by insisting that exchange value came prior to use value. In this framework, the use value of a good, thought to be the equivalent of “socially necessary labor time” in Marx’s political economy, served as an alibi for its exchange value, its capacity to mark status differences in society. Use value and needs, in other words, were products of the code that actually determined social relations in late capitalist societies.

Baudrillard consistently followed classical Marxism in his dialectical form of argument and emphasis on the relationship between objects and exchange value, but he came to reject the notion that productive labor could exist outside of the circulation of signs as capital, and the idea that a proletariat could lead a revolutionary overthrow of capitalist regimes. He tied his intervention into Marxist thought to the emergence of the image as the dominant form of commodity in the late 1960s. While the commodity for Marx represented labor time in an alienated form, Baudrillard argued that the image represented the reproductive work of machines, and so bore virtually no connection to

human labor. The voracious consumption of images that he described as endemic to nascent post-industrial France, and then in later writing, to the consumption practices of the United States, convinced him that, for better or worse, the left must turn its attention from relations of production to the political economy of signs. The sign economy, for Baudrillard, remade the form of alienation at the center of industrial production. While a commodity in Marx's terms provided value in terms of its use or pleasure for the consumer at the expense of effacing the commodity's relationship to the human labor that produced it, the image commodity, in Baudrillard's terms, aimed solely at desire, and in doing so, effaced its relationship to a pre-existing reality. What the image commodity alienated was the referent, the very possibility of reality, rather than labor. It was for this reason that Baudrillard turned toward the analysis of consumption, Saussurean semiotics, and Freudian psychoanalysis in *The System of Objects* (1968). It was not labor that demanded a political economic account in a post-industrial society, but the sign itself, exchange value unmoored from the alibi of human needs. These signs included, for Baudrillard, the activities of the orthodox Marxist left, which circulated as abstract image capital in a sign economy. In *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976), Baudrillard abandoned his affiliation with the radical left entirely, suggesting that death had become the only form of exchange that exceeded the integrative acumen of the digital code at the center of the emerging global system. Baudrillard ruminated on the operations of these vaguely imperial models of code and their relation to the image in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981, trans. 1994). Offering his analogue of the Marxist historical dialectic centered on modes of production, Baudrillard theorized four "phases of the image" in relation to what he called "profound reality":

Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum.

Such would be the successive phases of the image:
 it is the reflection of a profound reality.
 it masks and denatures a profound reality.
 it masks the *absence* of a profound reality
 it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.¹⁸³

Baudrillard claimed that the third phase silently dominated in an era of simulation, as institutions like Disneyworld offered themselves as imaginary in order “to hide that it is the ‘real’” of America.¹⁸⁴ While Baudrillard did not write about historical reenactments directly, he could have slotted reenactment into a host of other activities he identified as endemic to everyday life in a simulation society: “Everywhere one recycles lost faculties, or lost bodies, or lost sociality, or the lost taste for food. One reinvents penury, asceticism, vanished savage naturalness: natural food, health food, yoga.”¹⁸⁵ He suggested that the idea of history itself had become a myth, the “lost object” evacuated of sensuous (i.e. profound) meaning by its function as code for human and mechanic “present-day simulators.”¹⁸⁶ This “logic of simulation” even characterized war after World War II, he continued, as was evidenced by the fact that the American defeat in Vietnam—supposedly the worst in the nation’s history—seemed to have had “no internal repercussions.”¹⁸⁷ He argued that the war must have been something else, either a victory for the United States on a hidden plane, the result of a “crucial episode of peaceful

¹⁸³ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-3.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2, 44.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

coexistence” between empires in China and the United States, or both.¹⁸⁸ Baudrillard pointed out that the United States and North Vietnam came to be oddly aligned in their effort to snuff out any traces of “tribal, communitarian, pre-capitalist” social structures. When this end had been achieved, the United States could pull out of Vietnam knowing that, capitalist or communist, the North Vietnamese “were no longer the carriers of an unpredictable subversion.”¹⁸⁹ This suggested to him that war had come to lack the “ideological seriousness” of truly “antagonistic causes.”¹⁹⁰ If warring nations shared an orientation toward social rationalization and empire, then war itself would not lead to significant changes in the social order of victor or vanquished regardless of the carnage exacted upon the bodies of soldiers and civilians. War was a simulation like any other, and as marketable a form of entertainment via news reports as the cinema. And so, Baudrillard argued in his later essay *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1997), it was a mistake to call events like the United States invasion of Iraq in the early 1990s “war.” They were more like police raids that reenacted the aesthetic form of preexisting Hollywood films.¹⁹¹

Baudrillard’s insistence in applying the theoretical lens of simulation even to analyses of devastating wars demonstrated both the critical affordances of performative writing as an aesthetic form in a media saturated society, and the limitations of his particularly hyperbolic and masculinist style. His concept of simulation and its unsettling subversion of a real worthy of struggle problematized Marxist critique in post-industrial

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 36.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 38.

¹⁹¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War did Not Take Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

societies like those of the United States and Western Europe starting in the late 1960s. But Baudrillard's linguistic understanding of semiotics limited his concept of embodiment; his radically disembodied style of analysis led him to dismiss phenomenological analyses of gender, race, and everyday life practices that offered compelling theoretical lenses for gaining purchase on the macro social processes of exchange after 1968. In a digital visual culture, embodiment and movement *are* acts of production, and they deserve consideration as such. I accept that the "society of the spectacle" or the "simulation society" has to some extent short-circuited the possibility of reality prior to representation, but I contend as well that critical theory of Baudrillard's type has played a role in short circuiting the possibility of understanding the nuanced, politically charged interplay of embodiment and perception within critical theory about such a society. I explore this theoretical terrain in depth in Chapters 3-5 through analyses of the practices of camerawork and reenactment. For now, I simply offer the observation that there can be something quite powerfully unsettling about a cinema of duration like that of sensory cinema in a society of simulation, almost parallel, ironically, to the alienation effects that Brecht had once hoped would jar theater-goers out of their ideological stupor, or the affective energies that Phelan grappled with in her encounter with the long duration performance by Angelika Festa. In the ensuing section and then in Chapter 3, I consider historically and theoretically the logic behind sensory ethnographic film and video production, which I am calling sensory cinema.

Sensory Cinema

In his early 20th century writings on sociological and anthropological methodology, Marcel Mauss emphasized the importance of collecting documents to aid anthropologists in making sense of their experiences living in “primitive” societies.¹⁹² Perhaps he was channeling the thoughts of his uncle, Durkheim, about the way that affectively charged collective rites clouded an individual’s capacity to reason. Mauss’s treatise on method was partly a warning to anthropologists venturing into the field about the changes they would undergo as they lived by the rules of a foreign culture. By accumulating documents while in the field, anthropologists could later analyze the society in question as scientists, far removed from the intensity and emotions associated with encounter, but close to the artifacts that could trigger their memories of experiences. For Mauss, analyzing documents—masks, tools, flora and fauna, art, fieldnotes, photographs, and films—gathered during immersive, extended periods of fieldwork served as the foundation for writing anthropological theory, and the mechanical reliability of film and photography seemed to promise scientifically objective records of encounter, once anthropologists had worked out a systematic way to use the tools.¹⁹³ Though contemporary sensory cinema filmmakers do not think of their activity as science, there is

¹⁹² Marcel Mauss, nephew of Emile Durkheim, played a significant role in the development of sociological method and theory in early 20th century France. Unlike Britain and the United States, where sociology and anthropology were understood to be distinct disciplines, French sociology included studies of “primitive” societies as a subdiscipline. Though Mauss never lived in the field himself, he culled from the research he had read in order to write what became the textbook on ethnographic methodology in France. See Marcel Mauss, *Manual of Ethnography* (New York; Oxford: Durkheim Press/Berghahn Books, 2007).

¹⁹³ Marcel Mauss, *The Nature of Sociology: Two Essays* (New York: Durkheim Press/Berghahn Books, 2005); Paul Henley, *The Adventure of the Real: Jean Rouch and the Craft of Ethnographic Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 11-12.

something about the need that Mauss described to inhabit two cultural worlds to make one project that continues to inform their practice.

Sensory cinema theorists like MacDougall challenged the idea, associated most notably with the use of visual media espoused by American anthropologist Margaret Mead, that audiovisual technologies should function as scientific tools to aid in the writing of anthropological theory. While not a filmmaker herself, Mead was an early proponent of using film technology as a tool of cultural preservation, first using film cameras between 1936 and 1939 to aid her research in Bali.¹⁹⁴ She had studied interactions of mothers and their children while doing fieldwork in Samoa in the mid 1920s, and came to believe that analyzing film footage recorded in the field would enable anthropologists to theorize about the social role of the mundane details of daily life, often elided in written fieldnotes. “The field ethnographer in the past has too often been prone to describe culture only in terms of the conspicuous, the conventional, and the bizarre,” she argued.¹⁹⁵ In Mead’s way of thinking, the camera recorded the everyday activities of subjects from a non-intrusive distance so as to produce objective records of sequences of activity for fine-grained analysis at a later point in time. Details of subjects’ customs, habits, and social lives that might otherwise have escaped the anthropologist’s detection could now be (re)discovered through the repeated, slowed down analysis of filmed records. The value of film, for Mead, was in its capacity to illustrate theoretical points or aid in the creation of anthropological theory that was not so dependent on more subjective records like memories, fieldnotes, or interviews. The film camera, in other

¹⁹⁴ MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*, 93.

¹⁹⁵ Margaret Mead, “More Comprehensive Field Methods,” *American Anthropologist* 35, no. 1 (1933): 2.

words, facilitated objective analysis in keeping with the scientific aims of anthropological research.

On the contrary, sensory cinema practitioners like MacDougall, who called his own film practice “participatory” or “transcultural,” asserted that the central value of audiovisual media was in its unparalleled capacity to communicate the idiosyncrasies of a researcher’s embodied, subjective experience in and with a foreign culture. For MacDougall, film should reenact experiences of encounter for the consideration of a rapidly globalizing world rather than archive objective records of “a people” for questions about the evolution of human societies. Visual anthropology was “about the presentation of objects and the reenactment of experiences in the world,” he said, more a “*performative anthropology*” than a “‘translation’ of culture that could ever result in a series of propositional statements.”¹⁹⁶ MacDougall argued that the affordances of cinematic tools offered “new concepts of anthropological knowledge” in which “meaning is not merely the outcome of reflection upon experience but necessarily *includes* the experience.”¹⁹⁷ Film communicated the embodiment of fieldwork as a relational quality between researcher and subjects. The texture of these encounters resisted translation into words, but less so translation into film. MacDougall contended that cinema avoided many of the shortcomings of written anthropology (the paucity of description of things seen, the conceit of the “ethnographic present,” representing the temporality of everyday activity, and the de facto othering of subjects through the act of naming them) that alienated readers of ethnographies from ethnographic subjects. He concluded that

¹⁹⁶ MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*, 272.

¹⁹⁷ MacDougall and Castaing-Taylor, *Transcultural Cinema*, 79.

cinematic media might more effectively facilitate empathy and understanding between filmic subjects and spectators of finished films who lived in very different cultural worlds.

The direct cinema and cinema verite documentary film movements of the early 1960s, both of which made use of the then new, portable 16 mm synch sound film rigs to follow everyday life, served as important models for the development of MacDougall's ideas about cinema. Direct cinema was a term coined by American filmmaker Albert Maysles to refer to the filmmaking approach he shared most notably with Robert Drew, Richard Leacock, and D.A. Pennebaker. Stridently non-interventionist in their 1960s manifestation, direct cinema filmmakers attempted to depict the world in front of the lens as if they were not a part of it, using the conventions of continuity editing (match cuts, cutaways, and a third person omniscient authorial perspective) to create, for spectators, the cinematic sensation of "being there" in the midst of the event, with the cameraperson. Under the direction of Drew, the direct cinema movement in its early years produced films that mapped the narrative structure of dramatic realism onto real life situations (an election primary in *Primary* (1960), or the confrontation over school segregation in *Crisis* (1963), for instance).¹⁹⁸ Drew saw in the sync-sound filmmaking techniques emerging in the late 1950s and early 1960s the tools for following stories as they happened in the world, a development that he hoped could enable television journalism to abandon the leaden talking head format for the perspective of a "fly on the wall." He had worked for

¹⁹⁸ P. J. O'Connell, *Robert Drew and the Development of Cinema Verite in America* (Carbondale; Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992); Stephen Mamber, *Cinema Verite in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974).

years as a journalist for *Time-Life* magazine, and had often described how the stories he had covered would have made for compelling films if allowed to follow their natural, “dramatic logic instead of verbal, schematic logic.” He wanted to produce films that, like Hollywood varieties, would “move you and shake you and leave you a different person almost.”¹⁹⁹ Journalism that played like entertainment, he thought, could engross television viewers in a familiar dramatic form and thus lead them, through the back door, to think about serious public issues. He also realized that the early 1960s presented an unparalleled opportunity to pitch this kind of project to television broadcasters, plagued as they were by quiz show scandals and assessments like those of FCC chairman Newton Minow, who characterized television as a “vast wasteland.”²⁰⁰ His early films aired on the *ABC Close Up* series in the early 1960s at least in part because they seemed to address these criticisms while framing journalism as formally innovative and potentially profitable. The contingencies of the television market and Drew’s search for real life stories that fit the “crisis structure” narrative of Hollywood features existed uneasily next to the filmmakers’ assessment of their raw footage as “research data” and dismissals of interview based documentaries as inherently fake.²⁰¹

Cinema vérité, on the other hand, figured the sync sound filmmaking apparatus as provocateur, the “fly in the soup” that catalyzed the subjects in front of the lens to reveal themselves in ways that they otherwise might not in the course of their daily lives. Most strongly associated with French surrealist-ethnographer Jean Rouch, this style of

¹⁹⁹ O’Connell, *Robert Drew and the Development of Cinema Verite in America*, 35.

²⁰⁰ Michael Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland: Television Documentary and Cold War Politics* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

²⁰¹ Brian Winston, “The Documentary Film as Scientific Inscription,” in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 44.

filmmaking implicitly interrogated what was usually hidden in everyday life by incorporating the encounter of different cultures or different peoples into the fabric of his films. While the films that Rouch shot in North Africa in the 1950s also followed this style, he and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961) was the first to use the synch sound, and is most often sited as the first cinema vérité film. *Chronicle* was an experimental film provocation about happiness in Paris in the wake of the Algerian War, deploying the synch sound camera to conduct "man on the street" style interviews with Parisians, follow characters about their everyday activities, provoke intimate, emotional conversations with individuals they already knew, and document staged scenarios that were likely to facilitate cultural exchange. In one instance, Rouch and Morin screened the nearly finished film for the characters who appeared in it, and recorded their discussion afterward. The subjects-turned-viewers proclaim contradictory opinions about what in the film was, translating from the French, "truest," "artificial," "authentic," "unnatural," "indecent," "wonderful," and "monstrous," and this seemed to bother Morin. "We don't say this man's good, another wicked, or nice, or clever, so the audience is bewildered by these people they could actually meet," Morin postulated to Rouch as they reflected on the screening in the hallway outside of the theater. The two filmmakers then shake hands and part ways. "We're in for trouble," said Morin, the final line of the film. While Rouch greatly admired Russian experimental documentarist Dziga Vertov, and certainly paid homage to him in naming this film form cinema vérité after his kino pravda, it is fair to say that Rouch intended the idea of "film truth" to be taken ironically.²⁰²

²⁰² See, for instance, interviews from Rouch and Feld, *Ciné-Ethnography*.

While never completely comfortable with Rouch's interventionist bent, proponents of observational cinema like Grimshaw and Ravetz have situated observation as an important production technique across video art and installation projects in the wake of the sensory turn in anthropology. Citing a genealogy of cinema practice indebted to the use of nonactors, actual locations, and long takes in postwar Italian Neorealism, and a tradition of film theory that starts with Andre Bazin, Grimshaw and Ravetz sought to formalize a series of tacit and dispersed observational cinema principles into "an expansive inter-disciplinary site" with anthropology at its center. They also addressed what they saw as critical misconceptions in visual anthropology and psychoanalytic film studies of the observational form as "a narrowly ocular strategy with a tall order of negative features—voyeurism, objectification, surveillance, looking not seeing, assumed transparency, concealed ideology, lack of reflexivity, quasiscientific objectivity, the ethnographic present and so on."²⁰³ They cited the turn toward "material, emotional or affective, bodily and sensory ways of being in the world" as "critical to our rethinking observational cinema" on terms that had less to do with debates about the scientific merits of observational recording than with sensing through observational films and observational filmmaking "the finely grained texture of lived experience."²⁰⁴

The claim that observational filmmaking renders qualities like the texture, sensory perception, and affect of the real before the lens is part of a broader debate within the field of sensory ethnography about the role of visual images in shaping and communicating embodied knowledge. Related to visual anthropology, but focused as

²⁰³ Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*, xiii, 115.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv.

well on culturally specific processes of identity centered on smell, sound, touch, and non-western sensorial paradigms, sensory ethnography has enjoyed a resurgence in the 2000s that coincided with turns to questions of affect in film and media theory.²⁰⁵ In *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2009), Pink traced the genealogy of interest in the senses in ethnography to the work of David Howes, Paul Stoller, Nadia Seremetakis and Steven Feld of the late 1980s and early 1990s, and centered the subsequent development of sensory ethnography on three key debates: first, about the relationship between culture and sensory perception; second, about the place of the visual in relation to other sensory faculties across diverse cultural contexts; and third, about the nature of reflexivity demanded of sensory ethnographic practice in the wake of 1980s critical cultural theory that established race, gender, and class as enduring nodes of cultural difference.²⁰⁶ A key assumption behind all three of these debates, according to Pink, was that Western culture was unusually ocularcentric—an argument advanced by Grimshaw in her critical assessment of the visual in anthropology, *The Ethnographer's Eye* (2001). They were also concerned to demonstrate that the visualism they assumed to be at the center of Western culture was not universal. Howes, for instance, insisted that the “sensual turn” in anthropological scholarship was premised on the “hegemony of vision in Western culture,” and argued for cross-cultural comparative studies of sensory hierarchies across

²⁰⁵ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*; Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean O'Malley Halley, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Tarja Laine, *Shame and Desire: Emotion, Intersubjectivity, Cinema* (Bruxelles; New York: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2007); Cartwright, *Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child*; Cartwright, *The Hands of the Projectionist*, 443-464; Smaill, *The Documentary Politics, Emotion, Culture*; Steven Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect* (Winchester, UK; Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2010).

²⁰⁶ Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*.

cultures to see how non-Western “sensory formations” could produce alternative ideas or beliefs.²⁰⁷ Howe’s argument was connected to the assumption that visualism and the image was uniquely imbricated in processes for extracting value from everyday experience as a form of cultural or economic capital. Pink, through Tim Ingold, averred from this concept of culture because it presupposed that “to see is to reduce the environment to objects that are to be grasped and appropriated as representations in the mind,” thus generalizing sensory experience toward abstract cultural hierarchies instead of focusing on the specificity of individuals’ everyday practices and experiences.²⁰⁸ Pink, rather, advocated for experimental collaborations between researchers and subjects that might elicit shared insights about the relationships among place, memory, and imagination in the experience of sensory worlds.

Similarly, sensory cinema practitioners Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Ilisa Barbash argued that ethnographic filmmaking of the sort practiced by Rouch, Robert Flaherty, MacDougall, and Robert Gardner suggested the contours of a “post-semiotic anthropology.” “[T]his emergent postsemiotic turn in anthropology,” they asserted in *The Cinema of Robert Gardner* (2007), “opposes both an earlier conception of culture as a disembodied text and a conception of the body as a site exclusively of representation or surveillance.” Citing studies in cognitive neuroscience that suggested “the relatively limited role that it appears language. . . plays in cognition and social life,” Barbash and Castaing-Taylor advanced the notion that humans came to understand culture and their place within it primarily through phenomenological being, or embodiment, rather than

²⁰⁷ David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003) xii, xv.

²⁰⁸ Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 12-3.

language.²⁰⁹ Furthermore, they envisioned an ethnographic filmmaking practice premised on the insights of sensory ethnography as a promising direction for this emerging field, and established programs and institutions through which to actualize this paradigm. Between the early 2000s and 2012, Castaing-Taylor worked as the director of the Sensory Ethnography Lab (SEL) at Harvard University, and served as the director of the Harvard Film Study Center, founded by Gardner in 1957 to support experimental ethnographic film initiatives. Comprised of visiting fellows and graduate students in visual anthropology, film studies, and visual and environmental studies, SEL supports, according to its website, “innovative combinations of aesthetics and ethnography, with original nonfiction media practices that explore the bodily praxis and affective fabric of human existence” that are not easily communicated in words.²¹⁰

This aim toward affective engagement with textures, moods, atmospheres, and lived experiences connects sensory cinema to historical reenactment, Castaing-Taylor’s criticisms of duplicitous reenactment notwithstanding.²¹¹ Viewers of a sensory cinema film understand the images on screen to be material traces of the past that was once present and before the lens. However, I see an important distinction between embodied reenactment and the film viewing experience (during editing and screening) in terms of the moment of co-presence, or bodily encounter. We may be able to conceive of a film as a “film body” with its own kind of agency and intention, following Sobchack and

²⁰⁹ Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, *The Cinema of Robert Gardner* (New York: Oxford, 2007), 9.

²¹⁰ “Sensory Ethnography Lab.” President and Fellows of Harvard College, <http://sel.fas.harvard.edu/> (accessed Sept. 1, 2012).

²¹¹ See Taylor, “Introduction,” *Transcultural Cinema*, 6-8.

Cartwright, but it is not a human body.²¹² The co-presence of human bodies, at the moment of shooting an observational film or participating in a reenactment, produces a sensation of shared accountability that is different from watching a film, reading archival documents, or editing observational footage. It is the liveness, movement, and knowledge of the ephemerality of co-presence at the center of camerawork and reenacting experience, coupled with the imagined witnessing of collectives present, future, and past, that creates the “vital energies,” to use Durkheim’s term, that enable the sensation of transcending the everyday. Yet this is not to say that reenactment demands bodily movement per se. Editing is a kind of reenacting activity and a live act, even though the goal of the activity is to create a simulation loop meant to evoke and resemble the real through an inorganic object, a film. Observational shooting, on the other hand, is not a reenactment at the level of content, as “the seen” in front of the lens happens in just such a way only one time, but it is a reenactment in terms of its form. Camerawork is a way of listening with the eyes. But as a regular activity that follows conventions, observational shooting also employs a way of seeing that represents the accumulated judgments, innovations, and habits of a collective filmmaking tradition tied together by an ethic of practice that is more visibly active than listening.

Nonetheless, I feel obliged to express my reservations with a particular kind of reenactment that this kind of cinema practice affords. In *The Corporeal Image* (2006), MacDougall issued his most emphatic and eloquent case for an academic discipline of images rather than words, and brought a broad range of theories about the body and the

²¹² See Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*; Cartwright, *Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child*.

body in film to bear on his long-standing project. More than in any of his previous writing, he emphasized the affirmative rather than “soul stealing” side of the image. But an essay about the “stylistic originality” of unknown colonial photographer Jean Audema overstepped the ethical limit of this iconophilia. Given the scanty written documentation he can find about Audema, MacDougall grounded his admiration of this hired French colonial photographer in gesture, pose, framing, and the uncanny evocation of the subjects’ presence in Audema’s photographs, taken at the height of European empire building in Africa. Perhaps the central piece of evidence in this article was MacDougall’s ability to spot Audema’s postcards amongst the thousands sold at the “Paris flea market, from street stands, and from postcard dealers” because they exuded an unusual quality of good will and humanity.²¹³ Key to these positive photographic outcomes, MacDougall argued, were the right practices of making the images themselves, the “intertextual,” co-constructed, negotiated representations of encounter, evidence registering through the ages in postcard photos of Africans posed as “types” but who nonetheless “seemed to possess a remarkable élan and self-confidence.”²¹⁴ There was something quite dangerous in the argument he was making here, one that assumed considerably too much about the affirmative potential of image making, and the correlation between image and reality. MacDougall must have been aware of this, but hazarded this provocation anyway. Perhaps some of these colonial postcard

²¹³ MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*, 178.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

photographers “had a genuine interest in the different cultural groups and individuals they encountered.”²¹⁵ So what?

American performance artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez Peña’s project *Couple in the Cage* (1994) reenacted a colonial history from the imagined perspective, rather, of the photographed others. Throughout the 500th anniversary year of Columbus’s “discovery” of the Americas in 1992, Fusco and Gomez Peña portrayed two fictional “undiscovered aborigines,” Amerindians ostensibly hailing from an island off the coast of Mexico called Guatinaui, whom were caged and displayed at a variety of art and natural history museum venues. Though the content of the narrative they portrayed was empirically fake—a duplicitous reenactment for many spectators who mistook their performance for actual display—their engagement with the dozens of first world, museum-going publics they encountered reenacted a familiar form of voyeuristic exchange. “The central position of the white spectator, the objective of these events as a confirmation of their position as global consumers of exotic cultures, and the stress on authenticity as an aesthetic value, all remain fundamental to the spectacle of Otherness many continue to enjoy,” Fusco reflected in her essay “The Other History of Intercultural Performance” (2006).²¹⁶ This reenactment of the humans-on-display trope associated with World’s Fairs and traveling curiosity shows for hundreds of years compelled spectators’ engagement with the live and living spectacle of injustice. The performance was both a simulation in Baudrillard’s terms (an image that precedes the spectator’s encounter with the real) *and* a performative documentary encounter in which consumers

²¹⁵ Ibid., 178.

²¹⁶ Coco Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” *Spaces of Visual Culture* (2006), 47.

of the exotic display unwittingly revealed “the real” of themselves (the unconsidered, the contingent, and the uncontrolled of “the colonial unconscious of American society,” in Fusco’s terms) for documentary cameras that functioned as part of the performance project.²¹⁷ The simulation of a colonial encounter produced a live, unscripted event with stakes worthy of documentary attention. While not a work of sensory cinema in the realist documentary vein described above, Fusco and Gomez Peña’s multimedia work that included a documentary video prefigured emerging symbioses between reenactment performance and quasi-ethnographic documentary video production. Documentary film theorist Jonathan Kahana commented on this trend in his introduction to a series of essays on reenactment in documentary media published in *Framework* in 2009. He noted that across mainstream film and television, museum venues, and avant-garde cinema “one was seeing the return of techniques of historical restaging that had once been quite common in documentary and social realist film,” but it was not for the same reasons that such techniques had been utilized before.²¹⁸

Embodied Reenactment as a Research Tool

Embodied reenactments are live, theatrical performances of historical events, considered as both an object of scholarship in the fields of cultural anthropology and history and memory, and an ethnographic research methodology within the fields of performance studies and cultural history.²¹⁹ Anthropological studies of ritual theorize the

²¹⁷ Ibid., 47.

²¹⁸ Kahana, “Introduction: What Now? Presenting Reenactment,” 46-60.

²¹⁹ In the field of cultural anthropology on ritual reenactment see, for instance, Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*; Turner, *The Ritual Process*:

formal qualities of reenactment across cultures from the perspective of an outsider observer. Questions focus on the processes and ends of reenactment in relation to social authority and culturally specific notions of individual development within a particular context. A key question across performance studies and history on reenactment as a

Structure and Anti-Structure; Victor W. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*; Rory Turner, "Bloodless Battles: The Civil War Reenacted," *TDR* 34, no. 4 (1990): 123-136; Handler and Saxton, "Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in 'Living History'"; Barbara G. Myerhoff and Marc Kaminsky, *Remembered Lives: The Work of Ritual, Storytelling, and Growing Older* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); Michael T. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Mark Auslander, "'Give Me Back My Children!': Traumatic Reenactment and Tenuous Democratic Public Spheres," *The Religion and Culture Web Forum* (2012), <http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/webforum/>. Books in the field of history and memory of the United States that consider reenactments include Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History*; George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and their Battlefields* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Michael G. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991); Cullen, *The Civil War in Popular Culture: A Reusable Past*; Alfred Fabian Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1999); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); Thompson, *War Games: Inside the World of 20th-Century War Reenactors*. Performance studies considerations of reenactment as an ethnographic methodology include Richard Schechner and Willa Appel, *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Fusco, *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*; Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*; Scott Magelssen and Rhona Justice-Malloy, *Enacting History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011). Notable uses of reenactment as a methodology in the field of cultural history include Vanessa Agnew, "Introduction: What is Reenactment?" *Criticism* 46, no. 3 (2004): 327-339; Vanessa Agnew and Jonathan Lamb, *Special Issue: Extreme and Sentimental History* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 2005); Alexander Cook, "The use and Abuse of Historical Reenactment: Thoughts on Recent Trends in Public History," *Criticism* 46, no. 3 (2004): 487-496; Jonathan Lamb, Vanessa Agnew and Daniel Spoth, *Settler and Creole Reenactment* (Basingstoke, England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Iain McCalman and Paul A. Pickering, *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

methodology, rather, centers on the gap between experience reenacting in the present and the experience of living elsewhere or in the past—a concern that dates paradigmatically to the debate between Plato and Aristotle on the subject of mimesis. In their edited volume *Historical Reenactment* (2010), Iain McCalman and Paul Pickering reframe this longstanding question in terms of embodiment and realist aesthetics: “Is reenactment the key to knowing what it was like to live in the past? Would the re-enactor’s holy grail of realism or authenticity narrow the gap between past and present so that we might touch it?”²²⁰ A key question in performance studies on reenactment has centered on the relationship between documents, photographs, and films that inform reenactments and the liveness of reenactment performance as it registers on and through co-present bodies.²²¹

While an early champion of statistical methodologies and positivist sociology, Durkheim’s last major work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), set forth a research agenda that influenced the field of history and memory that developed from Halbwachs work on “collective memory,” the qualitative study of ritual processes in the work of Victor Turner, and Baudrillard’s theory of exchange value in *Consumer Society* (1970)—all relevant to ongoing debates about the meaning of reenactment as a social form. Durkheim posited that the experience of religious aura in “primitive” societies was a fetishization of social authority, accumulated in symbolic totems over historical time

²²⁰ McCalman and Pickering, *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn*, 8.

²²¹ These themes are treated at length in works such as Victor W. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982); Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*; Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*; Jones and Heathfield, *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*; Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*.

through the group's regularly repeated religious rituals. He framed this analysis, which combined ethnographic observation with a theory of social evolution drawn from the natural sciences, as a form of historical writing. Historical analysis "alone enables us to resolve an institution into its constituent elements," Durkheim explained, "for it shows them to us as they are born in time, one after another."²²² While "sensuous experience" served as the interface between the world and the individual mind, Durkheim acknowledged, it was reason that enabled humans to categorize these experiences and make them meaningful. He believed that reasoning capacities became more complex as societies developed, and he argued that deciphering the mechanics of reason in industrial nation-states like those in early 20th century Europe and North America was more difficult than in simpler societies. Thus, to understand the foundations of knowledge—which he located in primitive religious rites—a researcher had to observe rites and rituals central to the construction of meaning in simple, pre-industrial societies wherein inhabitants lived homogenous lives and expressed beliefs consistently. "The slighter development of individuality, the small extension of the group, the homogeneity of external circumstances, all contribute to reducing the differences and variations to a minimum" in primitive societies, Durkheim asserted.²²³ "This conformity of conduct only translates the conformity of thought."²²⁴

In his conclusion, Durkheim distinguished between beliefs and rites in the formation of religion, and between the sacred and the profane in the constitution of the

²²² Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 3.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

social body. While beliefs and rites are recursively related, Durkheim separated activity amidst a collective (what he called a “Church”) from beliefs that derived from and then informed ritual activity. It was in the collectively witnessed and enacted rites, Durkheim pointed out, that the “experimental proof of [the practitioner’s] beliefs” emerged. During rituals, the co-presence of believers in a particular cult created a collective form of energy that was inaccessible to the individual member going about his or her everyday life. Durkheim argued that this energy was the “collective effervescence” of society—the morals, norms, and ideals that hailed individuals as parts of a group—concentrated into ephemeral rites and set apart from everyday activity. What Durkheim described as the “vital energies” that circulated in these events might also be considered as a particularly poignant form of indexicality: the contiguity of bodies that index the ancestry and sustained existence of a particular group. Co-presence of group members, while not a determinant of the heightened sensations of the sacred, brought into contiguity the bodies of individuals and the idea of the collective. In Durkheim’s analysis, this charged, ephemeral environment “changes the conditions of psychic activity”: “The believer who has communicated with his [sic.] god is not merely a man who sees new truths of which the unbeliever is ignorant; he is a man who is stronger. He feels within him more force, either to endure the trials of existence, or to conquer them.”²²⁵ Because the end of religion, for Durkheim, was the implementation and enforcement of social discipline rather than the search for truths, reason was not the mode through which religions developed or sustained themselves. The sacred was by definition a domain that eluded absolute comprehension, serving instead as a focal point for collective attention. Sacred

²²⁵ Ibid., 416.

rites, rituals, and objects existed in contiguity with social values because they were held apart from the domain of the profane, the known, everyday lived reality of group members. “To consecrate something, it is put in contact with a source of religious energy,” Durkheim observed.²²⁶

Durkheim’s student Maurice Halbwachs extended the exploration of social cohesion in *Elementary Forms* into what he called “collective memory,” the idea that the kinds of experiences a group of people share become focal points of exchange, meaning, and identity amongst a given group. Halbwachs explained that collective memories mediated between individual experience and the norms of the group, and significantly shaped perceptions of group belonging through categories like class, gender, or nation. A question that Durkheim’s concept of “collective effervescence” left unaddressed was the process through which a group identity might be passed on in periods of relative social stability. While moments of threat or struggle provided a justification for the formation of strong bonds amongst group members, it was not clear to Halbwachs that totemic figures alone could carry this sentiment forward in times of peace. Halbwachs argued, rather, that regular rituals of commemoration, like the recitation of epic poems, seasonal harvest festivals, rites of passage, and annual national celebrations of battle victories enabled memories to circulate in the social realm across generations, even as the meaning attributed to such collective memories changed over time.²²⁷ I would categorize all of these practices as reenactments, live events that evoke shared practices, memories, and historical events.

²²⁶ Ibid., 419.

²²⁷ Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Historical reenactment is a collective ritual activity like the religious rites that Durkheim described, but situated as the product of archival, secular historical research in industrial societies, reenactment events often downplay explicit religious affiliation. It is not contiguity with the divine that reenactors tend to ascribe to their experiences of doubleness with the past (though some do), but fun, catharsis, education, group solidarity, or pleasure.²²⁸ Durkheim argued that the participants in rituals that he observed, rather, mistook the historical-social authority accumulated in totems as being derived from God. In a challenge to empirical epistemologies premised on perception and observation as the sources of evidence, Durkheim suggested that social forces shaped the everyday practices, beliefs, and ideas of individuals in ways that they themselves could not detect through sensory perception. History was by necessity a field that demanded the tacking between close observation of detail and distanced theoretical abstraction; to stand close enough to social norms to feel the collective weight of their power was to lose the capacity to rationally contemplate their origins.

Victor Turner, an anthropologist of ritual and key performance theorist in the late 1970s and early 1980s, came to understand the “spontaneous communitas” associated with sacred rituals and selected moments of everyday life to be central to the process of reflection through which members of a society could open cultural norms for critical scrutiny. Unlike Durkheim, who saw religious rites as antithetical to reason, Turner viewed ritual dramas more broadly as integral to the development of reflexive thinking in all forms of social life. Accepting Durkheim’s evolutionary logic for studying pre-

²²⁸ Interviews with Revolutionary War reenactors in the PBS film *Patriots’ Day* (2004), for instance, include statements to suggest all of these motivations for participating.

industrial societies, Turner studied what he called “social dramas” amongst the Ndembu people of Zambia in the 1960s and 1970s in an effort to discover the elemental components of reflection that might contribute to understanding artistic representation in complex, industrial societies. Turner examined the processes for resolving conflicts that arose organically in everyday life amongst the Ndembu to develop a theory about the ritual foundations of social structures across cultures. He argued that these everyday “social dramas” uniquely enabled members of a society to reflect on their shared norms, and consider their relevance in the present as they decided how to resolve the dispute; modern societies, which were “more dexterous in the use and manipulation of symbols,” developed professional arts venues like the theater for the consideration of social dramas, separated from the spheres of religion and law.²²⁹

Two points of Turner’s thesis served as important interventions in the understanding of both theater and anthropology at that time. First, the idea that theater developed from everyday life interactions rather than ancient Greek rituals like the Bacchae was a previously unconsidered angle—and one that coincided with a concern of Schechner, who had noted in the early 1970s that the archival evidence for the rites and rituals thesis was skimpy. Schechner, as well, had turned to anthropological studies of ritual as a way to broaden his understanding of performance principles across cultures. Second, Turner disavowed the exclusive reliance on empirical methodologies in anthropological study, instead turning to qualitative methods and formal analysis to explicate the ritual process. It was a short step to go, then, from seeing process qualitatively and arguing for universals of conflict resolution experience across cultures

²²⁹ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, 11.

to advocating for reenactment performance as a uniquely illuminating ethnographic and pedagogical method. “Perhaps we should not merely read and comment on ethnographies, but actually perform them,” Turner wrote near the end of *From Ritual to Theater* (1982), his final book publication.²³⁰ After reenacting an Ndembu naming ritual with a graduate class of theater and anthropology students at NYU, Turner reflected on what he saw as a “pedagogical breakthrough.” Substituting “situational indices of cultural symbols” for sacred objects (a broomstick for a sacred tree, for instance), and ethnographic description for a playscript, could “bring data home to us in their fullness” instead of forcing “alienated students [to] spend many tedious hours in library carrels struggling with accounts of alien lives and even more alien anthropological theories about the ordering of those lives.”²³¹ While questions about the process of translating ethnographic report to performance script and the ethics of appropriating the sacred rituals of “primitives” remained unresolved, Turner was convinced that reenactment performance practice could expose the shortcomings of certain kinds of written ethnographies and provoke unusually spirited, engaged conversations amongst student participants.

Perhaps not coincidentally, historical scholars of the late 1970s also began to practice reenactment as part of their research. Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb, Stephen Potts, and McCalman and Pickering all credit 20th century historian, archeologist, and philosopher R. G. Collingwood’s concept of mental reenactment as the foundation of their historical research. In *The Idea of History* (1956), Collingwood asked “How, or on

²³⁰ Ibid., 89.

²³¹ Ibid., 89, 91, 96.

what conditions, can the historian know the past?”²³² Historians study artifacts left by people with whom they cannot communicate directly to understand the causes of events and ideas. The historian’s knowledge is therefore indirect and inferential rather than empirical, Collingwood explained, and so “the historian must reenact the past in his own mind” [sic] using the relics and documents of former times as tools for discovering what people of the past must have thought about their worlds.²³³ Mental reenactment channeled through the constraints of primary source documents provided a way to humanize historical subjects and imbue them with sensible motivations and alternatives. He argued that this was a methodological necessity given the absence and impossibility of the historian’s direct experience with the events in question.

Collingwood was writing this theory of history at an historical moment prior to the social and cultural turns within the discipline of history, however, and so constrained his conception of reenactment to the historian’s thinking through the processes of decision making undertaken by powerful men of the past. The historian “must see for himself, just as if the emperor’s situation were his own, how such a situation might be dealt with. . . . Thus he is re-enacting in his own mind the experience of the emperor; and only in so far as he does this has he any historical knowledge.”²³⁴ Efforts to reclaim the histories of oppressed peoples, for which archives provided far fewer sources, led subsequent generations of historians to investigate other kinds of evidence, including statistical data about slaves and laborers, women’s letters, court records, and cultural

²³² R. G. Collingwood and T. M. Knox, *The Idea of History*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 282.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 282.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 283.

artifacts like songs, physical implements, and representations of marginalized social groups that circulated in popular culture.²³⁵ Starting in the late 1970s, a small number of historians engaged in physical reenactments of past activities as a way to discover facets of the embodied experiences of common people of the past. Because reenactment was associated with the popular practice of war commemoration—particularly after the well-publicized, troublingly nostalgia-tinged reenactments of the Civil War during the centennial of the early 1960s—professional historians in the United States tended to disavow reenactment as a valid methodology for understanding the forces that produced historical change. Respected American historian Allan Nevins, for example, while serving as Chairman of the U.S. Civil War Centennial Commission in 1962, declared that

²³⁵ Paradigmatic United States historical studies associated with the social and cultural history movements of this period, which foreground gender, race, and class as determining nodes of lived experience, include: Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Rebels Against Slavery* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967); Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Deborah G. White, *Arn't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1986); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976); John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); George Lipsitz, *Class and Culture in Cold War America: A Rainbow at Midnight* (New York: Praeger, 1981); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

“if the National commission tries to reenact a battle, my dead body will be the first found on the field.”²³⁶

Anderson’s *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (1984) was the first book length academic publication in the United States that argued for the positive value of reenactment as a methodology within the discipline of history. A survey of what Anderson categorized as the simulation practices of experimental archeology, living history, and reenacting, *Time Machines* embraced ruminating on trees, to paraphrase the author, as a way to make sense of the forest. He framed living history as both a cathartic practice and a tool for learning about the past. Anderson himself had participated in Civil War reenactments as a Confederate soldier, and spent decades reenacting as part of his research on American folklore and cultural history.²³⁷ Reenactment, for Anderson, “could be interpreted as a ‘time machine,’ a vehicle that enables people to re-enter another period of time, vicariously, and to simulate life there, if only for a short period.”²³⁸ Anderson argued that the simulation of past life could lead participants to understand something about the differences between themselves and people who had lived in former eras, though he acknowledged that such learning tended to be idiosyncratic and affectively powerful regardless of the mimetic proximity between archival documentation and reenacted event. What was more significant for Anderson was the persistently expressed need amongst reenactors to “escape from the tyranny of

²³⁶ U.S. Civil War Centennial Commission, *The Civil War Centennial: A Report to the Congress* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 14.

²³⁷ Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History*, 13.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

abstract time.”²³⁹ Reenactment was a practice charged with the potential to disrupt the alienation associated with workaday life organized by clock time: “The real ‘big brother’ of 1984 is the clock, and it continually reminds one that time is money, and success is measured by the speed with which a job is done.”²⁴⁰ Living historians sought out a sense of much needed rootedness in their practice, even if they knew that they would have to return to day jobs after the end of a weekend of roleplaying. “To them,” Anderson explained, “a medieval revel or a Civil War encampment has the potential for becoming an oasis of eternity in the desert of modern abstract time.”²⁴¹ He even went so far as to describe reenactment in the language of drag, or gender crossing. “Since people cannot control where or when they were born, time travel gives them the opportunity to practice a kind of reverse re-incarnation,” he suggested.²⁴² Still, Anderson emphasized the importance of sourcing, documentation, and archival research to responsible tripping. Following one’s “curiosity about the *texture* of life in the past” required the historian’s discipline as well as imagination. Indeed, Anderson interpreted Marshall McLuhan’s famous dictum about the power of technology in an emerging age of mass communication—“the medium is the message”—to suggest the importance of correcting “historically inaccurate distortions” in popular living history museums of the 1970s by attending to archival documents to guide the production of textures, smells, and sights.²⁴³ To critics like Baudrillard, who interpreted McLuhan’s totalizing theory of the media as a

²³⁹ Ibid., 183.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 183.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 185.

²⁴² Ibid., 186.

²⁴³ Ibid., 59.

precursor to his own, attributing sentiments of realism to the medium of reenactment was itself the medium, a manifestation of the self-replicating code of reality effects.

Prior to the publication of Baudrillard's *Simulation and Simulacra* in English, cultural anthropologists Richard Handler and William Saxton critiqued Anderson's optimism for reenactment in "Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in Living History" (1988), a study of American living historians reenacting in the mid-1980s. They framed reenactment as a postmodern form of what C. B. Macpherson had called the "possessive individualism" at the heart of modern capitalism and selfhood. In this way of thinking, the authors explained, "individuals realize themselves through the acquisition of property, and the desire to conquer nature and amass property is seen as part of 'human nature.'"²⁴⁴ Like capitalists of the industrial age who defined their conceptions of self through the accumulation of property, the authors continued, reenactors engaged in a never ending quest for authentic "self-realization" through roleplaying a life imagined to be simpler and less alienating than their own in the present of the late 1980s. The authors speculated that reenactors derived satisfaction from the experience of the wholeness of historical narratives, which they found lacking in their own lives. But in misrecognizing the past lives that they re-enacted as emplotted rather than existentially uncertain, Handler and Saxton argued, reenactors suggested more about the paradigm of postmodernism than any previous historical era. "Living historians have a remarkable capacity to overlook the present-day cultural routines that underpin the production of particular simulations," they commented, concluding that the subjectivity

²⁴⁴ Handler and Saxton, "Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in 'Living History'," 247.

and individualism at the center of a reenactor's experience was irreconcilable with claims to knowing something about the past lives of others.²⁴⁵ The authors' refusal of present-day experience as a source of knowledge about the past here dovetails with the anti-phenomenological commitment that Baudrillard practiced.

Ethnographies of historical reenactment conducted in the early 2000s like Jenny Thompson's sympathetic portrayal of World War II reenactors, and the publications of researchers who participated on *The Ship*, a BBC television program that documented the reenactment of John Cook's voyage from eastern Australia to Jakarta, Indonesia that aired in 2001, engage with embodied historical reenactment as insider practitioners rather than outsider critics. Several academics who participated on *The Ship*, including Vanessa Agnew, Iain MacCalman, Brian Cook, and Jonathan Lamb, subsequently advocated for this kind of research practice as a form of "extreme history." Iain McCalman and Paul Pickering's edited essay collection *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn* (2010) returns to Collingwood's idea of history time and again, but emphasizes the importance of considering "reenactment as an embodied activity."²⁴⁶ Because the physical bodies and processes of perception of contemporary humans more or less resembles those of people living in other times and places, this line of reasoning contends, embodied reenactment under certain technological constraints can provoke unique insights about the past. Citing the contributions from numerous writers in their collection—and echoing ideas espoused by sensory ethnographers—McCalman and Pickering asserted that "reenactments have a powerful and immediate impact on a

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 244.

²⁴⁶ McCalman and Pickering, *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn*, 13.

visceral register and can reveal the past in ways that words cannot.”²⁴⁷ While they acknowledge that such sensations may be “reality effects” rather than indices of lived experience, they argue that embodied reenactment can force historians to reexamine the conclusions that they draw from archival documents. Practitioners of sensory cinema push this logic one step further, arguing that the unusual indexicality of cinematic technologies affords the communication of prediscursive, affective apprehension of the real itself as a form of knowledge—de Certeau’s vision for the organization of tactical practice as praxis realized through the theater.

Conclusion

The acceleration of the consumption of experiences via tourism, films, and television designed for the modern individual to “have” a safe encounter with difference suggested, for simulation theorists like Debord and Baudrillard, the emergence of a new basis for the relation between the individual and the group in post-industrial societies. The obsession with having real experiences and of experiencing the realities other than one’s own lived relation to industrial labor, land, and kin reflected, for Baudrillard, the internalization of a code nascent in capitalist production and operational in a media saturated, consumer society. Rather than make a product for consumption, modern citizens made themselves as products, or as productive agents, through consumption rather than labor. Or, as Baudrillard came to see it, consumption, the “*systematic act of the manipulation of signs*,” was the social labor that demarcated one individual or group from another amidst the otherwise homogenous form of exchange at the center of the

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

object/advertising system—a form that negated difference.²⁴⁸ In Baudrillard’s way of thinking, reenactment was like the use of a particular brand of toothpaste or the activity of reading a book. Reenacting produced “reality effects” that responded to the individual’s need for social differentiation, but safely removed from the uncertainty, survival struggles, and clear hierarchies of the archaic social relations that haunted their claims to the real, it functioned in fact as a commodity like any other.

In embodied reenactments like those analyzed in subsequent chapters, it is true that co-present bodies interacting in performance produced the model, to use Baudrillard’s term. This does not mean, however, that the bodies of reenactors *were* bits of code. Disavowing phenomenological experience leads simulation theory into its own theoretical feedback loop, and away from the possibility of an ethical center; conflating the lived body with technologies of simulation reifies the violence of machines over human-scale value (in terms of morality, ethics, and responsibility). Considering documentary production as a kind of embodied orientation like reenactment—a “mode of consciousness,” to use Sobchack’s term,²⁴⁹ or a performance practice, as I suggest in the next chapter on sensory cinema production—rather than a genre of film or a guild of media-makers suggests new trajectories for documentary theory. These avenues avoid the challenge of the digital to older ideas of the indexical trace as filmic imprint, while keeping at a distance Baudrillard’s nihilistic conclusions about simulation society. Embodied reenactment performance, in this light, serves as a promising method of research for exploring the tensions and possibilities that arise when bodies “play” code

²⁴⁸ Baudrillard and Poster, *Selected Writings*, 22.

²⁴⁹ Sobchack, *Toward a Phenomenology of Nonfictional Film Experience*, 241.

derived from historical documents. As feminist historian of cybernetics, literary theorist, and critic of posthumanism Katherine Hayles posited, “If we want to contest what these technologies [of simulation] signify, we need histories that show the erasures that went into creating the condition of virtuality, as well as visions arguing for the importance of embodiment.”²⁵⁰ The subsequent chapters of this dissertation perform close analyses of sensory ethnographic films and historically situated historical reenactment events using theories of gender, race, and class as an attempt to pursue such an argument.

A portion of Chapter 2 is under review at *Visual Anthropology Review* and may appear in 2014.

²⁵⁰ Hayles, *How we Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, 20.

Chapter 3: Performing and Observing Time in Sensory Cinema:

Lunch Break (2009), *Sweetgrass* (2009), and *Bombay Beach* (2011)

What is the place of observation in ethnographic documentary films of the digital era, and how does this place relate to the direct cinema and cinema verité approaches to observation developed in the 1960s and 1970s? This chapter builds on concepts developed in Chapter 1 and 2 to consider the relationship between shot duration and reenactment performance across three sensory cinema projects about American masculinity, all of which came out in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis in the United States: *Lunch Break* (2009) by Sharon Lockhart, *Sweetgrass* by Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor (2009), and *Bombay Beach* by Alma Har'el (2011). Although each of the filmmakers comes from a different disciplinary background (Lockhart from fine art photography and structural filmmaking, Castaing-Taylor and Barbash from visual anthropology and sensory ethnography, and Har'el from the music video industry), they have in common their use of observational recording techniques, and they all describe their interpersonal approaches to ethnography in ways that strongly resonate with the ideas of ethnographic filmmakers Jean Rouch and David MacDougall.

Decisions about shot duration are central to the treatment of sensory experience in all of these films. To make *Lunch Break*, Lockhart conducted a yearlong ethnography of workers at the Bath Iron Works (BIW) factory in Bath, Maine, a subsidiary of military contractor General Dynamics that is responsible for manufacturing guided missile destroyers for the United States Navy. *Lunch Break* is both the name of the film at the center of this project and the title of the larger multimedia installation that also includes

photographic “still lives” of workers’ lunch boxes, photographs of workers at the BIW plant, and a second film, *Exit*. The film *Lunch Break*, recorded during an actual lunch break at the plant, is composed of a single dolly shot through a long interior corridor where workers at BIW sit and eat. The original eleven-minute take was transferred to an HD digital format and decelerated in a non-linear editing program by a factor of eight so that the duration of the single shot in the finished film is about 80 minutes. The second film, *Exit*, is a five-shot, forty-minute film that documents the backs of workers as they leave BIW at the end of each workday over the course of the week, with eight minutes of film from each day—a long duration filmic reenactment of Lumiere’s *Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory* (1895). Barbash and Castaing-Taylor’s *Sweetgrass*,²⁵¹ dubbed “an unsentimental elegy to the American West” in the filmmakers’ tagline for the film, follows the 150-mile journey of ranchers and hired cowboys who led a herd of three thousand sheep to public grazing lands in the mountains of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness in Montana during the early 2000s, the last sheep runs of their kind in the United States. Throughout the film, scenes where very little happens linger on screen in single shots of extended duration, sometimes for minutes at a time. In addition to

²⁵¹ Barbash and Castaing-Taylor produced *Sweetgrass* together, but they have stated in interviews that Castaing-Taylor did the shooting for the film in the mountains while Barbash acted as the film’s primary producer, and shot scenes at the Allstead family ranch in Big Timber. The couple decided to focus the film only on the material that Castaing-Taylor recorded in the Absaroka-Beartooth mountains, but left open the possibility of working on the material that Barbash recorded for different films in the future. The filmmakers shared the tasks of editing, and discussed shooting strategies at length. In my writing about the film in this chapter, I try to communicate who did what accurately where possible. When I mention Castaing-Taylor individually, I am writing about decisions made at the moment of recording a particular shot. Decisions that inform the appearance of a finished sequence in the edited film, including individual shot duration, were collaborative.

producing a feature-length documentary, Barbash and Castaing-Taylor drew from their two hundred hours of ethnographic footage to create a series of minimalist art installation videos, similar in form to the long duration structural films of 1970s era filmmakers like James Benning.

Whereas Lockhart and Barbash and Castaing-Taylor feature shots of long duration in their films, Har'el uses shots of very short duration in *Bombay Beach*. Its title derives from the California Imperial Valley desert community from which the film's three protagonists hail. An ill-fated resort community founded in 1929, Bombay Beach is on the coast of the landlocked Salton Sea. The landscape of the film features this anomalous saline desert lake, a byproduct of hapless irrigation planning during the early 20th century, which regularly deposits bloated fish carcasses on the shore near the small enclaves of trailers inhabited by an eclectic variety of survivalists. Unlike *Lunch Break* and *Sweetgrass*, Har'el's film is cut like a music video—which by moments it literally becomes. Observational scenes morph organically into choreographed montage sequences featuring the film's protagonists dancing through their home environments to a score by the alternative rock band Beirut.

In this chapter, I focus on the relationship between the aesthetics of duration, the labor process involved in creating each of these three projects, and the theme of white, American masculinity in decline. I draw from performance theory to assess sensory cinema as a kind of performance practice. In different ways, each film discussed in this chapter is concerned with the relation between the imaginaries of the American Dream and the traces of the bodies of men who have long represented the central subject of its enduring mythology. Released after the economic collapse of 2008, all of these films can

be read in light of that watershed year, even if they were not produced with cognizance of its imminence. The recession of 2008 deeply troubled the already fraught idea that by practicing “possessive individualism,” anyone who worked hard and made smart use of their opportunities in the United States could achieve financial wealth, home ownership, and status in their communities. Intellectuals across the political spectrum have connected the decline of this version of the American Dream (and the struggles of young American men to integrate into the post-industrial economy) with a need for reconsidering the value of the tacitly white, middle class, masculine ideals associated with it. I draw from gender scholars Jacqueline Moore, Michael Kimmel, and Lyn Hymowitz, who write about masculinity in relation to historically specific conditions of labor, to flesh out the gendered meanings of shot duration as expressed by these films in the post-2008 context.

I suggest by the end of the chapter that although observational cinema theory pits reenactment as its antithesis, observationally grounded cinema, in these examples and in many others, in fact embraces the logic of historical reenactment. Observational films produce a simulation of the historical real for viewing audiences who encounter the indexical traces of filmic subjects for the first time. The logic of historical reenactment is performed in the viewing experience that such films tend to afford, not in a scripted dramatization of the past that unfolds on screen. But building on this point in my analysis of *Bombay Beach*, I suggest that staged, reenactment performance can work in concert with observational recording toward building intimacy, trust, and mutual understanding between subjects and filmmakers. Reenactment performance is not just an expedient for meeting the timelines of commercial production or a gimmick for

dramatizing the lurid unseen; it can also serve as the grounds upon which observational recording techniques can begin to attend to the details of everyday activity.

The matter of masculinity is in the foreground in all of these films. Each of these sensory cinema projects offers a different set of phenomenological tools for assessing the contradictory legacies of masculine embodiment in the United States, and the futures that these legacies portend. Drawing predominantly from Sobchack's and Marks' film theory, I examine the ways of seeing expressed by the films themselves—often through observational recording and shot duration—in relation to masculine ideals. These films thus provide an opportunity for considering the formal techniques of a filmic analytic of American masculine performance and temporality, rather than simply engaging masculinity as a matter of content.

All three films can be understood in the context of MacDougall's writing on the relationship between being and seeing in the production of observationally grounded cinema. Within the ethnographic tradition, observational cinema codes a certain methodological trajectory, a loose set of Bazinian aesthetic principles, and a philosophy of action in everyday life that dates in the United States to the inception of Colin Young's short-lived ethnographic film program at UCLA in the late 1960s, where MacDougall was a student. MacDougall continues to make the case, albeit distanced from the scientific overtones of 1960s writing on observational film, that cinematic forms of ethnographic communication work differently—and better in expressing embodiment and lived experience—than their counterparts in writing. In *The Corporeal Image* (2006), for instance, MacDougall defended the value of “intimations of the kinds of knowledge that come from a close personal acquaintance with a particular society,” which he qualifies as

persons met, journeys taken, striking sounds, etc.—memories from fieldwork—that are often dismissed as unscientific or supplemental to anthropological writing. “I think we should now turn that view on its head and assert that what were taken as the weakest contributions of visual anthropology—its ability to conjure up bodies and places and personalities—were actually its strengths,” MacDougall concluded.²⁵² He makes the claim that the cinema is a richer medium than the written word for communicating the sense of embodiment, a sentiment that has significant ramifications in visual anthropology, and also, tacitly, within critical traditions that center on the affective, embodied experience of everyday life. To follow MacDougall’s logic in the domain of the theory of embodiment would suggest a move away from writing and toward cinematic practice as a mode of scholarship.

Grimshaw and Ravetz echo MacDougall in their 2009 reassessment of observational cinema when they suggest that the emphasis on linear, unspectacular narrative progression, extended shot duration, and the following ethic of observational film could produce the mundane everyday “not as an object of scrutiny but as a space to be opened up between seer and seen,” or an intersubjective space.²⁵³ But intersubjectivity in film has not been solely the domain of ethnographic theory. To a certain extent, ironically, MacDougall’s ideas also overlap with the analytical terrain set out by feminist theorists Sobchack and Marks between the early 1990s and mid 2000s, whose writing in the phenomenological tradition about film spectatorship aimed to trouble the white male as normative subject, and reconsider the heterogeneity of cinematic experience. In *The*

²⁵² MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*, 273.

²⁵³ Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*, 155.

Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience (1992), Sobchack argued that the “existential, embodied nature of vision” undercut the totalizing claims of apparatus and psychoanalytic theory that mistook the inherent “doubleness” of cinematic vision (the view of the filmmaker in the film simultaneous with the view of the spectator) for the illusory nature of the medium itself. “For the filmmaker, the world (whether ‘real,’ drawn, or constructed in any other fashion) is experienced *through* the camera,” she wrote, anticipating MacDougall’s *The Corporeal Image* (2006). “It is seen and *felt* at the *end of the lens*.” Picking up on a thread of analysis from feminist phenomenologist Iris Marion Young on feminine bodily comportment, Sobchack posited that bodies of spectators marked socially as “disfigured,” “female,” “colored,” “diseased,” “fat,” “old,” and “deprived” produced subjective orientations toward space, movement, and posture that resonated with certain styles of cinematic expression and not others. “The scope and style of [a film’s] motility,” she suggested, may express a “marked” phenomenological experience, and so “provide us actual and possible modes of becoming other than we are.”²⁵⁴ In this way, Sobchack suggested, we are moved by cinematic form only inasmuch as we can relate our lived experiences to a film’s expressed way of seeing.

I have previously noted that performance theorist Amelia Jones, in *Performing the Subject*, saw radical political potential in the practice of body art, as against the position of formalist feminist art critics of the 1970s who dismissed body art as another iteration of essentialist narcissism. Body art, for Jones, creates an intersubjective space between artist and viewer to consider the lived experiences of oppression under the dominant

²⁵⁴ Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, 23, 175, 160-2.

regime of “the straight, white, upper-middle-class, male subject coincident with the category ‘artist’ in Western culture.”²⁵⁵ For Jones, performing the marginalized self through bodily display was crucial to the political project of body art. Sobchack suggested that it was not just the body that mattered in the context of cinema, but also the way the embodied vision behind the camera saw, and the social codes that this way of seeing expressed. It is this point that takes us directly to the heart of the sensory ethnographic project. Following Jones, we might say that long duration observational recording affords seeing in such a way as to minimize the explicit presence of the cameraperson in the finished film, and we might also say that this disembodied way of seeing coincides with the tacitly masculine subject at the center of formalist art. Following Sobchack, we should still consider the acts of recording and editing as a kind of embodied performance that expresses subjective intention for an audience.

Jones noted that the straight white male was the political target of body art criticism, and of body art as a performed mode of criticism by women body artists. It was works by men like Vito Acconci that Rosalind Krauss characterized most pointedly as narcissistic in her classic essay on the video body art medium.²⁵⁶ The projects of the filmmakers considered in this chapter do not engage the subjectivity of the filmmaker’s own body reflexively and narcissistically in the same sense that this tradition has done. Yet I would nonetheless suggest that the category of body artist, or performance artist, can be extended to describe the performative work of the sensory cinema filmmakers analyzed in this chapter. It is important to note that the filmmaker bodies in question are

²⁵⁵ Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, 9.

²⁵⁶ Krauss, *Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism*, 50-64.

not all the dominant subject identified by Jones. Caistaing-Taylor would be the only filmmaker discussed here to occupy that category. However, all of the films do center on this subject, specifically on the figure of white American masculinity in decline. None of these films put forth the paradigm of marginalized subjects becoming empowered through expression.

Krauss (1976) noted that performance art performed a blurring of distinctions between subject and object. Sobchack's phenomenological film theory makes a similar point in demanding that we recognize the viewer/reader's fleshy contiguity, their mutual accountability, with the on-screen others in their presence. I propose that sensory ethnographic films intend to produce this experience of intersubjectivity in viewers, between viewer and film and, moreover, I propose that this experience is one of temporal re enactment. In other words, the films produce a critical experience of sensory intersubjectivity in their viewers over time. In different ways, the films I analyze here use extended duration, either in the length of time a shot holds on screen or with the slow pace of subjects' lives, as an aesthetic strategy to evoke the viewer's doubt, disorientation, surprise, or sense of loss at beholding the moving image in time. These are performance effects for viewers of the finished films, if not live performances as defined by copresence in vintage performance art. Disaggregated across years of researching, decisions made at the moments of recording, and the accumulations of countless choices during editing, the works of these sensory cinema filmmakers express performances of embodied vision rather than performances of bodily display.

Duration and Work in *Lunch Break*

Lockhart has long been concerned with the relationship between photography and film and the duration of representation. While training to become a commercial photographer at a technical college in Boston in the mid-1980s, Lockhart saw the photography of Cindy Sherman and decided to instead pursue a career as an artist. The techniques of reenactment staging at the center of Sherman's practice find echoes in nearly all of Lockhart's work. She was introduced to 1960s and 1970s formalist and structural filmmakers Andy Warhol, Michael Snow, Chantal Akerman, Yvonne Rainer, Hollis Frampton, and James Benning while a graduate student at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, and began to explore the affective qualities of the long take and the static camera in moving image representations of everyday activity.²⁵⁷ The everyday activities she films usually blur the line between performance and routine. "If someone's reading a book for 10 minutes in a film," Lockhart explained, "they're really reading a book."²⁵⁸ Her thesis project crossed photography, reenactment performance, and structural film. *Shaun* (1993) was a series of five color studio portraits that depicted a boy named Shaun being dressed with Hollywood makeup as though preparing to become a character in a horror film. He was then cast in the leading role of *Khalil*,

²⁵⁷ Although disputed as a category since *Film Culture* critic P. Adams Sitney identified the emergence of a "cinema of structure" in 1969, "structural film" has come to stand in for a New York based, avant-garde film movement that utilized the structural elements of celluloid, film reels, projectors, and film cameras—and later, as in Benning's work, temporal structures gleaned from everyday life—as the aesthetic base for constructing new, non-commercial cinematic experiences that exceeded the dominant understanding of film as escapist entertainment. I write in more detail on this film movement in the concluding pages of the section on *Lunch Break*.

²⁵⁸ Carnegie Museum of Art, "Sharon Lockhart, CI08: Life on Mars," *CI08 on YouTube*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkX00ixS8W4> (accessed June 24, 2012).

Shaun, A Woman Under the Influence (1994) in which Shaun (in ghastly makeup) and another boy reread a scene from the eponymous John Cassavetes film. The disconnect between the hyper-emotional method acting at the heart of the original film and Shaun's flat rereading of the lines suggested the trajectory of Lockhart's later film projects, which use the duration of the shot as a device for exceeding the capacities for her subjects inside of the frame to perform their roles, while at the same time beckoning spectators to seek out nuanced details in the image.²⁵⁹

Her interest in the phenomenology of still, banal everyday activity as expressed through film and photography led her to the participatory ethnographic research practices of Rouch; the representations she creates out of her encounters with subjects address the concerns of formalist visual art while challenging the boundaries and epistemological assumptions of visual anthropology. In some of her choreographies for films, for example, she references the pedestrian, everyday movement in 1960s and 70s postmodern dance experiments of Rainer, Bruce Nauman, and Merce Cunningham, but leaves gaps in direction to force her non-expert dancers to think on their feet (literally) while the camera is rolling. In her still photographs, likewise, Lockhart tightly controls the lighting, frame, and backdrop while allowing her subjects to dress and pose themselves as they please across several shots. The seriality of these images permits subjects to adjust their bodily comportment in response to seeing an earlier image, and lends a filmic quality to her photographic installation work, as is the case in the photographs of lunch boxes from *Lunch Break* (Figure 3.1).

²⁵⁹ For commentary on these works, see Dominic Molon, "The Delicate Structure of the Everyday," in *Sharon Lockhart*, ed. Robert Fitzpatrick (Chicago, IL: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001), 13.

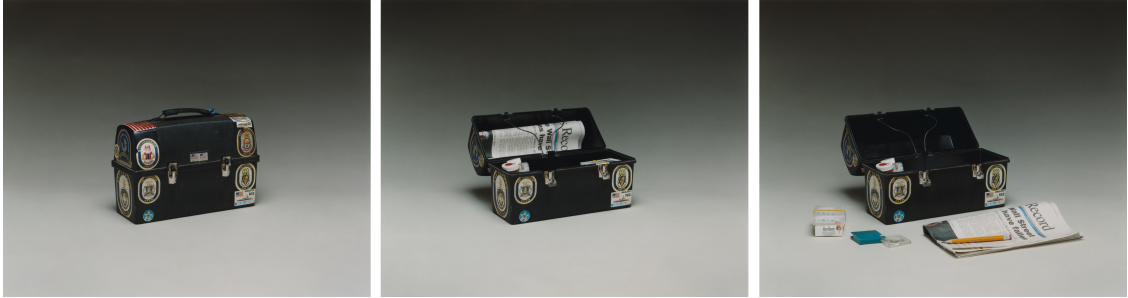


Figure 3.1: Photographic triptych entitled “Gary Gilpatrick, Insulator” by Sharon Lockhart, 2008. Copyright has been obtained. *Lunch Break* by Sharon Lockhart.

Though featuring inanimate objects, the stylized photographic sequences of lunch boxes depicted in her multimedia installation *Lunch Break* progress like scenes in an observational film. *Gary Gilpatrick, Insulator* (2008), for instance, features a triptych of poster-sized, color photographic prints of Gilpatrick’s lunchbox. The first of the three prints depicts a black metal lunchbox with rusting latches, American flag stickers, and decals for four different DDG series Navy warships.²⁶⁰ The box sits awkwardly alone in the softly lit, gray-toned studio space more reminiscent of the backdrop for a product advertisement than either the lived environs from which the lunchbox came, or the neutral background of classification photography. The marks of everyday use on the lunchbox index years of this daily respite from labor in the break between the first and second halves of Gilpatrick’s workday. There is something clinical about the three images seen together, as if the seeing eye that produced the photographs desired a comprehensive documentary knowledge about the lunchbox that could not be grasped from a single shot. In the first, the lunchbox is closed, positioned frontally and at a 45-degree angle from the camera’s vantage point. In the second, the lunchbox sits in the

²⁶⁰ DDG is an acronym at a slant for “Guided Missile Destroyer.”

exact same position, but opened, revealing a newspaper in its top half held in place by a black metal wire, the tops of three prescription pill bottles in the left hand side of the box, and the front of a packet of Marlboro cigarettes barely visible on the right. In the third photograph, the contents except for the pills have been removed and placed on the studio floor in front of the lunchbox. Also visible is a retractable magnifying glass opened from its square, aqua case, and two well-sharpened pencils resting in the tiny valley formed between the center and edge of the newspaper. The sequence of photographs gestures toward the sense of discovery—the photographer’s, and by extension, our own—about the life that produced this set of objects. Unlike other lunchboxes in the series, this one features no food. We are left to think about what Gilpatrick, insulator, spent the brief respite in his work day doing, and what this says, first, about him, and from this, about the human ways of coping with factory labor more broadly. He was likely older, given the number of pill bottles, the vintage of lunchbox, the number of ship decals on its façade, and the presence of the magnifying glass. Perhaps he passed his lunchtime smoking a cigarette while reading the newspaper and doing the crossword puzzle—a distinctly analog form of leisure. But then there is another detail in this arrangement that speaks subtly to the staging intentions of the artist rather than the everyday life of Gilpatrick. The date on the copy of the Brunswick, Maine newspaper, aptly named *The Times Record*, is September 15, 2008. Just legible in the portions of headlines on the upturned half of the paper are the words “Wall Street . . . Have Fallen” and “... Brothers files Chapter 11; Merrill Lynch sold.” This was the day that the Lehman Brothers global financial consulting firm filed for bankruptcy and sent the economy into an uncertain

tailspin. The title above the newspaper's leading photograph, half of the face of a white man framed against a black background, reads "... A GHOST."

In this series of photographs Lockhart stages two trajectories for thinking about the *Lunch Break* project as a whole. First, the work documents objects that bear the marks of contingent, particular histories. The lunchboxes elicit from viewers the affect of recognition—*those* pills and *that* magnifying glass were part of *the* life of Gary Gilpatrick—coupled with the awareness of lived experiences that they cannot know from a photograph, like one's situated perspective after working for thirty eight years manufacturing Navy warships. Gilpatrick is, after all, a ghost insofar as he haunts the presence of these objects before Lockhart's lens in her California studio, and then later their imaged presence in publications, galleries, and online databases. While he carried on with his life in Maine, the photographs fixed the objects that he regularly carried to work. When Lockhart photographed these everyday objects, she transformed their aesthetic, cultural, and economic value by dint of her sensibility as a photographer and reputation as a thoughtful, widely recognized artist. Lockhart's act of fixing, in other words, rendered Gilpatrick's everyday, casual use of these objects over years as an unwitting form of collaboration in the production of high art in 2008. Photographs of other workers' lunchboxes functioned in a similar fashion; in each case, Lockhart pointedly directed the spectator's attention toward the lunchboxes as indices of actual lives. The accumulated effect of the details visible in these photographs—rust stains on white plastic handles, dozens of banana stickers affixed to the exterior of a lunchbox, beaten coffee thermoses, pillboxes, cigarettes, coleslaw in Tupperware, tinfoil wrapping, etc.—is to exceed the status of *these* lunch boxes as commodities for general

consumption, even though they are framed through the aesthetics of product advertising. Here, they are photographed anthropological relics of a dying ritual, the communal lunch break. “[I]t is an aspect of working life under threat,” observed art critic Mark Godfrey. “In the drive to increase productivity, many factories are doing away with the communal lunch break; workers begin to do staggered shifts, and their breaks no longer fall together.”²⁶¹ There is something as timeless about Lockhart’s photographs of well-worn lunch boxes as the black and white photographs of laborers taken by the Farm Security Administration photographers during the Great Depression, whom Lockhart frequently mentions as influences on her own work. Only here, the portrait centers on an object in a studio rather than persons in their domestic spaces. The lunch box is doubly fetishized; it stands in for an individual who has long participated in a dying collective ritual while at the same time it is aestheticized as an ideal commercial product through staging.

In *The Skin of the Film* (2000), Laura Marks’ analyzed the photographic representation of everyday objects like Gilpatrick’s lunch box in films of memory as fetishes, or “recollection-objects.” Marks posited that fetishistic objects “condense time within themselves” such that “in excavating them [through photography and film], we expand outward in time,” though we may understand this expansion affectively rather than as a narrative or discourse. This way of thinking about the fetish, Marks explained, crossed the Marxist understanding of the fetish as labor and movement transformed into a commodity, with the psychoanalytic understanding of the fetish as memory partially cathected as affect onto an object. Marks emphasized both the importance of indexicality

²⁶¹ Mark Godfrey, “Photography and: The Discourses of Sharon Lockhart's Photographic Practice,” in *Sharon Lockhart: Lunch Break*, ed. Jane E. Neidhardt (St. Louis, Missouri: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum at Washington University, 2010), 88.

in any account of the documentary real through the metaphor of the fossil, and the inevitably subjective, non-observable apprehension of the indexical reality in a given object through the metaphor of the fetish. “The fetish, by partaking physically of the thing it represents, threatens the idea that only the distance senses”—sight and hearing, the staples of empiricism—“lend themselves to knowledge,” Marks explained. “Thinking fetishistically allows us to take embodied knowledge seriously.” Marks’ proposal for considering embodied knowledge, in other words, implies a critique of the ideology of independence at the center of stories about the American “self-made man.” “To be dependent upon an object affirms not only the materiality of one’s body but also the incompleteness of one’s self”—i.e., to fall short of the ideals of masculine self-possession and to lack the capacity for cold rationality. “It suggests that meaning inheres in the communication between self, objects, and others rather than in a communication mediated by the mind alone.”²⁶²

By way of example, Marks analyzed Rea Tajiri’s *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (1991), a haunting experimental documentary about Tajiri’s mother’s experience at the Poston internment camp in Arizona during World War II. Tajiri’s mother can tell her daughter virtually nothing of her years at Poston, and she has no photographs of her time there. Seeking evidence that might flesh out her mother’s story in the face of this absence, Tajiri travels to the camp and correctly intuits her way to the space where her mother had lived. She removes a single piece of tar paper from the roof of the building and takes it with her, a silent, fossilized witness to the lives of the

²⁶² Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, 77, 119-20.

interned. “One could say the piece of tar paper, having been exposed to those events, ‘photographed’ them and just needs to be developed: rectangular and gray, it even looks a bit like an old photograph,” Marks suggested.²⁶³ There is, in fact, a clinical, overhead photograph of the piece of tar paper included in Tajiri’s video, as if its trace on the screen will allow it to evoke stories that it cannot tell. The affective power in the indexical presentation of *this* piece of tar paper for both Tajiri and the collective of Japanese-Americans whose experience it hailed, Marks insisted, derived from its physical contact with the internees at Poston. The tar paper was once co-present with Tajiri’s mother and countless other interned Japanese-Americans; it touched and touches a particular “cryptic history” of oppression in the context of Tajiri’s video, and calls forth reflection and sense-making from the touched who see it. This sense of a collective’s involuntary physical and psychological connection to filmed objects was what Marks called “haptic visuality,” the affective sensation of being “touched” through the act of beholding a fetish object.

The second trajectory that Lockhart staged in her photographs of Gilpatrick’s lunch box likewise aimed to elicit the self-reflexive engagement of a collective of viewers. Lockhart set up this lunchbox to act *as if* it were opened and discovered on a particularly poignant day. This is not simply a lunchbox; it is a time capsule, an evocative reconstruction of one particular experience of a daily routine. Like the newspaper, *The Times Record*, the box is a record of specific time. *This* day, September 15, 2008, indexed a turning point in the slow but steady decline of a mythology about the white, laboring man as the lynchpin of a virtuous American economic, political, and

²⁶³ Ibid., 82.

military hegemony. Gilpatrick’s lunchbox suggests that he was proud of his role in literally constructing the war materiel that made this hegemony possible. Each sticker represented a ship he had helped build while working at Bath Iron Works, so that “the lunch box documents his entire career at the shipyard.”²⁶⁴ In looking at the photograph, we are beckoned to wonder what Gilpatrick might have made of these headlines before he flipped over to the crossword on that day. Would he have connected the visage of this unprecedented financial collapse to his own home, his own way of life, or the global growth of the security industry—the source of his own continued employment? Lockhart celebrates these workers—perhaps even romanticizes them through her exaggerated durational shooting in the films *Lunch Break* and *Exit*—but her own “work” frames her subjects as a dying breed. Photography has often been likened to an act that appropriates the soul, a critique that Lockhart has grappled with in all of her projects, and which logically leads to “capturing” the lunchbox rather than the face of Gilpatrick on film. Lockhart engaged the workers at BIW in conversations about their lives and her project through showing them photographs of American workers from prior eras. Lockhart’s own filmic and photographic project was the alibi for this sustained engagement in symbolic gift exchange—most of which remains outside of the final presentational format of Lockhart’s finished work. But Gilpatrick took his relationship with Lockhart one step further. When he passed away in 2010, he left *this* lunchbox to Lockhart in his will.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ “Open space,” Dec. 7, 2011, <http://blog.sfmoma.org/2011/12/lbt8/>.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

Sobchack postulated the difference between the photograph and the film image in terms of the spectator's perception of the object's *becoming*. Whereas the photograph remained unchanging through time, and so affiliated itself with our imagination of the dead, the film image moved, and so beckoned us to consider it as a body with agency and intention. "In the still photograph, time and space are abstractions. Although the image has a presence, it neither partakes of nor describes the present," Sobchack explained. "Thus, when we experience the 'timelessness' that a photograph confers on its subject matter, we are experiencing the photograph's compelling emptiness."²⁶⁶ The absence of movement embedded in the structure of the photograph ensured its enduring relation to the meaning of death, for Sobchack. Motion, on the contrary, "sufficiently fills up that vacancy and inaugurates a fullness." Sobchack argued that when we watch a film, we regard it from within our own lived experience of temporality. When we look at a photograph, we see a "'hole' in temporality" that we must fill imaginatively. While a photograph "waits—as a vacancy—for us to possess it," a film "*has being* in the sense that it *behaves*."²⁶⁷ Marks' analysis of the photograph as an extension of a fetish object, alluded to above, implied that there were "behaviors" embedded in the still for particular viewers. Photographs were not simply vacancies waiting to be filled. Lockhart's work, apropos to this point, asks the question of what happens when one regards a film that behaves *like a photograph*. What kind of performance does this way of seeing produce?

Lockhart's film *Teatro Amazonas* (1999) features a single, 38-minute wide shot of a group of 600 residents of a town in Brazil sitting in the local theater to hear a

²⁶⁶ Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, 59.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 60-1.

performance of a score composed by Lockhart's longtime collaborator Becky Allen. The film camera rested on a tripod on the proscenium of the theater and recorded the audience members, who seemed to look into the lens. Over the course of the film, the sound of the live performance of the score fades out so that the only remaining sound is that of the audience—coughing, rustling in chairs, whispering comments. The visitor to the installation of this film, positioned with the camera, faced the audience in the theater and heard the sound without seeing its source, as if it emerged from between these two spaces that were separated by space and time. In the film's credits, the viewer learned that the audience in the theater was a representative sampling of the people from different neighborhoods in the city, all of whom Lockhart met personally over the course of her fieldwork. In this tongue and cheek way, *Teatro Amazonas* visually represented a statistical cross section of the town in her film. But the sort of knowledge that this ethnographic product communicated was not at all invested in the kinds of categories through which representation usually carves out discursive meaning. It was, in the terms of critical theorist Norman Bryson, a "counterpresence." "As we go on looking, the details we find are no longer appropriated or impounded by the documentary gaze, the gaze that looks to photography in order to read the meanings of the world," Bryson observed. "Counterpresence is all about the inadvertent, about deflection and withdrawal." What this created, especially after the conclusion of Allen's score and the extension of the filmed image over the melded ambient sound of the two screening spaces, was "an unexpected afterglow." For Bryson, part of this affective charge came from the knowledge that he was looking at the visual representation of the *polis* in the

theater, while at the same time noticing details of the everyday material world that were “darting, random, and unsorted” rather than collective.²⁶⁸

Pine Flat (2006), an ethnography of children from the rural community of this name east of Los Angeles, continued her exploration of the relationship between the individual and the group through filmmaking that approximates photography. *Pine Flat* is a two hours and sixteen minute film that screens in gallery spaces and movie theaters. Each of the film’s two halves is made up of six, ten-minute, tripod long-shots that she staged with children in the forested areas around the town. The first half of the film shows children alone doing everyday things in these spaces, like reading a book, waiting for the bus, or sitting very still and looking for animals while hunting. In the second half of the film, the shots depict children interacting in groups as they engage in activities like climbing a hill or swimming in a creek. “I was interested in the difference, how we perceive time differently within a group experience or a solo experience,” she explained of the project. “I mean it’s very different looking at a kid playing a harmonica for thirty seconds than it is for ten minutes.” A year and a half into her filming, Lockhart also opened a portrait studio in the town, where she invited the kids she had been filming to stop by whenever they wanted to have their portrait taken. “It wasn’t about this anthropological documenting of every kid in the town, but it was whoever wanted to come, and some kids come all the time and some kids didn’t come. But I was thinking about the early portrait studios, and how they were the social space in small towns everywhere.” These portraits became collaborations between herself and the children

²⁶⁸ Norman Bryson, “From Form to Flux,” in *Sharon Lockhart*, ed. Robert Fitzpatrick (Chicago, IL: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001), 84.

who came by, as she allowed them to dress and pose themselves as they chose for their photographs.²⁶⁹

Lunch Break built upon the collaborative ethnographic methodology she developed in the *Pine Flats* project, and followed Lockhart's longstanding questions about duration, reenactment, and the relationship between photographic and film images. But what distinguished *Lunch Break* from her earlier projects was her subjects' relationships to time inside of the workplace. The lunch break was their only respite from a long workday in a loud factory, and elongating this brief moment of time in the routine of factory labor became the center of Lockhart's interest in the project. James Benning quipped that the film *Lunch Break* was the only one he had ever seen where it took more time to watch than it did to make. The single, ten-minute 35mm film shot was decelerated eight times digitally, and then screened on HD projection systems as an 80-minute film. But Benning's comment must be taken half in jest. Lockhart spent the better part of a year at the Bath Iron Works and a dozen other industrial workplaces throughout Maine conversing with workers and showing them photographs and paintings of industrial laborers dating to the early 19th century. She recorded an entire film about each part of the labor at BIW that contributed to the completion of a ship. But in the end, Lockhart said, the heart of her project was in that brief moment of time in which workers did not work. The setting of the finished film is a long corridor in which a number of workers would sit or stand to eat their lunches. Framed by rows and rows of lockers on the right, an endless array of exposed electrical wires and ventilation ducts on the left,

²⁶⁹ Quotations in this paragraph are drawn from an interview with Sharon Lockhart from the Carnegie Museum of Art, "Sharon Lockhart, CI08: Life on Mars."

and fluorescent lights and an insulated tube on the ceiling, the hallway recedes to a vanishing point in the far distance and precludes seeing anything outside of this space (Figure 3.2). “When I walked that hallway the first time, I was exhilarated,” Lockhart recalled in an interview about the project with James Benning:

I knew it would be the center of my film. I spent more time there than at any other location. Taking that shot and slowing it down changed the film for me. It became a film that captured the lunch break experimentally, rather than literally. It created a relationship to time that I felt was missing from the original film. I wanted audiences to have time to think about the break and the place in which the break was situated without being fully caught up in a conversation or activity.²⁷⁰



Figure 3.2: Film still from *Lunch Break* by Sharon Lockhart, 2008. Copyright has been obtained.

²⁷⁰ James Benning, “James Benning Interviews Sharon Lockhart,” in *Sharon Lockhart: Lunch Break*, ed. Jane E. Neidhardt (St. Louis, Missouri: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum at Washington University, 2010), 105-6.

For Sobchack, slow motion was a form of expression unique to the film camera and projector combination. The filmmaker might imagine a shot in slow motion before recording it, but could not experience the effect of slow motion until afterwards, when “the camera in concert with the projector . . . literally perceives and expresses the perception of these phenomena.”²⁷¹ Part of this process in Lockhart’s film involves the intermediary of a digital film-editing platform, which enabled her to decelerate her ten-minute film tracking shot. The necessity for this digital manipulation added to the broader metaphor of the project about a way of work and life in transition, between analog and digital worlds, and industrial and sign economies. But more to Sobchack’s point, Lockhart’s documentary film did not exist in such a way that a human observer could experience the sensation of the world it expressed outside of the moment of screening itself. In terms of its time, this was a documentary with no phenomenological correlate outside of cinematic viewing spaces. In this way, *Lunch Break* brings a state of being into the world through viewers’ perceptions of its time on the screen. It is performative in this literal sense, somewhat like a photograph.

Ironically, this slowing down, according to several accounts, led viewers to search the visuals more intently for clues as to the meanings behind certain conversations and activities depicted by chance in the film. A moment in which a subject on screen rubbed his forehead, for example, communicated a different meaning to a viewer seeing the activity elongated by a factor of eight than to an observer present to the event. The hand slowly reached up to the head, and the subject seemed to rest upon it for minutes, as if in worried contemplation rather than rubbing. “Is this a moment of despair?” asked online

²⁷¹ Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, 188.

art critic Rob Marks after seeing the piece at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in late 2011. “In this otherworldly place, everything that seems obvious at conventional speed becomes a mystery, a puzzle to be solved only by the closest attention.”²⁷² In this way, the film focused the viewer’s perception of action in slowed down time rather than on the subject of the respite for eating in the middle of the workday. Rudolf Frieling, curator of Lockhart’s show at SFMoMA, asserted that at the end of the film’s first screening at the museum, several spectators walked out of the theater in slow motion, as if they had unconsciously internalized the film’s expression of time.²⁷³ Audiences in less amenable venues did not wait that long to leave. Hammer to Nail film critic Michael Ryan reported that “there was a near riot” at the film’s Sundance premiere in 2009, where unsuspecting audiences who gobbled up tickets to any event tended to expect entertainment rather than experimental structural film. “Arguments broke out demanding refunds, some claiming that it wasn’t a movie while someone else asked if the ‘projector was broken,’” Ryan recalled.²⁷⁴ Two weeks into the festival, according to the then undergraduate blogger “Benjamin Films” who attended a screening, *Lunch Break* was one of the few films that did not sell out, and even then most of the audience left before the film’s conclusion. “I would say that of the hundred or so people (and like I said it was NOT full in the first place) by the time the film had finished and the lights came on

²⁷² Rob Marks, “Daily serving: An international publication for contemporary art,” Dec. 5, 2011, <http://dailyserving.com/2011/12/act-repeat-suspend-sharon-lockharts-lunch-break-at-sfmoma/>.

²⁷³ Rudolf Frieling and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now* (San Francisco; New York: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art ; In Association with Thames & Hudson, 2008).

²⁷⁴ Michael Ryan, “*Lunch Break: The Cruel Crawl of Time*,” *Hammer to Nail*, February 5, 2009, <http://www.hammertonail.com/reviews/experimental/lunch-break-film-review/>.

in the theater, I would say that only fifteen people were still sitting,” he said.²⁷⁵ In the space of the theater away from work and the art gallery, perhaps some viewers expected that having escaped briefly from the normative schedules that organized their lives, they would not be forced to endure yet another challenging commitment to someone else’s time schedule.

The reception to *Lunch Break* was a reenactment of sorts of audience reactions to Warhol’s long duration “antifilms” of the early 1960s, like *Empire* (1964) and *Sleep* (1963), which Lockhart has said she admires. Mike Getz, an enterprising if somewhat disingenuous theater owner in Los Angeles in the 1960s, advertised the premiere of *Sleep* at his theater as “a film so unusual it may never be shown again”—a tagline that attracted 500 people for the event.²⁷⁶ He neglected to mention that the nearly six hour, black and white, silent film was comprised of only a handful of static, tripod shots of Warhol’s lover, John Giorno, as he slept for the duration of one night, but Getz made sure to tape a “no refunds” sign to the box office window before the start of the screening. Soon afterward, Getz sent an annotated timeline of that evening to Jonas Mekas to publish in *Film Culture*. The film started at 6:45 with a close up, 45-minute shot of Giorno’s abdomen gently rising and falling with his breath. People began complaining and leaving the theater by 7:00. After the film’s first cut to a close up of Giorno’s head, one member of the audience ran up to the screen and shouted “WAKE UP!!” into the oversized ear while others asked for refunds. “Audience getting bitter, strained,” Getz reported. By

²⁷⁵ Benjamin Films, “The Walk Out Club: Films NOT for Public Consumption,” *benjaminfilms*, March 20, 2012, <http://benjaminfilms.wordpress.com/2012/03/>.

²⁷⁶ Thom Anderson, “The ‘60s Without Compromise: Watching Warhol’s Films,” *Rouge*, 2006, <http://www.rouge.com.au/8/warhol.html>.

7:45, most of the audience that remained was in the lobby of the theater demanding their money back. Getz described the scene as follows:

Lobby full, one red-faced guy very agitated, says I have 30 seconds to give him his money back or he'll run into theater and start a 'lynch riot'. 'We'll all come out here and lynch you, buddy!!' Nobody stopped him when 30 seconds were up; he ran back toward the screen. In fact, the guy who had said he didn't want to make a scene now said, 'Come on, I'll go with you!!'²⁷⁷

Getz offered the nascent mob free passes to a future screening, a gesture he also extended to the hearty souls that endured to the film's completion. By the end of the evening, Getz guessed that only fifty or so of the original audience members remained, though other accounts estimate the number as low as ten. Film critic Thom Anderson was one of those who present at the film's conclusion. He recalled the viewing experience as one of "profound happiness." The point of the film, he said, was to represent "something so obvious no one had noticed it, something that therefore demanded acknowledgment," like sleeping. "We spend a great part of our lives sleeping, but we never see sleeping represented in moving pictures," he noted. He said that he liked that he and the film were self-sufficient with or without one another, allowing him to enter the film as an equal rather than as a dependent, as in a commodity relation. Yet the publication of his story of being there, at *the* first screening of the film in Los Angeles, suggests that this relationship between viewer and film object was not without its fetishistic aspect. Enduring a Warhol unspectacular and then "getting it" has become a measure of the viewer's worth as a cultural sophisticate. Anderson acknowledged that when Getz gave the viewers who stayed until the end of the film their passes, "we

²⁷⁷ Jonas Mekas, "Andy Warhol's Sleep," in *Movies*, ed. Gilbert Adair (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 50, <http://beebo.org/smackerels/sleep.html> (accessed 8/12/12).

accepted [them] as though they were Boy Scout merit badges,” earned rather than purchased. Coming from a background in the fine arts and structural film, Lockhart likewise viewed the space of the theater as one of contemplation and engagement rather than entertainment. “When you go to see a film, you are making a communal commitment to spend time,” she said.²⁷⁸ Note that her point is that audience members *spend* time communally, not pass time. A film is an investment and a ritual.

Ryan, the critic who reported on one of the Sundance screenings, seemed to experience the film more or less as Lockhart hoped viewers would. While watching the film, he recalled his own experiences of lunch breaks while working as an alienated wage laborer for MTV in the late 1980s. “I remember those one hour lunches well because I was miserable and knew I was wasting my life by punching the clock, but I was trapped by the need for the paycheck,” he said. These were moments that he said he had not considered until he saw Lockhart’s film, which evoked sense memories of feeling the oppressive weight of clock time. “Those lunches were precious and were haunted by the ticking clock; they were never long enough and though often spent alone, reading or writing, I always felt, by hour’s end, an overriding sense of pathetic futility.” In one sense, the extended duration of Lockhart’s film is partly an expression of the desire to extend the escape from the clock for longer. In another sense, the film and the project as a whole catalyzes reflection on the meaning of declining (in the United States, at least) industrial, analog work in an era when a film can be digitally decelerated in a computer. Ryan offered an interpretation of the film as a metaphor for the “devouring crawl of

²⁷⁸ Benning, *James Benning Interviews Sharon Lockhart* 107

capitalism in general, over the course of time, not just hours but over years and generations.”²⁷⁹

Now several generations removed from the New York based structural filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s who influenced Lockhart’s ideas about duration in film, it is an open question as to whether or not the strategy of extended duration itself constitutes a form of resistance.²⁸⁰ For proponents in the 1960s, experimental film production and consumption seemed capable of expanding the dimensions of human consciousness beyond the well-trodden tropes of realist narrative drama and the reified stars they churned out. Structural film displaced the fetish of the culture industry star with an unusual affinity for sprocket holes, burning celluloid, flicker effects, the static or slow moving camera, seemingly endless loop printing of mundane found footage, and the duration of a reel in order to achieve a “mystical contemplation of a portion of space,” to quote from *Film Culture* critic P. Adams Sitney’s 1969 article declaring the emergence of

²⁷⁹ Ryan, “Lunch Break: The Cruel Crawl of Time.”

²⁸⁰ Treatments of the politics of structural film include: P. Adams Sitney, *Film Culture Reader* (New York: Cooper Square, 2000); Regina Cornwell, “Structural Film: Ten Years Later,” *The Drama Review: TDR* 23, no. 3, Structuralist Performance Issue (Sep., 1979): pp. 77-92, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145231>; Bruce Jenkins, “A Case Against ‘Structural Film’,” *Journal of the University Film Association* 33, no. 2 (Spring, 1981): 9; David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); Gregory T. Taylor, “‘The Cognitive Instrument in the Service of Revolutionary Change’: Sergei Eisenstein, Annette Michelson, and the Avant-Garde’s Scholarly Aspiration,” *Cinema Journal* 31, no. 4 (1992): 42-59; P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Noel Carroll, “Philosophizing through the Moving Image: The Case of Serene Velocity,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no. 1 (2006): 173-185; Arnd Schneider, “Three Modes of Experimentation with Art and Ethnography,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute: Incorporating “Man”* 14, no. 1 (2008): 171-194; Juan Suarez, “Structural Film: Noise,” in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, eds. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 62.

a “cinema of structure.” Sitney argued that unlike earlier avant-garde practitioners that sought to “make disparate elements cohere” through “the development of a cinematic language of *conjunction*” as in the montage style of the early 1960s work of Stan Brakhage, Peter Kubelka, and Kenneth Anger, structural filmmakers of the early and mid-1960s like Michael Snow, Peter Kubelka, Frampton, Joyce Wieland, George Landow, Paul Sharits and Ernie Gehr aimed to “elongate their films so that time will enter as an aggressive participant in the viewing experience.”²⁸¹ To this point, Sitney mentioned Warhol’s *Sleep* (1963) as a predecessor of structural filmmaking, albeit insisting that “Warhol, as a pop artist, is spiritually at the opposite pole from the structuralists.”²⁸² *Film Culture* critic Henry Geldzahler’s brief reflection on viewing *Sleep* in 1964 credited Warhol’s film with bringing about this changed state of consciousness in him. After allowing “the eye and the mind to adjust to a quieter, flowing sense of time,” he said, “we find that the more that is eliminated the greater concentration is possible on the spare remaining essentials.” It was as if a still photograph suddenly began to move. “The slightest variation becomes an event, something on which we can focus our attention,” he said.²⁸³ Lockhart frequently mentions Warhol’s work in interviews, and has followed his strategy for moving subjects beyond their comfort zones by asking them to perform for too long, and filming still activities so as to elevate the status of small movements.

Lunch Break enacts its reduction, however, through a manipulation of the speed of the shot rather than through the sparseness of the activity depicted. The film slowed

²⁸¹ Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 330.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

down seems as endless as the hallway and the routine of the workday at the factory across years of labor. It undermines the fidelity of our observations as viewers, while at the same time beckoning us to touch the images with our eyes. Before us are moving pictures of iconic American factory workers alienated from their own time (perhaps doubly) and rendered almost photographic in the ways they seem to move. Indeed, we can actually see the shift from one still photographic frame to the next across the 14,400 frames of 35 mm film that Lockhart shot, each on screen for 1/3 of a second instead of 1/24th. “In effect,” noted Benning in an introductory statement to his interview with Lockhart, “this draws attention to the fact that movies don’t move and that they are directly connected to still photography.”²⁸⁴ Though the outcome of visual ethnographic research, and though it channels the iconography of American male workers and their working class lunch pails as a fetish for the decline of normative masculine ideals of the laboring subject, *Lunch Break* does not attempt to visualize the everyday lives of its subjects as a form of salvage, as in the “classics” of visual anthropology like Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922), Ernst Shoedsack and Merrian Cooper’s *Grass* (1927), Robert Gardner’s *Dead Birds* (1960), and the MacDougalls’ *The Turkana Trilogy* (1968-72).

Sweetgrass, though employing the long take of structural film that intended to subvert the narrative thrust of realist cinema in the 1960s, is grounded in this tradition of ethnographic filmmaking and its realist, narrative, observational epistemology. Durational shooting does not aim to alienate performers before the lens from their performance, as in Warhol and Lockhart’s films, but rather to reflect the pace of subjects’

²⁸⁴ Benning, *James Benning Interviews Sharon Lockhart*, 101.

everyday lives who do not perform. Castaing-Taylor has even gone so far as to declare his role in the production of the film as that of “recordist” as opposed to “director” or “filmmaker,” a moniker he feels more accurately describes the indexical affordances of the video camera and his role as an embodied but unobtrusive observer who uses it.²⁸⁵

The long take in *Sweetgrass*, then, does not aim to create a pathway to a new, technologically mediated kind of subjectivity that Lockhart produced through the interplay of slow motion and the still, but rather constitutes an aesthetic strategy for capturing and preserving for future audiences the phenomenological sense of a dying way of being in the world before it goes extinct. The camera, in this way of thinking, stands in for a human who witnesses events, though it is a particular kind of seeing.

Anticipating the viewing expectations of a modern, urban audience eager for narrative films about cowboys on the range, *Sweetgrass* enacts its politics through the way its long takes and lack of verbal explanation unsettle viewers accustomed to the fast-paced, word-driven, testimonial style of witnessing typical of the documentary genre on the whole.

²⁸⁵ Jay Kuehner, "Interviews: Keeper of Sheep Lucien Castaing-Taylor on *Sweetgrass*," *Cinema Scope*, December 27, 2009, <http://cinema-scope.com/cinema-scope-magazine/1107/> (accessed July 12, 2012).



Figure 3.3: Video still from *Sweetgrass* by Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, 2009. Copyright has been obtained.

Duration and reenacting decline in *Sweetgrass*

In the opening sequence of Lucien Castaing Taylor and Ilisa Barbash's film *Sweetgrass*, the camera hones in on a single sheep chewing its cud (Figure 3.3). The shot holds still for forty seconds, the proximity of the camera to the animal indexed by the detail evident in the sheep's wool and the closely miked sound of jawing. The shot evokes the slow pace of life for a sheep in winter. Like a bucolic version of Warhol's *Sleep*, *Sweetgrass* offers viewers the chance to experience duration of the mundane, an opportunity to watch a subject without consciousness do nothing much, providing the viewer with a space for its own ruminations—not on sheep per se, but on the everyday and the banal, on the span of our own attention and patience. One rarely encounters a cinematic view of sheep or any other animal performing such a trifling act for so long, presented with the filmmakers' secure conviction that the act deserves our attention for

its full duration despite its absence of narrative action. Documentaries about animals, wild or domestic, typically offer more of an arc, with drama unfolding even within individual shots. There is by contrast something uncomfortable about the duration of this shot of a sheep chewing its cud, something hauntingly irritating. It arouses interest, but also impatience. We want the film to get on with it.

I want to suggest that *Sweetgrass* is guided by a logic of historical re-enactment through simulation of the mundane everyday, a logic that is performed in this shot. In feeling the impulse to get on with the action, the viewer may also feel a touch of nostalgia for the connections to nature, animals, and land that we are losing with the national shift toward large-scale corporate ranching practices. It would be known to most American viewers that this film is in fact an elegy to herding practices in demise. Large agribusiness has made it very difficult for traditional family ranches to survive; pressure from environmentalists has led to legislation like the Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975, which disallowed the issuance of new grazing permits in designated wilderness areas; and the American market for mutton, lamb, and wool has declined precipitously since its peak at the end of World War II. In 1946, 56 million sheep lived in the United States; in 2002, there were 7 million, and only around 200,000 of those lived in Montana.²⁸⁶ Simple everyday ranch experiences such as a sheep chewing its cud will increasingly be performed, in the future, without the presence of human observers, sheepherders, in the pasture. Yet already, the viewer may never actually have lived in a manner that offered this kind of sustained connection to everyday life on the ranch, where there might be

²⁸⁶ Faith Rogow, *POV Community Engagement and Discussion Guide: Sweetgrass*, eds. Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Ilisa Barbash (American Documentary, Inc., 2011), 12.

nothing much to see for long stretches of time, other than a sheep's repetitive chewing. The feeling of nostalgia generated by this film, and in this shot, is thus for many viewers a simulation. The shot offers a mediated experience of ranch life coded as authentic, and offers it up close and in codes of documentary realism, employing the long take of direct cinema and structural film. But for "the typical East Coast viewer," to use Barbash's term for middle class American urbanites, this experience of ranch life on screen precedes any experience of the real.²⁸⁷ The viewer is well aware that the opportunity for access to the real itself has slipped away even before seeing the film. This film is an elegy; the real of the film documents a *last time* that has already passed. The shot offers a real that has been.

The shot also indexes a second absence, a ghost of the sheep itself. After watching the film, we can infer that the sheep in this particular shot was in all likelihood either poached by bears in the Montana wilderness, or shipped off by train to a slaughterhouse. It is a dead sheep that here in our presence at first seems so mundanely alive, so unperturbed by the presence of the camera. The sense of liveness and the agency of the sheep is reinforced when, forty seconds into this shot, the sheep stops jawing, turns its head, and gazes directly into the lens—and, by extension, looks into the eyes of the film's viewers. This moment transgresses the rules that the film has thus far set out for its position relative to its subjects, as a faux-invisible observer, and irrupts the position of the viewer as casual voyeur. Whereas the camera nearly always remains a respectful distance from the human characters in the film, it frequently invades the space

²⁸⁷ Mark Feeney, "A very Different Kind of Western," *Boston Globe*, sec. Arts and Entertainment, March 28, 2010 (accessed 8/12/12).

of the sheep—when they eat, when they cross a stream, when they cram through a narrow trail in the woods, when they give birth, when they nurse, etc. The initial moment when the sheep turns to stare at the lens indexes a history of the camera’s intrusive looking of which we are aware, but usually dimly (Figure 3.4). For viewers who have experienced the shame-inducing stares of oppressed human subjects regarding the lenses of outsider cameras reporting on their suffering, the sheep’s definitive turn toward the camera touches a troubling legacy. But our collective affective jolt of complicity quickly turns humorous. This is a sheep, after all, upon which we project our sense of empathy for the nuisance of the camera staring too long. The sheep, “proverbially the world’s dumbest animal” in Castaing-Taylor’s description, is our mirror, serving as a vacuous companion for humans since they began to domesticate animals 10,000 years ago.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ *Sweetgrass* POV, “Interview with Barbash and Castaing-Taylor,” July 5, 2011b, <http://www.pbs.org/pov/sweetgrass/interview.php>.



Figure 3.4: Video still from *Sweetgrass* by Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, 2009. Copyright has been obtained.

Across thousands of years of sacred myths in Abrahamic religions, the figure of the sheep has stood in for sacrifice, spiritual purity, vulnerability, and innocence in times of strife. Castaing-Taylor named several such myths in a 2009 interview with *Cinemascope*: “The carefree gamboling lamb, Christ as agnus dei, the church as his flock, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Muhammad, and King David all being shepherds, the Passover lamb as Korban for Jews, and their annual sacrifice in Eid-al-Adha for Muslims, and so on.” The sheep that he recorded, he went on to suggest, offered a different kind of experience to their human interlocutors on the ranch, himself included. “But when you’re with them, and especially day in day out in such close quarters up in the mountains, their allegorization just falls away, and you’re left encountering brute sheep, negotiating with them where to go, where to bed down, where to feed, whatever: you’re in this embodied relationship, resisting, cajoling, cohabiting together.” He has insisted

that the film in the end is as much about the phenomenological experience of sheep as an elegy for the labor of the American cowboy. The sheep “stole *Sweetgrass*’ thunder,” he said. Tacit in this statement is the filmmakers’ conviction that the long duration of observational shots produces a phenomenological experience for viewers that meaningfully engages them in the lifeworld of sheep and shepherds, if not the clarity of their subjects’ thoughts, intentions, or histories. He attributed the fact that “every ethnographic film festival has rejected [the film] summarily” to this orientation toward the film’s subjects, which he claimed to be at odds with the “limpid clarity of expository prose” that stands in for anthropologists’ “quest for ‘cultural meaning,’ which they’re hell bent on linguifying”—a short-sighted and mistaken position, in his view. “Clarity for me is an illusion, a product of a certain kind of cultural textology,” Castaing-Taylor stated about this aspect of the film. “I’m never clear about anything; are you? Isn’t cognitive and sensory muddle the human condition?”²⁸⁹ Perhaps to this point, the film is less elegiac about a second kind of labor in decline, that of the filmmakers recording and editing as curators of cognitive and sensory muddle. Barbash and Castaing-Taylor aim to revive an observationally grounded aesthetic sensibility more in keeping with documentary production trends of the 1960s and 1970s than 2009. The way of seeing, in other words, is also a historical reenactment of sorts, and thereby an implicit political statement about the pace of hypermediated, modern life.

Numerous reviewers have connected the sense of Barbash and Castaing-Taylor’s filmmaking, in fact, to the rigidly observational style of American direct cinema filmmaker Frederick Wiseman. Barbash and Castaing-Taylor conduct no interviews with

²⁸⁹ Kuehner, “Interviews: Keeper of Sheep Lucien Castaing-Taylor on *Sweetgrass*.”

subjects, employ no music, and avoid the use of cutaways inside of scenes. Many of the shots play for minutes at a time. Analogous to scenes in countless Wiseman films, *Sweetgrass* follows a process. A family of sheepherders in Montana and their hired ranch hands lead their flock of 3000 sheep to pasture on public grazing grounds in the Absaroka-Beartooth Mountains. Over the summer months, the sheep graze on the sweet grass that grows there naturally while two hired cowboys, John Ahern and Pat Connolly, struggle to contain the herd and ward off predatory wolves, bears, and wolverines. The landscape is beautiful, but violent, dangerous, and difficult. Connolly curses at the sheep, complains about aching knees, and admits that he might not be cut out for this work anymore. “I’d rather enjoy these mountains than hate ‘em,” he says atop a mountain in a tearful, climactic cell phone call home to his mother, set to a pan of a spectacular mountain landscape (Figure 3.5). “This shit’s going to catch up with me.” After several months, Ahern and Connolly lead the fattened sheep back to town and onto a cargo train, ostensibly headed for a slaughterhouse. Two title cards at the end of the film communicate to viewers that they have just witnessed the “last band of sheep” that undertook this 150 mile journey into the Absaroka-Beartooth mountains for summer pasture. “There’s such an irony when one of the cowboys is so miserable in the documentary, and there’s a pan of this magnificent landscape,” said Barbash of the film’s subversion of the romantic tropes of the pastoral. “Viewers must think, how could he not want to be there?”²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ Feeney, “A very Different Kind of Western.”



Figure 3.5: Video still from *Sweetgrass* by Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, 2009. Copyright has been obtained.

In spite of the simplicity of the narrative, or perhaps because of it, the film offers audiovisual textures of its subjects' everyday lives as its central concern. The long take beckons viewers to attend to little things and revel in their relationship to the spare narrative in a way reminiscent of participants in historical reenactments.²⁹¹ To return to the example of the sheep chewing its cud, it is not “a sheep” that viewers see in this shot, as would be the case were it held on screen for three seconds instead of fifty. In our impatience with the image, we either drop out of the film or dive into its details, noticing the texture of the sheep's wool, the circular pattern of its repetitive jaw movement, the

²⁹¹ Roddey Reid offers an alternative reading of the long take, long shot in his article on cinematography in Todd Haynes' *Safe*. The tension between distanced looking and the spectator's desire to empathize with depicted characters, he says, “queers and goes against the grain of what could be called ‘a politics and epistemology of visibility’.” See Roddey Reid, “UnSafe at any Distance: Todd Haynes' Visual Culture of Health and Risk. for Steven Shaviro,” *Film Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (1998): 33.

patina on the brass bell on its neck, or the peculiar shape of the sheep's pupil. As in an historical reenactment, it is the felt experience of the mundane everyday, and not the larger forces of historical change, that constitute the primary focus of concern.

The reception of the film, however, speaks as much to the life circumstances of its viewers as the lifeworld of this ghosted sheep and its cowboy shepherds. In the midst of the economic crisis of 2008, and a renewed bout of soul searching within the American nation about the virtues of individualistic striving and the possibilities of living on the land, the decision to open the film with the sheep's gaze at the lens was not just a joke. This moment indexed the introspection of viewers themselves, who were then presented with an hour and a half long meditation on the end of the iconic life of cowboys on the range, long the symbol of entrepreneurial American independence at the center of myths about national greatness. On screen is a reenactment of a way of life that most viewers know through action-packed Westerns or nature documentaries following the "feed, breed, and kill" formula, rather than lonely nights in the mountains and personal contact with ranch animals. Against this backdrop of such ideas about the natural West, the long duration of shots like the one of the sheep takes viewers by surprise. The slow, sparseness of the film might resemble either an incomprehensible string of "amateur home movies of inept sheep ranchers,"²⁹² in the words of an Amazon reviewer who claimed to have grown up on a ranch, or the conduit to discovery about what ranching life might be like, or have been like, in the flesh. "I didn't appreciate the style at first," wrote a viewer on the film's comments section for the public television program *POV*, which aired the film in 2011.

²⁹² A. Reader, "Like Someone's Home Movies of Sheep," May 27, 2010, *Sweetgrass* customer reviews on Amazon.com, <http://www.amazon.com/Sweetgrass-Pat-Connelly/product-reviews/B003FO80MI?pageNumber=3>.

But he said that after a while, “it was kind of cool to just be along for the ride and have the opportunity to form my own thoughts and opinions rather than being told everything.”²⁹³ The duration of shots simulates the pace of life on the range, and so produces a sense of engagement and then nostalgia for viewers who cannot experience it firsthand. One American critic, for example, described his reaction to reading the film’s final title card in this way: “what you have just seen is the last dying breath of the real life behind an American myth. And in the dark of the theater, you feel like weeping for the world.”²⁹⁴

Castaing-Taylor and Barbash committed early on to the long take aesthetic of structural filmmaking, a decision facilitated in part by their choice to shoot the documentary on standard definition DV tape instead of 16 mm film. The low cost and comparatively light weight of the tapes enabled Castaing-Taylor, the only member of the filmmaking pair to venture into the Absaroka-Beartooth mountains for the summer, to carry hours of tapes in a backpack and experiment with takes of unusually long duration, sometimes more than thirty minutes at a time. Initially, these shots were intended for gallery installations like *Hell Roaring Creek* (2010), a three shot video of the 3000 sheep crossing a river at dawn, but the parallels in structure and theme between these early installation pieces and *Sweetgrass* are unmistakable.²⁹⁵ At its eighteen-minute length,

²⁹³ *Sweetgrass* POV blog, “Film Update,” June 30, 2011a, http://www.pbs.org/pov/sweetgrass/film_update.php.

²⁹⁴ Peter Simek, “A Eulogy for the Cowboy: *Sweetgrass* Takes You on the Last Montana Sheep Drive,” *D Magazine*, March 28, 2010, <http://frontrow.dmagazine.com/2010/04/a-eulogy-for-the-cowboy-sweetgrass-takes-you-on-the-last-montana-sheep-drive/> (accessed 8/12/12).

²⁹⁵ For a more in depth description of this piece, see Grimshaw and Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life*, 151-2.

Hell Roaring Creek leads viewers through a series of discoveries about the world in front of the lens. It starts as a black screen, the creek before dawn. By the video's conclusion, the sun has risen, all the sheep have crossed the river in full shot in front of the camera, and the world in the Montana mountains has become visible. The uninitiated urbanite viewer can come to think about the particulars in the shot—the slow reveal as the sun rises of the beauty of the natural landscape, the slightly panicked demeanor of the crammed sheep as they cross the creek, the fact that the sheep seem to cross the stream and screen without end, and the quiet emptiness of the landscape once the sheep have all crossed. The duration of the continuous shots measures both the time span of the sunrise and the scale and manner of industrial sheepherding in the region, while also gesturing to the historical end of this kind of ranching practice. The final frame presents an image that bears no visible traces of the ranching activity that passed through *this very place* just moments before. The particulars of the shots invite viewers without ranching experience to reflect more broadly on the existence and then decline of this practice, an effect replicated in the early shot of the sheep in *Sweetgrass*. “It’s a more structural piece,” Castaing-Taylor explained of *Hell Roaring Creek*, “but in working this way the virtues of the long take crept up on us and changed the way *Sweetgrass* was edited.”²⁹⁶ The filmmakers have stated that this was a discovery made late in the editing. The shot of the sheep chewing—and the film’s long duree ethological bent more broadly—was added to the beginning of the film near the end of their editing work on the project.

Unseen but detectable in both *Hell Roaring Creek* and the opening shot of the sheep is the presence of Castaing-Taylor’s body behind the camera. It is worth

²⁹⁶ Kuehner, “Interviews: Keeper of Sheep Lucien Castaing-Taylor on *Sweetgrass*.”

mentioning the filmmakers' discussion of how it came to be his and not Barbash's body performing this act of recording. Considering the physical challenges presented by the grueling journey into the mountains as well as the actual danger of bear attacks, the couple decided that Castaing-Taylor alone should follow the cowboys and their sheep to pasture. Barbash remained on the ranch with the couple's children and recorded footage in the town, which she has said she hopes to edit at some point in the future.²⁹⁷ But *Sweetgrass* and the installation videos associated with the project are comprised almost entirely of footage shot by Castaing-Taylor, much of which retains traces of the physically demanding process of positioning and holding the camera in difficult circumstances. To record *Hell Roaring Creek*, for example, Castaing-Taylor stood knee deep in the water of the stream and became a kind of human tripod for the camera. "When I was filming—or even when I wasn't, actually—I'd wear an absurd kind of harness that would go up my spine, and that would allow the camera to be suspended in front of my head from dawn to dusk," Castaing-Taylor explained, "so it really became part of my identity."²⁹⁸ Willing the camera to become part of him took a toll on Castaing-Taylor's body. At the end of filming in the mountains, Castaing-Taylor required surgery on both of his feet, and he now has to wear orthopedic shoes. Subtle movements of the camera in *Hell Roaring Creek* suggest the presence of a body in the water recording this scene. The sheep's sudden gaze at the lens in the opening of *Sweetgrass*, likewise, tips off viewers that the filmmakers' presence in the world of the film matters, as tacit as it tends to be.

²⁹⁷ POV, "Interview."

²⁹⁸ Alva French, "Sweetgrass Gets Sweet Praise," *Sweetgrass* POV blog, July 5, 2011, http://www.pbs.org/pov/blog/2011/07/sweetgrass_gets_sweet_praise/.

These devices are typical of films made in the tradition of ethnographic cinema articulated by MacDougall, whom Barbash and Castaing-Taylor credit as a key influence on their development as sensory ethnographers. While the extent to which such eye contact across the spatial and temporal rupture of the screen can serve as a surrogate for the touching hands and the shared accountability of co-presence remains in dispute, sensory cinema practitioners following MacDougall tend to regard the image on screen as a potential conduit for empathy across space and time, and so this sense of empathic touch becomes a question about aesthetics and voice. By what principles, methods, and subjects, in MacDougall's words, can sensory cinema practice serve as "the empirical arm of phenomenology" and yet retain an ethical, humanizing relationship on screen to subjects before the lens, which is by necessity a situated rather than empirical relationship?²⁹⁹ An on screen subject's glance at the lens, a brief contextualizing voiceover at the opening of an otherwise observational film, long take recording, or a single conversation with on screen subjects about their thoughts on anthropologists with cameras in their midst stands in for the subjectivity of the filmmakers as it matters to the film's subject. These forms of contact remained relatively non-interventionist, invested in the filmmakers' beliefs in the intersubjectivity of ethnographic film encounters across subjects, filmmakers, and spectators, and the power of the films to transcend preconceived categories of difference between viewers and subjects. Castaing-Taylor has made the case that MacDougall's writing and style of filmmaking actively resists what he sees as the fatal attractions of autobiography, in which subject-filmmakers perform themselves in ways that may or may not emphasize the details most relevant to the

²⁹⁹ MacDougall and Castaing-Taylor, *Transcultural Cinema*, 272.

viewing audience, and dramatization, in which the staging of scenes “in fact sublimates the real behind a simulation of its own fashioning.”³⁰⁰

Such thinking about film form cuts against trends in commercial documentary, performance art, and hybrid projects focused on the trauma of loss. As feminist film and performance scholars Jones, Walker, Marks, and Sobchack suggest, loss, traumatic experience, and fractured forms of identity are neither visible for an observational phenomenology to represent, nor linear like conventional narrative form demands of its subjects. Though a film about loss that depicts the struggles of ranch hands that may have been traumatic, the narrative arch in *Sweetgrass* is linear and the film is deeply invested in the “vulgar positivism,” to use Castaing-Taylor’s term, of prioritizing the recorded moment in its sonic and visual dimensions over either the intimately interpersonal or the psychic dimensions of experience.³⁰¹ The long duration of shots, in this context, turns the tables on where surprise and discomfort reside. In the duration of the shots, we sense the film’s demand to actively engage with the details inside the image to make it meaningful, to reperform the filmmakers’ mediated observations of the world they came to know through filmmaking. Shot duration here forces the modern viewer to struggle with a foreign sense of time, and an even more foreign form of consciousness, that of the sheep, by engaging with the unadorned, synch sound image on the screen. We are presented with a sheep in its time, and left to decipher for ourselves what we can know through this encounter.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 6.

³⁰¹ Kuehner, “Interviews: Keeper of Sheep Lucien Castaing-Taylor on *Sweetgrass*.”

In other words, we, like the filmmakers, look at this world as unabashed outsiders, a departure from what MacDougall called the “unprivileged camera style.” MacDougall described this style by way of example, referring to the aesthetic choices he and his wife Judith made while shooting amongst the Jie people of Uganda:

What we were trying to give was a sense of being present in a Jie compound, a situation in which few of our viewers would ever find themselves. There were several reasons for this—to counteract prevalent representations of ‘exotic’ people, to express the realities of fieldwork, to record informal aspects of culture, to allow individuals rather than types to emerge—and a number of things made it possible: our subjects’ acknowledgement of our presence, our long and static camera takes, and the very low energy-level of much that we filmed. We were not singling out dramatic subjects for attention so much as opening the film up to a kind of anti-subject-matter: apparently inconsequential events that were more like what one would witness in ordinary experience than choose as film subjects.³⁰²

Filming in this way was unprivileged, MacDougall argued, insofar as the embodied vision of the camera remained in tune with everyday life amongst the Jie. This meant not simply recording everyday life from an intimate proximity that communicated the Jie subjects’ knowledge and acceptance of the presence of the camera, though proximity and visible cues of subjects’ comfort were important components of an unprivileged camera style. MacDougall was arguing, rather, that the camera itself should “act” as if it were a kind of silent participant in conversations that took place within a Jie compound. The anthropologist-filmmaker’s camera visually approximated the actions of Jie eyes during an everyday conversation—and by extension, the position of the Jie body—in order to communicate the “sense of being present” as someone learning *to be* Jie. Following narratives that emerged in everyday life conversations of

³⁰² MacDougall and Castaing-Taylor, *Transcultural Cinema*, 200.

subjects, recording long durations of synch sound activity, and retaining in finished films the gradual incorporation of the anthropologists' (and by extension, their cameras) into the intimate spaces of Jie social life enabled finished films to both represent an aspect of life amongst the Jie and to simulate a *Jie way of seeing* for western audiences. The camera itself had to communicate not just the filmmaker's one time actuality of co-presence with subjects before the lens, but more importantly, a sense of *belonging* to this group as a nascent cultural insider. The camera operator was close enough to subjects that they could engage in dialogue, and the sound recordings approximated an acoustic experience aligned with the camera operator's position. To fulfill the humanizing mission of transcultural cinema, the film had to invite uninitiated viewers to identify or empathize with the dilemmas faced by the characters on screen, *as if* they could learn to be Jie by opening themselves up to the perspective of the film.

When Castaing-Taylor stands on mountain ridges to record his subjects wrangling sheep in valleys, however, his camera style is privileged. In such moments, Castaing-Taylor's camera-body assumes the position not of cultural insider, but of outsider or empathic voyeur, watching the cowboys from distant mountains as they grunt and curse at sheep into high-powered radio lavalier microphones, unaware of being recorded. No reciprocal view is possible in these moments, and the camera cannot stand in for his subjects' ways of seeing. In fact, Castaing-Taylor has acknowledged that subjects said and did things on tape that he suspects they never would have if the camera had been more proximate to them. In the climactic scene of the film, for example, the viewer sees a high angle, extreme long shot of Connolly on his horse, his dog, and a very large flock of sheep at the bottom of a mountain. Though Connolly appears on screen as a few

grainy pixels beneath the black dot of a cowboy hat, we hear his voice as if we are inside of his chest cavity. His language immediately breaks the spell of the picturesque landscape. “Ho!” Connolly calls. “Back up there, you bitches!” The shot unfolds in this frame for about a minute as the dog runs circles around the outside edge of the herd, which took a wrong turn at the top of a ridgeline and wandered into a dangerously exposed valley. Connolly’s invective at the sheep grows nastier and more misogynistic as the time passes. Then, Castaing-Taylor begins a slow, carefully executed zoom out as the sound of Connolly’s cursing, the deep breathing, and the bleating sheep continues. Preoccupied with the urgency of wrangling the herd a mile from the camera—a task laden with considerable economic import for he and the ranch owners alike—Connolly does not seem to perceive the camera recording his sound and image, and he continues his rant. After 38 seconds, Castaing-Taylor settles on his final frame. Connolly, the sheep, and his dogs are barely visible in the midst of a magnificent view of the natural landscape in the mountains. “Fucking dog,” Connolly curses, now breathing heavily. “You’re as worthless as the tits on a bull hog.” To say the least, Castaing-Taylor’s postcard view of lush, green meadows, billowing clouds, pine trees, and snowcapped mountains receding into the distance does not square with Connolly’s simultaneously, verbally communicated orientation toward the space. Viewers are not witnessing the traces of a tacitly accepted, reciprocal relationship between cameraperson and subject, but rather one of one-sided visibility and exposure. The shot raises an ethical question. Is it actually preferable to record subjects who do not know that they are being filmed, even if they have given their general consent to the filmmaker to record? This disjuncture exposes a side of Connolly that he and the ranching community have

occasionally intimated they would rather have not shared with the film's viewing public,³⁰³ although nary a review of the film fails to comment on this scene. It undermines the myth of the stoic cowboy as an icon of masculinity, verbally communicates the stress, exhaustion, and anger that goes with shepherding labor, and disarms urban viewers' desires to soak in the beauty of the landscape they see. This moment in the represented natural west is neither action packed nor pastoral; it is, as it likely was for cowboys a century and more earlier, simply grueling and dehumanizing.

In her article "Cow Boys, Cattle Men, and Masculinity" (2010), historian of the American West Jacqueline Moore expanded upon the various vested interests that turned the undesirable plight of the hired ranch hand in late 19th century Texas—decidedly boys and not men, in her telling—into the mythological symbol of ideal masculinity in the United States. In contradistinction to the cowboys of Hollywood Westerns whose manhood was never questioned, corporate investors in industrial scale cattle ranches and the middle-class managers who operated them viewed the hired, working class ranchhands as misguided *boys* in need of paternal guidance and discipline.³⁰⁴ Moore argued that the ideals of cowboy masculinity that developed through these relationships centered on the boys' technical skill and loyalty to the corporation, enforced by the cowboys' need for continued employment *and* by the criticism of their fellows for incompetence or complaint. Akin to the way that gender historian Nancy Cott discussed

³⁰³ See, for instance, the comments of Diane Allestad, matriarch of the ranch, in her update on the family posted on the *Sweetgrass* POV blog, "Film Update," June 30, 2011a, http://www.pbs.org/pov/sweetgrass/film_update.php.

³⁰⁴ Jacqueline M. Moore, "Cow Boys, Cattle Men and Competing Masculinities on the Texas Frontier," in *What is Masculinity?: Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World*, eds. John H. Arnold and Sean Brady (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 349.

the “bonds of womanhood” in Victorian New England—which bound women together through their shared experience as women as it bound them down to the domestic sphere—the bonds of manly affection that developed in these homosocial groups of cowboys were largely the product of their shared experience of being bound by their status as working-class hired hands.³⁰⁵ While these bonds could extend across racial differences, moreover, Moore suggested that they tended not to in the 19th century, when white Americans across the class spectrum tended to attribute to non-white peoples inherent qualities of inferiority and slavishness—the opposite of dominant masculine ideals. The frontier was not a place of freedom and rugged individualism, in this light, but a place of hard labor, extensive managerial oversight, racism, and bleak prospects for the future. Lacking a sense of control over their lives, cowboys took to gambling, drinking, fighting and whoring—activities that earned them reputations locally as miscreants, even as middle and upper class easterners reenvisioned cowboy masculinity in the image of restrained, bourgeois self-made white men who had escaped the feminizing effects of urban life. Teddy Roosevelt celebrated the cowboy’s self-possession as the ideal salve to the waning of masculine vigor that he saw in the wake of industrialization in cities. The cowboy possessed “few of the emasculated milk-and-water moralities admired by the pseudo-philanthropists; but he does possess, to a very high degree, the stern, manly qualities that are invaluable to a nation,” he wrote.³⁰⁶ Subsequent westerns, like films starring Gene Autry in the 1930s, Moore pointed out, presented the cowboy as a tame and virtuous man who would treat elders, children, and

³⁰⁵ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*.

³⁰⁶ Moore, “Cow Boys, Cattle Men and Competing Masculinities on the Texas Frontier,” 363.

animals kindly; “never smoke or drink; are never racially or religiously intolerant; are always clean in thought, deed and personal grooming; respect women and the law; and above all are patriots.” This was a far cry from the “out-of-control, overgrown boys” that ranching communities perceived in the late 1800s.³⁰⁷

Sweetgrass tacks between these two representational traditions in its depictions of the hired hands who work on the range, and the result is a decidedly ambivalent view of their lives with the sheep. In shots like those in which the silhouettes of cowboys ride horses on mountain ridges, the film seems to anticipate that urban viewers will come to the theater with the iconography of Hollywood Westerns or the Marlboro advertising campaign as their primary set of references for understanding life on the range. One reviewer on Amazon wrote that Ahern “is the real Marlboro man not the Hollywood version we've been taught to believe.”³⁰⁸ Anthony Lane, in his *New Yorker* review, said that “even the Duke, in his *Red River* days, might have scratched his chin in approval” at a scene of Ahern casually urinating next to the carcass of a sheep, killed the night before by bears.³⁰⁹

But I want to make the case that the more significant expression of masculinity in this tradition comes from the behind-camera performance of seeing, and the editing decisions that leave the duration of individual shots long and quiet. Barbash and Castaing-Taylor communicate something like what Roosevelt pined for in his idealized

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Michael Monagan, “a work of art (but not for everyone),” *Sweetgrass* customer reviews on Amazon.com, Sept. 23, 2010, <http://www.amazon.com/Sweetgrass-Pat-Connelly/product-reviews/B003FO80MI>.

³⁰⁹ Anthony Lane, “The Current Cinema: *Sweetgrass*,” *The New Yorker*, Jan. 11, 2010, <http://sweetgrassthemovie.com/2010/01/the-new-yorker/> (accessed 8/12/12).

image of the silent, forceful cowboy. In the amount of time that the sheep chews its cud on screen, an imagined viewer could flit between several emails and check the day's news headlines. Viewed through the kind of anxiety that Roosevelt expressed about the effects of urban life on masculine vigor, the accelerated speed of media might be seen as a new kind of threatening feminization. Though itself a media object that plays on a screen, *Sweetgrass* distinguishes itself from others by stubbornly resisting subservience to speed. In this regard, the film mixes classed sensibilities. Its subjects derive from popular culture and associations with action packed Hollywood westerns; its pace derives from structural and observational filmmaking forms that alienate viewers more accustomed to commercial sensibilities about their use of time. To refuse to adapt to expectations about the normative duration of shots is nostalgic for an older ideal of masculine embodiment—and one at odds with the transformation in middle-class masculinity occasioned by the rise of new kinds of work.

The shift in the American economy since the 1960s, also the beginning of the direct cinema and cinema verite nonfiction film movements, has been to prioritize jobs that bear little resemblance to the physically demanding factory and agricultural work of the industrial eras. Particularly after 2008, cultural critics across the political spectrum in the United States began to point out that the post-industrial economy had also produced the gradual decline of white, male privilege, and a concomitant “crisis in masculinity.” Young, college educated American men who had become civic leaders in previous generations, argued feminist scholar of masculinity Michael Kimmel, now wallowed for a decade or more in the narcissistic, affective pleasures of “guyland”—binge drinking, sex, sports, fast-paced action movies, and pornography—as college educated women

assumed middle class professional jobs.³¹⁰ Conservative cultural critic Lyn Hymowitz attributed the “rise of women” to the fact that the skills and dispositions most valued in what she termed a “knowledge economy” tended toward femininity rather than masculinity. “By the late 1960s and for the decades that followed, the Western world produced a growing number of jobs trading in knowledge and ideas rather than brawn, manual dexterity, or routine clerical skills. These were knowledge jobs mostly in the fields of technology, medicine, law, design, culture, and finance,” she observed. “Had newly liberated women been staring at such jobs as truck driving or concrete mixing, it’s an open question whether they would have thought that vacuuming was all that bad. . . . In fact, it’s no exaggeration to say that the knowledge economy had as much to do with women’s lives as the pill.”³¹¹ Hymowitz and Kimmel alike suggest that this shift demands reconsidering the value of the tacitly white, middle class, masculine ideals associated with achieving the American Dream—competition over cooperation, quiet stoicism over theatrical expression, and universal truths over the particularities of embodied experience—and perhaps revising its meaning altogether. Much of this new work is focused on creating affect in design and image-making trades, particularly in the domains of film and video production, which has less to do with the goal of accumulating objects than with producing experiences. The increasing speed of communication technologies has facilitated the unparalleled circulation of information, and led to demand for workers who can navigate complex networks of relationships quickly and gracefully.

³¹⁰ Michael S. Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (New York: Harper, 2008).

³¹¹ Kay S. Hymowitz, *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women has Turned Men into Boys* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 25, 81-2.

The ideal duration of any form of communication—be it filmic, spoken, or written—is as short as possible. In this context, films of long shot duration like *Sweetgrass* are not just anomalous. They are aggressively antagonistic to the prevailing logic of what communication should be and do. Har’el’s *Bombay Beach* is far less invested in communicating her subjects’ lived experience of time through on screen duration, but giving up extended shot duration affords her observational shooting a different kind of access to her subjects.

“The broken American Dream”: *Bombay Beach* by Alma Har’el

“I got something serious to tell you,” says the voice over of Benny Parrish about 48 minutes into Har’el’s documentary. It sounds as though he is talking in a tunnel, a stylistic manipulation unique in the film. Benny is an imaginative seven-year old boy who lives with his parents and three siblings in a rural desert trailer community by the Salton Sea called Bombay Beach. At this point in the film, we are aware that local doctors have diagnosed Benny as bi-polar and prescribed a variety of medications to manage his behavior, including Ritalin and lithium. A jump cut montage of Benny’s mother standing by as he takes his pills in the morning—a routine disarmingly reenacted over four different days in this forty second sequence—has primed our concern for Benny’s well being. On the image, Benny explores a brightly painted concrete mountain in the middle of the desert.³¹² The camera tracks his feet in flip flops across a yellow and beige staircase, and then frames him through an oblong window in the mountain as he

³¹² Though not contextualized in the film, the location is an oft-photographed site in the Salton Sea area called Salvation Mountain, a multiyear art project carried out by a local resident named Leonard Knight.

navigates around old buckets of paint in its interior. Benny wears a skin-tight, leopard print jumpsuit with fabric that ends just past his knees and elbows, about two sizes too small. He appears in long shot on a boat in the sand nearby and makes believe as though he is rowing it with a decayed wooden pole. His voice continues across these shots: “I was in jail for one hundred years. Even mom was in jail, too. Me and Michael [Benny’s brother] get ripped apart, and I’d be alone with someone else. There was no TV, no radio, no food, no chairs, no beds, no house. No anything. You had to sleep on the ground where scorpions are. Bad people are in there. They’d killed kids.” The image cuts to a medium close up of Benny, inside a nondescript beige room and wearing a button down plaid shirt, continuing his story in synch. The sound returns to the naturalistic style used in the rest of the film. “There’s a rope tied up on the wood. They put—they make a little hole, they put on your head, right here (*Benny touches his neck with his right index finger*), and. . . they tell you jump off, and you’ll die.” Benny momentarily looks at the camera, his expression blank.

Har’el has described her film both as a reflection on “American dreams that got broken” and an homage to what her subjects “create around themselves in a reality that doesn’t really define them because that place is so undefined.”³¹³ The film centers on the lives of three males from Bombay Beach: Benny; Cedric Thompson, a black sixteen year old from South Central Los Angeles who has moved to the Salton Sea to escape gang life and focus on earning a football scholarship to go to college; and Red, an 85 year old resident of a trailer park who reflects philosophically on the meaning of love, friendship,

³¹³ Logan Hill, “Tribeca Film Festival’s Breakout Doc Director Alma Har’el.” *Vulture*, April 21, 2011, http://www.vulture.com/2011/04/tribeca_film_festivals_breakou.html.

and poverty as he struggles to survive. The characters never meet one another in the film and live out decidedly different lives in the same general location; in the finished film, their stories are intercut like scenes in a music video. Har'el is a music video director by trade and training, and it was only because she traveled to the Salton Sea area to shoot a video for the alternative rock band Beirut that she came to think about making a documentary there. "I thought it would be great to take the qualities movement can have and use it to explore things in the lives of people who aren't dancers," she said of her initial concept.³¹⁴ In interviews, she states that she is "not a very cerebral director" who considers the meanings of this or that shot as she records it, and she never attended a film school.³¹⁵ Nonetheless, *Bombay Beach* has screened at Castaing-Taylor's Sensory Ethnography Lab, and her production practice bears similarities to other works of sensory cinema. She lived in Bombay Beach off and on for over two years to conduct her shooting. Without a budget or additional crew, Har'el pursued the bulk of her film through single person observational shooting, radio mic audio recording, and an occasional interview. Her camera tends to be proximate to her characters, as though she had become an accepted part of their lives over this time. And the shots pay a great deal of attention to unspectacular everyday interpersonal interactions, following small developments in subjects' lives rather than manufacturing a dramatic arch. Like Rouch (but unlike many documentary filmmakers), Har'el showed her subjects rushes to seek out their thoughts in the midst of shooting and then editing the film.

³¹⁴ Philip Concannon, "They all have their path and as tragic as some of it is it can also be inspiring' - An Interview with Alma Har'el," *Phil on Film*, February 1, 2012, <http://www.philonfilm.net/2012/02/interview-alma-harel.html> (accessed June 20, 2012).

³¹⁵ Ibid.

Unlike other documentary films about the survival struggles of the American poor, *Bombay Beach* began as an experiment with choreographing non-actors in their everyday space, an idea that the finished film retains. Without warning, the subjects of Har'el's observational ethnography morph into dancers moving in choreographed rhythm to a song by the group Beirut, slowly fading in. Rather than observing everyday life for a documentary, Har'el was documenting everyday life for a series of dance performances for film. If the goal of distant shots in *Sweetgrass* was to minimize the self-consciousness of subjects through the absence of the visible presence of the cameraperson, the goal of Har'el's work process was to minimize the distance between herself and her subjects so as to create something new through collaborating.

Bombay Beach is as deeply informed by the filmmaker's attunement to popular culture, the medium of video, and the close ups and parallel editing aesthetic central to much music video production as by its observational shooting style. In the quick pace of its cutting, the integration of choreographed dance sequences, and intimacy of shooting, this is a work that bears the marks of a relatively young maker comfortable with the affordances of video and the affects elicited by bodily movement and proximity. It likely could not have been produced on film. The collaboratively produced dance sequences (between herself, her subjects, and choreographer) were central to building relationships of trust and the subjects' sense of agency in producing the finished film itself. *Bombay Beach* is interesting not for the journeys the characters take—indeed, they don't really go anywhere, and the end resembles the beginning in its narrative arch—but for the intimacy through which these lives unfold on the screen in a space that resembles haunting dreams. Intercutting amongst the three central characters, *Bombay Beach* proceeds as a

phenomenological meditation on growing up and old as an American man in a landscape that indexes the history of ruin produced by actions of ambitious and entrepreneurial white American men pursuing dreams of wealth. The fantasies good living in 1950s America exacerbated the environmental devastation of the Salton Sea area begun at the turn of the 20th century; Har'el focuses on the ways of living that developed in the area amongst the poor who moved there after the bust. "I found it so haunting," she recalled of her first visit to the Salton Sea. "It immediately makes you feel your own mortality and there's something about it that's beyond reality."³¹⁶

A long history of one large-scale planning disaster layered on top of another haunts the landscape surrounding the Salton Sea. In 1900, the California Development Company initiated a project to divert water from the Colorado River into the dry lakebed area known as the Salton Sink in order to facilitate agriculture in the Imperial Valley. For several years, this venture successfully enabled farmers to grow crops in the area, but silt from the Colorado River gradually filled the canals. Unusually large amounts of rainfall in 1905 broke the dikes, and the entire Colorado River drained into the Salton Sink, creating the 385 square mile Salton Sea and flooding out several towns in the region. In the 1920s, the area became a tourist attraction as a kind of inland beach in Southern California, and the home to a variety of fishes and waterfowl. However, the landlocked lake gradually accumulated salt content due to the high salinity of the sole inflow channel and the lack of outflow. Coupled with fertilizer runoffs from local agriculture and the resulting algae blooms, fish died in increasingly higher numbers through the 1960s. Efforts to turn waterside areas into destination resorts in the 1950s

³¹⁶ Ibid.

failed, largely as a result of the toxic environmental conditions in and around the lake, and most human inhabitants abandoned the area by the 1970s. The Salton Sink had become, in the words of one critic, “a pool of dead fish in the middle of the desert.”³¹⁷

The film *Bombay Beach* opens with a montage of advertisements from the 1950s for a variety of Salton Sea development projects. The “miracle sea in the desert” with its “wide, sandy beaches” claim the confident male narrators, will become the “new recreation capital of the world.” White people wearing sunglasses and wide smiles waterski behind motorboats, a JFK lookalike casts a line into the water, and a young woman in a red mini-skirt lounges lakeside as a leisure boat returns from the sea loaded down with its catch. A perky patois of flute and violin music prattles on in the background. “And you have been present at the birth of a city,” the narrator concludes. A jarring straight cut interrupts the crescendo of music beneath a full shot of a man and woman walking away from the camera in silhouette, lakeside at sunset. On screen appears a video image of the Salton Sea landscape recorded in the late 2000s, sans music or people. In the foreground, a small brown sign on a metal pole, slightly canted in the way it protrudes from the sand by the lake, reads “CLOSED AREA.” A single bird flies across the frame in the background, slightly obscured by a haze that lingers above the water. Shots of faded out business signs, metal skeletons of trailers rusting on the sand by the sea, and fish corpses piled on the shore flesh out the ambience of the area fifty years later, and lead into introductory shots of the film’s three central characters. Red, an elderly man who lives in Bombay Beach, speaks the first words in a low, deep voiceover

³¹⁷ Dustin Chang, “*Bombay Beach*: Alma Har’el Interview,” *Twitch*, October 14, 2011, <http://twitchfilm.com/interviews/2011/10/alma-harel-interview.php>.

juxtaposed with an image of Benny peeling paint off of the empty windowpane of an abandoned looking home. “Love is a combination of several things. Trust, caring, and honesty” he says. “If you see love between your parents, even if it’s just once in a while, that will install love in you. If you don’t, you’re going to be a long, lonesome dude in a faraway place.”

The visage of such a dude, ironically, was the motivation behind Har’el’s initial encounter with the Salton Sea. Har’el’s music video for the Beirut song *Concubine* features lead singer Zach Condon dressed as the Joe Buck character played by Jon Voight in *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), wandering aimlessly through the tawdry walk of stars area in Hollywood. Voight’s original performance as Buck in the Academy Award winning film was itself a haunting evocation of dreams gone awry in a wash of drugs, parties, and aimless urban wonderings in late 1960s New York City. As Buck runs through the money he saved as a dishwasher in Texas in his largely unsuccessful attempts to establish a career as a gigolo dressed as a cowboy for wealthy New York socialites, he thinks back to moments of his youth in Texas, represented in *Midnight Cowboy* as flashbacks. Har’el’s music video reenacts this structural form, with Bombay Beach serving as the site of the Condon character’s youth. Mike Parrish, the older brother of the boy at the center of *Bombay Beach* the documentary film, plays the boyhood Condon character in the flashback sequences of the music video, dressed in a cowboy hat and frill suede jacket and wandering through the dystopic landscape by the Salton Sea. Handheld shots evoke the space of the Parrish family’s life—the darkened interior of a trailer bedroom where Mike casually inspects his black cowboy hat, the hands of his mother washing a pink, plastic wine glass in a kitchen sink in the morning light that comes through a trailer

window, dogs on a roof barking at the camera, the purchase of a light blue freeze pop from a cluttered neighborhood convenience store, and Mike from behind as he ambles into the flat empty landscape of the desert, a small cowboy with a long shadow in the early morning light. While intended as a visual reference to the original *Midnight Cowboy*, the hat and jacket also communicate that the boy and the man are the same character across an expanse of time in the diegesis of the music video. The parallel editing between the Condon and Mike scenes thus communicate about disjunctures both in place and time. These events are not happening simultaneously in two different places, as in the structure of D.W. Griffith's early suspense films, in which parallel editing elicits anxieties, for instance, about whether the man driving the car would save the woman tied to the tracks before the arrival of a train. In Har'el's video, the parallel editing juxtaposes the same character at two different times in his life and in two places. The intention behind the editing structure foregrounds questions about coming of age, or the existential quandary of salvaging meaning from dreams that lead to disillusion rather than fulfillment. The parallel editing, in other words, focuses the viewer on psychological connections across time rather than narrative ones across space.

Likewise, Har'el's video stands as an echo and a reflection of *Midnight Cowboy*, or perhaps its afterlife. A boy who dresses as a cowboy and passes time walking along the railroad tracks by his rural desert home ends up in the western metropole as a young man to try his hand at roleplaying the Joe Buck character on the Hollywood walk of stars. Buck's failures to achieve the American Dream by capitalizing on his self-styled image as an exotic Texas cowboy in New York are here echoed in the Condon character's unheeded street performance that aims to capitalize on the success of the original film.

The only figure who pays him any attention is another walk of stars street performer, a man dressed as Gene Simmons of the rock band Kiss, who asks the Condon character for a cigarette, and then removes a Kiss-length prosthetic tongue to smoke it. As the Condon character roams alone across a concrete bridge above the polluted Los Angeles River at sunset and then peers out at the graffiti on its concrete basin, the intercutting to shots of Mike walking alone to the shoreline of Bombay Beach accelerates. Gradually, the framing of shots across this expanse of time comes into alignment, as if the boy's dreams for leaving home and becoming a star led him, as an adult away from home, to seek out places that reminded him of his past. These were the shots that Har'el took of Mike the first time they met. "It wasn't planned," Har'el recalled of this original shoot. "I wasn't looking for a kid or anything, but I had a costume in the car that was a mock-up of the *Midnight Cowboy* costume that Zach Condon was wearing, and I wanted him to be a younger version of the guy that Zach plays in the video. We shot for half an hour at the beach and afterwards I introduced myself and he asked if I wanted to meet his parents."³¹⁸

The Parrishes, though notorious locally for having been the subject of FBI antiterrorism investigations for spearheading a local paramilitary group that shot assault rifles and detonated bombs in the desert, welcomed Har'el into their home and allowed her to film their everyday lives.

The shift from music video to documentary, however, did not change the way Har'el approached her subjects or her shooting. Rather, it would be more accurate to say that the form, pace, and idea at the center of *Concubine* served as a model for the way she

³¹⁸ Concannon, "They all have their path and as tragic as some of it is it can also be inspiring' - An Interview with Alma Har'el."

approached *Bombay Beach*. Har'el's documentary employs non-actors playing out their fantasies and personal dilemmas through choreographed dance sequences in their home environments, and the editing still moves at the pace of a music video. The relationship her parallel editing established between the characters played by Mike Parrish and Zach Condon in the music video, which evoked one individual's disillusionment with childhood dreams and the ephemeral pleasures of "making do" in forgotten spaces, also informs *Bombay Beach*. The three central subjects of the film exist in parallel time, but the relations that the editing structure evokes in moving from one to the other suggests the status of an imagined collective—American males—rather than the progress of a narrative or the psyche of an individual. Through communicating their ambitions for the future, performing their everyday lives, and revealing shards of their family histories, the three central characters of *Bombay Beach* point to the declining status of the American Dream, or at the very least its transformation, in the wake of the financial collapse of 2008. The favorable responses to Har'el's film—as with *Sweetgrass*—likely have had something to do with this climate of reception.

Given this context, I want to focus on Har'el's unusual documentary decision to facilitate collaborations with her subjects on choreographed dances. In the diegesis of the film, these segments seem to develop both organically from the observational moments that precede them, and suddenly, as in a musical where the characters abruptly transition from dialogue to song. In one observational scene, for example, a group of neighborhood pre-teen children plan out "a date" between one of the boys and one of the girls, filling out roles for the rest of their mates to play. A girl named Rebecca writes out the various parts in red crayon on a piece of printer paper, including details about what they will eat.

Benny, who is several years younger, asks to be included, but Rebecca tells him that he cannot participate. “You’ve never tasted Alaskan crab before,” she says to him, framed over Benny’s bare shoulder in a medium shot. “It’s yum.” There is a jump cut, and we hear Benny repeating over and over again “I like fish sticks,” but Rebecca seems not to hear him. After a second jump cut, she says to Benny “You don’t even got any class.” A cut to a reverse shot shows Benny in close up, brow furrowed, framed by an American flag tacked across a window in the background. “I got a class. I got a class at hom—at school,” Benny says. The girls quickly clarify the kind of class they mean, class “like a gentleman.” The shot holds for a beat as Benny turns his head downward.

While Har’el remains quietly behind the camera at this uncomfortable moment in the film, the ensuing scene suggests that she made a gentle effort to intervene. The children move outside, where the older kids push one another bumper cars-style in two baby strollers on the street in front of the trailer. Benny again seems to be excluded. Softly, piano music begins to fade in, and the children start to orchestrate their play subtly to its rhythm. In a profile full shot, two girls push the strollers into the backsides of a boy and a girl standing on the street as if touching their toes. They fall backward into the strollers on a downbeat of the piano, and begin to arch their stomachs skyward in syncopation with Zach Condon’s first line of vocals. There is a cut to a frontal medium shot of the boy repeating this motion, his stomach rising as Condon shifts the pitch of his voice higher on the last, elongated syllable of the word “Oct-o-ber^s,” then a cut to an extreme close up of the girl’s face in profile, with glimpses of the setting sun over the mountains in the background. These details indicate that the viewer should read the scene as choreographed performance rather than observations of everyday life. The

image track cuts to sequence of shots of Benny drawing shapes with chalk on the street, alone. Cued by a shot of Benny turning his head toward the boy and girl, the older children begin to stage the date across a brisk montage sequence. The “waitresses” dance pirouettes while holding empty faux-bronze dinner plates on their heads, the camera tracks across a cloth placemat at a dinner table sprinkled with small white shells, the girl sits in one of the strollers as a female friend dresses her with a butterfly mask, and the boy looks at the girl as the camera tilts up his bib, which pictures a cartoonish frog wearing a crown and the words “prince charming.” The couple, doing their best to mime “class,” locks arms and drinks water out of green plastic wine glasses (before spitting the water, tossing the contents of their respective glasses at one another, and laughing), and the boy and girl hold hands as the two waitresses push them in the strollers.

Throughout this sequence, the image occasionally returns to the earlier frame of Benny looking on at the older kids’ activity. In the last of these returns, Benny abruptly drops the façade of a passive observer, and bares his teeth, raises up his elbows, and growls while staring at the older kids. The image match cuts to an over the shoulder shot from behind Benny. In the background, we see the older children now facing Benny. There is a match cut to a medium shot panning across their faces as they roll their eyes, expressing their exasperation in dealing with Benny’s antics. Over a succession of brief shots that move between close ups of Benny’s face, long profile shots of Benny screen right facing the older children screen left (about 20 feet apart), and stylized low angle singles of the older children, we see Benny turn and slap his backside at the older kids, stick out his tongue and wiggle his fingers by his ears, and then jog in place as he juts his arms into the air—gestures that signify his desire to attract their attention, even if it’s

negative. The older children then mimic Benny's gestures back to him and giggle, a parodic performance that nonetheless enfolds them into Benny's perspective on their dynamic. Benny runs at the line of older children, who now hold hands, and crashes his body into the arms of two of the children, who throw him back. He stumbles backward to his original position, apart from the group. Then, the older children walk toward Benny and encircle him, still holding hands. Now framed in close up and almost in silhouette before the setting sun, Benny "rolls" around the circle formed by arms and backs of the older children, an intimate movement that features him in the image and includes him in the group, at least for this moment. The music crescendos to Condon's searching vocals. This sequence ends as the older children release their circle and begin dancing in boy-girl couples, and Benny returns to his chalk drawing on the pavement.

The "chalk dance" sequence, as Har'el has called it, was not improvised on the day that the incident occurred. As is typical in observational film production, Har'el said that she only considered the poignancy of this scene and how to respond to it after editing together the footage in the weeks after the original conversation about "class." In an interview with the online blog *Hammer-to-Nail*, she spoke of the process through which this dance sequence came to fruition:

There is the scene where a group of older kids are making fun of Benny, telling him he can't participate in their games because he has "no class," leaving him out completely. Then they went outside and played with those carts that later became a part of that dance sequence. After editing that scene together, the choreographer, Paula Present, and I rehearsed with them at the community center and we had them wear the same clothes that they wore that day and shot it over two days at the same time of day. So it really looks like they just stepped out to play and then started to dance.³¹⁹

³¹⁹ Pamela Cohn, "A Conversation with Alma Har'el," *Hammer to Nail*, October 12, 2011, <http://www.hammertonail.com/interviews/a-conversation-with-alma-harel/>.

There is an invisible gap in time between the observed and recorded incident between Benny and the older kids about the meaning of class, and the choreographed dance sequence in which they come to acknowledge Benny as a part of their group. This is in fact the juxtaposition of two different recorded events, the latter presented *as if* outside of lived experience in the time and space of a music video, although it seems to arise organically from the children's play. The reenactment dramatizes the psychic connotations that the children associate with the term class, while exploring the pre-teens' nascent conceptions of romantic relationships.

This scene is emblematic of the other choreographed dance sequences in the film in two ways. First, it allows a space for the subjects on screen to perform feelings and emotions that might not otherwise find a cathartic outlet in their everyday lives. In this respect, the music video sections of *Bombay Beach* bear similarities to reenactment performance therapy in the field of psychodrama associated most prominently with American psychiatrists J. L. Moreno in the mid 20th century and Andrew Blatner in the early 2000s. By acting out scenes and characters that have created difficulties in the subject's life, in this line of thinking about therapy, the subject can gain a perspective through which he or she can transcend their default point of view, and assess the causes of their troubles reflexively. Such reenactments can direct therapist-subject dialogues toward the end of mitigating the subject's anxieties by framing them in a broader perspective, and afford the subject ways to understand others' views on their actions.³²⁰ Har'el has been asked about this aspect of the choreographed scenes in the film, and

³²⁰ For an overview of the theory and method behind this therapeutic practice, see: Blatner, "Morenean Approaches: Recognizing Psychodrama's Many Facets," 159.

while she avers that she is not a therapist—“I was getting as much therapy as they were by getting to explore a lot of stuff, like love and violence and childhood and romance,” she said—she has acknowledged that “having the kind of liberty to imagine your own life in certain ways you don’t get all the time can help you get at those things that are hard to talk about.”³²¹ In the chalk-dance scene described above, Benny externalizes the frustration he feels at being excluded, and the older children reenact Benny’s actions in such a way that they are forced to consider his position, even if covered by the alibi of parody. When Benny returns to his drawing at the end, there is the sense both that the older children have acknowledged his presence humanely, and that Benny can peaceably allow them to continue their play-date without trying to interfere.

Second, and more to the point in relation to the espoused goals of observational cinema, Har’el’s enthusiasm for collaborating with her subjects on these kinds of sequences strengthened in turn their trust in her *as an observer* of their everyday lives. By starting from her desire to collaborate on productions that borrowed liberally from the conventions of commercially produced popular culture and an affectively charged music video aesthetic, presumably familiar to her subjects, Har’el established the grounds upon which her observations of subjects’ lives could read as components of a gift exchange rather than a theft. After a mini-stroke and still perilously close to death, Har’el and Red stage a choreographed sequence with cigarettes, with Red gradually emptying the tobacco from one on a glass tabletop and inserting the second an end of the pile, as if a tombstone on a fresh grave. CeeJay and his new girlfriend Jesse playfully express their budding romance in a nighttime dance scene at a local park, welcoming the collaboration with

³²¹ Hill, “Tribeca Film Festival’s Breakout Doc Director: Alma Har’el.”

Har'el and Present as an opportunity for caresses and gestures of affection. The intimacy and access that drives the film, in other words, testifies to the positive contribution that Har'el's orientation as a music video producer with particular interests in staging and dance afforded to her ability to *see with* her subjects rather than to look at them. Furthermore, in spite of their "magical quality," Har'el rightly insists, like Lockhart, that there is a documentary spirit behind the dance performances themselves, which stems in part from the fact that the dancers are not trained performers. While subjects contributed their own ideas for gestures, movements, and actions in the choreographed sequences, part of their interest in participating in them came from the energy and expertise that Har'el and Present brought to their production. It is in the gestures of acting *as if* a performer that these non-performers generate what Marks called "a third thing," neither themselves without the camera nor a professional dance performance burdened by the polish of convention.³²² "I love to see people who are not dancers dance," Har'el explained. "It becomes like a language that they're not used to speaking and they reveal so much of themselves. . . . Those are very much documentary moments."³²³

Conclusion

Though I have suggested that reenactment and staging constitute valuable components of research concerned with documenting embodiment and lived experience, I do not mean here to suggest absolutely that choreography and reenactment are "better" ethnographic methods than the traditional techniques of observation and non-intervention. Indeed, Har'el's choice to use these staging techniques was responsive both

³²² Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, x.

³²³ Hill, "Tribeca Film Festival's Breakout Doc Director: Alma Har'el."

to her skills and interests, and the situations of her particular subjects. All of the central characters in *Bombay Beach* state that they live in a place where there is not a lot to do. Residents of Bombay Beach seem to pass time rather than spend it. Time in such places functions differently than in industrial factories like the BIW in *Lunch Break*, where complex systems depend upon the uniformity of clocks, schedules, and senses of responsibility simply to avoid catastrophe. Amidst the ruins of such a catastrophe by the Salton Sea, time again seems to give up the clock. Children lose themselves in play, adults pass their days in conversation, riding dune buggies, and drinking, and fish carcasses routinely wash up on the shoreline of the Salton Sea as if an ongoing event. Red sits for hours in his chair just looking out at the desert, smoking, and thinking. CeeJay, though driven to succeed at the spectacularly time-managed sport of football, meets up with friends in abandoned homes for evening dance sessions that dissolve into the night. To Har'el, Bombay Beach felt as if it were “outside of time,” reminiscent of her memories of “this mode you can get into when you’re a child.”³²⁴ The sole image of a clock in the film, in fact, appears as the first shot in a brief sequence showing Red in the hospital after his stroke, a modern institution some distance from Bombay Beach. In this context, Har'el's lengthy visits to the area and her offer to include her subjects in playful music video collaborations resonated with their lived experiences of time. The sense of intimacy that emanates from the screen has much to do with this shared orientation about the meaning of time.

This is not to say, however, that the film indexes its subjects' lived experiences of time in a literal way, and this is a significant difference from the approach taken in

³²⁴ Cohn, “A Conversation with Alma Har'el.”

Sweetgrass. While the measurement of shot duration makes no necessary or universal connection to audience reception, the differences between *Sweetgrass* and *Bombay Beach* two films are quite striking, and worth fleshing out.³²⁵ Though CeeJay, Red, and Benny's mother all mention the slow pace of life in Bombay Beach in Har'el's film, the editing does not convey this sensation through the duration of shots on screen. Consider, for instance, that the average shot length (ASL) of *Sweetgrass* was around 40 seconds, compared to 4.5 seconds in *Bombay Beach*. Though *Sweetgrass* was an hour and 42 minutes long and *Bombay Beach* only 77 minutes, there were 155 shots in *Sweetgrass* and around 1000 in *Bombay Beach*. Certainly these figures have something to do with the music video sequences in Har'el's film, which involve faster cutting to keep in rhythm with the music. The ASL of the music video sequences is just under 3 seconds. But there are relatively few of these scenes in the film, and they take only about 13 minutes of screen time in total. Even without accounting for these, the ASL is just over 5 seconds, and there are well over 700 shots.

I cite these statistics not as a definitive statement about the relative quality of labor or affect involved in producing either of the two films, but rather as a way to enter into thinking about the relationship between aesthetics and duration in sensory ethnographic film. Unlike Barbash and Castaing-Taylor's film, in which the camera

³²⁵ For the ensuing analysis, I used the online Cinematics tool developed by film studies scholar Yuri Tsivian and a team of software engineers. The Cinematics tool allows a researcher to categorize every shot of a film by clicking on a set of pre-designed metrics at each cut. In the default mode, these metrics designate the scale of object in a particular shot, but a user can customize them to fit their analytical questions. For *Bombay Beach*, I created categories to correspond to observational and music video shots for each of the three central characters, Red, Benny, and CeeJay. For *Sweetgrass*, I designated categories of shot by the presence of sheep only, humans only, humans and sheep, or landscape. To see more about Cinematics, visit: <http://www.cinematics.lv/index.php>.

tends to record its subjects from a distance in relatively static frames in full or long shot, or *Lunch Break*, in which the long shot framing of the dolly shot has more to do with the shape of the hallway than the particulars of activity within its borders, *Bombay Beach* renders portions of almost each scene in extreme close up, and the camera moves about the space of subjects' lives as if it is breathing with them. Individual shots contribute to an overall gestalt of a particular scene rather than standing alone as a scene unto themselves. Events that happen over the course of hours of time are condensed into two to three minutes, or less. *Sweetgrass*, on the other hand, presents many single shot scenes that play for minutes at a time. When they do not show the entirety of a process, they suggest an ongoing kind of activity. The forty-second image of the sheep chewing its cud at the beginning of the film, for instance, does not communicate to the viewer a synopsis of that evening's activity for the sheep, but rather suggests a more timeless—even photographic—way of being that the extended figure of the sheep evokes. Har'el's film does not do this. She could have recorded such a shot of Red, for example, sitting on a lawn chair smoking a cigarette and looking out at the desert, an activity, Har'el suggested, in which Red frequently engaged. "He can sit outside in his chair and just think for hours," Har'el said of Red in an interview about the film. "He thinks deeply about things and then thinks about how to articulate those thoughts in a way that will capture people's attention, almost as a poet would do." There is a shot of Red sitting in his lawn chair near the beginning of the film, before the viewer knows who he is or that he will become one of the central subjects of the film. It appears, interestingly, at approximately the same time and in the same kind of establishing montage as the aforementioned sheep in *Sweetgrass*. Har'el framed Red in his chair from directly behind

him in medium shot. We see the back of his head leaning against his left hand holding a cigarette, elbow propped on a lawn chair. In the background is a powerline protruding from the desert, and the mountains further in the distance beneath a blue sky. But the shot holds for only four seconds. Instead of evoking a sense of the time of Red's thinking in this space, as does Castaing-Taylor's shot of the sheep, it shows *that* this man looks out at the desert as part of a multi-shot montage of Bombay Beach landscapes.

For Har'el, the slow pace of life is not a phenomenon to represent through shot duration, as in *Sweetgrass*, or a creation of the cinema apparatus, as in *Lunch Break*; it is a valuable production resource. It is the source of ideas and affects organic to the traumatized landscape of the Salton Sea that in turn become central to Har'el's film about men and the American Dream. While Bombay Beach might not accommodate the drive for upward mobility often associated with the American Dream, its "brokenness" does afford dreamers who live in America the space and time to indulge their unconventional thoughts. *Bombay Beach*, though documentary, though ethnography, inverts the preservationist instinct behind much documentary and anthropological film. It is less "salvage ethnography" than ethnography of salvage. In this way, its marginalized subjects manage to imagine a future rather than romanticize a past.

A portion of Chapter 3 is under review at *Senses of Cinema* and may appear in 2014. A second part is under review at *Body and Society* and may appear in 2014. A third section of Chapter 3 is being prepared for submission to *TDR: The Drama Review*, and may appear in late 2014 or 2015.

Chapter 4: Reenacting Simulation: Camerawork, Affect, and Performance in the U.S.
Army's "Cultural Awareness" Training

This chapter applies the concepts of duration and indexicality developed previously to perform an analysis of embodied simulation military training exercises conducted at the Fort Irwin National Training Center in Barstow, California. Participants' observations and documentary media made by journalists³²⁶ and filmmakers about such training are the focus of this discussion. More broadly, I consider the relation between embodied performance and camerawork during the preparation of troops for deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan between 2004 and 2012. In the midst of these occupations, the US military overhauled its "force on force" training paradigm to emphasize counterinsurgency and "cultural terrain."³²⁷ The army introduced what they called "cultural awareness training" to its new manual in 2004. Training centers like Fort Irwin constructed villages that simulated locations and social conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Throughout the history of US military practice, the individual American soldier has been represented as an interchangeable unit trained to play a part in a great combat

³²⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all written news reports quoted in this chapter were downloaded from the *NewsBank: Access World News* database and accessed in July of 2011. See the following web address: http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/InfoWeb/?p_action=explore&d_search_type=keyword&d_sources=location&d_place=world&d_issuesearch=&f_clearSearch=yes&d_issuesearch=&p_product=AWN B&p_theme=aggregated4&p_nbid=J4ES55LKMTM4MDgyMTgwMy42NzMxNDc6MT oxMzoxMzIuMjM5LjEuMjMx.

³²⁷ For an incisive critique of the cultural turn in military training, including a chapter on "cultural terrain," see: Roberto J. González, *Militarizing Culture: Essays on the Warfare State* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010).

machine. Military drills little changed since the 18th century compel soldiers to move their bodies mechanically and in unison, as though capable of blocking out the terrors of war. In this view, the troop body is integral to the projection of technologized military force. As James Der Derian noted, the US military has had a longstanding proclivity for “technological exhibitionism” as a cultural means of performing displays of national power.³²⁸ Journalists and scholars who have visited Fort Irwin have suggested that the cultural awareness model of training represents a shift toward a more humble, empathic concept of military operations. I propose below, rather, that the cultural awareness model of training reappropriated the tendencies toward technological-corporeal interchangeability and techno-corporeal exhibitionism. The military’s layering of the cultural capital of embodiment and language over the traditional instruments of military spectacle (tanks, bombs, airplanes, machine guns, etc.) and territorial domination are the key concerns of this chapter.

Questions along the way also concern the line of thinking in warmaking that posits “the enemy” as embodied subjects, and the ideological material that resurfaces in simulation training exercises meant to emphasize the military’s attunement to cultural nuance. Significantly, during the period of my research, civilian Iraqi- and Afghani-Americans were hired at Fort Irwin for the purpose of acting in simulations that served as training exercises for troops preparing to deploy overseas. These hired actors were expected to perform as Iraqi and Afghani villagers, bureaucrats, and occasionally insurgents at sites like Fort Irwin. In effect, extracted from these subjects was the staged,

³²⁸ James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 104.

embodied enactment of support for America's invasion of their native countries. Rather than expanding upon the obvious irony of this scenario, I examine the performed experience of the site simulations among these civilian subjects, as well as the troops in training, the mix of military and civilian staff members who manage the sets, and the media personnel (including myself) who documented the Fort Irwin simulations. What do troops learn about culture through this training regimen? How do different role players describe their relations to the training simulations, and what meaningful patterns emerge from accounts of these experiences? In what ways does the embodied simulation training scenario produce particular kinds of documentary and journalistic accounts of military ethos in the war on terror? What do these training simulations index when they double as live performance?

I address these questions through reflections on my own experience as a filmmaker-visitor to Fort Irwin and close analyses of written journalistic reports and documentary videos made by other visitors. I offer a critique of documentary practices that emphasize the journalist-documentary filmmaker's stance of humility and self-effacement when employed to represent the scenario of military simulation. Drawing from Tomkins' theory of the "affect system," cognitive anthropologist Edwin Hutchins' concept of "distributed cognition," and Sobchack's understanding of the "film body," I theorize the training simulations at Fort Irwin as an example of what I am calling a *cinematic system phenomenology*. Theories of simulation drawn from critical theorists Coco Fusco, Liz Losh, Kara Keeling, Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio, Roger Stahl, and James der Derian facilitate my interpretation. Whereas phenomenology traditionally refers to the study of individual consciousness and perception, Sobchack's theorization of

the film as a kind of body for its capacity to express perception and intention offers a way to impute phenomenological being to other types of environments, as well. Fort Irwin is not a body in the same way as a film, as it exceeds the scope of participants' phenomenological interactions within it in important ways, but it is a system that expresses perception and intention. Moreover, as an institution that aims to retain funding in times of peace and war, it is a system that has developed "survival instincts" across time. Tomkins' theory of the affect system—itsself modeled on simulation technologies developing in the 1950s and 1960s—provides the framework I use to interpret performance and camerawork at Fort Irwin. The Fort Irwin system responds to and remembers the actions of performers, visiting journalists and documentary filmmakers, and soldier trainees across time. Cinematic production, both in terms of the recording activity of diverse camerapersons and the evolution of performance and mise-en-scene in the mock Iraqi and Afghani towns, functions as the system's affective memory.

Cameras and performance have played a key role in war campaigns dating to Matthew Brady's photographs of corpses on battlefields arranged before his lens during the American Civil War,³²⁹ but the War in Iraq featured an unusually wide array of camera operators who created photographs, moving images, and spectacles to be photographed for very different ends. Perhaps most signally, the revelation of the prisoner abuse scandal at Abut Ghraib demonstrated that photographic practice was not simply an exercise in exposure. In Errol Morris's documentary exposé *Standard*

³²⁹ For a consideration of the production process of Brady's photographs and its relationship to the industrialization of war, see: Alan Trachtenberg, "Albums of War: On Reading Civil War Photographs," *Representations*, no. 9 (1985).

Operating Procedure (2008), the prison guards' cameras at Abu Ghraib emerge as extensions of bodies, and the imagery they produced as performative of emergent social norms regarding the routines of orchestrating prisoners' humiliations. Clips could be quickly and easily created, distributed, consumed, and considered for elaboration in future productions. Until reported on by the press, the Abu Ghraib photographs functioned as a medium of exchange that tended to strengthen sentiments of solidarity amongst military police stationed inside the prison. They shared digital clips and images via USB drives, collaborated on the staging of prisoners as spectacles for the camera, and developed a shared understanding of their "tribe" through the degradation of the Iraqi Others under their watch. The incremental, recursive ratcheting up and normalization of these activities occurred over a long duration of time, though guards knew that they needed to hide evidence of their crimes from outside visitors, even those who were in the US military.³³⁰

While the eerie presence of the Abu Ghraib photographs looms in the contextual background of my analysis here, I focus on the evolving use of cameras and embodied performances employed in military training exercises at Fort Irwin, where Iraqi bodies served a different cinematic function. In the midst of a burgeoning insurgency, an army poorly trained to negotiate urban warfare and police work, and the public relations disaster that followed media attention to Abu Ghraib, the United States Army re-conceptualized training and remade forts throughout the country into three-dimensional "playworlds" modeled after Middle Eastern cities and villages. The Marine Corps, Air

³³⁰ Errol Morris et al, *Standard Operating Procedure*, (Culver City, Calif.: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2008)

Force, and Navy developed similar training facilities. At Fort Irwin, the army contracted with Hollywood film special effects studios to develop a series of counterinsurgency warfare and “cultural awareness” training simulation narratives. They also built mock Iraqi and Afghani villages using cargo containers equipped with surveillance cameras, and eventually surround sound and smell dispensers networked to a centralized control center. Arabic speaking Iraqi-Americans were hired as contract laborers to live for weeks at a time in these villages and play Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds in the Iraq simulations. Finally, the army designed a specialized improvised explosive device (IED) training center for bomb technicians, which also happened to serve as the training site for actor Jeremy Renner as he crafted his adrenaline junkie, bomb technician character for the film *The Hurt Locker* (2008).³³¹

Cameras were increasingly ubiquitous in these environments. Each trainer carried a digital camera that could record stills or video for use in PowerPoint after action reviews to teach trainees better soldiering techniques, visiting journalists from around the world rotated through daily to document and report on the training exercises, performers inside of the simulation portrayed TV news outlets including Al Jazeera and CNN as well as insurgents circulating homemade videos of beheadings, and soldiers themselves carried digital camcorders and cell phones equipped with cameras to document their adventures abroad, sometimes for family and sometimes with ambitions for chronicling their own war story for a potential market. Public Affairs Officer John Wagstaffe told me that the army positioned cameras in every mock village, and recorded activities

³³¹ Magelssen, “Rehearsing the ‘Warrior Ethos’: ‘Theatre Immersion’ and the Simulation of Theatres of War,” 47-72; David Germain, “New Iraq War Film Shoots for Box-Office Dynamite Amid Duds,” *The Daily Star (Beirut, Lebanon)*, June 27, 2009.

continuously throughout a rotation: “We have cameras everywhere, one on top of that mountain there, all over the villages, so nothing can happen that we don’t see it.”³³²

While the ubiquity of cameras played a part in the devolution of propriety at Abu Ghraib, the presence and operation of cameras in the midst of cinematic performances at Fort Irwin was integral to the institution’s intention to train troops how to be culturally aware. In both cases, audiovisual recording technologies functioned as part of a feedback mechanism. What is more striking than cultural awareness learning at Fort Irwin, however, is a different lesson. In the midst of ubiquitous cameras and demands for “realism,” cinematic behaviors function as a weapon, which is also a way to hide.

Cultural awareness training that involves performance now has a place in longer-range military plans. The army rewrote its training manual in 2004 to emphasize the need for counterinsurgency training in light of global demographic shifts. Though promising “doctrine that seeks nothing less than victory for the United States—now and in the future,” the 2008 manual ruminates on the fact of 9/11, the failing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the specter of 2.8 billion young, jobless city dwellers living in poverty throughout the globe by 2015, coping with “overcrowding, pollution, uneven resource distribution, and poor sanitation,” and ostensibly recognizing an allure in radical ideologies that identify the United States as a key culprit. The introduction of the manual predicts a long duration of low intensity war: “America is at war and should expect to remain fully engaged for the next several decades in a persistent conflict against an

³³² John Wagstaffe, interview by Andy Rice, Fort Irwin National Training Center, April 7, 2007.

enemy dedicated to U.S. defeat as a nation and eradication as a society.”³³³ Whether or not such a future of endless war plays out, it is vital to the survival of the army and its funding to make the case that it will. In the military economy, cultural performance constitutes a growth market.

Though cultural awareness training was emergent simultaneously at Fort Polk in Louisiana, the 29 Palms facility for Marine training, and the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Bavaria, Germany (amongst many other places between 2004 and 2008), the Army identifies Fort Irwin as its premiere training facility. Most army units spent their final three weeks before deployment immersed in the simulated war environment at Fort Irwin. I frame the training simulations as an attempt to address practical difficulties that American soldiers encountered on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan, a way of thinking that itself transformed the landscape of the desert and Southern California more broadly, and a public relations performance for journalists, scholars, and filmmakers who visited the base between 2004 and 2012. My case study also considers the experiences of participants—both role players and visiting outsiders who observe at close range—in embodied training simulations. I draw from twelve interviews and observation of training conducted during two, two-day trips to the base (in 2007 and 2012), and over 200 news reports. My sources also included the documentary film *Full Battle Rattle* (2008), several books about simulation and war that comment on Fort Irwin, and an article published in the performance studies journal *TDR* in 2009 that

³³³ United States. Dept. of the Army. and United States Marine Corps, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual: U.S. Army Field Manual no. 3-24: Marine Corps Warfighting Publication no. 3-33.5* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), viii, 1-2.

framed the base sympathetically as a rehearsal space for troops' performances of American nationalism.

In previous chapters, I have developed a case for considering a concept of indexicality that emphasizes embodied experience in historical reenactment performance and the activity of camerawork as in some sense “touching” the activities of people who lived in the past. In this chapter, I analyze performance in the case of a simulation, where the temporality of the performer's indexical connection to chronicity is potentially more complicated. Performances of roles at the Fort Irwin site index several different moments of past, simultaneous, and future time. Soldiers about to deploy perform as anticipated future versions of themselves in Iraq or Afghanistan, but the moments of greatest affective intensity in the simulations also touch back to difficult events they have experienced in their own pasts. Hired Arabic and Pashtun speaking actors roleplay as Iraqi and Afghani villagers, mayors, farmers, police officers, ambulance drivers, etc., drawing from role scripts given to them by army officers—scripts intended to suggest contemporary village life. But these performers also draw their material from the recent or somewhat distant past: their own memories of living in their native country prior to immigrating to the United States. For some, the movements, gestures, expressions, and audiovisual details that comprise the simulation environment touch off memories of living in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of the 250 or so Iraqi roleplayers are Chaldean Christians who migrated to the United States in the late 1970s, while others are more recent refugees. The army battalion stationed at Fort Irwin permanently performs the roles of the insurgent army. Most have deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, engaged in combat operations against the insurgencies, and studied guerrilla warfare tactics. They

draw on their own training and past war experience to simulate a hyper-capable foe, at least in terms of their acumen with armaments, for the American trainees about to deploy. They collaborate with TCs, who are officers in charge of orchestrating the simulation narratives and after action reviews with the troops, where they show digital photographs of just enacted simulation exercises to discuss what went right and wrong. The TCs have all done at least one tour of their own, and draw from their own experience when instructing troops. Some have said that standing in the midst of the simulations triggers involuntary psychic reenactments of traumatic war experiences. Visiting journalists and documentarians have tended to approach the task of reporting on the base as though it were a story like any other, deserving of the representative account of a neutral witness a priori historical at the moment of writing, reading, or viewing. All of these different orientations to past and future time intersect in the moments of performance. Paradoxically, roleplayers must play their parts as indexical, as touching a past or future moment of time, for the simulation to function at all.

This is not to say, however, that the affect of indexical presence as experienced in a training simulation fits the same mold as my previous descriptions of indexicality in camerawork and historical reenactment. The key temporality of the index in simulation is different. I want to distinguish between simulation and reenactment a bit more precisely here. Whereas the primary temporality of the affect associated with indexicality in the experience of historical reenactment points to the past and suggests a way to regard future activities, the focal point of indexicality in a simulation exists in a future time and suggests a way of thinking about the past. A simulation draws from coded, normalized concepts rather than particular events associated with the past to craft

a most likely future scenario or outcome. This is why computer simulations are useful to sciences that aim to project the effects of activities that might be carried out in the world in the future. If the index in film studies refers to the particular of the past, either as practice or event, then the simulation refers to the particulars of the future by effacing the particulars of the past. Duration of time is a variable rather than a lived experience. A computer simulates duration as a symbol of time that passes or has passed, not the passing of time itself except as the time required to process its guiding variables. At least in theory, the simulation's distance from events allows human interpreters to see its results clearly, objectively, and quickly, outside of a situated position.

The imperative of embodiment in the training simulations at Fort Irwin thus produces a tension in this way of thinking about simulation. Simulation draws from an interpretation of the past, writ as representative of very particular futures. But as a disembodied form, simulation lacks an ethical foundation beyond the precision of its own reproduction. When the army began to operate embodied training simulations focused on cultural awareness and counterinsurgency, it was almost hardwired, we might say, to seek to overcome new threats to its viability through old ideas about domination. The spectacular display of violence, blood, chaos, and bodies at Fort Irwin was instrumentalized toward the dual goals of inoculating soldiers against the shocks of battle and capitalizing on the presence of ethnically Middle Eastern and Afghani bodies in the simulation to present the military as an enlightened, progressive institution in the wake of Abu Ghraib. These goals were necessary to its survival. In the context of pervasive cameras here and abroad, the military's vision of a future of endless small-scale urban warfare against poverty stricken "terrorists," ongoing practices of torture in secret

military prisons, the visage of electronic warfare suggested in the discovery of the Stuxnet virus in Iran, and the emergence of drone strikes as a counterpoint to “cultural awareness,” I argue that it is vital to see the military’s experiments with managing affects in visible simulation performances as a new kind of military weapon executing old ends, and not a new iteration of progressive, virtuous war.

Stitch Lane: Observing Fort Irwin

“Turn the camera off,” the army sergeant tells me. Several unscripted flames are searching for unconsumed materiel on the driver’s side of a mangled, charcoal Humvee spattered with red stains. This army officer, known at Fort Irwin as a Tactical Controller (TC),³³⁴ is about to veer from standard protocol to fix the problem. The TC grabs a plastic container filled with fake blood, using it to douse the fire as twelve other TCs, a Fort Irwin public relations guide, and several members of the media look on. Satisfied, the TC politely informs me that I can resume videotaping. Smoke continues to billow into the air from three canisters hidden behind the wheels of the “bombed” Humvee—canisters designed for use in scenes like this one. Tactical Controllers and media visitors to the base are invisible within the diegesis of such simulations, though they overrun the set. Moving in closer with my camera to the actors and objects awaiting the arrival of the trainees, I record shots of one ghastly stage sight after another, scenes that are part

³³⁴ When I visited the fort in 2007, these trainers were called “Operational Controllers.” In 2012, the army referred to them as “Tactical Controllers.” To avoid confusion in this chapter, I refer to them throughout as tactical controllers, but this is not necessarily the case in other works about the fort created prior to 2011.

Hollywood spectacle mapped onto this sliver of California's Mojave Desert and part evidence of military failure in Iraq prior to this day in 2007.

In this oft-repeated scenario dubbed Stitch Lane by the Army, the explosion of an American patrol vehicle upends peaceful everyday life in the simulated village of Medina Wasl. On the side of the road opposite the Humvee, a small group of Iraqi-Americans performing as "Iraqi civilians" huddle around an actor playing a villager injured in the blast. Dressed with surface wounds, this figure lays motionless on the pavement in a pool of fake blood. A young woman sits in feigned shock in the back seat of a black sedan, collateral damage of the roadside bomb that destroyed the Humvee. Several of the army's "sim-man" \$60,000 medical dummies—artificial bodies equipped with internal speakers, malleable flesh, a heartbeat, and prosthetic lungs—have been dressed with injuries that simulate those frequently wrought by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) used in Iraq. Shrapnel wounds, lacerations, contusions, and burns mark the bodies of the sim-men strewn around the Humvee. The TC's have carefully placed the bodies to give the aesthetic impression of disorder, and then turned on an audio recording of a male voice shouting a panicked string of expletives, invocations of God, groans, and cries. With the sounds of war ready to grate at the nerves of trainees, the TC's casually snap digital photos of wounds on the bodies of "the injured" in preparation for an "after action review" (AAR) assessing the troops' performance, and mumble to one another through walkie-talkies. Ambling confusedly through this chaos is a soldier playing a United States Army private wounded by the blast. He alternately screams for a medic and babbles about Disneyland and his mother. A bandage around his head has been fashioned from a white T-shirt, and makeup specialists have dressed his face with a deep,

oozing gash. Fake blood trickles from his ears. In the distance, the soldier-trainees who have arrived two nights prior for a three-week rotation drive their Humvees toward this scene.

As I record this unfolding of the Army's assaultive training-movie, I am aware that I am being recorded by an unknown number of hidden surveillance cameras and observed by military personnel also carrying cameras. I wonder dimly why a beginning graduate student like myself is being allowed to document so much evidence of the training of US military policy in Iraq, including training in scenarios of practical failure. Stitching is not, moreover, an accurate description of the activity I see through my viewfinder except in the most metaphorical of senses, as in Kaja Silverman's adaptation of "suture theory."³³⁵ Silverman uses the metaphor of the suture to discuss the construction of the filmic text as a way to close "wounds," the time elided in the continuity edit. The absent subject, in this line of theory, provides the logic whereby these elisions may be stitched together. We might call this logic common sense, a notion that I develop further in the section below. In this light, the drama of the simulation scenario affectively stitches together the trauma of the IED explosion, the narrativization of such events, and the training of troops in the present for the contingencies of a future that may bring actual wounds. These three sutured temporalities function to solidify bonds of camaraderie in troops who must confront the specter of bodily harm through enactment. But *Stitch Lane* literally intends to teach troops to stanch bleeding and

³³⁵ Kaja Silverman, "Suture [Excerpts]," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 219.

evacuate bodies from a dangerous environment, after which time, the name sardonically implies, the wounded will require stitches.

The recently arrived troops have begun to bandage the wounded. They are dressed in full uniforms, complete with helmets, rifles, and laser detection belts, which emit a high-pitched tone if a soldier is shot by someone else's laser rifle. My guide permits me to circulate around the outside edges of this scene, assuring me that the soldiers will ignore my presence. Like the TC's, media visitors to the base are invisible within the context of the playworld, so I move in close with my camera, recording shots of one catastrophic injury after another. Occasionally I turn my attention to the TC's, who alternately mumble into walkie-talkies and snap digital photos of tourniquets that medics have wrapped on the injured. I come across one TC who talks into a microphone wirelessly connected to the speakers inside of a dummy: "Talk to me, what's going on? Why is it so dark? Ohhhh, it's so cold." He pauses and repeats. A female medic wearing latex gloves consoles the dummy as she straps it to a gurney. Another medic approaches the actor playing the injured Iraqi civilian, lying in the middle of the street and moaning as he clutches the left side of his neck. The fake blood trickling out of his ears is a sign, I'm later told, that this man has suffered a concussion. The eight villagers (seven men and one woman) point at the body and speak loudly to the medic in Arabic; one wails as he looks toward the sky. The medic, holding his rifle, gestures for the villagers to stand back. One responds by pointing at the gun and shaking his head "no," but the medic seems not to notice. The woman begins gesturing toward the girl in the sedan, who reaches her arms out of the open car door toward the medic. He pauses to assess the relative severity of the injuries. The goal is to save both lives if possible, so he

must determine which person is in the most immediate danger of dying. The medic decides to settle next to the man in the street. A third medic wraps a bandage around the arm of the wounded private, who continues to call for his sergeant and his mother.

My guide tells me that this unit of soldiers did not follow the proper procedure for handling the scenario. Most of the Humvees remain in a line just outside of the town and the perimeter of the bomb-site remains unsecured. The medics, tasked with stopping massive bleeding and loading the injured into a Red Cross Humvee, are taking too much time dressing the wounds. They also have difficulty loading one of the injured bodies into the truck. After ten minutes, the lead TC calls in an insurgent sniper. A young American soldier playing an insurgent appears from one of the cargo containers and shoots two of the medics. Their laser devices start to beep, and they lie down on the ground, injured but not killed. "This is bullshit," said the medic who had tended to the man in the street, now himself shot in the back. "I ain't never gonna come with these mother fuckers. They should've been up here and secured the damn vehicle." Other soldiers now have to load these two men, with all of their gear, into the medivac. They are heavy, and this process takes more time. One of the officers senses that his soldiers are losing control of the situation, and begins pacing quickly around the vehicles barking orders. A few minutes later, a TC radios for a suicide car bomber, directing him to approach the scene of the accident from an unsecured area on the east side of the town. One minute later, a red pickup truck drives undetected up to the Red Cross Humvee and detonates. A TC pulls out his "God Gun," a light blue physics calculator fashioned after a handgun, and begins to assess the damage that a bomb of this size would have done to the people in the area. After "shooting" each soldier in the scene with the God Gun to

compute the extent of their simulated injuries, he declares that all would have died here. This ends the simulation. The unit then retires to the courtyard of a façade resembling a mosque in the center of the village, where the TC's load their digital images and videos onto a large flat screen TV and discuss what went wrong. This group will repeat the scenario, with minor adjustments, two more times before leaving for the Middle East.

To be invisibly present in the midst of this training simulation is like walking through a three-dimensional Hollywood movie freighted with life and death stakes. The production of war spectacle in the Stitch Lane simulation plays on commercial cinema tropes for manufacturing drama, affect, and audience investment, even if—or perhaps especially because—the immersive scene refers to war events that spectators and participants alike imagine to have had mortal corollaries in Iraq in the recent past. In the context of cinema spectatorship in the dramatic realist tradition, the representation of the negative, disorienting events of war can arouse what Tomkins called the positive affects, excitement and joy. Feminist performance artist Coco Fusco reflected on this tension in relation to her projects on the role of women in army interrogation practices. “I’ve been divided throughout the research,” she said, referring to her discovery that female interrogators at Guantanamo Bay had smeared fake menstrual blood on Islamic prisoners as a tactic for eliciting information. “The part of me that wants to exercise ethical judgment says this is wrong, but the part of me that is an artist and a performance artist understands this as incredibly dramatic material that I want to somehow or other explore, even if it’s very bad.”³³⁶

³³⁶ Coco Fusco, “Keynote Address at Feminist Theory Workshop,” Duke University, May 24, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4KTPQAtpe0>.



Figure 4.1: Video stills of actor playing “Wounded Private” before, during, and after the Stitch Lane training simulation, 2007. The “bombed” Humvee and sim-man medical dummy are visible in the frame top left. In the frame bottom right, the private points to fake blood trickling from his eyes. The simulated laceration is visible on his right hand, the simulated skin avulsion on his left arm. Recorded by the author with permission from Fort Irwin National Training Center, Barstow, CA.

During my visit, I, too, find the “very bad” on display that day at Stitch Lane inexplicably alluring, and I am troubled by this. The young man who played the confused army private wounded by the attack, whose performance induced in me conflicting sensations of excitement and horror, casually prepares for his next round in the main street of Medina Wasl. I speak to him (Figure 4.1). He is a soldier who has been stationed at Ft. Irwin for the past year, acting out numerous roles in the training simulation. This is his ninth rotation. “I’m a rookie private in the Humvee [that detonated the roadside bomb],” he says of his role in the Stitch Lane simulation. “So I’m

all disoriented, thinking I'm in Iraq fighting and then thinking I'm in Disneyland." Up close, I notice that he has been made up with several different kinds of war wounds on his body. "I get blown up by an IED [improvised explosive device] and this is supposed to be a skin avulsion, which they somehow treated as a burn," he says, pointing to a flap of rubber skin affixed to his arm. "But they're learning." His character also suffers shrapnel wounds on the face and arms—"just some abrasions, lacerations," he says—and a concussion, represented by blood coming out of the corners of his eyes and his ears.³³⁷

I am now invited to see the end of the AAR debriefing session in the mosque. The interior is an open-air, enclosed façade equipped with two, large flat screen televisions on one wall. The troops who just failed the simulation exercise sit together as a group on the dirt as a TC plays a video on screen, recorded by one of his colleagues just minutes before. The grainy clip depicts a high angle medium shot of a medic dressing a wound on one of the sim-men, the sound of the ubiquitous wind overwhelming the little microphone on the consumer digital camera used to record the event. The instructor points to the image and says that the medic improperly treated the injury. He asks what went wrong, and then discusses the proper technique for affixing a tourniquet to quickly stanch the bleeding of a severe leg wound. "Stop massive bleeding, load, and go," he says. The soldiers listen attentively, and several take notes. The emphasis here is on procedure rather than affect. They are a team, bonded together in this ritual of review before this mainstay of domestic architecture, the TV. The TV is not a window on

³³⁷ "Private," interview by Andy Rice, Fort Irwin National Training Center, April 7, 2007.

reality, but a mediator of soldiers' relations with one another, an index of their shared struggle to survive as the executors of empire.

I see this stitch lane scenario played out two additional times over the next three hours, and witness several other tactical drills. A young army officer haltingly speaks via a translator to the Medina Wasl chief of police. His brigade captured a suspected Al Qaeda operative in the village, and they want to turn him over to allow local police for interrogation. A small unit of soldiers searches the village building by building for insurgents as a radio plays traditional music from the Middle East, and civilians walk about the streets, clapping to the beat. When they find insurgents in the second story of a building, a firefight ensues. Several soldiers hiding behind a bombed-out car sitting on the street become victims of an IED implanted in the wreckage of the car. They lie on the ground as other soldiers pull them to the sidewalk and prepare their "dead bodies" for processing. Over the course of the next two days, surviving soldiers will enter the names of the deceased into a casualty count, write letters to their family members, and perform a ceremony in which they name the soldiers and reflect on their loss. To minimize lost training time, soldiers killed in action return as new enlistees after this process is completed.

The second day of my visit, I interview two of the Iraqi-American role players, who go by the names "Sam" and "Nadia" in the simulation. Both are charismatic and personable advocates of the fort's training mission and their roles within it. Sam is a Chaldean Christian who immigrated to the United States in the late 1970s. He plays the mayor of Medina Wasl in the simulations. Between rotations, he lives in a large Iraqi expatriot community in El Cajon, San Diego, where he operates a liquor store. Nadia is

also a Chaldean Christian who left Iraq in the late 1970s. She lives with her two sons in Dearborn, Michigan, the locale of the other major diasporic Iraqi community in the United States, also predominantly Chaldean Christian. “At first it was just for the money,” Nadia explains. Her husband had just had heart surgery, and she was having a hard time finding a job until she applied to work at Fort Irwin. “But then I loved it.”³³⁸ Sam, similarly, says he has formed close bonds with the thirty-seven Iraqi-Americans who inhabit Medina Wasl during rotations: “If I just lived in San Diego, I probably never would have met them. We’re like family out here, some of them have become very good friends.” Both Sam and Nadia argue that they offer important cultural perspectives on etiquette and decorum that American soldiers must understand once in Iraq. They say that this knowledge will mitigate against miscommunications, needless escalations of mistrust, and the likelihood of hostilities between American soldiers and Iraqi civilians, thus saving lives on both sides. Sam, who last visited Iraq in 1986, claims that American soldiers improve their performances “100%” in the simulations across three-week rotations. “This is reality, we’re not playing games with it. We’re using real Iraqis,” he says:

We act like them, we get mad like them, we yell out just like the Iraqis, we tell them get the hell out of my country, ‘cause you’re not helping—we do everything just like in Iraq ‘cause they should know. That’s what they’re gonna face. I talk to lieutenants who have been in Iraq already when they come here. They say, hey, flashback. This is the same. We give them the same thing.³³⁹

³³⁸ “Nadia,” interview by Andy Rice, Fort Irwin National Training Center, April 8, 2007.

³³⁹ The rhetorical emphasis on realism is ubiquitous in my interviews, a point to which I return in my analysis below. “Sam,” interview by Andy Rice, Fort Irwin National Training Center, April 8, 2007.

I visit Wagstaffe's office a final time before I leave. His walls are lined with framed photographs of journalists and filmmakers that he has led to "The Box," each labeled with the date and institutional title of the visitors. There is also a new photograph of Sam shaking hands with then President George Bush, who had made a speech at Fort Irwin several weeks before. Wagstaffe has promised to bring Sam a copy of the photograph the next day. I pan across the wall and attend to journalists' institutional titles: Market Road Productions (who shot a feature film here), Australian TV, Berlin newspaper, Armed forces Info services, Christian broadcasting network, Danish National TV, History Channel Modern Marvels, Deutsche Welle Television, French Radio, State Dept Press Tour, Sacramento TV, the BBC, and dozens of others that I do not catch. Six to twelve media institutions visit for every three-week rotation, Wagstaffe tells me. "Then they go on my wall of shame." I am surprised when he points out the newest image, a photograph he had taken of me, unawares, the day before. He tells me that keeping photographs on the walls helps him remember all the people he's met, and he reiterates again how much he likes journalists. I like him, too. But as I leave the office and begin the thirty-mile drive through the desert between Fort Irwin and Barstow, I cannot shake the thought that all of us hang in there like so many hunting trophies.

Cinematic System Phenomenology

In *Cognition in the Wild* (1995), cognitive anthropologist Edwin Hutchins theorized mind as distributed across "cognitive systems" rather than localized in individuals' brains. His central example was the navigation of a Navy ship, which the crew steered toward its target collectively though no instrument or human actor

understood every aspect of the system in its entirety. He understood a cognitive system to include people engaged in diverse activities, as well as the artifacts and tools they used to carry out their tasks; this “distributed cognition” enabled the system to intend toward a goal. Gleaning from Hutchins approach to cognition and system allows for theorizing a relation between affect and system in the training simulations at Fort Irwin, which I am referring to as a *cinematic system phenomenology*. Hutchins’ notion of distributed cognition highlights the limitations of a phenomenological approach that is constrained to the experiences of the individual observing subject, and so I propose imagining a phenomenology expressed by systemic forms of consciousness rather than individual minds. On the Navy ship, for instance, many human actors performed actions that were essential to the navigation of the ship without ever seeing the ship turn or move. The phenomenological experience of individuals had no observable relation to the “lived body” of the cognitive system in which they were embedded, a condition analogous to my own as the visitor to Fort Irwin described above. But the Navy ship, like the fort, demonstrated a phenomenological orientation. It intended toward a goal and responded to stimuli to negotiate its relation to the world. The objectives in play at Fort Irwin are more complex than steering a ship. The system phenomenology of the fort intends to produce, manage, and control human affective responses to representations of war for several different ends at the same time.

For reasons described in Chapter 1, I am wary of privileging the analysis of machines over the human components who negotiate their lives within them. At Fort Irwin, humans play important roles in manufacturing the objects that mediate affects. But the military also desires its human components to act like machines, or at least to

behave in ways such that machines can eventually displace what they do, but faster. In a revealing interview with Der Derian quoted in *Virtuous War* (2009), Vice Admiral Arthur Cebrowski explained the logic behind this way of thinking. Asked: “Do you really want machine time to dictate your strategies and your tactics?” Cebrowski answered: “As soon as you can. Because what we try to do is move the human mind to successively higher levels of thinking and of problem-solving, if you will, so as soon as you can relieve humanity of a lower-level decision making process, you should do that.”³⁴⁰ Cebrowski answered this question as though it were common sense. Eliminating human error meant mechanizing military tasks “as soon as you can,” and then embracing the accelerated “decision making” process that the technologized entity could afford. Embodied simulation training compresses time like such a technology, like a cinematic machine. Instead of living through months of boredom in a yearlong rotation in Iraq, soldier-trainees can encounter a vast array of potentially fatal scenarios in three weeks. The object of this acceleration is to mechanize human affective responses, both those of soldiers and visitors to the fort.

In *The Witch’s Flight* (2007), Kara Keeling argued that the cinema emerged as the dominant medium of “common sense” across the 20th century because it met the affective needs of a burgeoning urban citizenry living in conditions of unusually new forms of danger. For Keeling, common sense referred to both “a shared set of motor contrivances that affect subjective perception *and* to a collective set of memory-images that includes experiences, knowledges, traditions, and so on and that are available to memory during

³⁴⁰ Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network*, 133.

perception.”³⁴¹ The obsession with detail and repetition in military training simulations enacts this mechanical kind of logic onto human flesh, and dispersing codified common sense across a techno-corporeal boundary. Sobchack has quipped in an essay about desire and plastic surgery that “as a part of our culture, we have all had ‘our eyes done,’” a notion that we might extend to the defensive brand of perfectionism upon which the military prides itself. The sense that one can never be done with realism, or that the realism is never good enough is very much a cinematic artifact, and it is one particularly in synchrony with the growth imperative of capitalism in an information economy. War performance offered up as spectacle for extraction, cameras extend the goals of such training in several different directions simultaneously. But the relation between cultural knowledge and affective training of this sort is not one-to-one.

My framework for thinking about the implications of the embodied simulations at Fort Irwin differs from others whom have documented activities at the fort between 2004 and 2011. In his article “Rehearsing the ‘Warrior Ethos,’ ‘Theatre Immersion,’ and the Simulation of Theatres of War” (2009), for instance, performance theorist Scott Magelssen foregrounded interviews and observations that he gleaned from his one-day visit to the fort as representations of its reality. He, like me, visited Medina Wasl, observed the “healthy camaraderie” between army staff and Iraqi-American actors, reported on that day’s “successful” suicide bombing simulation at Stitch Lane complete with photograph of an officer’s God Gun, and interviewed “Sam” and “Nadia,” who stand in as representative voices for Iraqi-American role players at the fort. Sam told me

³⁴¹ Kara Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 14.

that he had done well over fifty interviews for media visitors over his two years of working at the fort. Magelssen reported Wagstaffe's story about how the simulation, while falling short of "kitchen sink realism," elicited affective responses from soldier-participants, who occasionally disqualified themselves from their looming tours of duty either for suffering battle fatigue in the simulation or killing excessive numbers of mock civilians.³⁴² And while he acknowledged that he saw nothing that the army didn't want him to see, he nonetheless judged the training simulation positively:

I sensed a genuine desire on the part of Army and Iraqi staff to make things right by teaching the troops about the changing face of the cultural and political landscape in Iraq, and a deep resentment toward those who act poorly, as in the case of the alleged Blackwater massacres.³⁴³

Like the embedded reporters who "objectively" related sympathetic stories about humble and patriotic American soldiers on the ground in Iraq, Magelssen in effect assumed what digital media theorist Elizabeth Losh has described as a pragmatic rhetorical stance. Losh ascribed this position to critics of the US wars who nonetheless accepted military contracts to program virtual reality training games like *Tactical Iraqi* and *Virtual Iraq*.³⁴⁴ These programmers argued that the games' missions to teach Arabic language and Muslim culture and aid treatments of PTSD respectively outweighed the fact that the military funded the games, and might reappropriate their work for other ends in the future. While I appreciate the nuance of this position for the designers of such programs and scholars who write about military affairs, it is not the place from whence I

³⁴² Magelssen, "Rehearsing the 'Warrior Ethos': 'Theatre Immersion' and the Simulation of Theatres of War," 51.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁴⁴ Liz Losh, "The Palace of Memory: Virtual Tourism and Tours of Duty in *Tactical Iraqi* and *Virtual Iraq*" (Perth, Australia: Murdoch University Press, 2006), <http://losh.ucsd.edu/cv.html>.

intend to proceed here. Perhaps Magelssen was intending to give pause to an audience of academics who would regard military activity as a de facto negative component of collective life in the United States, or perhaps he was acting out what he saw as ethical ethnographic practice by affirming the legitimacy of the pragmatic position of his Iraqi-American subjects. This is, indeed, the dominant framework in journalistic accounts of the fort, and Magelssen's article offers a more detailed account than most from which to draw such conclusions. But in focusing on the present of his visit as opposed to the longer history of the fort itself or the potential ramifications of the shift from conventional warfare to "cultural awareness," Magelssen overestimated the truth-value of his proximity to the events and people he described. He wrote as though he had not been a part of the show, and yet his conclusions uncannily resemble the public relations material that the military itself has generated around these training simulations.

Likewise, the nationally televised feature documentary about the Fort Irwin training simulations, *Full Battle Rattle* (2008) by Jesse Moss and Robert Shapiro, allowed the army to sculpt its institutional image. While the filmmakers state in material about the film that they are against the war personally, and while it is the most comprehensive treatment of the experiences of individuals in the training simulations (soldiers and actors alike), it foregrounds intimacy with subjects employed by the military, presence to simulated performance events, and the stories of participants over structural critique. Thus, while the style of the film retains faith in the indexicality of the camera to communicate the phenomenological experience of fake war and all the complexities the endeavor entails, it also *by design* gives a great deal of control over the production of affect and interpretation of its political import to military spokespersons, whom

orchestrate both for the participants in the simulation, the filmmakers, and the spectators of the finished film. Absent a story that follows soldier-trainees once deployed from the perspective of Iraqi civilians (a far more difficult, hazardous, and expensive project to undertake), the filmmakers must acknowledge a measure of complicity in the military campaign and its continuance, in spite of their stated intentions to the contrary. As of 2012, the public relations office at Fort Irwin still showed the film in its entirety to introduce the look, feel, and rationale of the simulations to groups of tourists who pay to see a live training exercise.³⁴⁵

I am concerned about the limitations of such a documentary approach to this particular subject matter. These representations of Fort Irwin and other immersive sites like it tend to amplify their spectacular affects rather than call them into question, a trend that has a longer history. Critical media theorist Roger Stahl identified four historical developments that allowed the emergence of the symbiotic relationship between journalistic reporting and interactive military spectacle in the wake of the Vietnam War. First, presidential administrations starting with Nixon outlawed the publication of graphic war photographs in mainstream news outlets. This left the visual depiction of war entirely to the entertainment industries. Second, the elimination of the draft and the creation of an all-volunteer army of the poor sapped public energy for sustained mass protests of America's foreign wars, increasingly categorized under the vague rubric of

³⁴⁵ A public affairs officer communicated this information to me during my visit to the fort in 2012. Every month, the army leads several "Box Tours" for members of the public to see the "worst day ever" a soldier might encounter in Afghanistan. Tickets cost around \$50. "If you're interested in experiencing how America's war fighters train before they deploy, book a tour today!" the site reads. See a full description of "NTC Box Tours" at <http://www.irwin.army.mil/Visitors/Pages/TheNTCBoxTours.aspx>.

“security” rather than “national defense.” Third, the consolidation of corporate news media outlets (from around 50 in 1983 to 5 in 2003) narrowed the range of viewpoints that circulated in the public sphere about American foreign policy. Fierce competition and the need to sustain 24-hour TV news cycles led emerging cable news networks like Fox, CNN, and MSNBC to favor opinion shows and cheaply produced reports over investigative journalism. Cooperating with the Pentagon’s public relations office, Stahl remarked, ensured the press continuing access to saleable war stories so long as they demonstrated “a willingness to be programmed.”³⁴⁶ Fourth, war media during and after the first Gulf War shifted toward an interactive form of address. Citizen engagement with the Gulf War, in Stahls’ terms, was less a discussion about “why we fight” than consumption of a show that “loses itself in the fact that we fight.”³⁴⁷ News broadcasts of video cameras attached to smart bombs mimicked and informed the aesthetics of entertainment films and video games, indicating a collapse of the cinematic apparatus and military power. Stahl saw this trend continue after the 9/11 attacks, when the military refocused its energies on rendering the citizen its object rather than its subject. Military institutions and private companies alike created a variety of virtual outlets through which citizens could subjectively experience the simulation of a soldier’s perspective of battle. The term “militainment,” popularized in the 2002 *Time Magazine* article “That’s Militainment!” by James Poniewozik, came to describe this “military colonization of civic space,” encouraging interaction between citizen and soldier, but on dramatically different terms than in the 1970s. This was a form of what Paul Virilio called “endo-

³⁴⁶ Roger Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 14.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

colonization”: “the internal translation of the population—even the body—into an appendage of the military machine.”³⁴⁸ “That is, instead of positioning the citizen as subject of war, this interactive war further cements the citizen’s role as object of the military apparatus,” Stahl concluded.³⁴⁹

I would not characterize public sentiment about war as passive and consumeristic based on the fact that smaller, cheaper, more pervasive audiovisual recording technologies privilege expressions of subjectivity over traditional “discourses of sobriety.” While it is true that first person shooter games are popular and violent forms of play, the values of presence, interactivity, and subjectivity also inform critical performance practices like those of Wafaa Bilal and anti-war, performative documentaries like those of Michael Moore and Nick Broomfield. Nonetheless, I find Stahl’s notion of militainment useful to think about the intersection between military training and the affect, audience investment, and dramatic realism practiced by the commercial film industries, and the ramifications of military spending on cultural performance instead of bombs and tanks. Locally at Fort Irwin, too, this transition has a longer history. Below I consider the traces of the simulation itself across time as indicative of the development of this particular “affect system.” I read the marks inscribed into the desert and stories participants and visitors tell about the fort as suggestive of the kind of affective organism that the military training itself embodies over time. In this way, I am dependent both upon my own phenomenological experience of visits to the base, and the accounts of many other visitors over years of time, who also

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 37, 40.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 47.

contribute such observations in their own accounts. By gleaning from accounts drawn from a database as well as my own camerawork, my analysis intends toward a depiction of this affect system rather than a story about the success or failure of the simulations as training exercises.

The Transformations of the Desert of the Real

In the latter half of *America* (1988), Jean Baudrillard wrote about the landscape and culture he encountered while traveling through the southwestern United States. He marveled, somewhat horrified, that California's freeways, suburban supermarkets, theme parks, and housing developments existed on land that was essentially like the deserts just a few hours to the east, where life itself seemed impossible. He was especially captivated by the experience of driving through the Mojave, which he interpreted as a metaphor for the forces of simulation at the center of American culture. "The simulacrum is something you can simply feel here without the slightest effort," he wrote. "It is Disneyland that is authentic here! The cinema and TV are America's reality!"³⁵⁰ When he wrote about the "desert of the real" in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), he was describing a social condition in which the copy, instrumentalized toward the ends of profit and empire, preceded the possibility of a preexisting original. Sanitized of archaic, ritualistic, and mystical qualities, these copies simply reproduced a normative code, stretching lifeless in all directions like the endless Mojave Desert. Building upon such a desert was fundamentally meaningless, for Baudrillard. When the United States Army constructed its premiere training facility on land in the Mojave Desert, it was acting literally

³⁵⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London; New York, NY: Verso, 1989), 104.

according to the metaphor by which Baudrillard characterized American society more broadly. The lure of the desert was its pliability to metaphor, its seeming lack of visible history and ongoing life.

While Baudrillard viewed the desert as the quintessential symbol of American culture, however, the US military envisioned it as the ideal site for producing otherness, an endeavor that changed in inflection in response to particular historical circumstances across time. Prior to 2004, the Army used the spacious and remote desert land of Fort Irwin to train specialists in force-on-force tank warfare. General George Patton directed armored vehicle maneuvers on land in the Mojave Desert starting in the early 1930s in anticipation of the United States entry into World War II, and he orchestrated the training of tank battalions there for the campaign in the deserts of North Africa in 1941-2.³⁵¹ After World War II, the land was used minimally until 1981. Following the Arab-Israeli War, the formation of OPEC, and renewed strategizing for a potential ground war against the Soviet Union, the U.S. Army designated this land as the Fort Irwin National Training Center. Studying tactical decisions made in the Arab-Israeli War convinced military planners that practicing full scale mobilizations would be crucial to implementing an effective military strategy in the case of an actual war. For military strategists of the time, the vast stretches of flat land in the Mojave Desert approximated the topography of the flat Eastern plains of Germany, the anticipated site of an initial ground battle against the Soviet army should the Cold War *détente* have broken down. The remoteness of the landscape, moreover, allowed the army to drop “anything but nuclear weapons,” in the

³⁵¹ See Jack Harris, “A short history of Fort Irwin,” *Jack Harris 1924-2009: In Memoriam*, <http://www.jaeger.ws/memorial/irwin.html>.

terms of one officer, and fire live rounds of tank ammunition on target ranges without alarming civilian populations.³⁵² By 1982, the American soldiers stationed at Fort Irwin were performing as an enemy army—the “Krasnovians”—that employed Russian tanks and small arms, and simulated Soviet military tactics. Rotations of US Army tank battalions would engage in mock battles against the Krasnovians that stretched over dozens of miles of desert.³⁵³

At the end of the Cold War in 1989, military officials struggling to justify continuing military expenditures and journalists who visited Fort Irwin attributed new meanings to its desert backdrop. One article reported that the Krasnovians had begun shifting between playing “Samaritans” modeled after Saddam Hussein’s army in Iraq, the “Atlanticans” based on Cuban infantry units, and the “Hamchuks,” an unfinished project to simulate the army of North Korea. At the time, the Army was also studying the military forces of Libya, Iran, Algeria, and several other smaller third world nations to develop more simulations. While still training to fight against the technological capacity of a conventional military foe, these developments suggested the representational trajectories afforded by the desert and the Soviet weaponry already on hand. “Everybody and his brother bought the Soviet equipment,” said one Fort Irwin officer interviewed in 1992.³⁵⁴ Commanders at Fort Irwin settled on emulating the army of Saddam Hussein in 1989 because the army deemed the Republican Guard to be the third most threatening to

³⁵² Keith Rogers, “Nevada Soldiers Help in Training,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, sec. City, February 27, 2005.

³⁵³ John Wagstaffe, interview by Andy Rice, Fort Irwin National Training Center, April 7, 2007.

³⁵⁴ John Lancaster, “At Army’s Training Center, the Bad Guys Still Fight Like Soviets,” *Washington Post*, January 21, 1992.

the United States at that time, and because the Iraqis used Soviet arms already available at the fort, a significant cost savings.

As the army designed its new enemy, the discourse about the military value of the fort began to shift, emphasizing its screen-like quality and barrenness over its size as an area. The scale of the fort was said to facilitate the testing of technologies that linked widely dispersed individual soldiers through computer networks, and the harsh desert environment was frequently likened to the landscape in Iraq. Articles indicate that the army tested out “smart bombs,” rifle-scopes that doubled as cameras, and night vision binoculars equipped with data screens that automatically communicated real-time information about troop locations and the movement of enemy combatants. Officers argued that these “Nintendo” technologies would reduce Americans’ exposure to risk in a ground war without front lines and an easily discernable opposing army.³⁵⁵ As American soldiers amassed in Saudi Arabia in preparation for the invasion of Kuwait, journalists visiting Fort Irwin deemed the desert landscape significant for its incompatibility with civilized living. One reported that tank battalion trainees at Fort Irwin suffered from “immense loneliness” when staying in the desert for extended periods of time, as they were used to living “in moderate climates amid water, greenery and other people.” Excepting those from “western Nebraska or Kansas,” quipped an Army major quoted in this article, trainees were “spooked” by the undifferentiated landscape that offered few visual cues with which to gauge distance.³⁵⁶ “The environmental stresses alone present a tremendous challenge,” reflected one combat psychiatrist who had served during the

³⁵⁵ Steven Komarow, “Cybersoldiers Test Weapons of High-Tech War,” *USA TODAY*, March 6, 1997.

³⁵⁶ Harry Levins, “War,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 28, 1990.

Persian Gulf War. “The desert is like the far side of the moon. Everything becomes arduous.”³⁵⁷

Though inhospitable, the desert was also seen to be a socio-geographical formation suited to the projection and enactment of hyperreal fantasies of war quite like the ones actually mobilized during Desert Storm. The desert, after all, has been flexible to a particular army truth: “The big point is you need something that stands in stark contrast to your own,” said Colonel Patrick O’Neal to a visiting *Washington Post* reporter in 1992, who was raising questions about the utility of simulating tank warfare after the fall of the Soviet Union. “You need an enemy.”³⁵⁸ The convergence of entertainment paradigms and warmaking technologies sutured the training carried out in the desert to a new ideal of “clean war,” executed via cameras from a distance, and witnessed by spectators who did not feel the suffering of those on the ground. “*The desert is a screen where all is exposed to the searching eye of an adversary employing the full array of object-acquisition systems,*” wrote Virilio in an essay about the Gulf War of 1990-91 in *Desert Screen* (2002).³⁵⁹ The most significant battles were occurring on and for broadcasters like CNN rather than territory, he argued, aided by the facility with which the flat desert landscape could serve as a metaphor for the television screen. “The screen is the site of *projection of the light of images*—mirages of the geographic desert like those of the cinema,” he explained. “[*T*]he screens of the Kuwaiti and Iraqi deserts were

³⁵⁷ John Jurgensen, “Stress Under Fire: To Keep Soldiers Mentally Fit to Fight, Army Providing Psychiatirc First Aid on the Front Line,” *The Hartford Courant*, April 9, 2003.

³⁵⁸ Lancaster, “At Army's Training Center, the Bad Guys Still Fight Like Soviets,” A5.

³⁵⁹ Paul Virilio, *Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light* (London; New York: Continuum, 2002), 20.

to be linked with the *television screens* of the entire world, thanks to CNN.”³⁶⁰ Virilio here completed the conceptual transformation of the desert from a space large enough to accommodate tanks to the archetypal apparatus of the culture industry. While hyperbolic, the metaphor of the screen in both its inflections could certainly be applied to what took place at Fort Irwin after 2004. Seen through the instrumental gaze of the military, the desert functioned as a screen for the projection of an operational imperative, to harden and mechanize its fleshy components. This combination of factors played out upon and through the bodies of performers in the simulation, who were filmed and engaged in cinema production from a variety of perspectives and on a daily basis.

Fort Irwin became the Rhode Island sized screen upon which the army produced its peculiar brand of realist drama, its thirteen mock Iraqi villages too dispersed to be seen by individuals on the ground without the aid of technological instruments like databases, digital maps, coordinated scenarios, surveillance cameras, and twelve teams of specialized operators. “Common sense” scenarios for training centered on the emergence of the IED in Iraq. The focal point of *Stitch Lane*, the IED was the weapon that catalyzed the shift from combat operations to makeshift municipal governing. A story that ran in *The New York Times* in February of 2006 reported that the Pentagon was tripling its spending, to \$3.5 billion that year, on strategies for mitigating the impacts of “homemade bombs,” armaments to which were attributed over 90% of the Army’s casualties up to that point in the war. Counting attacks on Iraqi civilians and security units allied with the United States, there were 5,607 reported incidents with IEDs in 2004 and 10,593 in 2005,

³⁶⁰ Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network*, 96.

of which the military was only able to detect about 40%. Most of the spending on strategies, the article reported, was to fund a “combat laboratory” at Fort Irwin, dubbed the “IED Center of Excellence.”³⁶¹ This laboratory and the simulation scenarios that developed through it played a central part of the training rotations in the ensuing years, while also producing something like entertainment content—characters, charismatic actors, storylines, anecdotes from the front, and bomb defusing techniques—for a variety of media visitors to the base. Numerous articles feature a role player named Tim Wilson, “a former tank commander who shed his uniform for a bisht (gown) and kaffia (head-dress),” according to one article, to play “Monsour Hakim,” a friendly hot dog vendor by day who spent his nights making IEDs for the insurgency.³⁶²

By November of 2006, the army had spent \$6 billion on efforts specifically aimed to neutralize IEDs, yet these weapons remained the army’s central problem. Official figures released on October 21, 2006 listed 1034 American deaths and 11,231 injuries caused by IEDs—50% of the total in Iraq and 30% in Afghanistan.³⁶³ General Robert Scales argued that satellites were not useful in this new war environment, which depended overwhelmingly rather on the operations of “small units” working on the

³⁶¹ Eric Schmitt, “U.S. Tripling Fund to Stop Homemade Iraq Bombs,” *The New York Times*, February 6, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/06/world/americas/06iht-military.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (Accessed October 2, 2013); Scott Gutierrez, “Training Stop on the Way to Iraq - Fort Lewis Troops Practice in Calif,” *The Olympian*, February 26, 2006.

³⁶² Chuck Mueller, “Preparing for Urban Warfare,” *The Sun, San Bernardino*, April 9, 2006b; Dexter Filkins and John Burns, “Mock Iraqi Villages in Mojave Prepare Troops for Battle,” *The New York Times*, May 1, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/01/world/americas/01insurgency.html?pagewanted=print&_r=0 (Accessed October 2, 2013).

³⁶³ Jack Dorsey, “The Government has Spent \$6 Billion Fighting IEDs ... but as Casualties Mount, are the Efforts all in Vain?” *The Virginian-Pilot*, November 1, 2006.

ground. Everyday activities like trash pickup assumed vital military importance, as trash on the streets and “dead animals” provided places for insurgents to hide IEDs.³⁶⁴ American soldiers working in urban areas had started paying local Iraqi civilians to pickup trash in streets where IEDs had been found in the past, as much a cost saving measure as an intercultural negotiation.³⁶⁵ The army developed a version of the simulation training scenarios called XCTC, or the “exportable combat training center,” which could be set up across the country at a savings of about \$10 million per rotation. This model that quickly became pervasive.³⁶⁶ “All of our Army regulations, all of our training manuals, are completely changed,” observed one soldier for an *NYT* reporter at Fort Irwin in May of 2006. Another added that “We're pretty much fighting ghosts.”³⁶⁷ By February of 2006, SWET procedures, or “Sewage, Water, Electricity, and Trash,” were the focus of many simulations.³⁶⁸ Army officers began making visits to the LAPD “to learn how they fight crime and deal with gangs,” information that they believed would help track the production of homemade bombs in Iraq.³⁶⁹ An article written in the spring of 2006 reported that counterinsurgency training, virtually unmentioned in 2004, occupied about 45% of the soldiers’ time at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The shift in training emphasis also transformed the landscape of forts throughout the country, leading

³⁶⁴ Steven Komarow, “Unexpected Insurgency Changed Way of War,” *USA Today*, March 21, 2005.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ Terez Paylor, “Replicating Iraq: Guard Trains for Combat at Kentucky Site,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, June 30, 2005.

³⁶⁷ Filkins and Burns, “Mock Iraqi Villages in Mojave Prepare Troops for Battle,” 1.

³⁶⁸ Gutierrez, *Training Stop on the Way to Iraq - Fort Lewis Troops Practice in Calif*, 01A.

³⁶⁹ Chuck Mueller, “‘Graduate-Level Training’,” *The Sun, San Bernardino*, April 14, 2006a.

David Petraeus to remark that Fort Leavenworth was “now scarily like the Sunni Triangle.”³⁷⁰ The emphasis in articles shifted from “military operations” and “decapitation” to “nation-building” and “cultural terrain.”³⁷¹ “When we came into this town, the battle scenario reminded me of the movie ‘Black Hawk Down,’ a film about the chaos in Somalia,” said one army officer about his first impressions of Medina Wasl.³⁷² Still, as of 2012, the IED remained the central weapon used against American troops in Afghanistan.

The military’s shift to cultural awareness training after 2004 in response to the threat of IEDs created a new cottage industry in southern California to service the cinematic and theatrical production needs of bases. Army veteran Jamie Arundell-Latshaw and her husband, for instance, started a small, storefront business in the predominantly Iraqi-American Chaldean community of El Cajon in San Diego to provide the US army with Arabic speaking role players for simulation training exercises. Between 2006 and 2009, as annual revenues of their company, called Lexicon, Inc., increased from \$101,943 to over \$14.4 million, the couple also contracted to provide Arabic speaking translators, interpreters, and cultural educators for dozens of high profile military and intelligence agencies throughout the country.³⁷³ Strategic Operations, a subsidiary of San Diego-based Stu Segall Productions, opened for business in 2002. Known previously for producing the San Diego based, TV crime drama *Silk Stalkings*

³⁷⁰ Henry Cuningham, "Training Leader: Army Changing Focus," *The Fayetteville Observer*, April 13, 2006.

³⁷¹ Chuck Mueller, “‘Graduate-Level Training’.”

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Mike Harris, “Fillmore Couple’s Firm Tapped for Honor: Lexicon Provides Language, Cultural, Military Training Noticed by National Media X Yx Yxy Y X Yx,” *Ventura County Star*, November 26, 2010.

and soft-core pornography, Stu Segall Productions partially transitioned into the military training simulation business after 9/11, when the action film and television industry “took a bit of a nose dive,” in the words of one company executive.³⁷⁴ While the company does not disclose its earnings publicly, a spokesperson acknowledged growing at a rate of 60% per year between 2002 and 2011. According to the Fort Irwin public affairs office, as of 2012 Strategic Operations was responsible for producing almost all of the pyrotechnics special effects for the training simulations at the base.³⁷⁵ Strategic Operations contracts with dozens of other security and paramilitary institutions, as well.

Incremental changes to simulation scenarios since 2004 have aimed to magnify the sensorial cues that might produce the sensation of shock, bewilderment, or disgust in trainees, even where these representational effects might exceed the volume and visual display that a soldier could see in actual combat. “Hyperreal,” in fact, is a moniker that Strategic Operations claims with pride, going so far as to use the phrase as a trademark on its webpage about “Combat Wound Medical Effects.” The page reads: “Truly ‘next generation’ in detail, realism, dynamics, and scope; Strategic Operations Inc. (STOPS) calls it Hyper-Realistic™.” A photograph of a young, ethnically Middle Eastern actor looking skyward to display a gaping, bloody protrusion from chin to thorax and as wide as his neck accompanies the text. In addition, following the lead of Strategic Operations, Fort Irwin began to hire amputees to play the victims of IED attacks in simulation scenarios in 2008. These actors wear full-body, flesh-colored latex suits that gush fake blood when punctured. Each suit costs approximately \$25,000, a savings from

³⁷⁴ Emily Vizzo, “Purposeful Chaos: Local Company Sets Up Realistic Training for Combat, Drug Houses and Ship Seizures,” *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, May 10, 2011.

³⁷⁵ John Wagstaffe, phone conversation with Andy Rice, 2012.

the completely synthetic \$50,000 “sim-man” of previous simulations that also enables for greater drama on the field of simulation.³⁷⁶

These are expensive effects, and their use in training simulations offers visiting reporters and journalists a great deal of “free” production value for their projects. Simulation scenarios generated by the military mimic commercial forms of dramatic realism, while intimating actual life and death stakes that documentary filmmakers and institutions of journalism tend to deem worthy of reportage. It is a gift, a spectacle covered by the alibi of future sobriety. These training simulations thus seem to offer a readymade answer to a longstanding journalistic dilemma: how to integrate the drama of a “good story” into reports about issues of public concern. And it is cheap to cover. Instead of traveling to Iraq, hiring interpreters, risking their lives, and spending weeks of uncertainty developing stories about life in a war zone, filmmaker-journalists journey to Fort Irwin from Los Angeles for a daytrip or short overnight, and leave with a range of dramatic, affect-inducing storylines upon which they can graft timely meta-narratives about war, culture, and stagecraft. For its part, the army offers journalist-visitors courteous and affable guides from the public affairs office; easy access to role players, soldier trainees, and commanding officers for interviews; and proximity to simulation performance events for observation, or even in some cases participation. Army spokespersons reiterate statements about the necessity of counterinsurgency warfare in the present, the importance of audiovisual realism to effective training, and the value and patriotism of ethnic role players who cultivate soldiers’ proper performances of American

³⁷⁶ Strategic Operations, “Combat Wound Medical Effects,” *Strategic Operations*, <http://www.strategic-operations.com/combat-wound-medical-effects> (accessed January 31, 2013).

nationalism. Dutiful, “objective” filmmakers and reporters communicate these opinions in their work, and everyone seems to win. The soldiers are better prepared for handling terrorist attacks and cultural negotiation, California and its cultural industries receive federal funding to provide the military with cinematic expertise, the Arabic and Afghani-Americans have well-paying jobs that allow them to express love of their native countries and American patriotism at the same time, the army itself can claim ownership of the story, and journalist-filmmaker visitors offer their supporting institutions entertaining, cheaply produced, saleable narratives that touch on issues of public concern.

Affective Realism

Central to the mechanics of this affective system are ideas about realism, a contested and endlessly debated term in critical film studies. I understand realism to signify a regime of evaluation in which minimizing the mimetic gap between an original event and its representation is assumed to be the central goal. This regime tacitly assumes a singular simulacral standard of the real for which classical narrative cinema conventions might stand as normative. Realism of this sort seeks to induce deep empathic or identificatory investment in narrative, motivation, and character across the triad of filmmaker, actor-subject, and spectator. Thus, paradoxically, realism expresses what Keeling called “common sense” in a media saturated society. The cinematic real must simultaneously mimic the appearance, manner, and affective resonance of a thing that exists or once existed in the world, and present it in such a way that an imagined normative spectator can recognize this resemblance and integrate it into their preexisting worldview. When realism succeeds, a spectator may comment about the experience of

seeing a film as believable or convincing without articulating the assumptions from which this sense of the real emerged, sometimes even in the full awareness that their sense of this reality directly contradicts social facts.³⁷⁷

In articles about the training simulations at Fort Irwin, invocations of realism are both pervasive and ambiguous in ways that are instructive about the tacit kinds of common sense in operation here. Descriptions in reports and comments from military interviewees typically identify landscape, climate, the presence of Arabic speaking Iraqi bodies, and the occasional inducement of traumatic symptoms in trainees to signify realism. "From the geography to the language to the tactics, everything is as close to the real thing as we can make it," said one army officer to a reporter visiting from Atlanta.³⁷⁸ A reporter who mentioned covering the war in Iraq before writing her story about Fort Irwin wrote that the "[simulated Fort Irwin Iraqi town] Al Jaff is battle-scarred. Shipping containers in drab desert hues resemble the concrete, flat-roofed houses common in Iraq."³⁷⁹ She described "the smell of grilled meat" wafting through the air in juxtaposition to "the hollow shells of shot-up cars" that lined the streets.³⁸⁰ Across the transition from force-on-force to cultural awareness training, stories about the fort

³⁷⁷ Ien Ang's seminal reception study *Watching Dallas* (1985), for instance, discusses the phenomenon of "psychological realism" in relation to European fans' responses to the American TV soap opera *Dallas*. Audience members identified with the dilemmas of the show's protagonists even though they were aware that the degree of wealth and drama were not representative of American society on the whole.

³⁷⁸ Dave Hirschman, "Guardsmen Prepare for Iraq: Scenarios Test Skills of Georgians," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 23, 2005.

³⁷⁹ Dave Hirschman and Moni Basu, "Georgia's Guard: Training the 48th: Duty's Dry Run - in Fort Irwin, Calif., Role-Players Provoke Real Emotions in Iraq-Bound Guardsmen," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 18, 2005.

³⁸⁰ Moni Basu, "A Chilling Taste of Death in the Desert," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 16, 2005.

increasingly focused on the journalists' sensory experiences of being present to the simulations. Their narratives read like a cross between phenomenological description and Hollywood script: "Pop-pop-pop-pop-pop-pop! BOOM!" wrote one. "Toomer popped off a round -- and then his gun jammed, at the worst possible time, just like in the movies."³⁸¹ A *New York Times* feature published in 2006 likewise connected the cinematic ethos at the fort to realism, authoritatively demonstrated in his account by soldiers' embodied responses to their new training regimen:

With actors and stuntmen on loan from Hollywood, American generals have recast the training ground at Fort Irwin so effectively as a simulation of conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past 20 months that some soldiers have left with battle fatigue and others have had their orders for deployment to the war zones canceled. In at least one case, a soldier's career was ended for unnecessarily 'killing' civilians.³⁸²

A feature published in 2007 affirmed this kind of affective realism as key to this new kind of military training. "'It's realistic to the point where soldiers pass out, throw up, turn white and start shaking,' said Sgt. Mark Ramsey, an Iraq war veteran and Hollywood stunt man who helps plan the training mission. 'You've got to train like you fight.'"³⁸³ Numerous reports, and the documentary film *Full Battle Rattle*, focus on the reenactment of decapitations in simulation scenarios after 2005. Quotations from senior officers offer rationales for extreme training of this sort that shift over time toward culture: "We want our commanders to say that it's harder at the National Training Center than in war," said then Brigadier General at Fort Irwin Robert Cone in 2004. "We put

³⁸¹ Brian Thevenot, "Duty Calls: Louisiana National Guardsmen are training furiously in California, preparing for the front lines of Iraq," *The Times-Picayune*, September 12, 2004.

³⁸² Filkins and Burns, "Mock Iraqi Villages in Mojave Prepare Troops for Battle," 1.

³⁸³ Joe Vargo, "Destination Iraq: Inland Base Trains Troops for Intense Situations," *The Press-Enterprise*, June 15, 2007.

them in a tent where it's 100 degrees, there's dirt in their computers and they haven't had a shower for a week and see how they function. We want to put them under stress and see how they cope.”³⁸⁴ The commanding officer at Fort Irwin in 2008, General Dana Pittard, offered a new take on this directive: “The kind of towns, the urban towns we're creating, the signs, it must hit all five of your senses. You must see Iraq and Afghanistan. You must smell it. You must touch it.”³⁸⁵

The army intends to manage the sensory environment in which the soldiers train so as to regulate their affective responses to the worst moments they might experience in a guerrilla war. Bodies are the instruments of measure, indexing realism through involuntary gestures, actions, and facial expressions induced by the visage of blood, the sound of gunfire, the presence of Arabic speaking people, and the enforced consideration of the possibility of their immanent deaths in the near future. At stake here, in other words, is an affective realism, the production of “real feeling” in the bodies and psyches of the troops—a realism of involuntary bodily responses to phenomena that startle, frighten, and disgust. While spokespersons for the army argue that these simulations “inoculate [soldiers] against stress”³⁸⁶ and thus allow them to function more effectively in scenarios where lives may be at stake (a conceit of this training that I examine at length below), it is also the case that phenomena that arouse intense affects, particularly those that routinely defy explanation and trigger fear, and force those who experience them to undertake particular coping strategies, to search out reasons to explain the affects they

³⁸⁴ Darrell R. Santschi, “Uncertain Future // Base Closures: Fort Irwin Fights to Stay on Duty,” *The Press-Enterprise*, November 29, 2004.

³⁸⁵ Dan Rather, “Battle Plan,” *Dan Rather Reports*, September 16, 2008.

³⁸⁶ Kit Lavell, “Advances in Training Help Revolutionize the Military,” *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, March 9, 2003.

feel. In Tomkins' affect system, this is the recursive relationship between affect and consciousness.

Simulation and The Affect System

“How should one devise an automaton to simulate the essential characteristics of the human?” asked Silvan Tomkins in a piece of writing on the workings of the affect system. Tomkins was taken by the capacity of computers developing in the 1960s to operate through a feedback system, and saw a parallel to this process in the relation between memories of experiences and consciousness in human thought. Simulation machines offered an apt analogy, for Tomkins, to the mechanics of what he called the affect system. In theorizing what the affect system was, Tomkins suggested that the answer might be found in identifying what the computerized automaton was not. He asked what elements of programming an automaton would need to be improved to make it act more like a human, concluding that a central problem with the computer simulation was its inability to track its own motivations to survive across time. “The automaton must be motivated,” Tomkins stated. “It must also be motivated to reproduce itself . . . if we are interested in the problem of human simulation, the race of automata must be perpetuated not only by knowledge but by passion.” An automaton that could feel pain, guard its own integrity against overzealous interlocutors, and reproduce itself would function as an organism with a drive system, “a characteristic of all forms of life.” A human automaton, Tomkins continued, would also require an affect system, or “a number

of responses [to stimuli] which have self-rewarding and self-punishing characteristics.”³⁸⁷

He included amongst these affects excitement, joy, fear, sadness, shame, anger, and contempt, each of which could vary in terms of duration and intensity. The “phenomenological quality” of these self-rewarding and self-punishing affects were hard-wired into humanity across evolutionary time and cultural context, in Tomkins’ theory. Humans evolved to want to maximize positive affect and minimize negative affect. They desired to live in such ways that minimize the inhibition of affect of any kind, and still enjoy the power to control their own affective lives. Affects mediated between perceptions and consciousness as an intensifying filter, playing the indispensable counterpart to reasoning and action. But the affect system was also shaped by a sensory-affect-memory feedback loop that was responsive to lived experience over time. Tomkins likened the affects to technologies for the ways they extended and transformed external stimuli. “The fragmentation and amplification of man’s [*sic*] capacities by automata has been the rule,” he explained:

The next and the final development of simulation will be an integrated automaton—with microscopic and telescopic lenses and sonar ears, with atomic powered arms and legs, with a complex feedback circuitry powered by a generalizing intelligence obeying equally general motives having the characteristic of human affects. Societies of such automata would reproduce and care for the young automata.³⁸⁸

A site like Fort Irwin aimed to become this “final development of simulation.”

Army forts like Fort Irwin secured funding, or self-reproduction, by demonstrating that their training simulations helped US troops survive when at war. The way to ensure the

³⁸⁷ Sedgwick, Frank and Alexander, *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, 41-2.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

survival of the fort's affect system, ironically, hinged on its capacity to create images that could induce in its human components the affects associated with looming death. The visible evidence of stress, fear, and disgust at Fort Irwin are central to its claims to improve the survival rates of soldiers. Such images suggest to visitors and evaluators that the fort can habituate soldiers to the intense affects of war, thus limiting the power of affective response to gore and fear that can impede judgment in actual battle. Fort Irwin must also anticipate war scenarios of the future, or at the least make a case that their training paradigm remains relevant in times of peace. Images at Fort Irwin thus have a dual aim, a dual purpose in relation to the fort's survival. By coincidence, Tomkins in fact named the aims of consciousness within the affect system as *Image*. The aggregate of sensory, memory, and affective imagery processed through consciousness comprised the organism's Image, its understanding of purpose and direction. "In the case of predominantly habitual action it is the rule rather than the exception that affect plays a minimal role."³⁸⁹

Below I consider what kind of a strategy the affect system of Fort Irwin pursues. I first turn to an interview I conducted with an ex-Marine Non-Commissioned Officer, "Greg," who rotated through Fort Irwin on two different occasions while on active duty. Greg explained that the training he received was overwhelmingly intended to make soldiers fearful, suspicious, and on edge. "The commanders want to instill a certain fear in you to keep you sharp, to keep you edged, to keep you ready," Greg explained. Pedagogy emphasized that no procedure or action carried out by troops was deserving of a commander's positive praise. "Bottom line is that it's just never going to be good

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 45.

enough, no matter what,” Greg said. “Their reward system is through negativity. . . I didn’t realize that until I stepped out of the military and got into this profession, fitness, which is more about positivity.”³⁹⁰ He recalled an incident in his training that occurred several days after a suicide bomber killed a number of US soldiers in a mess hall in Iraq. One of his commanding officers lectured Greg and his unit of 200 Marines about the need to be vigilant to the activities of contract workers, even those that they knew and liked personally. The commander left the room, and several minutes later, a female janitor whom the Marines knew by name entered the conference room with a large trashcan. “When she walked out of the room, she left a trashcan there,” Greg recalled. Several minutes later, he walked over to the trashcan, peered over the top lip, and saw a simulated bomb comprised of gallon milk jugs and some wires:

I was like, aw, shit. This would take out everybody, like 90% of the room. And they all looked at me, and I tried to shove it out of the door and it popped. From the backside, the commanding officer walked in, and it was a “gotcha” kind of thing. It was an eye opener for everybody. It was like, I don’t think we’re ready for this. It’s an intangible kind of thing, a fear.³⁹¹

Greg explained further the affective response that this moment induced in him.

While acknowledging that he felt shame for “letting everybody down,” he also connected the moment he saw the fake bomb to a traumatic experience from his childhood. It was “almost like a feeling where you just want to tuck up in a cave and hide,” he said. As a ten year old boy, he had gone to a local bar with his mother and brothers to retrieve his father, who was there drinking. Several minutes after they arrived, two armed burglars

³⁹⁰ “Greg,” interview by Andy Rice, La Jolla, CA, February 3, 2012.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

entered the bar, and Greg's brothers pulled him underneath a table, out of sight. Greg recounted the incident in the present tense:

I was kind of young, and I remember looking over at my parents, and my dad was drunk, wasted, and he's shouting racist terms toward the guys that are robbing the bar, and one of them's like threatening him like I'm going to freaking shoot you, and blah blah blah. And one of them punched my dad, and my dad's drunk, and he doesn't do anything. And my mom's like crying. . . I see my dad's face covered in blood. . . . Again it's a moment where you feel so hopeless. You had absolutely no control over this.³⁹²

Greg's story raises questions about the line between the reenactment and simulation of trauma. On the one hand, the sensory experience of discovering the fake bomb triggered the involuntary negative affect of despair, which Greg associated with an event from his past. The tenor and tense of his story bears the marks of reenactment, a strategy for coping with traumatic memory. But the event that catalyzed this reenactment was his reflection on finding the simulated bomb in the trashcan. When the simulation event occurred at Fort Irwin, it indexed a specific moment of the recent past, while also suggesting an emergent strategy being deployed by insurgents that would likely impact this unit of Marines deploying to Iraq in the near future. The relatively brief duration of time between the actual IED explosion in the mess hall in Iraq and its simulation at Fort Irwin was key to its affective power for this group of Marines. This was a reenactment of current news *and* a training simulation simultaneously. In this context, the bodies of these Marines in training touched something of the bodies of those who had died in the bomb attack affectively, if not literally. It could have been them. Greg's response, "I don't think we're ready for this," was perhaps the desired pedagogical outcome of the

³⁹² Ibid.

bomb simulation. But in the idiosyncratic case of Greg, the doubt he expressed about his ability as a Marine also touched one earlier moment of intense humiliation and fear.

Tomkins argued that a subject exposed to repeated and unremitting humiliations can internalize the feeling of self-contempt that others project onto him or her. The subject that such conditions produced, in Tomkins' description, resembled the military's avowed ideal of the good soldier, "learn[ing] to have contempt for those who surrender too easily and to avoid defeat at any cost lest he suffer self-contempt."³⁹³ Tomkins suggested that there is a monopolistic tendency in the affects of contempt and humiliation if they are not confronted, assuaged, or worked through. Repeated experiences of these negative affects produce in the subject what Tomkins calls a "strong affect theory" that serves as the foundation of ideological thinking: "it is the repeated and apparently uncontrollable spread of the experience of negative affect which prompts the increasing strength of the ideo-affective organization which we have called a strong affect theory."³⁹⁴

"Strong theories" about how the world works harden over time into what Freud, Melanie Klein, and Eve Sedgwick called the paranoid position.³⁹⁵ This corresponds most closely with the principle of avoiding negative affect, the defining strategy of military training. Avoidance strategies inevitably cut off the subject from a range of encounters with potentially shaming, humiliating, or misunderstood objects that have in the past overwhelmed the psyche, and so further mystifies the objects. This leads a strong theory position to claim more and more objects as applicable within its purview over time, as

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 169.

³⁹⁵ Sedgwick and Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 123.

power to control affective experience is defined purely by avoidance. It seeks almost automatically to expand its power by hardening particular boundaries, and this can be contagious with others who follow a similar affective strategy of avoidance that is not counterbalanced by positive affective experience. Moreover, positive affect can actually come about in the process of working to counter the negative affect by avoidance or anger, as is the case in the oft mentioned camaraderie of soldiers in their shared misery. In these cases, ironically, the object associated with the strong affect theory of avoidance becomes central as well to the experience of a restrained positive affect. These are “wounded attachments,” in the terms of documentary theorist Belinda Smaill via Wendy Brown. Smaill applied this phrase to her own analysis of social arguments in documentary films. Adhering to these “wounded attachments” in fact could simply reproduce preexisting ideologies in the minds of documentary viewers who understood the representations on screen as “others” whom it would be interesting to know better. “A politics of injury and pain must formulate an address to the audience that emphasizes the relationship between pain and systems of power,” she says. “Such an address must also attempt to circumvent representations that feed into a desire to consume pain, a desire that seeks out the familiar and the pleasurable.”³⁹⁶ What she is describing, in other words, is an attachment to wounds, perhaps more palpable at a moment in which documentary evidence comes in increasingly affective and personal forms. Total and complete victory over the negative affect leaves a kind of vacuum at the center of affective life.

³⁹⁶ Smaill, *The Documentary: Politics, Emotion, Culture*, 70.

We might ask after the implications of avoidance in relation to images that tend to arouse negative affects. Kara Keeling argued that the cinematic extends outside the theater once internalized by spectators as “common sense” and turned on the world itself. Humans who regard what they see through the logic and needs of cinematic structures become “living images”; their world an extension of the theatrical experience as well as a reflection of the world on screen. Certainly this would seem to be the intention of training simulations at Fort Irwin in relation to soldiers. The strong negative affects of training reinforces boundaries between us and them, and works against the notion of openness in intercultural exchange. But what about the journalists who visit the fort? As outsider observers of simulation activities, what kind of “common sense” do they take away from their experiences as witnesses and why?

While documentary theory to date has not mined Tomkins’ work for insights about the quality of memory activated in “documentary consciousness,” to use Vivian Sobchack’s term,³⁹⁷ and while Tomkins focused on the mechanics of individual consciousness outside of the context of film screenings, his observations about the nature of “traces” in memory offer an apropos model for making sense of the kind of indexicality I am focusing on here. This is somewhat akin to what Cartwright describes as an “inner imprint [in memory] of a structure that knows and expects,” a notion that she gleans from Tomkins in her discussion of intersubjectivity in facilitated communication.³⁹⁸ Tomkins likened the brain to a kind of recording device, and accepted that any definition of memory must focus to some extent on the process of

³⁹⁷ Sobchack, *Toward a Phenomenology of Nonfictional Film Experience*, 241.

³⁹⁸ Cartwright, *Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child*, 220.

duplicating experience inside of the brain. Yet he also recognized that the affect system influenced the mechanics of memory in a way very much unlike a tape recorder. The brain's "interpretive cortex," Tomkins argued, could act on information that came from sensory sources, memory, or affective feedback, and need not be localized just in the "tape recorder" brain.³⁹⁹

He insisted that this information was stored in memory indexically rather than symbolically. Information in the brain, he said, "preserves some aspect of the domain [of the world] in a nonsymbolic, nonconventional manner."⁴⁰⁰ No learning or accumulation of ideas would be possible if a being could not isolate information from a chaotic environment for special focus, and then somehow preserve the experience of regarding it inside the brain. Perceiving stasis and movement—that which changes and that which remains the same in an organism's sensory field—was so crucial to survival that humans, like other organisms, engaged in this activity constantly. Most of this information, Tomkins argued, does not make its way into conscious registration, especially once we have sufficiently understood an environment, process, or train of thought so as to take its repetitions for granted. This is information that we have "permanently preserved" as scripts for use in future encounters with a very similar set of environmental circumstances. But such unconscious memory, for Tomkins, is different from the process of conscious retrieval. What he considers memory is not the fleeting information that touches the sensory receptors, but rather the qualities of "enduring storage and long-

³⁹⁹ Silvan S. Tomkins and Bertram P. Karon, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (New York: Springer Pub. Co., 1962), 114.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

delayed retrieval.”⁴⁰¹ Memories touch the present in everyday experiences to make recognition or attention possible. The moments when these recognitions are palpable but not articulable in language—*affect*, in Keeling’s terms—we are primed to take in and accept explanations that are familiar.

Tomkins described three kinds of recognition scripts that suggest analogues to theories of indexicality in the cinema. Recognition, unlike reproduction, required the presence of something external to the self to bring memories of familiar past experiences to bear on perception and consciousness in the present. The sensory information that the subject encounters is transformed as partially recognizable reproductions of one’s personal past, particularly if they are analogues of what Tomkins calls “nuclear scenes.” Nuclear scenes are scripts that refuse complete solutions or disavowals, and so shape desires and perception toward their incessant reproduction. A nuclear script serves as the supportive base for variations on a theme in memory, and the accumulation of these magnifies the importance of the nuclear scene as a starting point. Mourning scripts, on the other hand, peak as a kind of idealization in memory of the person or object lost, and then recede as “more and more compressed and paler versions of the relationship . . . ending in radically diminished searches or reminders of the lost lover, in grief.”⁴⁰² A third kind is the addictive script, which Tomkins qualifies as a “pseudomourning script” because the object of loss can be obtained again, such as a cigarette smoker’s desire for another cigarette. As in the mourning script, “memory swamps consciousness” initially

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 138.

“as one searches desperately for a cigarette.”⁴⁰³ But when the cigarette is found, Tomkins stated, using the language that Baudrillard would take on to describe the real in the context of ubiquitous simulation, the completion of the mourning process is “short-circuited.”⁴⁰⁴ Expert guides and interpreters of training simulations at Fort Irwin tap into “common sense,” nuclear scripts to answer questions about the lack of the object, the reality of danger and death, to which all signs point. This is dramatic realism as the addictive cigarette.

Critique of Affective Realism

Bonnie Docherty, a researcher at Human Rights Watch who specializes in questions of disarmament and limiting civilian casualties during war, published the most detailed study of the training simulations and their relation to the practices of soldiers once deployed in theater. Docherty positioned herself as a spokesperson for improving military training to reduce civilian casualties, and was allowed unusually extensive access to the fort and its personnel. She visited the fort three times over the course of four years of research and pored through 40,000 pages of training manuals and documents about army lessons learned. In line with the reports of other visitors, Docherty emphasized the importance of realism in her study, but she found it lacking at Fort Irwin. The towns were too small, and the Iraqi role players too few in number to simulate the sense of threat that they engendered for troops once deployed. She said it was a problem that only American soldiers stationed at Fort Irwin play the insurgents, as soldier trainees quickly

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 138-9.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 139.

learn to distinguish between Arabic speakers who play cultural roles, and “insurgents,” none of whom speak Arabic. The simulation scenarios themselves were not varied enough in intensity or goals. Encounters with Iraqi role players were still minimal. And the Rules of Engagement (ROEs) for following International Human Life standards were neither taught nor practiced at Fort Irwin. She insisted that “troops must receive reviews that consider not only military success but also civilian casualties,” a factor not evaluated in army engagements in Iraq until September of 2007, four and a half years after the start of the war.⁴⁰⁵ While Docherty quoted veterans who experienced flashbacks to their combat experience in the midst of participating in simulations, she averred from accepting these comments as evidence of the kind of realism she deemed most important to cultural awareness training. “The different views of NTC’s realism are in part attributable to whether or not a trainee had been to Iraq,” she observed. Her field research corroborated the views of one battalion commander she interviewed, who said that “those who had not been in theater were ‘relatively unfazed [by the realism]. [To them, i]t’s a training exercise.’” She concluded that the affective realism advertised by the military, and relayed by most visiting journalists and filmmakers in their representations of the simulations, remained elusive. “The new trainees’ lack of reaction is disconcerting since NTC’s role is to awaken them to what lies ahead,” she concluded.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵ Bonnie Docherty, *More Sweat . . . Less Blood: US Military Training and Minimizing Civilian Casualties* (Cambridge, MA: Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard University, 2007), 4.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

Wagstaffe, a father in his late 50s at the time of our last conversation, reflected on the dilemma the army faced in getting the attention of trainees. “If it’s not on video,” Wagstaffe said, “then it didn’t happen.”⁴⁰⁷ Wagstaffe explained that for a generation of recruits who grew up playing video games and watching war films, the baseline standard of assaultive sounds, smells, and actions that could induce the sensation of affective realism—the stated key to pedagogy at Fort Irwin—was extreme. This problem was partly of the military’s own making. In military sponsored video game series like *America’s Army*, *Call of Duty*, and *HALO*, recruiting depots set up in public schools, advertisements aired during sports broadcasts, Hollywood action movies endorsed by the military, like *G.I. Joe* (2009) and *Ironman* (2008), and the controversial “Army Experience Center” opened in a Philadelphia shopping mall,⁴⁰⁸ extreme, graphically depicted, reactive violence predominantly functions as a form of exciting entertainment. Offering gaming experiences as part of the army brand, in addition to suggesting that army life might lead to such adventures, aids recruiting within the army’s key demographic of poor, frustrated young men. It is also an ethos that is at odds with the notion of cultural awareness. As one sergeant noted in unnerving frustration in the midst of the transition to cultural awareness in 2004, “You train a guy to kill, and then you tell

⁴⁰⁷ John Wagstaffe, telephone interview by Andy Rice, San Diego, July 5, 2011.

⁴⁰⁸ The \$12 million center, which closed in July of 2010, operated dozens of gaming stations, helicopter and Humvee simulators, and a space for managing enlistments. Located between an arcade and a skate park, the center became a flashpoint for protesters troubled by the army’s endorsement of graphic violence in first person shooter games targeted at children. See Matthew Cousineau, “The Surveillant Simulation of War: Entertainment and Surveillance in the 21st Century,” *Surveillance and Society*, 8 no. 4 (2011): 519; Kathy Matheson, “Flashy Army Recruitment Center in Pa. Mall Closing,” June 11, 2010, <http://shutdowntheaec.net/> (accessed January 20, 2013).

him to go hand out water and not to shoot anybody unless he's shot at."⁴⁰⁹ Within this context, it is not surprising that some of the soldiers viewed the embodied training simulations as just another drill to endure. Moreover, and perhaps more to the point, commanders' assumptions about such preexisting attitudes led them to develop "worst case scenario" simulations, to perform simulated gore and violence that exceeded what soldier trainees would likely see in combat. To achieve the affective realism that would open the space for soldiers to feel the consequences of their actions and the possibilities for their own deaths, in other words, meant creating scenarios that were *not* representative of their future lives. I want to suggest a more general argument from this insight. In a media saturated culture, affective realism is the product of inverting the ideals of representative realism.

It is worth saying a bit more about the kinds of realism claimed as operational at the fort, and the problems that these claims pose for evaluation by outsider journalists and filmmakers. Visitors have no way to judge whether or not this kind of training is effective at reducing civilian casualties, facilitating cultural exchange, or saving the lives of American soldiers during deployment. Beyond this, the evaluators that most matter, Iraqis and Afghanis living through wars who must deal with the distant presence of American troops in their home countries, are not available for comment about the realism of military training. Instead, Iraqi-Americans who left the country in the 1970s, soldier trainees who have not deployed but have played video games, and veteran soldiers whose traumatic experiences of war lead them to experience flashbacks in the midst of much

⁴⁰⁹ Thevenot, "Duty Calls: Louisiana National Guardsmen are training furiously in California, preparing for the front lines of Iraq."

more mundane, everyday sensations stand as authorities on realism in reports and films about the fort. While these participants may be well intentioned and open, they are frequently acting on faith. They manage procedural realism, the real of written military codes about how to move down a narrow street as a unit, perform guard duty, inspect cars at checkpoints, and “kick down doors,” to use the phrase of one army mechanic. While these concerns are deeply practical and relevant to the everyday activities of soldiers, and useful to see and improve upon through the use of video, they have little to do with Iraqi culture.

What is significant here is the relation between the affective experiences induced by the simulation scenarios, and the official interpretations on hand to account for them. Viewers and participants who have not been exposed to graphic depictions of violence tend to have more pronounced visceral responses to the training simulations. One middle aged, white woman from the nearby town of Barstow, whom I will call Jane, accepted a job as a part time role player at Fort Irwin around 2008. I interviewed her in 2012. In rotations of troops who were destined for Afghanistan, she wore a burqa and played the second wife of a rural Muslim Afghani man (his actual wife, Jane’s actual friend, played his first Muslim wife in the simulation). Though Jane knew very little about Afghanistan or Muslim culture, the army allowed her and other local American women to play these roles because, according to script, they said nothing in public, remained anonymous beneath the burqas, and simply followed their husbands. Arabic and Pashtun speaking role players are more expensive to contract, so as many roles as possible are played by enlisted army members and local civilians who need part-time work. As a result, role players like Jane enter the simulations with a very different set of experiences of war

imagery and expectations about war representations than army trainees. Jane recalled seeing for the first time one of the amputees who played a bomb victim in one of the simulations (Figure 4.2). “To me it was so realistic that I just started crying,” she said:

He was yelling where was his leg, and the next thing I know I’m just crying because I’m wondering where his leg’s at. Just sitting there, and you’re like, oh my god, it’s how they must feel when they’re out there and the lose their leg. . . . My dad didn’t really let me watch war movies, so my first time out here, I didn’t know we had amputees, so I cried a lot my first rotation. They made me stay over there because I really was. . . I was devastated. I don’t know a lot about war. So when I’d seen it, it was very scary.⁴¹⁰



Figure 4.2: Video stills of the “Wounded Private” (left) and Afghani role players (right) acting in the Stitch Lane training simulation, 2012. Recorded by the author with permission from Fort Irwin National Training Center, Barstow, CA.

Jane said she gradually learned how to cope with the display of violence and blood because she needed the job, and because she accepted her officers’ interpretation of what she had seen: many soldiers had lost limbs in Iraq and Afghanistan, and so it was crucially important that they experience something of what these moments are like before troops deploy. By hardening herself to the intense affects of fear and disgust that overwhelmed her at first, Jane believed she could help soldiers to better perform their

⁴¹⁰ “Jane,” interview by Andy Rice, Fort Irwin National Training Center, February 15, 2012.

jobs. “I got to where I understand that the concept out here is to help [American soldiers] come back alive,” Jane explained:

I have to learn to do it because it’s my job. And so I waited a couple days and I came back, and the more you come back and you see it, you see you’re helping soldiers. They come in, and you know that hopefully what they learned while you were here is going to bring them back alive. So that made me feel really good about what had first freaked me out.⁴¹¹

Jane’s reaction to the horror of seeing an amputee, and her subsequent acceptance of the military’s interpretation of its meaning, mimics the logic at the center of many documentary and journalistic interpretations of the training simulations. Absent their own critical intervention, these reports convey a message sympathetic to the military mission. In light of this dilemma, I see Coco Fusco’s performative documentary *Operation Atropos* (2008), her live single person performance *A Room of One’s Own: Women and Power in the New America*, and her collaborative performance *Bare Life Study #1* (2005) in Brazil as a more promising approach to critically engaging questions about the meaning of US militarization in training, cinema, and war. *Operation Atropos* features Fusco and five female collaborators undergoing interrogation training with a private company over the course of several days. *A Room of One’s Own* is a monologue homage to Virginia Woolf that expresses reservations about the owned room in the context of interrogation. In *Bare Life Study #1*, Fusco dressed as an American drill sergeant and directed a group of about 30 females dressed in orange prison jumpsuits to clean a street in Sao Paolo with toothbrushes, a gesture carried out in front of the American embassy that reenacts a disciplinary practice commonly employed on prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. Fusco’s projects critique the argument that the deployment of

⁴¹¹ “Jane.”

sexuality is necessarily a tool of female empowerment. Instead, she presents the state's reappropriation of feminine sexuality as a strategy for breaking down Muslim male prisoners, and asks after the limits of sexuality as a means of radical critique. In engaging this problematic, Fusco does not simply document the fact of her own revelation and then allow its ambiguous affective force to compel spectators' interpretations—a documentary strategy of representation. Fusco's performance and writing critique discursive positions rather than represent the affective force of the “very bad” for others to consider. She acknowledges that female soldiers whom have acted as actual interrogators see the use of feminine sexuality in interrogation as a patriotic duty that saves American lives, but rather than accept and reproduce this affect and argument through documentation of their views, Fusco interprets such statements as part of the “mounting evidence that the state is orchestrating sexual torture and using women to perform it.”⁴¹² Similar interpretations of the political import of affect at Fort Irwin have not been forthcoming.

Conclusion: Stitch Lane Still Continues

"I want to show taxpayers in the Western world what their tax money is doing to people in another part of the world," explained Pakistani journalist Noor Behram. Behram has been photographing and videotaping the victims of the United States' secret drone war in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan since 2004, and has

⁴¹² Coco Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), 58.

begun to receive recognition for his work internationally.⁴¹³ Trevor Paglen, a geographer and visual artist who has done extensive research on the invisible aspects of American militarism, extreme extradition practices, and torture, curated a show in March of 2012 at the Kansas City Art Institute, “On Watch,” that included some of Behram’s photographs. Behram was also profiled in *Wired* magazine in 2011, and 27 of his photographs were featured in a show in London called *Gaming in Waziristan*. He has a network of friends in Northern Pakistan who call him when they see or hear about drone bombings. Behram then travels to the site of the attacks, sometimes minutes after the event, and sometimes several days later in villages that are difficult to reach. His images reveal a stark contrast to the depictions of drone attacks as an extension of “clean war” reported in the West. He has accumulated over 100 photographs of children, over 620 of women, and countless images of men killed in the attacks in addition to medium shot portrait photographs of shocked survivors holding the casings of hellfire missiles—the kind fired from drone planes and American helicopters. “For every 10 to 15 people killed, maybe they get one militant,” he said. “I don’t go to count how many Taliban are killed. I go to count how many children, women, innocent people, are killed.” Behram risks his life to document the drone attacks, as drones often fire a second round of missiles on rescue teams sorting through the rubble on the assumption that they must be Taliban sympathizers. Most reporting on drone attacks thus does not come from journalists working in the field, but

⁴¹³ Spencer Ackerman, “Rare Photographs show Ground Zero of the Drone War,” *Wired*, December 12, 2011, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/12/photos-pakistan-drone-war/?pid=999&pageid=63671&viewall=true>.

from Pakistani informants who cooperate with the US and their own governments to identify compounds where elements of the Taliban might be hiding.⁴¹⁴

This exceptional kind of American war is an extension of older military logic, and Behram's photographs a new iteration of the evidence that offers their viewers traces of the affective shocks that demand accounting. Though now global rather than national in scope, the photographs reenact a dynamic that dates in the United States to the first uses of photography to document the Civil War. What is different here is the context of reception. Behram's photographs, though forensic in aesthetics and conception, were first shown in the West in art galleries, not journalistic institutions. This has something to do with the fact that Waziristan is a difficult place for American journalists to navigate. But it is also the case that absent American troops on the ground, the cooperative, mutually protective relationship that has developed between journalists and the military is not facilitated. No cultural awareness, no performance of cooperation between the US military and locals is necessary for the drone war in Waziristan. US leaders would like to keep it that way.

⁴¹⁴ Sarah Saeed and Peter Beaumont, "US Drone Strikes in Pakistan Claiming Many Civilian Victims, Says Campaigner," *The Guardian*, sec. World News: Pakistan, July 17, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jul/17/us-drone-strikes-pakistan-waziristan>.



Figure 4.3: Video stills of the staging ground for Stitch Lane training simulation, 2007 (top row) and 2012 (bottom row). The explosion that initiated the simulation in “Medina Wasl” in 2007 can be seen in the top right frame; the explosion in this same space, renamed “Ertebat Shar” by 2012, can be seen on the bottom left. Recorded by the author with permission from Fort Irwin National Training Center, Barstow, CA, 2007 and 2012.

I revisit Fort Irwin in 2012, and once again I am taken to Medina Wasl, now called Ertebat Shar and reimagined as a town in Afghanistan. John Wagstaffe passed away in 2011, so I am led by a new public affairs officer. Unlike my last visit, I am now confined to a “press box” built upon several of the cargo container buildings. The village has tripled in size since 2007, and the main road is paved now (Figure 4.3). I’m told it has become by far the largest village on the fort. Concrete barricades line the street, and buildings feature more elaborately detailed facades and awnings. Hooded men wearing the MILES laser tag vests push carts of plastic toys and melons through the street, occasionally followed by a figure in a burqa or a goat. The call to prayer echoes throughout the space. A statue stands in the center of the town, a replica of the Princess of Hatra erected in 238 AD in the city of al Hadr, Iraq to protect it from Persian invaders. Though the town is now meant to simulate Afghanistan, the statue remains. Because the circumference of the statue’s base and the concrete barricades that surround it prevent anyone from standing too close, TCs and their contract pyro-technicians can hide large

gunpowder charges there and detonate them safely. A plaque at the base of the statue indicates that it was constructed “in appreciation of the American Soldier, the true protector of democracy,” and built by Strategic Operations, the same San Diego based company that had supplied Iraqi role players, amputees, and pyrotechnics advice to the army since 2007 (Figure 4.4). The explosions released from the statue are deafening. “Everybody got earplugs on?” asks the TC in charge of the simulation. He compliments the look of one of the Afghan role player’s cart, and defers his invitation to lunch for later in the week.



Figure 4.4: Video stills of the “Princess of Hatra” statue and placard, 2012. Recorded by the author with permission from Fort Irwin National Training Center.

Again, I see a rendition of the Stitch Lane exercise I had witnessed five years earlier, but this time structured by a much more complex cinematic simulation apparatus. The wounded private is played by an amputee dressed with a bloody protrusion on the remains of his left leg. A second portrays a soldier who lost his arm in the explosion. Professional army videographers record the training event from three different angles using large cameras with expensive zoom lenses. Their footage is compiled, marked, and integrated for use in AARs at a communications center hidden in the village, which is adjacent to a climate controlled screening room with seating for soldier trainees. Two

contract employees monitor the feeds on a computer screen, and cue the sounds of gunfire, the call to prayer, livestock, screams, etc. on the command of the lead TC. They can also release smells into the center of Medina Wasl, including burning flesh, “dragon’s breath,” coffee, roast beef, jasmine, sewer, apple pie, gunpowder, and vomit.⁴¹⁵ All of the footage that they record is sent wirelessly via microwave transmission to a larger communications center and server on the post.

There is a sense in the unfolding of the simulation that it is part for training and part for show. I attach a radio lavalier to the head TC so I can hear his stage directions before they unfold in the town. He conjures snipers out of myriad windows, summons a suicide bomber to the center of the city street, and directs insurgents to fire from their locked down positions until they are hit. “Give them a Hollywood ending,” he says. The insurgent stands in a window, and shoots as many of the American soldiers as he can before the receptors on his laser tag vest indicate that he has been killed. The duration of the firefight stretches on, nearing forty-five minutes as a host of other visitors look on with me from the covered platform. This is also the space where tourists stand during “NTC Box Tours.”

It is possible that some of what occurs in the simulation references specific events in Afghanistan, but it is also surely the case that many elements index the cinematic affect system I have described. The cameras provide ongoing audiovisual material for scrutiny; the town is an object for embellishment. Over time, Medina Wasl became not just a site for training soldiers, but also a showpiece for the army’s new, publicly

⁴¹⁵ “Technician,” interview by Andy Rice, Fort Irwin National Training Center, February 15, 2012.

palatable consideration of culture in the midst of insurgent war. It has been a public relations coup, leading even critical theorists like Magelssen to write favorably of its activities as representative of an American military finding its way after Abu Ghraib. I, too, came away from the Fort on both of my visits liking the individuals with whom I interacted, and respecting their opinions about the need for training of this sort. But I also retain the belief that cultural performance in the context of military training is not by default progressive. The affective strategy that emphasizes avoidance, mistrust, and contempt of potential enemies remains at the center of army camaraderie, a wounded attachment in relation to the objective of intercultural engagement. Counterinsurgency warfare demands cultural performance to function as one weapon amongst many. In the midst of ubiquitous cameras, cultural performance cannot simply be the domain of Special Forces who have long functioned in the US military as collaborators in guerrilla wars in distant locales. The attacks that most devastate the army, in this case, are the journalistic reports *in the midst of war* that reveal unnecessary civilian deaths. From the perspective of the US military, as the lack of punishment meted out for Abu Ghraib attests, the crime is not in the killing or the torture, but in the photographs of the killed or the tortured.

Ruminating on the photographs of Behram, media theorist Lisa Parks suggested that the nature of camerawork in the digital era has rendered covert war difficult, if not impossible.⁴¹⁶ It is a provocative assertion, and leads to two conclusions. First, covert war must hide itself in the context of ubiquitous cameras in different ways. It must take

⁴¹⁶ Lisa Parks, "Talk on *Coverage, Media Space, and Security After 9/11 for Drones at Home*" (CalIT2, University of California, San Diego, May 11-12, 2012), <http://www.calit2.net/events/popup.php?id=2003>.

place in remote, highly secured prisons, or in the usually invisible computer code that operates machines. Second, the presence of cameras produces the internalization of the cinematic in an institution like the US military, which in turn drills these values into individual troops. Cinematic performance is here a weapon that short-circuits the oft-assumed power of documentary exposure to bring about social change. Rather, the rules by which ethical documentary practitioners play—faith in following subjects or foregrounding their statements over voice of god narration, belief in proximity to subjects as a route to truer representation, discerning organic narratives in subjects lives to allow their nuanced characters to emerge—are easily subsumed into the public relations component of Fort Irwin's affect system.

Chapter 5: Indexical Holes and Documentary Possession: Reenacting the 1946 Lynching at Moore's Ford Bridge in Georgia

This chapter explores the concept of indexicality in the reenactment performance of a racially charged historical trauma, a quadruple lynching that took place in Monroe, Georgia in Walton County shortly after the end of World War II. I draw from Sobchack's insights on representing death in documentary, Frantz Fanon's phenomenology of black subjectivity, bell hooks' writing on black female practices of healing and spectatorship, Suzan Lori-Parks' understanding of repetition and revision, and Keeling's theory of black cinematics to consider reenactors' accounts of playing lynchers and the lynched between 2005 and 2012. I also ask why performances of this event seem to compel the presence of cameras, and how reenactors' understandings of cinematic tropes in turn influence their experiences of playing roles in the annual reenactments. On July 25, 1946 at the Moore's Ford Bridge just outside of Monroe, a white mob kidnapped and brutally murdered two black couples, George and Mae Murray Dorsey and Roger and Dorothy Malcom, who many friends and relatives insist was seven months pregnant at the time. The perpetrators were never prosecuted. Both as a way to work through the lingering trauma of that event in the present, and to compel prosecution of the three to five surviving members of the lynch mob who may still live unpunished in Walton County, black activists and white sympathizers from Georgia began to reenact the lynching in 2005. In analyzing this performance process, I argue that deeply rooted, embodied experiences of racial identity centrally inflect the practices of historical interpretation that inform the reenactment and controversies surrounding it, but suggest

that the performance cannot be read outside of a theory of a digital cinematic apparatus. Role player interviewees touch on ways that gender, class, religious, and regional identities also charge their performances with the deictic, affective aspect of indexicality.⁴¹⁷ In its broadest terms, the chapter asks after the functions of live reenactment performance in the absence of documentary evidence through which to authorize broad agreement on the particulars of historical representation. A live reenactment carried out under the auspices of mimetic realism and social justice produces affective evidence through performance while also offering an event to be observed and recorded in minute detail. I argue as well that considerations of camerawork in relation to this live reenactment constitute part of its performative repertoire in the digital context.

Activists involved in organizing the reenactment regularly recount its origin story in public speeches. One Georgia state representative, “Dante Scott,”⁴¹⁸ was a SNCC organizer working in Monroe on the day of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination in Memphis, Tennessee, April 4th, 1968. Subsequently, he committed himself to carrying out King’s strategy to pursue the arrest and prosecution of perpetrators of “cold case” lynchings like the one that had taken place in Monroe. King had intended to travel to Monroe several weeks after his stop in Memphis to bring awareness to the failed FBI attempt to prosecute the case in 1946. Along with a local activist group called the Moore’s Ford Memorial Committee (MFMC) that formed in the late 1990s, a group associated with Scott, the Georgia Association of Black Elected Officials (GABEO), participated in April 4 marches on the Moore’s Ford Bridge to commemorate the

⁴¹⁷ I discuss the concept of the deictic in indexical signs at length in Chapter 1.

⁴¹⁸ Unless otherwise noted, I am using pseudonyms for all interviewees quoted in this chapter.

assassination of Dr. King. During the march of 2005, Senator Charles Steele of Alabama, the organizer of an annual reenactment in his home state of the march across the bridge in Selma in 1965, suggested to other marchers that they reenact the Moore's Ford lynching. Sensible that a reenactment would bring attention to the case and extra-local pressure on residents of Walton and Oconee Counties to come forward with information about the perpetrators, GABEO organized a reenactment of the lynching to take place in July of 2005.⁴¹⁹ The event attracted worldwide attention. Organizers and participants appeared in interviews about the case on CNN, NPR, *The New York Times*, and *Democracy Now!*, amongst others. Longtime activists involved in pursuing the case in collaboration with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) and FBI say that in the wake of the reenactment, more people came forward with relevant information about the lynch mob than they had in decades.⁴²⁰ GABEO has sponsored a reenactment of the lynching annually since then, though without official support from the MFMC.

The annual reenactment takes place the last Saturday in July, which includes as well a full day of educational and spiritual activities that contextualize the lynchings and pay respects to the Dorseys and the Malcoms. Though the reenactment is open to the public, attendees are typically over 90% African-American. Many return year after year. The day begins at noon at the First African Baptist Church in Monroe, where Georgia-

⁴¹⁹ "Dante Scott," interview by Andy Rice, Paschal's Restaurant in Atlanta, GA, July 24, 2012.

⁴²⁰ One dilemma of the reopening of the FBI investigation into this case, however, is that this information has not been made available to the public. As a result, statements of progress in the case function much as details about the lynchings themselves have since the 1940s. They are rumors that beg for speculation and imaginative interpretation. At least in the short-run, such rumors inhibit rather than facilitate the collective desire for closure on this case. "Gerald Harvey," interview by Andy Rice, Social Circle, GA, July 19, 2012.

based reverends, Civil Rights activists from across the South, and representatives of GABEO speak to the crowd of approximately three hundred visitors about why they organize the reenactment of the Moore's Ford lynching. They discuss the history of racial oppression in the county and nation, the connection between the reenactment activities and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and the importance of holding political officeholders accountable to notions of justice derived from United States law and the Bible. They stress the need for continued, persistent, collective struggle for justice in the face of apathy and hostility. The entire caravan then travels by car to the gravesites of the Dorseys and the Malcoms, and four sites within the county where key incidents related to the lynching occurred in 1946. Organizers explain the significance of events that took place there before volunteer actors reenact these scenes. Photojournalists and film crews are allowed to record reenactment events from as close as they wish and without restriction on their movements, though spectators are asked to remain in viewing areas more distant from performances. Several of these reenactment vignettes are performed in highly trafficked public spaces in and around Monroe so that local residents black and white encounter them as they go about their everyday routines. The day culminates that evening around 5:30 with the brief but emotionally charged reenactment of the lynching scene at the Moore's Ford Bridge, which takes place very near to the site of the 1946 lynching. The four actors playing the victims then remain "dead" on the ground as a black woman in a white gown positions herself between the bodies and the audience to sing a spiritual (Figure 5.1). All together, the day's events take approximately six hours. The lynching reenactment itself takes about four minutes. But that four-minute reenactment produces in graphic and controversial detail likenesses

of the blood, the mob, the guns, and the corpses associated with the brutal murder of two black couples for co-present spectators and camerapersons. Documentary videos of at least five of these reenactments have been uploaded to YouTube, where they remain accessible as of April 2013.



Figure 5.1: Video still of the conclusion of the reenactment of the Moore's Ford Bridge lynching, *Always in Season*, Jackie Olive, 2012. The reenactors who take on the roles of the Malcoms and Dorseys are visible playing the dead in the bottom left corner of the frame. Copyright has been obtained.

A cameraperson at the reenactment embodies a different kind of presence than a spectator who witnesses events. Like a witness, a cameraperson is complicit with the structure of power that produces the event for seeing. But within the liminal space of the event, a moving-image cameraperson follows action from a relatively privileged set of positions. When subjects desire the extension and transformation that the cinematic apparatus affords their expressions, as is the case with actors and organizers of the reenactment, the camera functions as the cameraperson's alibi to witness and record

events before the lens at an unusually close proximity. Unlike witnesses or spectators, who tend to stand as passive, static, and distant observers, a cameraperson moves in syncopation with events that unfold. A one-person camera crew, in which the microphone is attached to the camera, makes such proximity technologically necessary in many cases. To record from too far away renders dialog distant, faint in volume, drowned out by ambient noise, and disengaged from the subject's subtle qualities of expression. A microphone two feet from a subject, rather, records sound with a presence that saturates the footage with the subject's vitality, while visibly communicating to the future spectator in a movie theater, living room, or office cubicle a tacit sense of trust between cameraperson and subject. To be so much inside the world of the subjects before the lens, even if they do not explicitly acknowledge the cameraperson as they go about their activities, strongly suggests that they understand and perhaps even cherish the role and intention that this documentary presence in their social world intimates. Without the camera, such privileged practices of looking and moving would prove awkward. A performer in the midst of playing a role, for instance, would not expect a spectator to track with her head the movements of a gesturing hand from inches away, or to observe facial expressions from a distance inside of culturally acceptable interpersonal space. Spectators are expected to regard from a distance. When a camera is present, however, such transgressions may be welcomed—even expected—rather than resented. The actors who play the lynchers and the dead in the Moore's Ford reenactment offer themselves for such proximate cameras. In some respects, though perhaps not altogether consciously, cameras serve as alibis for the co-present reenactors and spectators at the live

performance to engage with two subjects that are usually taboo in public spaces of the American South of the 21st century: racial atrocity and actual death.

Sobchack argues that representing natural death in audiovisual media presents a problem of duration. “In our cinematic culture,” she specifies, “violence gives death a perceptible form and signifies its ultimate violation of the lived body.”⁴²¹ Natural death, or the process of dying slowly across time, does not lend itself to cinematic apprehension. From this starting point, she charts her phenomenological analysis of death in the cinema, which continues across her essays “Inscribing Ethical Space” and “The Charge of the Real” in *Carnal Thoughts* (2004), by distinguishing the representation of death in a fictional film, in which spectators experience the event as the death of the character rather than the actor, and death in nonfiction film, in which the event depicts a death that is experienced as real. She argues that because death is a taboo subject in modern societies, spectators need an ethical rationale to witness actual death. These ways of coping with the fact of death and the desire to behold the taboo influence documentary aesthetics. I would add that roughly the same alibis for witnessing death in documentary apply to the reenactment of the Moore’s Ford lynching, at least in part because its performance occurs in the same place as the original lynching.

The setting of the Moore’s Ford Bridge indexes the lynching that once occurred there. Like an unexposed piece of film, it is flexible to either photographic or cinematic perception, though various elements of the landscape move. The perceptible landscape is not an organism quite like a “film body” in Sobchack’s terms, as it changes without so

⁴²¹ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, 238.

much visible evidence of human intention inscribed in its movements.⁴²² The rustling of the leaves in the trees, the chaotic flight of insects, the flow of a river, and the crawling of ants tend to function as a backdrop for human activity that once occurred there rather than the subjective orientation of humans themselves. These subtle movements of “nature” are like the particles of silver halide on the emulsion behind the closed shutter, waiting for human perception to expose them as indexical signs of *something*. As evidence of affective history, the landscape at Moore’s Ford is timeless even though the adjacent road is now paved, and the wooden bridge replaced with one of concrete. Like a photograph with scratches or the yellowish tinting of age, this landscape stands the perceptual test of time for participants in the reenactment, spectators, and locals who know something about the lynching that once stained it. The landscape becomes cinematic—and documentary, I would add—only in the midst of the live, acted performance of the lynching itself in the presence of witnesses. It is a “documentary space” in these moments, to paraphrase Sobchack’s film theory, because it is “constituted and inscribed as ethical space: [in the midst of performance] it stands as the objectively visible evidence of subjective visual responsiveness and responsibility toward a world shared with other human subjects.”⁴²³ But the reenactment is also a spectacle simultaneously.

While we know that the actors are not actually dead after they are lynched in the performance, we who are present to the live performance are keenly aware of the actual death that once took place on that very ground. It is the indexical quality of the landscape

⁴²² I discuss the concept of “film body” at length in Chapter 3 of the dissertation, and expand this analysis in Chapter 4.

⁴²³ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, 238.

in conjunction with the “collective effervescence”⁴²⁴ of the ritual reenactment that grants the performance of death by actors playing those who once died the poignancy, at least for themselves and some spectators, that Sobchack associates with documentary film spectatorship. Moreover, there is the fraught matter of racial identity at the center of both killing and reenactment in the case of the Moore’s Ford lynching. Whereas Sobchack attends to her own relationship with the representation of death, she insists that her insights are culturally and historically specific. The racist ideology at the core of the lynching tradition produces relations with these particular deaths that are quite unlike viewing the death of a rabbit or hoard of locusts on screen, two key examples to which Sobchack refers in her essay. These are deaths that index deeply personal sentiments of sadness, anger, and the need for solidarity for many black spectators who witness the reenactment and actors who play roles within it. The reenactment performance touches a “residue” that “stays with us” to use playwright Suzan Lori-Parks phrase, as well as the singular event of the lynching at Moore’s Ford itself.⁴²⁵

bell hooks’ phenomenological insights about her experiences with death and dying as a “down home” black southerner complement the framework that Sobchack sets out for her documentary theory of representing death. Black people living “in the midst of racial apartheid” did not have the luxury of keeping death at a distance. “Growing up, I learned to respect the reality of dying, not to ignore or make light of it,” hooks stated. She recalled church songs that framed death as a transitional state between two kinds of

⁴²⁴ See Chapter 2 for an elaborated account of this term, coined in: Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.

⁴²⁵ Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play, and Other Works* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1995), 10.

embodiment rather than an event to fear. The objective result of death was not a corpse to behold, but a spirit to feel in the presence of a community. “Many southern black people have held to the belief that a human being possesses body, soul, and spirit—that death may take one part even as the others remain.” She suggests that this tripartite understanding of the subject in death has enabled African-American believers to confront death without feeling overwhelmed. But like Sobchack, she identified the lifestyles of black urbanites (including her own) as structurally antithetical to these traditional rituals for expressing grief and working toward healing after death. “Just the pace of life in cities makes constructive prolonged mourning in the context of community nearly impossible,” she states. Given these circumstances, hooks argued that black women needed to take an active role in creating the spaces for their own healing. “Individual black women must ask ourselves, ‘Where are the spaces in our lives where we are able to acknowledge our pain and express grief?’ If we cannot identify those spaces, we need to make them.”⁴²⁶ In the course of this chapter, I suggest how the reenactment of the Moore’s Ford lynching creates a space for acknowledging real pain and expressing grief for black women participants. But I hold to the claim that this is also a cinematic space layered upon the “down home” one it appears to be. As Keeling suggests in her analysis of the cinematic in the Civil Rights Movement, the public display of black subjectivity as a nonviolent political strategy for exposing white violence was also very much in tune

⁴²⁶ Bell Hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1993), 100-104.

with the affordances of television.⁴²⁷ The Moore's Ford reenactment, in this vein, lends itself to attention within the serialized, transmedia environment of the early 21st century.

The reenactment of the lynching at Moore's Ford Bridge, though a live event, relies upon the presence of cameras and the dense accumulation of collective memory-images of Civil Rights demonstrations to sustain interest in the unresolved murder case. The shift from local activism to cinematic performance has successfully drawn the camera-wielding journalists and filmmakers to document the reenactment in Monroe, but perhaps at the price of local participation or support, especially amongst whites. In the absence of any credible eyewitness accounts of the original lynching, and in light of the FBI's silence on information they know or leads they are currently pursuing, the evolution of the reenactment over the years serves as an unusual case for considering the social implications of historical interpretations, and the tacit theories that undergird them. I argue in part that these tacit theories merge the lived experiences of race and cinema. Performing the roles associated with the lynching filled the holes left in the story in ways that suited cinematic interests and black positions of cathartic identification.

To perform well, some lingering vestige of hatred or terror must creep into the bodies of those who act their parts on the place where the original lynching occurred. In this context, and in the presence of witnesses, the reenactment itself does not just reflect a trauma that happened. For participants, it also constitutes an event at the border between trauma and therapy. The cognitive dissonance between the values and experiences of the actors, and the values and experiences of the lynchers and the lynched, are unbridgeable

⁴²⁷ Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*.

in some cases. Reenactors must embody and temporarily suspend their judgment of the hate and terror they imagine to have shaped the lynching of 1946. In the performance, their bodies must not simply resemble historical figures. They must *be* the documentary evidence of this disarming past for one another and for spectators of the reenactment, must possess its essence at least as much as a photograph or a corpse. When living humans perform themselves as the traces of the lynchers and the lynched, they feel the weight of the deaths and the accumulation of time affectively, *for* others that are both co-present and imagined.

Lynching and Spectacle

Lynching derived from older Puritan religious traditions of public executions of the ungodly and expedited wartime prosecution of misdeeds imputed to soldiers, but came of age in the era of photography and then motion pictures.⁴²⁸ Keeling smartly noted that the rise of the cinema was historically coincident with W. E. B. Du Bois's insightful 1903 prediction that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," a fact that shaped the way lynchings came to be practiced and remembered in the early 20th century.⁴²⁹ Lynching was at once a practice embodied and metaphoric. As Jonathan Markovitz commented in the introduction to his genealogical monograph on lynching tropes in popular culture, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (2004), "Lynching was always intended as a metaphor for, or a way to understand, race

⁴²⁸ Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, *The End of American Lynching* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012); Dwight Conquergood, "Lethal Theatre: Performance, Punishment, and the Death Penalty," *Theatre Journal* 54, no. 3 (2002): 339-367.

⁴²⁹ Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*, 1.

relations.”⁴³⁰ As a metaphor, lynching escaped the bounds of locality and the lived experience of memory. The psychic toll exacted by lynching spectacles on the families of victims as well as the descendents of lynch mobs extended for a far longer duration of time.

In her cultural history *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1880-1940*, Amy Louise Wood points out that white supremacy was a contested ideology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as towns and cities in the South were “lurching into modernity,” intimated new possibilities for interracial class alliances.⁴³¹ New factories in the South attracted working class, single men—black and white—as well as the attendant gambling halls, saloons, and brothels, which middle class families and “strivers” identified as morally threatening and responsible for upticks in crime. Northern Republicans’ abandonment of post Civil War Reconstruction in the late 1870s tilted the balance of force in negotiating these tensions toward white supremacy and away from nascent interracial class solidarity. The figure of the “black brute” and his insatiable appetite for white women emerged time and again in white prolynching discourses of this period, and served amongst southern whites to justify the brutality and public nature of lynchings. Wood argued that spectacle lynchings were in part responses to these shifts in the agricultural economy and the threats they represented to the old patriarchal order of the antebellum slave south, compelling white southern solidarity across class lines. Spectacle lynchings were carried out in public places before crowds of spectators,

⁴³⁰ Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xvi.

⁴³¹ Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 11.

particularly in emerging cities. Wood concludes: “Lynching spectacles, in this respect, did more than dramatize or reflect an undisputed white supremacy or attest to an uncontested white solidarity. Rather, they generated and even coerced a sense of racial superiority and unity among white southerners across class, generational, and geographic divisions.”⁴³² She intimates that photographs of lynchings and representations of lynching in motion pictures, culminating in D.W. Griffith’s notorious but commercially successful *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), served to “affirm and authenticate” white supremacist ideology as a consumer good.⁴³³ The performative nature of such events was thus also possessive. To be white and present to lynching was to be hailed as part of a community that was possessed by the values of white supremacy.

Lynching spectacles did not just destroy black lives, in the words of Barbara Lewis, but actively created “an effigy or trace of the power of whiteness.”⁴³⁴ Quoting the words of a young, white, southern girl who spoke to a reporter of “the fun we had burning the niggers,” Lewis suggested that the possessive power over witnesses to such events was “pleasurable and strong vital enough to last a lifetime; vital enough to motivate the keeping of a photographic reminder of a lynching in the family album for years and years where it could be periodically fingered in an evocation of nostalgic memory.”⁴³⁵ Lynching spectacles affirmed white supremacy at the scale of embodied experience as well as metaphor. The rituals of lynching and the visible dehumanization

⁴³² Ibid., 8.

⁴³³ Ibid., 10.

⁴³⁴ Barbara Lewis, “Decorated Death and the Double Whammy,” in *Violence Performed: Local Roots and Global Routes of Conflict*, eds. Patrick Anderson and Jisha Menon (Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 118.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 117.

of black victims, in Wood's terms, "enacted and embodied the core beliefs of white supremacist ideology."⁴³⁶ While the circulation of lynching photographs initially bolstered such possessive sentiments, Wood argued that shifting understandings about the nature of lynching ultimately undermined this initial power associated with lynching imagery. The NAACP, for instance, appealed to a national audience with lynching photographs, pointing to these indexical signs of terrorism as a national embarrassment.

Perhaps the most widely discussed campaign of this sort was the *Without Sanctuary* exhibit first organized by postcard collector James Allen in 2000. Allen's public presentation of 100 postcards from the early 1900s that featured lynching photographs drew capacity crowds at venues in New York City and then beyond. Many of the images depict burned, bullet ridden black corpses hanging from trees and telephone poles above a mass of seemingly unperturbed whites including young heterosexual couples, parents with small children, and police officers. According to statistics in the book compendium of lynching photographs featured in the *Without Sanctuary* exhibit, 4742 black persons were lynched between 1882 and 1968. Many more were executed through "legal lynchings" (accelerated trials and executions for blacks accused of crimes), the private actions of white southerners, and "nigger hunts" in which victims' bodies were never found.⁴³⁷ Between 1880 and 1930, a period during which some scholars estimate a black person was lynched approximately every five days, a great

⁴³⁶ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*, 8.

⁴³⁷ James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Twin Palms, 2000), 12.

number of these lynchings functioned as well as public spectacles.⁴³⁸ As significant as the suffering exacted upon the families and communities of the lynched was the power of the ritual of lynching to extend terror outward in space and forward in time. Though the original postcard photos circulated amongst prolynching whites as mementos of community events and spectacularized displays of white power, their reappropriation as documentary evidence in a 21st century gallery space shocked and shamed exhibit visitors black and white. *Without Sanctuary* sparked academic conferences, journal publications on race-based violence, a website, and exhibits in large museums throughout the country. In other words, though the NAACP had pushed Congress to pass antilynching legislation to no avail in the 1920s and had regularly published testimonies of victimized black families across the first half of the 20th century, it was the exhibit of historical prolynching souvenir postcards in 2000 that compelled popular response—and even an official apology in 2005 from the U.S. Senate for its prior inaction. The \$60 book publication of the exhibit photographs went into six editions in its first six years of existence. The spectacle of lynching, it seems, again has a peculiar kind of currency. “When we pause to ask why,” cautions historian of black performance Koritha Mitchell, “we find that the nation has again allowed the archives left by perpetrators to eclipse all others.”⁴³⁹ Mitchell’s monograph on one act lynching plays written by black playwrights including Angelina Weld Grimké and Alice Dunbar-Nelson produced in the early 20th century testifies to the ongoing struggle of black people in the United States not only to protest racism, but to survive with the fact of its inevitability. “While the mob’s efforts

⁴³⁸ Rushdy, *The End of American Lynching*, ix.

⁴³⁹ Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 6.

centered on black death,” she observed, “African American dramatists helped their communities to live, even while lynching remained a reality that would not magically disappear.”⁴⁴⁰

The re-embodiment of a lynching spectacle by black men and women from the South, then, reopens the question about the relation between spectacular possession and empowerment. On the one hand, reenacting a racial atrocity of the past as a spectacle conjures these old tropes of white supremacy, and all of the feelings of terror, oppression, and guilt associated with them. Mitchell critiques *Without Sanctuary* in this vein for failing to humanize the black victims of lynchings. Though the emphasis on the lynching postcard and the complicit white crowd catalyzed dialogue amongst 21st century audiences black and white, Mitchell points out that these tactics also compel overlooking the longer term ramifications of lynching. Lynching plays written in the early 1900s by black authors, on the other hand, focus on the trials, tribulations, and dilemmas faced by families and communities who lived with lynching. These plays avoided the representation of violence that de facto dehumanized black bodies. But the reenactment at Moore’s Ford Bridge is effectively a one act lynching play organized by black activists, performed outside rather than on a proscenium, that *centers* on the graphic depiction of violence. There is a palpable desire in this reenactment to render the violent atrocity visible and recordable. It is a staging for a lynching actuality film a century after the actuality genre’s peak. Unlike the one act plays of Mitchell’s description, the audience learns little about what happened to the surviving Dorsey or Malcom family members in the decades after the quadruple lynching (unless they should choose to speak

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 1.

with descendents in attendance). But the control over this event by black activists from Georgia casts the spectacular embodied reenactment of lynching in a different light than the *Without Sanctuary* exhibit. This is an attempt to find meaning and justice in the ruins of a past that is profoundly personal, inscribed as memories of embodied experience and the texture of the landscape rather than negatives on celluloid. Questions about the meanings of these cinematic and yet performed rituals for participants and witnesses are complex. What kind of solidarity does this collective ritual produce amongst its participants and spectators, and who does it exclude? What relationships to collective memory, personal experience, and collective history has this lynching reenactment expressed? How have these changed over time?

Reenactment participants, locals from Walton and Oconee Counties, and outside observers continue to debate whether the annual commemoration events are disastrous echoes of spectacle lynchings, historical reenactments, theatrical productions, passion plays, key markers of a nascent political movement, or an emergent kind of vernacular, collective avant-garde art practice. Laura Wexler's *Fire in a Canebreak* (2003), published the year prior to the first reenactment, is the most rigorous archival account of the 1946 lynching and its subsequent legacy in Walton and Oconee Counties.⁴⁴¹ Written as a detective story in the tradition of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965), Wexler aimed to coax out a deathbed confession or two from surviving members of the lynch mob. She was unsuccessful in breaking the local "wall of silence" about the case, but her

⁴⁴¹ There are, in fact, two Laura Wexlers who have written about the history of race, gender, and traumatic incidents in the United States. As of 2013, the Laura Wexler to which I am referring here taught in the MFA program in Creative Nonfiction at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland, not in the American Studies program at Yale University.

book usefully represents what is gained and lost by interpreting the story primarily through archival documents and on-the-record interviews. In her conclusion, she articulated two different ways of remembering the lynching itself. “For many black people,” she said, “the lynching was the most horrific thing that ever happened in Walton or Oconee counties, but for many white people, it was mainly an annoyance, an event that smudged the area’s good name.”⁴⁴² Her white interviewees often asked her why she would want to “drag this thing up.” Some felt that even gesturing to the kind of hatred that fueled the original lynching would do no one any good. Others, she said, implied in the way they asked her this question that they didn’t understand why anyone would make a “fuss over four dead black sharecroppers.”⁴⁴³ The degree to which the collective memories of the event itself remained segregated, Wexler explained, indexed “the extent to which racism has destroyed—and continued to destroy—our ability to tell a common truth.”⁴⁴⁴ In the reenactment itself, however, the tenor of Wexler’s interpretation of this history is essentially ignored. Wexler told me in an interview that she found the reenactment performance of 2005, the only one she attended, to be troublesome for its selective adherence to documented evidence about the case. “It’s not for me, if that makes sense,” she told me. “It’s for people who don’t know the story, and this is what they want to know about the story.”⁴⁴⁵ Other critics argued that the goal of arrest and prosecution validated the Brechtian local flavor of the early reenactments and symbolized the ongoing struggle against racism. Art critic Lucas Martin, for instance, described the

⁴⁴² Laura Wexler, *Fire in a Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching in America* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 267.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁴⁴⁵ Laura Wexler, telephone interview by Andy Rice, July 19, 2012.

reenactment in 2006 as a new form of vernacular public art better suited to critical political engagement in the “society of the spectacle” than trying to participate in “enlightened discourse among equals” in an imagined public sphere.⁴⁴⁶



Figure 5.2: Video stills of cars and spectators on their way to the Moore’s Ford Bridge for the reenactment, footage for *Always in Season*, Jackie Olive, 2012. Copyright has been obtained.

Scholarly treatments of the reenactment published since 2010 downplay the espoused rationale for the event in favor of reading its contours through the lens of ritual and repair. Julie Buckner Armstrong writes about the lynching reenactment as serving “a therapeutic function” in line with the development of “slave tourism” sites at Middle Passage departure dungeons in Ghana, Underground Railroad recreations in Indiana, and experiential exhibits of slave ships at museums like the National Great Blacks in Wax in Maryland.⁴⁴⁷ She sees the Moore’s Ford reenactment in line with the tradition of medieval mystery and passion plays because it employs stepwise “movement through space” and the “theme of redemption” to “transform into something sacred the evil that

⁴⁴⁶ Martin Lucas, “Resistance and Public Art: Cultural Action in a Globalized Terrain,” *Afterimage* 34, no. 1/2 (July/October, 2006): 18, accessed April 1, 2013, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aft&AN=505161988&site=ehost-live>.

⁴⁴⁷ Julie Buckner Armstrong, *Mary Turner and the Memory of Lynching* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 167.

happened in their own backyards.”⁴⁴⁸ Instead of engaging the messier historical narrative that Wexler presents, Armstrong contends, the reenactment presents the victims of the lynching as archetypal martyrs. She suggests that the script followed in the reenactment of the lynching at Moore’s Ford shows how “communities can and do conflate incidents” as stories about lynchings travel from place to place and become entangled in one another as legends, distilling the most poignant and lasting details into a hybrid story aligned with the community’s affective sense of truth.⁴⁴⁹ Cultural anthropologist Mark Auslander has conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study of the reenactment, summarized in “‘Holding on to Those Who Can’t Be Held’: Reenacting a Lynching at Moore’s Ford, Georgia” (2011) and “‘Give me back my Children!’: Traumatic Reenactment and Tenuous Democratic Public Spheres” (2012).⁴⁵⁰ He frames the annual reenactment as a ritual carried out in the traditions of the Civil Rights Movement and the black church in which participants are “trying to work out, and at least partially resolve, a set of underlying conundrums such as the status of the dead in U.S. society.” Following Baudrillard’s insights in *Symbiotic Exchange and Death*, and echoing the starting point of Sobchack’s essays on representations of violent death in the cinema, Auslander begins his analysis from the assumption that “death has been so medicalized, neutralized, and disenchanting that we are deprived of being reciprocally linked to those who have passed away. . . . [W]e long to be bound in give and take with those who no longer dwell among us.” For the majority African-American participants and spectators, reenactment

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 168-9.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 170.

⁴⁵⁰ Auslander is also currently writing a book about traumatic memory and reenactment in the American South, in which the Moore’s Ford case features centrally. He was kind enough to share his work and discuss the case with me for this chapter.

performance allows “the dead to enter into reciprocal relations with the living.”⁴⁵¹ He argues that these reenactment performances of traumatic historical events “often lead to unexpected moments of profound dialogue and exchange across putative lines of race and difference,” and so offer members of historically antagonistic social groups a direction for reconciliation and healing.⁴⁵² Through performance, white and black reenactors share responsibility for reengaging the affective energies of a collectively repressed traumatic event, and so offer themselves and witnesses to their acting a chance for grieving and self-expression.

I want to add to these observations about the nature of the reenactment and the collective that it produces an analysis of the cinematic apparatus that it hails, and its effects over time on the process of reconciliation and healing that Auslander identifies. Most of the participants in the reenactment black and white that I interviewed expressed a desire for the story of the Moore’s Ford lynching to be made into a movie, and for the annual reenactment to end. If arrest and prosecution were meted out to the surviving members of the lynch mob, and they told their version of that night’s events, then there would no longer be a need to go through the painful process of reenactment. It is worth considering what is gained and lost by relegating the cinematic quality of the reenactment to the physical spaces of movie theaters and venues of domestic screening practices.

⁴⁵¹ Auslander, “‘Holding Onto Those Who Can't Be Held’: Reenacting a Lynching at Moore's Ford, Georgia.”

⁴⁵² Mark Auslander, “‘Give Me Back My Children!’: Traumatic Reenactment and Tenuous Democratic Public Spheres,” *The Religion and Culture Web Forum* (2012), <http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/webforum/>.

The Hole Truth

As Wexler recounted the story, white people from Walton and Oconee Counties scoured the site of the lynching for souvenirs in the days after the murder of the Dorseys and the Malcoms. This was a lynching by gunfire rather than hanging. The body of each victim had been shot approximately sixty times by an estimated twenty armed perpetrators. Local police had removed the bodies, but the bits of rope, casings of shotgun shells, and bullets in the trees still drew scavengers. There was a precedent for this kind of macabre collecting in the post Civil War South. After Sam Hose was hung and burned to death outside of Atlanta in 1899, members of the crowd cut off body parts as mementos, indexical traces of the event like fingers, ears, limbs, bones, parts of his penis, and ashes. W.E.B. DuBois recalled some years later seeing Hose's knucklebones on display in an Atlanta grocery store several days after the lynching. Not all lynchings ended with the distribution of souvenirs amongst white spectators, however. After the lynching of Tom Allen in Walton County in 1905, the perpetrators attached notes to the body directing souvenir hunters to leave the corpse hanging so that its grisly presence would serve as a more effective, longer lasting warning to black men in the area not to replicate his reputed "crime," touching a white woman's face while she was asleep. In Allen's case, photography sufficed. Postcard images of Allen's corpse "sold briskly" in Monroe, and circulated throughout the country in the weeks after the murder. Photographs of Allen's corpse were framed and hung on parlor walls. Such uses suggest that many whites experienced lynchings of black people as entertainment, vigilante justice akin to that exercised in the frontier West, and an expression of white community solidarity against the sexual appetite for white women oft assumed innate and

uncontrollable in black men short of violence. Some believed that the relics of lynchings brought good luck to those who possessed them. One scavenger at Moore's Ford on that morning in 1946, a white undergraduate who had stopped by the site on his way to class at the University of Georgia in nearby Athens, found a tooth on the scene, which he in turn gave to a friend for her charm bracelet. "Four-leaf clovers, wishbones, good-luck charms on bracelets. You know, Indian-head pennies," he recalled. "She felt like that tooth would be something."⁴⁵³

On the same day in 1946, black people from Walton County looked upon and contemplated the other indexical remains of the lynching, the mangled bodies of the four victims on display at NAACP activist Dan Young's funeral parlor in Monroe. They looked at the bodies as "mute evidence in human form," in the words of one black reporter, that might help decode how the crime was committed, and some looked at the bodies so as not to forget the horror of that day. The bodies, perhaps, stood in for the absence of living, talking witnesses to address basic questions about how and why the couples were lynched. Where did the lynch mob shoot the victims? Was Dorothy Malcom shot in the face because of a rumored affair with her white landlord Barney Hester? Were there marks of injuries other than gunshot wounds, like cuts and broken bones, to suggest a struggle before the execution? How did they treat Roger Malcom, the man who eleven days earlier had stabbed Hester in a domestic scuffle, perhaps over the alleged affair, compared to the other victims? Was the excessively gory killing also a statement to black people in Walton County to stay away from the polls in the upcoming, hotly contested gubernatorial election? Reports surfaced in the weeks after the lynching

⁴⁵³ Wexler, *Fire in a Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching in America*, 73-4.

that Eugene Talmadge, a Klan sympathizer running for his fourth term as Georgia governor on a platform of suppressing the black vote, had visited the Hester family the evening before the lynching and spoken about “taking care of that negro [Roger].” But for now it was the bodies themselves that would suggest the truth of the lynchers’ intentions and the victims’ actions in response. The bodies were documentary evidence offering a story to decode, and a collective future to consider. Mary Alice Avery, the stepdaughter of a man who’d helped clean the bodies, offered her observations to a local reporter that day. “They kind of lacerated Roger. They had stuck him or cut him. He was tortured for sure,” she said. “The others just had bullet wounds, but he had been attacked.”⁴⁵⁴ A reporter from the black newspaper the *Chicago Defender* who said that seeing the bodies made him “sick all over, and torn asunder mentally” focused his attention on the holes in writing up what had happened to the bodies. Malcom had “a hole larger than a quarter-dollar torn in his head by a shotgun blast” and “bullet holes” in his back. Dorothy’s “face was shot away—leaving a hole large enough for a hand to be thrust into her mouth through the opening,” her breasts had been “torn from her body” by buckshots, her body “bore cuts and bruises,” and both her arms were broken. George Dorsey was missing part of an ear and had “one of his eyes shot out,” as well as broken arms, “knife gashes,” and a body “riddled with bullets and shotgun blasts.” Only Mae Murray’s face remained un mutilated, he observed, “but they also broke her arms.”⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁵⁵ John LaFlore, “On-the-Scene Story of Butchery,” *Chicago Defender*, sec. 2, August 3, 1946, accessed April 2, 2013, <http://bsc.chadwyck.com/bsc/newspaperViewContent.do?journal=ChicagoDefender&pageNo=1946-1947&issue=19460803#19460803>.

The absence of explanation, confession, or punishment in relation to this crime generated rumors, speculations, confluences of stories, and resentments that circulated locally beneath the surface of everyday life in the months and years after the lynching. Accounts of observers who witnessed the bodies that day came to contradict one another. Some claimed that Roger Malcom's genitals had been cut off and stuffed into his mouth. Others insisted that the women's genitals had been cut off and thrown into the trees above a nearby river, where they remained. Many made claims that one or both of the women were pregnant. None of these details showed up in official reports about the lynching in the black or white press. In any case, descriptions of the bodies suggested that as much corporeal matter was absent as present at the funeral parlor. "There were so many holes you could see daylight through the bodies," one visitor recalled, perhaps in an effort to cope with the trauma through gallows humor. "Their faces were like screens. You could sift flour through them."⁴⁵⁶

In her essay on the representation of death in documentary film, Sobchack proposed that death is unrepresentable except through a comparison to what it is not, a fact that grants the corpse a "paradoxical semiotic force." The corpse is "existentially connected to a subject who was once an intentional and responsive 'being,'" but absent the qualities of intention, movement, and response, the corpse remains outside of a condition that we can existentially understand as viewers who behold it.⁴⁵⁷ Sobchack offered the distinction between the perception of gradual "natural death" as a third person event, and violent death in the cinema as a first person event. Violent death suited

⁴⁵⁶ Wexler, *Fire in a Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching in America*, 88.

⁴⁵⁷ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, 236.

communication in a visual medium, where the abruptness of the transformation from sentient to static being shocks the viewer into recognizing the taboo on the screen, all the while safe from the implications of one's own punishment and dismemberment that the act of witnessing violent events live would entail. Though likely shocked, however, the anonymous black Georgian who looked down upon the corpses that day in 1946 was not referring to a cinematic screen. The referent for his screen was a tool of labor, and the fact of his looking at a face that resembled its porosity must have registered as a profoundly personal threat. The screen of his metaphor was for sifting flour, not for displaying images while obscuring the real, as the term "screen" has connoted in film studies since Stanley Cavell. The taboo and incomprehensibility of looking upon the mutilated dead still demanded metaphor, but the phenomenological orientation of this man was not primarily cinematic. Though the man described the face as an object, the event of his doing so was not like a movie, nor the face like a photograph. The era in which the reenactments takes place is quite different, even to the point that reading this use of the term screen by a black man from Monroe in 1946 is striking for not referring to the cinema. A screen is for sifting flour.

That holes are the essence of such a screen makes this man's metaphor for the face of Roger Malcom after the lynching a powerful symbol as well for black history in official United States archives. Black history, so conceived, is filled with holes. In this context, a hole is not an absence so much as an absent presence, an indexical sign of undocumented events as well as a racist code. At the end of *Fire in a Canebreak*, Wexler reflected on why her two years of research into the Moore's Ford case had failed to yield a single eyewitness account of the lynching: "I wonder if that unanswered question, that

hole where the center should be, isn't the truest representation of race in America."⁴⁵⁸ In the face of such a void, black artists and activists have long turned to performance and ritual—what Diana Taylor called the “repertoire”—in order to survive.⁴⁵⁹ Playwright Suzan Lori-Parks reflected on the documentary, collective-affirming value of black theatrical performance. “Since history is a recorded or remembered event,” she wrote about her reasons for writing plays, “theatre, for me, is the perfect place to ‘make’ history—that is, because so much of African-American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, washed out.”⁴⁶⁰ Her play *The America Play* (1994), for instance, is literally set in such a hole, “an exact replica of the great hole of history,” according to the notation. *The America Play* is an absurdist meditation in the traditions of black musical performance and Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1952) on the dilemma of the absence of black voices in sources that traditionally comprise United States history. Lori-Parks calls it “a drama of accumulation” modeled on the repetition and revision aesthetic of jazz.⁴⁶¹ The protagonist is a black entrepreneur, “The Foundling Father,” who capitalizes on the uncanny likeness he bears to the late Abraham Lincoln. At an amusement park “out West,” the Foundling Father stages the scene of Lincoln’s assassination at the hand of John Wilkes Booth by donning a top hat and roleplaying as the sixteenth president, laughing at the joke told on stage at the moment of his death. Tourists pay a penny, “choose from the selection of provided pistols, enter the darkened

⁴⁵⁸ Wexler, *Fire in a Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching in America*, 267.

⁴⁵⁹ Koritha Mitchell, for instance, makes this point by using Taylor's oft-cited term to explore the dynamics of amateur performances of one act lynching plays. See: Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930*.

⁴⁶⁰ Parks, *The America Play, and Other Works*, 4.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

box and ‘Shoot Mr. Lincoln,’” the Foundling Father explains.⁴⁶² For the diverse variety of visitors who pay to participate in his act the opportunity to faux-assassinate a black version of President Lincoln seems to be pleasurable. They fire the capgun at the Foundling Father’s head, and then claim the stage as Booth did, but improvising their own lines. They turn to thank the Foundling Father for their catharsis, and then leave the stage seeming to feel better about themselves. “A slight deafness in this ear other than that there are no side effects,” the Foundling Father states after each reenactment. This scene repeats time and again, but without progression toward a climactic moment in the plot. Rather, the repetition and revision of the reenactment of this traumatic moment in American history accumulates a density that gradually transforms the meaning of “the event.” Repeated without duration between iterations, the reenactments blunt the mythical cut of Lincoln’s assassination, stripping the event of its tragedy and pushing it into the realm of farce. Tragedy begins to suffuse the ambience of the theatrical space rather than define the singular event that ended the life of “the Great Man.” It is “a residue,” in Lori-Parks terms, “that, like city dust, stays with us.”⁴⁶³ The affective charge of experiencing this accumulation compels the audience to contemplate residing permanently in a great hole with/like the Foundling Father, the starting point for grappling with black American history. In this way, she explains, theater focused on expressing black subjectivity can be “an incubator for the creation of historical events—and, as in the case of artificial insemination, the baby is no less human.”⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶² Ibid., 164.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 5.

While Lori-Parks has suggested that “the great hole of history” plays with notions of gender as well as absence, we might also read it as a description of the recording apparatus employed in documentary cinema production, often connected to the ontology of history.⁴⁶⁵ The historical artifacts that comprise documentary films are selections of what light and shadow pass through a hole, the aperture in the camera’s lens; the act of selecting is often complicit with power, and so exclusive of those stories that contradict power’s interests. The “great hole of history,” so to speak, creates a past for the attention of the present, but in doing so, it inevitably performs an act of violence on the unrepresented. The most damning archival evidence of violence, in other words, resides in the missing, the absent. Lori-Park’s play poetically suggests how and why black people in America must still live with uncertainty regarding their own histories and suspicion over the contents of archival documents and official reports. But she also undermines the narratives of “great men” through the serial repetition of this sacred national story in a theatrical space essentially devoid of historical context. She plays fast and loose with the signs that comprise the normative meanings of Lincoln’s assassination. The Foundling Father, after all, is a black man who wears a fake blonde beard, making due in a tough market with the assets he has: a passing resemblance to Lincoln, his willingness to play the part of the assassinated president, and his black skin. This serial reproduction of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln colors the tragedy with farce, and compels spectators to the play to grapple with a relation to history defined by

⁴⁶⁵ For a particularly illuminating argument in favor of this reading of documentary, see Philip Rosen, “Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts,” in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 58; Sobchack, *Toward a Phenomenology of Nonfictional Film Experience*, 241.

absence and repetition rather than linearity and progress—the dominant hallmarks of the mythology attached to Lincoln.

Lori-Parks play suggests, then, a danger inherent to serial repetition. To repeat ad nauseam and in rapid succession is to sabotage the singular meaning of the gesture, performance, or utterance. It brings about the death of meaning outside of minor revisions to repetitions—in this case the death of the sacredness of Lincoln’s death and the concomitant mythology of “the Great Man.” The Foundling Father is not so much a unitary subject as the absence of one; spectators to the play or readers to its text must linger in his tacit melancholy as he jokes about being “a dead ringer in a family of Diggers.”⁴⁶⁶ This bitter residue emerges and becomes denser as the play unfolds and the repetitions accumulate. Though performed live, the phenomenological orientation of *The America Play* is serial, digital, even electronic. The Foundling Father’s life is a serially repeated death. His phenomenological orientation emphasizes perception without horizon and movement without depth, resembling what Sobchack called “electronic presence” in her typology of perceptual revolutions. And Sobchack identified this particular regime as a dead one compared to the cinematic. Other media theorists have identified similar characteristics with the term digital.⁴⁶⁷ We might ask after the significance of repetition of the Moore’s Ford lynching reenactment in these terms. Is there a point at which the repetition of the event pushes its resonance from tragedy and spiritual renewal into farce? Or is the very concept of the electronic regime a metaphor

⁴⁶⁶ Parks, *The America Play, and Other Works*, 166.

⁴⁶⁷ For an in depth account of this literature and my take on questions about the implications of the analog to digital transition for film theory, see Chapter 1.

for white dread at the prospect of losing unitary subjecthood, of palpably becoming slaves to digital cinematic machines?

In Sobchack's theory of perception, electronic presence is distributed across a network, and exists in relation to human interlocutors as a passive thing, manipulable and pliable to an individual user. It thus lacks a materiality that is central to the cinematic. Nonetheless, the electronic offers stimulation; it cultivates "impatient desire" by responding to the user's command. This quality "abstractly schematizes the analogic quality" of cinema, and "transmit[s] serially" the content of the image. The electronic image exists in a kind of netherworld outside of linear time, a "representation-in-itself" or a simulation, rather than a being-in-itself. It is always and cheap, released from "the elegiac mysteries of *duree* and of memory." It beckons accelerated communication, constant messaging as an assurance of one's existence and discourages "significant communication."⁴⁶⁸ Moreover, the electronic flattens space, as space fails to stimulate, fails to be pliable to the user command in quite the same way. Sobchack finds this to be a scary proposition. A user who prefers the virtual world and its affordances of control—a vestige of its origins as a military tool, she implies—will live by a different ethical code than a subject with a more coherent, singular sense of self. "Indeed, devaluing the physically lived body and the concrete materiality of the world, the dominant cultural and techno-logic informing our contemporary electronic 'presence' suggests that—if we do not take great care—we are all in danger of soon becoming merely ghosts in the machine," she warns. She fears the way "electronic representation by its very structure phenomenologically diffuses the fleshly presence of the human body" and how "the

⁴⁶⁸ Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, 153-5.

electronic tends to marginalize or trivialize the human body” such that “we can see all around us that the lived body is in crisis.” The signs of crisis are “marked in hysterical and hyperbolic responses” such as graphic displays of gore, death, and dismemberment, bodies “riddled with holes.” “All surface, electronic space cannot be inhabited by any body that is not also an electronic body.”⁴⁶⁹ What, then, are the implications for individual bodies that move about and think in a world saturated with electronics, and that mimic the logic of the recurring loop? The reenactment of the lynching, in this context, is a complex social ritual in which participants serialize and work through two kinds of death that they cannot know: their own, and those of wronged symbolic ancestors.

Justice, the Severed Fetus

Klansmen are hiding around the bridge waiting for Loy’s car to approach.

Loy drives slowly toward bridge and Head Klansman and helper steps out from bushes and walks toward the car.

—At rise description and blocking for the “Bridge Scene” of the Moore’s Ford Bridge lynching reenactment

In my first telephone conversation with reenactment director Lynette Blue, I tell her that my project focuses on the intense sensations of connection to historical events that reenactors feel when playing the past. Her response is surprisingly quick. “Do you want to be a Klansman?” she asks me. “Look, you’d have a book after that experience.” She explains that my playing the role will serve the interests of the reenactment. In 2005,

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 159-62.

the first year that they performed the reenactment, the local whites who had agreed to portray the lynch mob backed out at the last minute under pressure from their families and employers. Instead, two young black men who were kin to three of the organizers of the reenactment donned white hockey masks fashioned roughly after the iconic Jason character from the *Friday the Thirteenth* slasher horror franchise, and assumed the roles of Klansmen in the performance. The actors who played George Dorsey and Roger Malcom were distant kin to the lynched men. Since 2006, GABEO has enlisted the help of white activist allies in Atlanta to ensure the presence of white people to play the lynch mob. It is an undesirable role to inhabit, but one that offers sympathetic whites a concrete service to a movement for closure on a racial atrocity. Over the next several weeks, I consider Blue's invitation to play a Klansman, but ultimately decline on the advice of one worried adviser from Alabama who tells me that this "would be a bad way to introduce yourself to the community." Furthermore, I speak to a documentary film director who plans to record the reenactment for an hour-long PBS film, and find the idea of appearing in this way on national television to be highly unappealing. In any case, the filmmaker offers me a different role to inhabit as a participant observer of the reenactment process, a cameraperson for her film. I record footage during the first rehearsal.

Journalist and playwright Dave Fowler scowls in a medium shot that tracks with the pace of his walk across the conference room. The wall in the background is solid red, broken by an occasional canvas of a Georgia stream curling through golden brown meadows at sunset. Fowler quickens his pace and the camera pans with him as he swings his right hand violently downward, as if smashing the hood of a car. "We want that

niggah Roger!” Fowler yells. My camera is now positioned in an over the shoulder shot from behind Fowler. In the background, a white man of about 50, two black men in their late 30s or early 40s, and two white women in their late 50s (sitting in for the actresses who will play Dorothy and Mae Murray) sit in large leather chairs facing Fowler and the camera. Fowler, a native of Ohio and longtime Civil Rights activist, looks down at his script. Director/producer Jackie Olive’s work in progress, *Always in Season*, is a feature about three communities in the United States that are engaging in efforts to start biracial dialogues about the legacies of local lynchings. She has been working on the project with a minimal budget for over two years. I met Olive as a result of my interest in writing about the reenactment, and we agreed to pool our resources and cooperate with one another where and how we could. Today that means that my fieldwork is also her camerawork. Olive stands behind me holding a boom microphone to record the dialogue of the rehearsal. We are in the conference room of the Peachtree Professional Center in downtown Atlanta on a Wednesday evening in mid-July, 2012, about two weeks before the reenactment. The people before us in the large leather chairs are oriented as if passengers in a car.

Loy Harrison, a white farmer and sometime bootleg liquor manufacturer from Monroe who hired black sharecroppers to work his land, told reporters, police, and FBI agents in 1946 that he was just driving back to his farm with the Malcoms and the Dorseys after bailing Roger Malcom out of jail. He said that the Dorseys and Dorothy Malcom had persuaded him to have Roger work off the debt for bail on the Harrison farm. This was common practice in the South, especially in times when labor was in short supply. Black people could expect to be arrested on minor or trumped up charges

so as to be forced to repay “debts” with their labor to the white farmer who issued bail. On this occasion, Harrison said, the lynch mob blocked the road and forced his four black passengers out of the car. Though subsequent interviews and the revelation of Harrison’s activities with the KKK strongly suggest that he participated in the lynching as a gunman, his testimony was long regarded as the only eyewitness account of that evening’s atrocity. It still informs the reenactment script. A reenactor playing Loy Harrison stands quietly by as the scene unfolds.

“Cut a white man will you, niggah?! You a dead man!” Fowler continues. Bob Caine, a sixty four year old white, Atlanta-based activist and semi-retired sociology professor tonight playing the only other Klansman, makes his way to the passenger side door of the imaginary car carrying a noose he has fashioned from a rope. Caine, a native of Atlanta, has a big bushy white beard, gray T-shirt, a beige outback hat, and large circular glasses. One day during my fieldwork, we went to see a Civil War reenactment of the Battle of Atlanta together as 21st century civilians, where a man roleplaying as Abraham Lincoln noted, in character, that Caine bore a passing resemblance to Confederate General Robert E. Lee. But Caine attributed his involvement in the reenactment to family and personal hardships rather than his appearance. His distant cousin, Leo Frank, was lynched outside of Atlanta in 1915 amidst renewed Klan fervor and anti-Semitism in the region, and Caine recalls the 1960 bombing of his synagogue in Atlanta during his youth. Tonight at the rehearsal, Caine plays an unpalatable role for a cause about which he cares deeply. As Caine approaches the actors sitting in their red leather chairs, they begin to yell. “Drive!” “What are you doing???” “Aaaah!!” Caine grabs Roger by the arm and leads him from the chair toward a small space in the room

where the execution scene will be rehearsed. He places the noose gently around Roger's neck. "That's a real rope," says Corey Gilbert, the comedian by trade who is playing Roger, somewhat surprised. Caine later explains that he was once a boy scout and quite adept at tying knots, though he could not recall where he had learned how to tie a noose. Tonight it is the occasional subject of somewhat uncomfortable humor. "It wasn't in the boy scout manual," Caine jokes. It is his fifth year playing a role in the reenactment.

Athens based videographer Reggie Mason plays the role of George Dorsey, a black World War II veteran who worked on Harrison's land as a sharecropper. As he sees Roger being led away, Mason-as-Dorsey stands up from his leather chair and walks toward the head Klansman, brow furrowed, tone slightly aggressive. The camera whip pans to frame him in medium close up as he starts to talk. "Hey, what y'all doing? Leave him alone! He been in jail, they takin' him to court!" he says. There's an awkward pause. From the car, the woman standing in as Mae Murray Dorsey points at Caine and says, "I know you. I seen you around." This seals the fate of the rest of Harrison's passengers in the play. "Get them all out of the car," growls Fowler. "Four dead niggahs is just as good dead as one." Fowler envisions his character as a Klansman "who may be from Stone Mountain" and who "doesn't know who is who" in the car. Stone Mountain is a neighborhood about fifteen miles northeast of downtown Atlanta named after the unique rock formation at its center, the largest above ground piece of granite in the world. This was the epicenter of the Klan revival in the 1910s in Georgia and the United States more broadly, and as late as the 1940s, the Klan initiated new recruits into its membership on the granite. Stetson Kennedy, the journalist and social justice activist who successfully joined an Atlanta-based chapter of the Klan in the early

1940s as a spy, wrote about his initiation experience in *The Klan Unmasked* (1954): “Entering the small hamlet of Stone Mountain, we found the streets lit up by the glow” of a 300 yard long burning cross “made by stringing oil drums at intervals across the face of the mountain,” he recalled. He noted license plates from all across the South and the Midwest on cars parked along the road leading to the boulder’s top, and caught glimpses of police trousers protruding beneath the white robes of Klan members directing new arrivals. At an open area on the mountain beneath the fiery cross, “over a thousand white-robed Klansmen” encircled Kennedy and the other recruits, “nearly a thousand strong,” for the ceremony.⁴⁷⁰ Amongst other commitments, initiates swore to “do all in [their] power to uphold the principles of White Supremacy and the purity of White Womanhood.”⁴⁷¹ It is possible that one or several of the Klansmen present at this event were also involved in the Moore’s Ford lynching in 1946.

In the Atlanta professional building, Caine gathers the rest of the passengers in a tiny space between the immovable conference table and the red wall, and runs the rope around their midsections. Roger protests to save his wife, Dorothy. “She’s pregnant! Please don’t! You’ve got me. Let them go. Please!” he says. But the lynching proceeds. “We’re gonna make an example for all the niggahs in Georgia,” Fowler shouts at them. “You don’t touch a white man!” Reenactment director Lynette Blue plays an mp3 file on her laptop computer that simulates the sound of gunfire, like the kind one might hear at the end of an episode of *Miami Vice* in the shootout between cops and cocaine dealers. The Klansmen point their fingers as if gun barrels at the four victims,

⁴⁷⁰ Stetson Kennedy, *The Klan Unmasked* (Boca Raton; Gainesville, FL: Florida Atlantic University Press; Orders to University Presses of Florida, 1990), 40-4.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

who gingerly lower themselves to the ground and half-heartedly slump their shoulders and lower their chins to suggest that they are dead. Gilbert picks up bits of a potato chip that have fallen from the table to the floor to prevent the further spread of the mess. The Klansmen fire another volley. A white actress who will play a member of the lynch mob but tonight stands in as Mae Murray Dorsey is already removing the noose from Corey's neck. No one particularly wants to perform this section at full bore today.

A significant and recurring question in the reenactment staging asks after the behaviors of the Malcoms and the Dorseys in the moments before their deaths. Without any credible eyewitness accounts of the lynching,⁴⁷² the actors, director, and organizers of the reenactment are left with only theoretical frameworks and common sense insights to reconstruct how the victims might have accorded themselves. Such a discussion unfolds tonight after the rehearsal. I record Fowler in close up as he suggests to the group that they change the blocking for the George Dorsey character. "I think that everybody should stay in the car," he says as he directs his eyes to Mason, who plays George. "When they pull Roger out, you're scared. I mean you wouldn't want to go, you know? I think that would be the natural reaction. You wouldn't just jump out and defend him when you've got ten guys with rifles there—well, twenty. . . . And then when they pull you out, that's when you start getting, you know, more aggressive and trying to turn this

⁴⁷² Interest in the Moore's Ford lynching cold case was renewed in 1991, when a then fifty-five year old man named Clinton Adams claimed to have witnessed the lynching as a boy hiding in the woods nearby. He appeared on *Oprah* and *Dateline NBC* to tell his story and was the subject of numerous print publications about the lynching, which he said he had kept a secret up until then out of fear of the Klan. Wexler, however, raised questions about Adams' account, and found inconsistencies in the stories he told across this time. She even suggested it was possible he constructed this memory from bits he had heard from others over the forty-five years between the lynching and his testimony. See Wexler, *Fire in a Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching in America*, 216-223.

around.” Fowler has some acting experience and refers to the acting method of Constantin Stanislavsky when I interview him the next week. He tells me his daughter is an accomplished actress in this tradition, though he himself is “a rank amateur.” Nonetheless, he follows the notions of realism at the heart of the method, the idea that playing the role requires the actor to embody the character he or she plays such that it merges into the actor’s sense of self. For his role as head Klansman this year, this means that he must find ways to internalize ideas that he otherwise finds abhorrent: “I actually just think how much I hate black people. You know? I just hate ’em, they’re taking over our country. Give ‘em an inch, and they’ll take a mile.” He draws parallels between this white supremacist way of thinking about black people in the South and the expressions of anti-Muslim sentiments in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. As a veteran of the reenactment, he also discusses his role in the production as someone who has internalized the structure of the three-act narrative, more in terms of the techniques of realism in stagecraft than personal experience living in the South. He reflected that “maybe it was like seeing a movie the second time” he performed a Klansman role in the reenactment. “You’re maybe analyzing it a little more.” Part of his analysis includes a critique of a particular performance of black masculinity that he associates with a post rather than pre Civil Rights era context. In an interview with me, he explains: “I just think that black people at the time were so intimidated by Jim Crow and all of the crap that white people put onto them, and the terror, that they wouldn’t come out of that car acting like Muhammad Ali, and the Black Panthers of 1970. You know, that was a real break in the late 60s and early 70s into how African-Americans, you know, carried themselves.”⁴⁷³

⁴⁷³ “Dave Fowler,” interview by Andy Rice, Atlanta, GA, July 18, 2012.

Keeling described the “common sense” black subjectivity of cultural nationalist movements like the Black Panthers of the 1960s and 1970s, which Fowler here critiqued as inappropriate in reenacting the 1946 lynching, as tied to the aesthetic of The Black Arts Movement. Artist Larry Neal’s position statement, Keeling suggests, became hegemonic amongst African-Americans in the decades after the movement’s height in the 1970s. Black Art, in Neal’s statement, “is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America.”⁴⁷⁴ Blackness was re-imagined in this movement to exist in a pure state prior to the taint of white territorial and cultural colonization, and so could serve as the organizing principle for an imagined community of diasporic Africans. Black identity could be understood as a form of “cultural nationalism” even if black people were spread widely across an array of territorially fixed nation-states. In practice, Keeling suggests, this logic and its imbrication with the development of television came to locate cinematic capital, ironically, in black skin. Where black skin was marked as different from white, the norm, Keeling argued that blackness was charged with affect and possibilities for broader social transformation. To some extent, black people could shape and frame this capital to suit particular aesthetic contexts, even while the struggle for black citizenship en masse languished in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. And Keeling noted that cultural nationalist discourse was distinctly, though tacitly, both straight and masculine, a fact that produced tensions within the 1970s and 1980s Black Power movement that emerged from 1960s Civil Rights struggles. At

⁴⁷⁴ Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*, 49.

the least, in the face of publications like the 1965 Moynihan Report, which argued in the midst of the Vietnam War that military service might help black urban men learn how to assume fatherly responsibilities and overcome the psychic, cultural echoes of slavery, there was a great deal of political, social, and cultural import placed on the representation of black masculinity amongst Black Liberation activists.⁴⁷⁵

Secondary echoes of this discourse reverberate through the conference room at the rehearsal. The camera pans to Mason, who nods as Fowler concludes, “You wouldn’t be coming at the Klan like that because they were a real intimidating force. Even your resistance can’t be too aggressive.” Perhaps sensing the political delicacy of affirming the rightness of playing the subservient black man, director Blue intervenes. “Yeah. And then they have weapons, and you have no weapon,” she says as the camera pans to frame her in medium shot on the opposite side of the conference table. She is suggesting a second motivation for acting the part of a scared rather than assertive black man. George Dorsey was a World War II veteran who had engaged in combat, but at this moment he was unarmed. If he did not come out of the car, perhaps it had less to do with his own abject terror of the Klan than his calculation of an effective survival strategy given the context. Representative Scott sits on a filing cabinet by a window in the background of the shot, silently looking on. Blue turns her attention to Roger as she continues: “I’m thinking that at some point Roger was thinking, even if I don’t come out of this, there are

⁴⁷⁵ A few examples of social historians' accounts of slave life that emerged in the wake of the Moynihan Report include: Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*; Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*; Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*; Films that followed these insights about slave resistance in everyday life include Zeinabu Davis, Marc Chery, et al, *Mother of the River*, (New York, NY: Women Make Movies [distributor], 1995).

three other people in that car. Cause I know he had to be thinking, oh my god. My wife is in there pregnant, there's another woman in there, and it's one of my best friends in there." This interpretation frames Roger as a family man rather than the "black brute" cowed by the threatening display of white power. In the moments before the lynching, Roger thought of protecting his family, of their survival rather than his own. While he might not have agreed with the logic for his lynching, he understood its inevitability for a black man who stabbed a white man in 1940s Georgia, and he was making do in this context with trying to save the lives of his wife, unborn child, and friends.

Blue empathizes with the victims of the lynching in a particularly intense way that she attributes to traumatic events in her own past. It is her fourth year directing the reenactment, which she rewrote when invited by Representative Scott to take over the production in 2009. She runs her ministry from a rented office in the professional center where the rehearsal happens tonight. Blue is a longtime NAACP activist and advocate for women suffering from domestic abuse. Though originally from South Carolina, she left the state in the late 1980s after a white neighbor threatened to kill her if she stayed in town. Blue had witnessed the escalating harassment of an interracial couple that had moved in to her predominantly white neighborhood, and had called on the NAACP and local news media to cover the story. She recalls the date when she tells me the story:

On July 5, 1989, I heard someone yelling outside my door. And when I opened the door there was one of my neighbors standing there with a shotgun pointed at my door, and he said, "You nigger bitch, you better get out of here and mind your own damn business." And I slammed the door and hit the floor, and I literally spent the night [there on the floor].

Blue moved to Atlanta shortly thereafter. She said that the first time she saw the opening line of the reenactment at Moore's Ford Bridge, when the head Klansman slams

the hood of the car and demands “that niggah Roger,” she had a flashback to that night in South Carolina. “I felt like I blacked out for a minute,” she told me. The moment struck her “even more so than the actual killing in the field,” she said. She says that the prospect of arrest and prosecution of the lynchers is what motivates her to continue volunteering her time to direct the reenactment, even though she often finds the task unpleasant.

At the rehearsal, the camera follows a discussion about what Roger Malcom might have been expecting that evening when he was released from jail, and what the lynch mob itself was after when it blocked the road in the woods. Did they really want to kill all four of the victims or were they just after Roger? Elizabeth Jenkins, a white woman in her early 60s who grew up in a powerful Klan family in Georgia, speculates that Dorothy must have mentioned her pregnancy in the moments before the lynching. Brow furrowed, arms crossed, and head shaking in disapproval, she attributes to Dorothy a state of mind that may also reveal her understanding of the family ethic that was a part of the Klan code. “Surely Dorothy thought if she could appeal to them— ‘please don’t hurt the baby’ —that they would have backed off on her,” she says. Tonight Jenkins stands in as Dorothy for an actress who could not be present, but in the reenactment, she will play a “Talmadge Gal,” an enthusiastic audience member to a speech given by an actor playing the race baiter gubernatorial candidate, Eugene Talmadge. For Jenkins, playing a role in the reenactment is part of a healing process. She said she “lived with a lot of guilt” for being forced to observe her father’s Klan activities as a child, which included witnessing a lynching on Stone Mountain as a three year old. Nonetheless, she found the grisly murder of Dorothy Malcom particularly shocking. “When I first read

that it made me sick to my stomach,” she said. “Although I’ve seen them do things that left me with nightmares, I never witnessed anything like [the murder of a pregnant woman].”⁴⁷⁶ The depiction of Malcom’s pregnancy is a key element of the reenactment script, and tonight in the rehearsal no one questions it. The placard about the Moore’s Ford lynching posted on the highway a mile from the bridge where it occurred mentions Dorothy Malcom’s pregnancy as an historical fact.

Wexler, however, had been unable to find archival evidence that Dorothy Malcom was pregnant at the time of the lynching. She found this absence to be particularly telling. “I have one really, really strong piece of evidence I think in favor of her not being pregnant,” Wexler told me.⁴⁷⁷ In 1946, she explained, the lynching was national news. Photographers and reporters from black newspapers like the *Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, and the *Atlantic Daily World*, amongst many others, visited Monroe and described the wounds on all of the bodies in great detail. The quadruple lynching was a national embarrassment in the wake of World War II, and the NAACP sought to use the Moore’s Ford case to catalyze changes in the ways that lynchings could be prosecuted. As of 1946, lynching was not punishable as a federal crime, a fact that ensured lynchings in the South would be tried only in southern courts, where all white juries were sure to acquit perpetrators. Dan Young, the Monroe undertaker and NAACP activist who prepared the victims’ bodies, was interviewed by multiple newspapers in 1946. He was in regular communication with associates of Walter White, then the head of the NAACP in Washington, about new developments in the lynching case and six

⁴⁷⁶ “Elizabeth Jenkins,” interview by Andy Rice, Atlanta, Georgia, July 26, 2012.

⁴⁷⁷ Laura Wexler.

month long FBI investigation. White had been advocating for legislative change to lynch laws for the NAACP since his time as a reporter in the 1910s, and would have wanted to publish widely about the killing of a pregnant woman and her fetus. Young was also the person who told Representative Scott that Malcom had been seven months pregnant at the time of the lynching. But in spite of the clear value of such a horrific detail to the publicity mission of the NAACP, there are no written traces to suggest that Young communicated this information, if it were true, to anyone in 1946. “I mean this lynching was a tool of propaganda—and I mean that in the best sense—for the NAACP,” Wexler explained. “Why wouldn’t they have mentioned that? It doesn’t make sense.” Wexler speculated that the pregnancy “was one of a variety of things that was believable but not true.”⁴⁷⁸

There was a precedent for the lynching of a pregnant woman in Georgia, the Mary Turner case that was first reported by White in 1918 when he was a young NAACP field operative. Had White not investigated this case, it is unlikely that details about Turner’s pregnancy would have surfaced in documents. Turner was lynched in Quitman, Georgia on May 19, 1918. She was one of eleven black sharecroppers from the area who were lynched after a black field hand named Sydney Johnson shot and killed the white farmer Hampton Smith over a wage dispute. Johnson also shot Smith’s pregnant wife in the arm, and was falsely accused of rape. Retaliatory violence against blacks in the area was brutal. Early reports by the white press explained that Mary Turner had made “unwise remarks” to the mob that had lynched her husband Hayes Turner the day before. Specifically, she stated aloud that she would take the mob to court for lynching her

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

husband, who was innocent of involvement in the Smith affair. But prior to White's report, no mention had been made of Turner's pregnancy. In *Mary Turner and the Memory of Lynching* (2011), Armstrong stated that "Few accounts, whether from Quitman, Moultrie, Savannah, or Atlanta, shied away from details that Mary Turner's lynching included being hung, set on fire, and shot multiple times before a crowd of five hundred to one thousand people. None, however, mentioned her 'delicate condition' — words evoked for Mrs. Smith's advanced stage of pregnancy."⁴⁷⁹

Walter White, a light skinned man with a southern accent, was able to discover and publish new details about this lynching by passing as a white visitor to the town and spending time in barbershops, stores, and other places where men gathered. He would ask questions about how they treated "the niggers" when the subject came up, and invariably, he said, whites were anxious to brag about their roles in various incidents of racial violence.⁴⁸⁰ His published report on the 1918 lynchings in and around Quitman included the names of all of the victims, sixteen members of the lynch mob, and the following description of the lynching of Mary Turner:

At the time she was lynched, Mary Turner was in her eight [*sic*] month of pregnancy. Her ankles were tied together and she was hung to the tree head down. Gasoline was taken from the cars and poured on her clothing which was then fired. When her clothes had burned off, a sharp instrument was taken and she was cut open in the middle, her stomach being entirely opened. Her unborn child fell from her womb, gave two cries, and was then crushed by the heel of a member of the mob. Her body was then riddled with bullets from high-powered rifles until it was no longer possible to recognize it as the body of a human-being.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁹ Armstrong, *Mary Turner and the Memory of Lynching*, 38.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 53-7.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

In spite of the brutality of this lynching (or perhaps because of it), Armstrong found that official archives that exist in Lowndes and Brooks Counties contained practically no documented evidence of this lynching, or any of the others from that week in 1918. Armstrong, a white native of Birmingham, Alabama who grew up during the Civil Rights Era, was surprised at how difficult it was for her to find information about the Turner lynching in Lowndes and Brooks Counties through museums, historical societies, and local libraries—the white historian’s typical starting points. She recalled one meeting with a well-mannered, white southern lady at a library in Quitman, Georgia who claimed to be the descendent of the county sheriff: “Pausing in front of some faded photographs of town fathers, she told me that no lynchings had ever happened in Brooks County. . . I was certain that she was hiding something.”⁴⁸² The county museum happened to have lost the microfiche for the local newspaper only for the summer of 1918 to a fire, Armstrong wrote. Indeed, she found evidence of the lynching of Turner only after a black man died in police custody of a “brain hemorrhage” from either falling and hitting his head or sustaining a blow at the hands of a white officer, and the town divided along lines of race that were impossible to ignore. Black residents talked to Armstrong about the lynching, and their anger over its obscurity in white-controlled institutions. “My uncle took me to where it happened when I turned thirteen and told me to watch out for white people,” one young student told her.⁴⁸³

In the midst of researching her book on Turner, Armstrong came across the Moore’s Ford reenactment in the form of a YouTube video she accidentally screened in a

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

class. When she followed a student's suggestion to click on a link from the website of the Moore's Ford Memorial Committee, she and the class saw the reenactment of 2007. After the first few minutes of the video, she said, "the story was starting to look eerily familiar."⁴⁸⁴ For Armstrong—and for her students, whom were familiar with her book—the Moore's Ford reenactment seemed to refer as much to the earlier lynching of Mary Turner. The video from 2007, produced by a white, female Atlanta based activist videographer who also posted a video of the 2006 reenactment, depicts a new development in the story. At the end of the lynching, with the actors playing the Malcoms and the Dorseys lying on the ground as if dead, a female member of the lynch mob approaches Dorothy, mimes as if cutting open her stomach with a knife, and then pulls a black baby doll covered in fake blood from beneath her white T-shirt. She holds the fetus up above her head, states "here it is," and then drops it on the grass next to the lynched couples. Another white member of the production team squirts ketchup from a squeeze tube onto Dorothy's midsection. Armstrong suggested that this horrific detail of the Turner lynching has most likely been integrated into the stories about the lynching of the Malcoms and the Dorseys. "Communities can and do conflate incidents," she stated after seeing the reenactment of 2008 live. This was particularly true concerning traumatic events that remained shrouded in misinformation, a scenario that led locals to produce history through rumor, imagination, and competing conceptions of common sense. "As the Moore's Ford story traveled through private discourse, it took on the

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 164.

quality of urban legend: it became the story of what happens to women who get lynched in Georgia.”⁴⁸⁵

Representative Scott, however, interprets the documented information about the lynching differently, identifying what we might think of as an indexical hole. He recalled having a conversation with a retired FBI agent who had successfully prosecuted the perpetrators of the Birmingham church bombing and agreed to review the documents from the Moore’s Ford lynching. The agent recommended that GABEO go forward with the reenactment “as if it was 1946,” Scott recalled. Scott spoke to me in the second person, as if he were again listening to the FBI agent’s counsel: “You can’t sugarcoat it. You’ve got to be brutal, you’ve got to be mean. The N-word’s got to be used. You know, he just said you gotta do it the way it’s supposed to be done. You’ve got to show the blood. You’ve got to cut the baby out of Dorothy Malcom.”⁴⁸⁶ Scott and a local activist who has pursued the case since the 1960s, “Gerald Harvey,” then spent several years talking to black elders from Walton and Oconee Counties who knew the Malcoms and the Dorseys about what they remembered of the victims. Scott recalled: “[T]hey said, oh yeah, Dorothy was pregnant. She was big! Really. And that was the source of the confrontation between Barney Hester and Roger, that, hey, this my baby or your baby?” They spoke to “close relatives,” Scott continued, who corroborated elders’ stories as “common knowledge.”⁴⁸⁷ Others have speculated that because Dorothy and Roger Malcom were not legally married, the NAACP made a calculated decision to play up George Dorsey’s military background and elide the detail about Malcom’s pregnancy.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 169.

⁴⁸⁶ “Dante Scott.”

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

And Wexler acknowledged that it was possible that one of the two women was pregnant, but that she was not yet showing at the time of the lynching. Nonetheless, her question about why this detail, were it true, did not circulate in newspapers remains unresolved.

In some respects, the detail about Malcom's pregnancy is beside the point. It is beyond dispute that two black couples were lynched and mutilated on the Moore's Ford Bridge on July 25, 1946, and that no one was arrested or prosecuted for this crime. But the contestation over what counts as authoritative history, the debate about whether or not conducting the reenactment promotes healing, and the remembered experiences of reenactors themselves are centrally shaped by this detail of the narrative. It is the absence of evidence, the fetus itself or documentary accounts of Malcom's pregnancy, that constitutes the evidentiary force of the performed gesture of incision and removal. The "common sense" set of experiences that validates this interpretation of absence marks the ongoing difference between identifying as black and white in the South. There are profound reasons for accepting orally transmitted stories as the location of authoritative history amongst black people in places like Walton County. Harvey, for instance, recalled seeing old black men break down in tears—and "black men didn't cry back during the day," Harvey interjected—when they talked to him about their own experiences as young men. Some mentioned one or another friend who "left town" after a minor altercation with local whites only to turn up months later as "these bones out there in the wood" discovered by wintertime rabbit hunters. Harvey himself had been the target of two attempted lynchings for his persistent NAACP activism in Walton County. The house where he and his mother lived was firebombed by a white mob in the early 1970s. He described the case of Lynn McKinley Jackson, a young black army officer

founded hanging from a tree in the woods in Walton County in 1982. Though local officers ruled Jackson's death a "suicide," FBI agents categorized it as a lynching; black locals organized protests in the weeks afterward. Jackson had been dating the white daughter of a wealthy family from the area at the time of his death. Her father may have had affiliation with the Klan. "You know, the Moore's Ford lynching is the one that's been mentioned and talked about, but you have to listen to them old folks," Harvey said. "This was a way of life here in the south."⁴⁸⁸ In popular culture, DNA evidence seemed to validate a story passed down orally through generations of black people that Thomas Jefferson had fathered the children of his slave Sally Hemmings. These kinds of stories make it difficult to flatly dismiss oral histories, especially on questions of race relations in the South.

But to say as much does not altogether do away with the vagaries and confluences endemic to rumor, which flourish in ghost stories associated with the Moore's Ford Bridge and other locales in Walton and Oconee Counties. One white male native of Monroe in his early twenties, "Michael," recalled the Moore's Ford Bridge being a popular "make-out" and thrill-seeking site amongst peers when he was in high school. "Country families talk about stuff that happened," he said, which in turn arouses the curiosities of their children. According to legend, white nighttime visitors who drove to the bridge and turned off their engines for ten to fifteen minutes would be harassed by ghosts if their ancestors had been members of the lynch mob. He and two of his high school friends had once failed this test of complicity. "We actually started hearing noises," he recalled. "And it wasn't like animal noises or anything beastly or animalistic

⁴⁸⁸ "Gerald Harvey," interview by Andy Rice, Social Circle, GA, July 19, 2012.

or feral, it was moans, and sorrowful noises.” When his spooked friend tried to start up their truck to leave, the ignition failed, and they all “started freaking out.” After a number of failed attempts to start the car, his friend began “screaming out the window I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” He then explained a second part of the legend: “There was this whole, I don’t remember this part of the story, but there was a part that, if you were to ask forgiveness of the souls, that they would allow you passage over the bridge once you’d already stopped in their place and messed with them and stuff. And as soon as he did it, he tried two more times and the car cranked back up.” When I asked him to recount the story of the original lynching that had taken place there, however, his response drew details from several different incidents. “Now I don’t know if this is the same one because there’s actually multiple lynchings that have happened in and around Monroe,” Michael began. He went on to describe the lynching of a young black man who was having an affair with the daughter of a wealthy white man who, irate, organized a mob to go after him. “And I think they dragged him..” Michael said. “They’d either dragged him behind the car, or they tied him up, and then they beat him, and then dragged him to where they were going to hang him at,” he said. His father, a longtime resident of the county who knew a variety of stories and legends, would tell Michael this one whenever they passed a particular tree on a hill. He said his father was a history buff and storyteller who was something of a repository of legends and rumors about things that had happened in the county. But the details included in story most closely corresponded to the 1982 death of Jackson, discussed above, which as of 2012 remained categorized as a suicide by local officials. Michael’s second story referenced details associated with the lynching at Moore’s Ford, but slanted the story white: “Around 1947, a black guy had actually been

accused of killing somebody. And a group actually when out, it was called this, [pause] what was it? The Confederate Mafia, that's what they called themselves. And they actually went out, and chased him down, and liberated Monroe of threat. But they did a whole lot more than lynch that guy. They did a lot of bad stuff to him, as far as I've been told."⁴⁸⁹ Three details in this brief account are worth noting. First, Barney Hester, the white man stabbed by Roger Malcom, lived another thirty years after the incident in 1946, but the rumor that he died at Malcom's hand persisted across this time, and it is reproduced here. Second, telling the story as a lynching-for-murder narrative frames the white men in the mob as continuing a long tradition of justifiable vigilante justice in the South. Self-sacrificing white men did the unpleasant, but necessary work to "liberate Monroe of threat," a detail that harkens back to prolynching discourses of the late 1800s in unnerving fashion. Third, the four lynching victims and their names have been displaced by a single, anonymous "black guy" accused of murder, but the lynch mob, anonymous in official accounts of this story, here goes by the name Confederate Mafia. While Michael seemed to disapprove of the "bad stuff" the Confederate Mafia did to the body, he did not go into detail about what this might have been, and he made sure to emphasize that his story originated in the realm of rumor rather than documented fact. This way of telling the story frames the acts of the mob as wrong and bad, as disavowed by the storyteller, but also as outside of the teller's control though they believe that they are the beneficiaries of a community "safe" from the ravages of a black killer.

A seven-minute YouTube video posted by "Ebola Entertainment" titled "Moore's Ford Bridge—Haunted" features a slightly different ghost story conflation. The

⁴⁸⁹ "Michael," interview by Andy Rice, Monroe, Georgia, July 19, 2012.

cameraman and five other twenty something men and women horror fans visit the bridge at night to seek out “emotional echoes” of what happened there, as well as opportunities for ironic humor. A patois of high string music plays beneath the video throughout, and the title text simulates the appearance of dripping red liquid extending from the bottom of the letters. One white man describes feeling “insanely sick” as he stands on the bridge and looks out at the river, but speculates as his companions giggle that it “might have been the junk food from the gas station.” The cameraman lights the scene using only a small flashlight that he points at his subject of his choice with the hand not holding the camera. In the first minute and a half, this subject is a black woman who recounts to the camera the story of what originally happened at the bridge as she knows of it:

It was in either the late 50s or early 60s, this black man was basically accused of molesting this white girl—basically like raping her or whatever. So he was arrested as well as his brother. They were sent to the jail in Monroe, and the father of the girl who accused him of, you know, molesting her or whatever, was a member of the Klan. And basically he and the Klan went to the jail and got the men out of jail before they had been tried or anything like that, rounded up their wives, brought them to this bridge, and basically tortured them, lynched them, and threw them over this bridge. . . and they castrated the men.⁴⁹⁰

Elements of three stories recur here: the trope of the black brute with a perverse sexual desire for white women, bits of the narrative of Lynn McKinley Jackson’s murder at the hand of a white father affiliated with the Klan, and the torture and execution of the Malcoms and the Dorseys at Moore’s Ford Bridge. In the version of the story that Harvey told to me, Jackson was dating the white daughter of a man with Klan associations, not raping her. The way the speaker delivers the information about the

⁴⁹⁰ *Moore's Ford Bridge--Haunted*, Online video, directed by Eddie Ray (YouTube: Ebola Entertainment, 2011), accessed March 25, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTS1IKzX48k>

supposed crime—“basically like raping her or whatever”—suggests that she does not believe in its veracity, even though it is what she has heard of the story. This was a crime that local whites either trumped up or exaggerated to rationalize the brutality of their torture, dismemberment, and execution of two black couples. The date the speaker in the video sites—“late 50s or early 60s”—is somewhere in between the 1946 lynching of the Malcoms and the Dorseys and the 1982 lynching of Jackson. Roger Malcom and George Dorsey were friends, not brothers. They and their wives were not “rounded up” exactly, but were delivered together to the mob in waiting. While the speaker does not mention Malcom’s alleged fetus she does include the rumored castration of the men. In other words, while the presence of such a video speaks to the cinematic draw of ghosts, violence, and mystery, it is also transmitting a hybrid story though recorded oral testimony. As of March 2013, fewer than three hundred viewers had watched through this video, and the young director had moved on to produce another five hundred or so short videos for his YouTube channel. Nonetheless, several viewers of this YouTube video took the initiative to comment that “the story in the beginning is a little bit off.” One even called the video a “disservice to this case” and recommended that they “read the actual, documented account of this story” in Wexler’s book.⁴⁹¹ Videos like this one index how oral stories shift, combine, and transform over time in ways that archival historians try to avoid.

The question of how to make sense of oral history has been at the center of more painful schisms in groups about the meaning and import of the reenactment. It is one thing to tell a macabre story that one has heard, and quite another to perform it before a

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

crowd and the cameras of outsider journalists. In the former, the story remains in the control of the speaker and the listener, but in the latter, the expanded reach of the story also changes its inflection. Rich Rusk,⁴⁹² the son of Dean Rusk, Secretary of State during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, has been a particularly vocal critic of the reenactment. Rusk joined the Moore's Ford Memorial Committee in the late 1990s out of sentiments of anger, sorrow, and guilt about both the Moore's Ford lynching and his father's role in prosecuting the Vietnam War. "Subconsciously, I was trying to get involved in some kind of healing effort somewhere," Rusk told me, "and this damn thing was five miles from my house." He found the local activism that he could engage as a member of MFMC to be extremely rewarding. "One of the beautiful things about the Moore's Ford Committee was that we just all got so completely bonded together doing this work over a period of years where we shared the same goals and values," Rusk reflected. "To work side by side in a large multi-racial organization where you are really working hard and trying your best. . . It may be because the history is so horrific that made the experience even more special." Though he had "tremendous energy" for collaborating on local actions to commemorate the Malcoms and the Dorseys, publicize the history of the lynching, and promote interracial reconciliation and healing in Walton and Oconee Counties, however, Rusk was suspicious of the idea of a reenactment.⁴⁹³

Rusk acknowledged that the first reenactment brought worldwide publicity to the case and enabled "some terrific evidence" to find its way to the FBI. As a spectator to the reenactment who saw a number of good friends play roles, he recalled being "deeply

⁴⁹² Throughout this chapter, I have used pseudonyms for other interviewees, but Rusk asked that I use his actual name.

⁴⁹³ Rich Rusk, interview by Andy Rice, Athens, Georgia, July 21, 2012.

impressed with how meaningful that experience was for the people doing the reenactments.” But when the bloody, violent reenactment became an annual event, Rusk grew increasingly critical of it. He felt that the subsequent reenactments alienated the tentative white, local support that the MFMC had hard won since the late 1990s, and practically ensured that Walton and Oconee County whites whose families may have been involved in the lynching would no longer consider coming forward with what they knew. In Rusk’s view, this was “collateral damage” caused by the reenactment. “It pissed off a lot of people” black and white, Rusk stated. “To be honest with you, it just cut the legs right out from under our Moore’s Ford [Memorial Committee] members. We are a fraction of what we were.” Rusk recalled one white member in particular who had risked his job, family relations, and reputation in the county to attend a meeting and disclose to the group that his great grandfather had participated in the 1921 lynching of John Lee Eberhart in Oconee County. Rusk said that the group accepted his confession and his apology, “such as it was, and he became one of the strongest members of our group.” But this man “was furious, he was livid” when he found out about the reenactment. Rusk explained that the individual saw the reenactment not as a healing ritual or a means to expedite prosecution, but as a form of “showboating,” and he left the group. Though the MFMC disassociated itself from GABEO and the reenactment after the first year, the two remained linked in public perception afterward, a development that Rusk characterized as “humbling.” GABEO’s connections throughout the state allowed the recruitment of groups of reenactors from cities like Atlanta who had no ties to Walton or Oconee Counties, which ensured that the reenactments could continue without local support from the MFMC. Very few participants in the reenactment had to live with its

fallout in their everyday lives afterward, a fact that frustrated Rusk and led him to fear the resurgence of racial violence stirred up from its performed echoes. “[The reenactment’s] got a life of its own, unfortunately,” Rusk lamented. “I’d hate to have these things start up elsewhere. They just shouldn’t be done . . . These kind of events just perpetuate that racism and don’t lead to community healing.” He noted “the insensitivity” of the reenactment in particular at one stop along the way to the final reenactment at the bridge, when the caravan gathers on the front lawn of the Hesters’ descendents’ property to hear the story of the stabbing of Barney Hester.⁴⁹⁴ Scott, too, recalled several children coming out one year to yell racial epithets at the group, and they decided to explain and reenact this particular scene at the First African Baptist Church after the speeches in 2012.⁴⁹⁵

Moreover, Rusk grew convinced that there was no way to prosecute the case, given the scanty remains in the FBI file. “The physical evidence that they had at the time was apparently lost over the years. It’s not around,” he explained. A state trooper he interviewed for a series of newspaper articles about the Moore’s Ford case told him that not even confessions from the two to five remaining suspects could result in prosecutions without corroborating evidence. Prosecutions were thus impossible, in Rusk’s view. He dropped the bulk of his activities with the MFMC after the reenactment of 2008. The naming of Malcom’s fetus upset one of Malcom’s descendents, who did not agree that such a ceremony should proceed. Rusk was her friend and landlord, and did not believe that Malcom was pregnant in any case. “I talked to the FBI agent that was there at the autopsy—he was still alive—Lewis Hutchison. He said he was right there and he didn’t

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ “Dante Scott.”

remember any womb cut open or anything like that. He would have remembered that,” he said. Nonetheless, he said that dropping out of the group “broke [his] heart.”⁴⁹⁶

The reenactment foregrounds oral stories over archival forms of evidence. In the version of this history acted out since 2007, Dorothy was represented as seven months pregnant. The fetus was cut from her stomach after the execution because the lynch mob wanted to see the color of its skin. The fetus was then lost or buried somewhere in the woods, never to be seen again. The detail did not show up in official reports because Malcom’s pregnancy was not detected at the time even by coroner Dan Young. The body had been too mangled by bullets, and locals were too scared to say anything to the press or the FBI in 1946. Judging from the audiences at the reenactment, well over 90% black since at least since 2007, it is an interpretation of the history that favors a black conception of common sense. It also seems to attract attention, strong affective responses to the reenactment, and cameras. The organizers of the reenactment themselves here reenact a strategy at the center of the Civil Rights Movement for bringing about local change. Agitate in the area deemed problematic, and draw in the attention of outside observers, like Jackie and myself. Then allow the tensions to unfold and the pressure on local communities to build as cameras and reporters arrived to capitalize on the drama. In 2008, to the anger and chagrin of key local white supporters as well as some descendents of the Malcoms, the reenactment featured a naming ceremony for Dorothy Malcom’s severed fetus. “All these years, we wanted the baby to have a name,” Scott recalled. “We wanted a consensus and said what about ‘Justice.’”⁴⁹⁷ Justice Malcom.

⁴⁹⁶ Rich Rusk.

⁴⁹⁷ “Dante Scott.”

Scott appreciated the layers of Civil Rights reference embedded in the name, and even claimed that it came to him in a repeated dream, which he took to be a sign from God. He passed the story onto the press and repeated it in speeches on the day of the reenactment. “We now name this baby Justice, denied Justice in death, he is accorded Justice in the hereafter,” he said.⁴⁹⁸ It is perhaps with some of these considerations in mind that, at the end of the discussion back at the rehearsal in Atlanta, Scott interjects a question. “Who cuts the baby out of Dorothy?” he asks.

Traumatic Possession in a Documentary Event

In the opening of his chapter on “The Man of Color and the White Woman” in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon reflects on the troubling dilemma of desiring “to be recognized not as *Black*, but as *White*” as a Martinican living in France. His provocation allows him to ruminate on the ontological impossibility of his achieving recognition as an equal so long as the social categories of black and white comprise a “racial epidermal schema” for understanding difference. The black is marked and laden with associations with the bad object. The white is unmarked. But perhaps the black man can approach the status of the human, he jests, if he can win the love of a white woman. For “who better than the white woman to bring [such recognition] about? By loving me, she proves to me that I am worthy of a white love. I am loved like a white

⁴⁹⁸ Mark Auslander, “‘Holding Onto Those Who Can’t Be Held’: Reenacting a Lynching at Moore’s Ford, Georgia,” *Southern Spaces* (Nov. 8, 2010a), <http://www.southernspaces.org/2010/holding-those-who-cant-be-held-reenacting-lynching-moores-ford-georgia>.

man. I am a white man.”⁴⁹⁹ Engaging Fanon’s logic in the context of a lynching reenactment in the 21st century United States is a complicated maneuver. On the one hand, the most virulent forms of white supremacist ideology have justified lynching by using the same line of thinking that Fanon here articulates. Pro-lynching rhetoric posited that the black man desired the white woman as a pathway to whiteness and all the privileges it promised. The purity of white nationhood and white womanhood were thus inextricably linked, and essential to protect at all costs. This was the primary justification for lynching between 1880 and 1930, and pro-lynching whites used the “lynching for rape” rationale to explain their support for the most gruesome of these spectacles. In the 21st century, the difficulty that whites have in reconciling belief in equality under the law and the fact that they are the economic beneficiaries of this racial terror leads to something like an inversion of the logic that Fanon offered in the 1950s. The individuals who overtly support white supremacy mark themselves as debased elements of contemporary American society, as less than human, but these lingering traces of the past in the present haunt the white with the pangs of complicity. To paraphrase Fanon, only the black American can allow the white American recognition as a non-racist. One suspects that the white who mentions having “black friends” immediately before reiterating a racist stereotype senses as much. In this light, the reenactment offers the white participant a concrete affirmation of their humanity. Who better to forgive white guilt than a black community in Georgia? But the salve on offer, to play the role of a Klansman in a lynching reenactment, produces complications of its own.

⁴⁹⁹ Frantz Fanon and Richard Philcox, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 45.

Playing a role in the reenactment of a traumatic event can itself produce traumatic symptoms in actors. An actor's insights about the process of othering and the phenomenology of hate, for example, might become more incisive as a result of their performance as members of the 1946 lynch mob. But the closer one gets to mimetically embodying the role, the more dissonant that playing it becomes to the actor's sense of self. Many actors who play the Klan roles say that the gap between their embodied actions and beliefs in racial equality produces in them the sensation of psychic dislocation. One woman who had played the role of the Klansman who cuts the fetus out of Dorothy Malcom, for example, found the experience to be surprisingly affecting, even though she doubted the historical veracity of this particular detail and knew she was only playing a part. "The baby part got through," she said. "It surprised me that day, that I was emotional about it." She started crying, she told me, because she usually thought of herself as "an unviolent, pretty gentle sort of person" who could not "stand pain in anybody or anything." As she mimed this unforgivable action that may or may not have occurred in the original lynching, she found herself identifying with Dorothy as a mother who was losing her child, and then with the fetus itself all the while embodying "this big tough Klansman." In our interview, she recalled for me what she was thinking at that moment with her eyes cast down: "Um, what a gross, gory thing to have to do, um, that I have done. And also, I guess [pause] I want grandchildren, and here this is. I'm helping to murder a child."⁵⁰⁰ At the end of the reenactment, she made a point to speak to families in the audience, some with children as young as four, to ensure them that she was acting, and perhaps to reaffirm her own sense of self. Fowler also recalled feeling

⁵⁰⁰ "Annie," interview by Andy Rice, Atlanta, Georgia, July 2012.

“like a mean, cruel man” at the end of his first reenactment: “You want to know how I reacted after being a Klansman? I cried. I went up on the bridge, and I had bought cigarettes for just a prop, you know? [pause] I just smoked one [laughs], you know. I’m not a smoker. I mean it was just [pause] it was, uh, a phenomenal feeling of, uh, great sadness. I felt dirty.”⁵⁰¹

For reenactors who know of their own familial or ancestral ties to the Klan, the sensations of guilt and self-loathing can be particularly intense. Auslander described one reenactor who “couldn’t recall what had happened throughout the reenactment. ‘It’s a horrible thing to do,’ he said, ‘I was not there. I’d say it’s a fugue state. I’m still a little bit in shock. It’s not somewhere that you want to inhabit.’”⁵⁰² This reenactor’s family had lived in Georgia for three generations, and he knew that one of his grandfathers, a worker at a textile mill, had briefly been a member of the Klan. A more distant ancestor, a “country doctor,” had fought in Robert E. Lee’s army through the surrender at Appomattox, and he suspected that his uncle may have been part of the lynch mob. He managed to channel the demeanor of a Klansman to such an extent, Auslander observed, that this man he and his wife knew as a friend “seemed to have forgotten who we were and angrily ordered us off the bridge” before the start of the reenactment. When I spoke to “Walter” in 2012, he likened his orientation to the role in the midst of playing it to the audience member in a movie theater:

It’s that place in your head where you detach and emotionally distance yourself, and it’s like you’re watching a movie, and you’re just watching things happen. And yeah you’re speaking, but you don’t connect with it.

⁵⁰¹ “Dave Fowler,” interview by Andy Rice, Atlanta, Georgia, July 2012.

⁵⁰² Auslander, “‘Holding Onto Those Who Can’t Be Held’: Reenacting a Lynching at Moore’s Ford, Georgia.”

The minute it was over, that distance collapsed. . . Because all you've really been doing is been holding your actual, you know, gut reactions in check to get through this thing. And it's tough. It's tough. I'll tell you the truth, I can't do that anymore for that reason.⁵⁰³

Walter felt that it was his “responsibility as a southern boy” and inheritor of white privilege to actively engage questions of his de facto complicity in racism. “The KKK was America’s version was the death squads in South America,” he stated; it rankled him to be hailed as the beneficiary of the group’s crimes. Nonetheless, he was also keenly aware that he just as easily could have taken up this heritage in slightly altered circumstances. His father was convinced that his son would not live to see his thirtieth birthday for the way he talked about the legacies of racism in Georgia, and Walter did take some unusual risks. He had volunteered for an activist group called the Center for Democratic Renewal as a Klan infiltrator. As a white man with a Georgia accent and a pedigree connected to the Civil War and the Klan, Walter was able to play the part of a white supremacist well enough to gather information at informal Klan recruitment gatherings and the national annual conference at Stone Mountain. He reflected on the ominously double edged nature of his cultural capital: “If I’d been born in Cartersville, [Georgia] in 1926 like my dad, instead of growing up in Atlanta, GA in the late 50s and through the 60s, I might be an entirely different person.”⁵⁰⁴ This awareness of his own vulnerability and his practice at playing a white supremacist in the midst of the actual Klan helped him to act the part in the reenactment and provided him with an ethical reason for doing so, but he found the thoughts and affective posture his role compelled him to conjure to be profoundly disturbing. He explained that inhabiting the passivity of

⁵⁰³ “Walter,” interview by Andy Rice, Atlanta, Georgia, July 26, 2012.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

cinema spectatorship in the midst of acting was a strategy for coping with this heritage, but it was only a temporary salve: “To be dragging [the lynching victims] out and making it real, executing them in a field, and making that real on an emotional level, it takes a lot out of you. It takes a lot out of you. And, uh, you can’t really feel good about yourself after the fact.”⁵⁰⁵ Subsequently, Walter played the role of Governor Gene Talmadge instead of a member of the lynch mob. He gives a speech on the steps of the courthouse in Monroe that was drawn verbatim from a transcript of Talmadge’s stump speech from the 1946 campaign. Walter says that while this role is difficult, it is more palatable than playing a member of the lynch mob. Talmadge was a “race baiter par excellence,” Walter said, but was “very careful never to say ‘nigger’” in public speeches, and did not himself commit acts of violence or explicitly call for them in public forums. The insidious policies and actions he initiated behind closed doors did not surface in his “boilerplate” stump speech, Walter explained, so it was a less traumatizing for him to play Talmadge in the reenactment.⁵⁰⁶ In effect, interestingly, the documentary evidence provides a somewhat misleading portrait of Talmadge’s connection to the Klan and white supremacist violence, and so sticking to the documented Talmadge script functions for Walter as a strategy for managing his own affective responses to this past in the present of his performance. As the Talmadge of archival documents, Walter can tolerate the intensity of his shame, anger, and distress.

The experience of the reenactment has been differently intense for the six black women who played the female victims of the lynching between 2005 and 2012. All of

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

these actresses are active either as ministers or counselors in black churches in Georgia, and four of the five I interviewed connected the intensity of their experiences as reenactors to the presence of the spirits of the lynched. For the sisters in their late 50s who played the roles of Dorothy and Mae Murray in 2005 and 2006, these sentiments of connection also compelled them to think about traumatic experiences in their own pasts (Figure 5.2). The woman who played Mae Murray Dorsey in the first two reenactments, “Lorene,” described an “eerie feeling” that came into her when she realized that she “was in the same spot that the tragedy had happened.”⁵⁰⁷ She was the spouse of a key organizer of the MFMC and the reenactment. Though Lorene was calm and succinct in her comments to me about playing the role, observers present to the first reenactment saw her otherwise. Rusk recalled observing her performance in 2005: “Boy [the female actors] really got into it,” he said. “Lorene was just screaming and just really got carried away. . . . I went up to her afterward and said, ‘Lorene, my God! You’re as crazy as that husband of yours.’ And she said, ‘Rich, you have no idea what’s inside me. You have no idea what’s inside of me.’”⁵⁰⁸ Her sister, who first performed as Dorothy Malcom in the reenactment, said that while playing the role, she remembered what it was like “getting spit on, being called a nigger in the hallway” during the early years of school integration in Georgia. She had been one of the first black students to attend a white school in Monroe. “Maybe that’s why we went with this experiment, we doing it, the reenactment, because I really, really felt it,” she reflected in an interview with me in 2012. “I really could do that part without being rehearsed or being coached, do this, do that. There is

⁵⁰⁷ “Lorene Harvey,” interview by Andy Rice, Social Circle, Georgia, July 19, 2012.

⁵⁰⁸ Rich Rusk.

nobody tells what to do. It just came when we riding in the car [on the way to the Moore's Ford Bridge]. . . I haven't been killed, but I can imagine how scared I used to be while I leave school running. Boot scrapping, you know, the boys, what they going to do to you. 'Kill that nigger!'" She interprets the reenactment through the lens of her faith, and her belief that the spirits of the dead live on in dimensions that are palpable at particular moments, if no longer visible in everyday life. "God was in the mix" of the first reenactment, she says. "It was the best reenactment, because Dorothy and Mae was there. They show up through us, no acting, no actors, no nothing. It was just plain folks that done went through some stuff in their lifetime. . . I could feel Dorothy inside me."⁵⁰⁹ She suggests that future reenactments might eschew the violence of the lynching for a depiction of the four victims crossing the bridge in white robes, symbols of their sense of peace in an afterlife.



Figure 5.3: Video stills of local organizers and actors who staged the first reenactment in 2005 revisiting the Moore's Ford Bridge, footage for *Always in Season*, 2012, Jackie Olive. On the right, the sisters who played Dorothy and Mae Murray look at the place where the lynching and its reenactments occurred. Copyright has been obtained.

⁵⁰⁹ "Dottie Shields," interview by Andy Rice, Social Circle, Georgia, July 24, 2012.

The woman who played the role of Dorothy Malcom between 2007 and 2010, “Julie,” likewise spoke of the spirits of the dead haunting the bridge. When I asked her to explain, she told me: “I can't explain it and I know it sounds crazy, but I feel like I had an out of body experience.” She recalled a number of vivid sense details from her position lying on the ground—the clicks of the cameras, the heat of the air, the stickiness of the fake blood, the sound of water running over the rocks, the voice of a woman singing a Thomas Dorsey spiritual—and characterized the accumulated sensations as the ineffable sign of a long battle “between good versus evil.” Her twenty-five year old son had been murdered by gunshot in Atlanta by a sixteen year old, and as she played the role of Dorothy, she also tried to understand something about the moment of his death. Julie explained: “The thing that I wanted to know the most was what was he thinking when he was lying on the ground? Was he thinking, ‘I'm not going to make it’? Was he thinking about his brother, you know, my youngest son? Was he thinking where is my mom—I mean there was all kind of thoughts. Are they gonna find out if I die who killed me? Those are the things that I was thinking about while I was lying there.” The combination of this personal connection to gun violence and the density of spiritual unrest that she associated with the site of the original lynching dissuaded her from participating in the reenactment after 2010. She recalled visiting the bridge for Jackie Olive’s film in 2011 and sensing the breeze blowing across her face as the indexical presence of unsettled spirits. Olive had asked them to walk across the bridge as they answered interview questions: “As we got closer to the bridge, you know I could hear the water and I could feel the smooth breeze as we walked across the bridge, so I wouldn't never play that

again. . . not down there. If it was on a stage, an auditorium, or something like that maybe, but being in the actual site? That's really hard.”⁵¹⁰

Yvonne Cooper, a theology PhD and theater actress who had played the role of Mae Murray Dorsey on several occasions between 2007 and 2012, offered a particularly vivid account of her reaction to playing this role for the first time:

And when we had to pretend that we were being shot, I knew that they were mutilated pretty much before we were shot. It began to take its toll on my emotions. I knew they were covered in blood because they were bludgeoned. But as I started walking back to the church, people were frightened. . . . I went into the restroom and I looked in the mirror, and this overwhelming grief, and pain and anguish started going through me. And I ripped those clothes off of me, and I, [pause, exhale] I put them in the trash, because I did not want to feel like [pause] this thing was going to follow me . . . that later on the stigma was gonna follow me. I was just gushing with tears, I was crying, I was pouring out. I was [pause] went through a lot of emotions. It was almost as if, you know, I asked myself, am I this person? You know, am I feeling the emotions that this person really could have felt going through this? I think that I was. . . . And riding back home, I was solemn. I was stinging. I was trying to put together what did I just do? What was this really about?⁵¹¹

Part of the ideal of political documentary is to induce in viewers the sensation of shock, anger, or knowledge about the real that will lead to action outside the theater. To shake the viewer's preconceived categories, in theory, allows the film to catalyze social change outside of the cinema theater.⁵¹² The distinction of the real in documentary from fiction rests upon this principle. Yet in Cooper's case, the experience of this intense—perhaps hyper-intense—documentary real cascades from her own action in the world outside of the theatrical space. It is a cinematic series of actions played out upon a screen

⁵¹⁰ “Julie Williams,” interview by Andy Rice, Conyers, Georgia, July 18, 2012.

⁵¹¹ “Yvonne Cooper,” interview by Andy Rice, Atlanta, Georgia, July 24, 2012.

⁵¹² This kind of logic is expressed in much documentary theory, prominently including as a starting reference point: Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*.

that is also a landscape where an event that traumatized a community for over sixty years once occurred. Playing the role of one of the women lynched in this event, before an audience cultivated from announcements made in black, protestant churches in Georgia, was an overwhelming experience for Cooper. She spoke as well about incidents of racism that she experienced as a child, and a graduate education that included courses about the sexual abuse of slaves on plantations. For Cooper, the real of the reenactment event is also tied to a theological belief in spirits and spiritual possession. She believed that this traumatic event left the spirits of the dead unsettled, and feared that play-acting the dead in this liminal scenario might allow some element of this past to haunt her. The blood on her body and her clothes was tainted with the stigma of the “real” event that once took place at Moore’s Ford. These details of the performance became her documentary evidence of such a real, though she never saw photographs of the Malcoms or the Dorseys.

However, the woman who played Dorothy Malcom in 2011 and 2012 brought a different set of experiences to the role, which reflected changes in the ethos of the reenactment, as well. After 2005, organizers sought to enhance the cinematic affect of the production. They incorporated dialogue meant to cue black “common sense” assumptions of 1946 Georgia whites (for eg., a Klan member says at the end of the lynching “And I hear that nigger George likes white women.”), staged the removal of the fetus in part to intensify viewers’ sensations of horror, and recruited a younger woman to play the role of Dorothy, who was 20 when she was lynched. While the women in their 50s who have played the roles of Dorothy and Mae Murray could draw on their own lived experiences to understand the fright that these people might have felt in 1946, “Marlena

Johnson,” the 25 year old, upper-middle class woman who played Dorothy in 2011 and 2012, could not.

The differences in the ways that Johnson perceived the role she played are striking, as though she is stuck between her lived understanding of the social meanings of blackness and privilege. Johnson grew up in Stone Mountain, which though a Klan stronghold in 1946, became a predominantly black neighborhood between the 1970s and 2000s. She said she never experienced racism. When I met Johnson for our interview at a trendy Stone Mountain coffee shop, she arrived in a forest-green Mercedes and dressed professionally in a lime-green business suit with artfully applied and subtle makeup, combed, straight black hair in a bun, and large black and gold circular earrings. A college graduate working on her MA, she had ambitions to start a global youth ministry and Mary Kay cosmetics consulting business, which she hoped to one day comprise components of her own Christian-friendly lifestyle company. “I want to create a brand for myself, being able to speak on everything that kind of relates to a woman,” she explained, “whether it’s fashion, skin care, your relationship with God, your mental health, your makeup—all of that.” She said that the ubiquitous presence of Confederate iconography in her neighborhood struck her, but did not make her angry. Home schooled during her high school years, and having traveled abroad to Europe on several occasions for educational trips with other home-schooled teens, she considered questions of racism from an intellectual distance: “When you go through those [traumatic] situations it gives you preconceived ideas and it affects your future,” she said, adding that she was “very grateful” that she did not share the “paranoid” perspective that results from having “those

thoughts haunting us.” She nonetheless found it somewhat discomfoting that she did not cry after playing the role of Dorothy:

M: I guess it would be different if I saw it, but I would actually like to see some footage of maybe what it looked like. Because in my mind it's . . .

A: Did you cry?

M: I didn't cry. I didn't cry. And sometimes that makes me feel bad that I didn't cry because so many people are moved by it—sort of like when you go see a movie, and people don't cry, or someone just gives an amazing speech, and you're so moved by it and you're like, “Why aren't you crying? What's wrong with you? That didn't touch you?”⁵¹³

She described her approach to playing her role like a professional technician.

Whereas the sisters who played the roles in the first two years recalled screaming out of actual memories of terror when they were pulled from the car, Johnson expressed concern about “regulating [her] screams so that they don't sound ridiculous and overpowering.” She watched documentary films about the lynching of Emmitt Till and the Civil Rights Movement to understand the culture of racism in the 1940s and 1950s. When I asked how she might think differently about her role if she were not pregnant, she described how she might adjust her gait. She “always want[ed] validation” for her decisions about how to play dead—“I don't know what it's like to be dead, and so you just try to think of what you see in movies,” she explained—and suggested that making a movie about the reenactment event would lead more visitors to come see the live performance. “If there was to be a movie made about it,” she said, “then every year they did this reenactment I think people would come so they can be like, I went to the reenactment, you know? And I know that sounds phony, but people like to Facebook things like ‘at Moore’s Ford Bridge reenactment.’”

⁵¹³ “Marlena Johnson,” interview by Andy Rice, Stone Mountain, Georgia, July 23, 2012.

How then are we to make sense of the cinematic as the both source for Johnson's interpretation of her role and the object she hopes to produce through her acting? She had a hard time relating to the role of Dorothy Malcom. Not only was Dorothy younger, pregnant, and working class, but Johnson said she had not experienced any of the traumas of racism typical of that era for many black Americans. She did not have a reservoir of personal experience to draw from to play the role, and so she did not identify with it, even though her performance allowed other audience members present to cry at the fate of her referent. Her body became a pass through device akin to a photographic signifier, a medium possessed by the spirit of the dead, but somehow uncannily neutral to it, a spirit of cinematic possession.

That evening I attend the laser light spectacular at Stone Mountain, now a national park located adjacent to Johnson's neighborhood. It offers eerie traces of the past associated with the Klan and its place in Georgia history, some subtler than others. Carved into the center of the rock wall on the side facing the park are Mt. Rushmore sized bas-relief sculptures of Confederate icons Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and Stonewall Jackson, dubbed "the three heroes" in park videos produced as late as 2002.⁵¹⁴ The laser-light show is literally superimposed upon their granite likenesses, as if these mythological fathers of the Lost Cause themselves become the movie screen. Placards

⁵¹⁴ Though originally envisioned as sculpture of an entire Confederate army extending across the entire face of the Stone, cost and time forced those committed to this project (largely a combination of Klan members and the Daughters of Confederate Veterans) to scale back their ambitions. As it stands, the sculpture took over fifty years to complete (1915-1972). Stone Mountain Memorial Association, "Stone Mountain History," accessed October 3, 2013, <http://www.stonemountainpark.org/5.%20Explore/Text/History/Stone%20Mountain%20History.pdf>.

posted throughout the park to each state in the Confederacy tell the story of the Civil War absent any mention of slavery. But the thousand-person audience of the show is surprisingly diverse on this Monday night in July, perhaps sixty percent black, and the white audience members with whom I spoke associated the park neither with the Klan nor the Confederacy. A number of black families posed for photographs in front of the granite “heroes.” Parents and children eat picnic dinners together on blankets on the gently sloping grass hill, speaking quietly to one another above the drone of bubblegum pop songs as they wait for darkness to descend. “Vogue” by Madonna, then “La Macarena” by Los Del Rio, “The Electric Slide,” Will Smith’s “Nod My Head,” and the Flo-Rida featuring Kesha remix of “You Spin me Right Round.” Black and white locals who regularly attend sit next to out of town tourists, all facing the softly lit stone generals. One black woman who immigrated to Atlanta from Eritrea explains to me that the park is a nice place to take her grandchildren in the evening, in spite of the history of atrocity associated with Stone Mountain. Nowhere in Georgia is untainted, she states. I speak to two park employees who have summer jobs on the grounds selling bubble guns, glow sticks, and plastic light sabers to the scores of children running through the crowd. Both are black men in their early twenties who live in Stone Mountain. Though they know something about the Klan history in the area, they do not share these details with customers because they suspect it might be bad for sales and their long-term employment prospects.⁵¹⁵ A white woman sitting on a lawn chair surrounded by her children and

⁵¹⁵ None of this past was mentioned in their training to work here, they say, and one noted that the gift shop had greatly reduced its Confederacy themed “redneck wear” recently. At the time of my visit, however, one could still purchase a coffee mug

grandchildren tells me that she used to live in Stone Mountain, and loved to walk her dog through the park. She lived next door to a black family from 1985 to 2008, but moved with her husband to rural Georgia because the neighborhood was starting to get so “run down.” She mentioned that they also happened to be the “last white family in the neighborhood” when they sold the home. She had come with her family tonight because she had so many pleasant memories of seeing the laser light show, and wanted to share it with her grandchildren. At the climactic moment—her favorite, she tells me—“one of the presidents breaks his sword over his knee” and then drops it to the ground, where the two halves transform into a map of the United States.

This is indeed a powerfully affecting moment in the ninety-minute laser light show. It comes somewhere in the middle, after an extended section about the military campaigns of the Civil War. The reliefs of Jackson and Lee on horseback suddenly come to life as laser outline animations. Their swords are drawn and pointed toward the audience as they spur their horses to the swelling vocals of Roy Orbison’s rendition of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. The laser-animated Robert E. Lee breaks his sword over his knee to symbolize the end of the Civil War, and when the two halves drop to the ground, they become the Civil War era northern and southern United States, absent the West, and reunite. Actual fireworks shoot out of the base of the mountain, Orbison offers his full-throated conclusion “The truth is marching on!” to *The Battle Hymn*, and the crowd surrounding me on the lawn cheers. The spectacle would give way to laser animated vignettes of African-Americans with poor posture and big lips driving rusty

featuring the bust of Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, the man who founded the Klan at the end of the Civil War in 1865.

station wagons and dancing to funk music, photographs of firefighters in New York after 9/11, and projected, digitally animated, politically correct slide shows featuring American heroes including Amelia Earhart, Jackie Robinson, John F. Kennedy, Buzz Aldrin, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King. The show concluded with a slow dissolve into a computer animated close up of the American flag set to “America the Beautiful.” When the music reached its end and the image faded away, we were collectively left to look at what remained of the spectacle, “the three heroes” of the Confederacy stubbornly aloft on their horses, the lighted symbols of hope and terror alone in the darkness of the night. The crowd cheered loudly nonetheless.

Conclusion

The reenactment staging starting in 2005 was driven by the desire to return matter and dignity to the dead, a project intimately connected to cinematic technologies. Actors who have embodied the lynched in the annual reenactment have seen neither the bodies that they represent, nor photographs of the victims. Between the unsuccessful FBI investigation of the case in 1946 and its reopening in 2000 by Georgia Governor Roy Barnes, almost all of the physical evidence related to the case had been destroyed. If forensic photographs of the bodies remain in existence (and two longtime activists who collaborate on the reenactment claim to have seen them), they were not publicly accessible in 2012. Actors must imagine the final experiences of the lynched through other means. They employ their bodies to fill in indexical holes. As the actress who played Dorothy in 2005 recalled: “I knew she were dead, but I wouldn't be dead. And we had to lay there. We lay there for about 30 minutes. I remember saying they wanted us

in this scene. They wanted it on the front page that scene. I lay there with my eyes closed catsup, sticking, sticky for blood. And if she wasn't dead when they shot her, that's the way she was feeling. You know, ants crawling over you and your husband laying beside you. I was thinking suppose she was alive and felt this.”⁵¹⁶

This chapter has focused on the relationship between race and embodied historical interpretation in the digital context. In analyzing the subjective experiences of killing and death within the reenactment, I have considered a question central to documentary film theory from a new angle. Sobchack regards ethical rationales surrounding the representation of death in documentary film as an alibi for beholding the taboo, a conceit that I follow here as well. Though the logic for depicting historical death in the reenactment performance is similar, however, I have made the case that embodied performing changes the dynamics of documentary representation in two ways. First, performing in the reenactment involves bodily motility and verbal expression, which in turn intensifies the sensation of responsibility for action in documentary production over cinema spectatorship. Playing the roles of the lynchers and the lynched, I have intimated, approaches if not produces traumatic experiences for some of the actors in this particular instance. But these sensations are not uniform across actors. As with Sobchack’s discussion of witnessing death in film, the sense of one’s complicity only strikes with the affective, indexical recognition of a death that has happened. This affective charge is subjective, regardless of the actuality of death on screen. It is the same in the reenactment performance. The case of Marlena in the Moore’s Ford reenactment is particularly instructive in this regard. She grew up after the Civil Rights struggles of the

⁵¹⁶ “Dottie Shields.”

1960s and 1970s, and so could not draw on personal experience to play her role. Her understanding of this history in turn was more cinematic and technical than personal. She did not talk about the spirit of the dead coursing through her, but rather worried about how to play the dead convincingly. For Marlana, playing the role was more about doing a favor for the director, a family friend, than working through old demons.

Second, in speaking to different actors who have played the same roles over time, I have pointed to the ways that reenactment performance responds to shifting interests across time. As attention paid to the reenactment waned after 2007, organizers collectively decided to highlight the killing of the fetus and stage a naming ceremony. Whereas volunteers who played the roles of the lynched in early reenactments were descendents of the Dorseys and the Malcoms or close kin of reenactment organizers who had experienced firsthand the brutalities of Georgia racism in the 1950s and 1960s, many of the roleplayers in later years were outsiders to Walton County who looked the part rather than lived it. They recruited young volunteers to play the roles of the lynched, and Atlanta based progressive whites to play the lynch mob. These choices presented a trade-off. Heightened drama and the realism of amateur theater actors renewed outside press and filmmaker interests for several years after 2007. But control over the reenactment was no longer local. The biracial Moore's Ford Memorial Committee effectively shut down its routine efforts to continue the work of locally led reconciliation and healing, as friction over the reenactment split the group along the lines of race. In 2012, the reenactment was an event planned by politicians and church leaders predominantly based in Atlanta, featuring actors who came from Atlanta and Athens and spectators who were over 95% black. Of the twelve with whom I spoke on the day of the reenactment, seven

were from Atlanta. Several others were local families who knew the Dorseys and the Malcoms personally.

These two trends suggest the kind of change that Sobchack ascribed to the “electronic” regime, and perhaps intimate the sort of internalization that such an episteme of perception produces. Reenactments are human rituals that mimic the logic of the computer loop across time. Lori-Parks’ play expressed the logic of the loop within a dense cycle of repetition, and so produced the aura of fractured subjectivity, the proximity of death. But unlike the loop, historical reenactments are invested in the repetition and revision structure more typically associated with live performance, and often limited in number by the calendar year. In this case, it is more complicated than asserting that the reiteration of an event across time leads to the death of affect or representation freighted with meaning. When bodies act like electronic streams and loops in this small way, they retain a capacity for awareness of their own mortality, for feeling the wind in the trees and imagining other spirits not visible, or hearing the running of the river beneath the purr of camera clicks. Such experiences are subjective and felt, but they are as documentary within the ways that older participants perceive as any film. As the case of Marlena suggests, whether or not the indexical power of reenactment may continue on into the future, whether or not it depends on the still open wounds of the 1946 lynching, is an unresolved question.

Conclusion

This dissertation offers contributions to the fields of media theory, documentary studies, performance studies, visual/sensory anthropology, and American studies. In my analysis of sensory ethnographic films, training simulations, and reenactments, I have argued that the decreasing camera size and ubiquity of audiovisual devices are the key aspects of the analog to digital transition, driving the convergence of performance and documentary practice. Affect-producing activities like filmmaking, reenacting the past, and living before the lens increasingly blur the line between leisure and work and subject and object. To perform in this context is to offer oneself up as value for audiovisual extraction. I have argued, in turn, that research on embodied experience in a simulation society must consider the internalization of the cinema apparatus into the act of seeing itself.

Such a starting point is latent within the development of portable synch sound 16 mm camcorders and early sensory ethnographic film, as in the early insights of Jean Rouch, though it remains an avenue underexplored within theory in visual and sensory anthropology. In a 1967 interview with direct cinema, ethnographic filmmaker James Blue about *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961), for instance, Rouch discussed the question of the subject's self-consciousness in front of the camera. Blue argued that this was a problem to overcome. Documentary film should seek to "draw out of [the subject] not the professional performance of an actor but the revelation of what might be called his essential nature, his being," he said, but instruments of recording tended to "generate an artificiality that distorts his behavior." To Blue's surprise, Rouch averred that film subjects could not sustain their "self-conscious hamminess" for very long, and rather

advocated for playing up the artifice of the recording apparatus as a route to “infinitely more sincere” forms of engagement with subjects. Prefiguring his own reflections on an accidental reenactment embedded in the film, Rouch explained:

What has always seemed very strange to me is that contrary to what one might think, when people are being recorded, the reactions that they have are always infinitely more sincere than those they have when they are not being recorded. The fact of being recorded gives these people a public. . . . [Very rapidly, subjects] begin to try to think—perhaps for the first time—sincerely about their own problems, about who they are and then they begin to express what they have within themselves.⁵¹⁷

In this dissertation, I have considered the development of subsequent ethnographic film practices, focusing particularly on the tempered case for observational cinema that has reemerged following the sensory and affective turns in cultural and visual anthropology of the late 1980s-2000s. Sensory ethnographic filmmaker-scholars downplay the semiotic interpretations of culture predominant in anthropology. Instead, they aim to communicate the researcher’s phenomenological experiences of subjects’ social lives through cinema practice. Such practices do not often include reenactment staging. In *The Corporeal Image* (2006), David MacDougall praised Rouch for his participatory ethic vis a vis subjects, his films’ focus on individuals and cultural movement rather than societies, tribes, or peoples, and his resistance to criticism from within the science-inflected domains of anthropology, but not for his use of reenactment. For aesthetic and ethical considerations, MacDougall instead preferred to take “a stance

⁵¹⁷ James Blue, “Jean Rouch in Conversation with James Blue,” *Film Comment* 4, no. 2, 3 (Fall/Winter, 1967): 85.

of humility before the world” and respect subjects’ “distinctive spatial and temporal configurations” through an “unprivileged camera style.”⁵¹⁸

But observational approaches developed in this ethnographic tradition are ill suited to engage phenomena that are not visible in the present, like traumatic memories that cannot be processed and communicated through victims’ preexisting conceptions of self or world. Film scholar and psychotherapist Deirdre Boyle noted that subjects who experienced trauma could often not communicate their memories of traumatic events through narrative retelling—a social act. Traumatic memory, rather, “demands reenactment for its recall. It is inflexible and invariable, has no social component, is not addressed to anyone, and usually is a solitary activity.”⁵¹⁹ Memories return to “possess” one’s consciousness involuntarily, in the words of critical historian and trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra, “as if one were back there reliving the event, and distance between here and there, then and now, collapses.”⁵²⁰

In this context, I accept the idea that observational cinema can exceed spectators’ preconceived typologies and thus challenge their ideological assumptions, but I disagree with the notion that reenactment is reactionary and inherently suspect as a technique for considering “the real.” To insist on this premise, to use Schneider’s phrase, reproduces the “chronopolitics of race and gender [that] haunt the privileging of document over

⁵¹⁸ Paul Henley, “Seeing, Hearing, Feeling: Sound and the Despotism of the Eye in ‘Visual’ Anthropology,” *Visual Anthropology Review* 23, no. 1 (2007): 56; MacDougall and Castaing-Taylor, *Transcultural Cinema*, 196.

⁵¹⁹ Deirdre Boyle, “Shattering Silence: Traumatic Memory and Reenactment in Rithy Panh’s S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 50, no. 1-2 (2009), 99.

⁵²⁰ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 89.

embodied act.”⁵²¹ Reenactment can also function within ethnographic film as a catalyst for memory or new ways of thinking, a possibility that Rouch deduced. There is some affinity between this description of reenactment experience and the phenomenon that Rouch called “cine trance,” in which the body of the filmmaker in the act of recording feels as though syncopated with subjects and absent from their social world at the same time.⁵²² We might say that participants in reenactment experience a cine trance induced by remembered personal experience touching collective historical memory, played out *before* the camera rather than behind it. Their movement is central to the performance of the past and the re-emergence of memory in the present. Reenactors are thus explicit subjects of aesthetics in such films. In observational film, the relationships established between filmmaker and subjects tend to serve the technologies of recording, valued for their capacity to index the world before the lens. In reenactment, the technologies of recording tend to advance the relationships between filmmaker and subjects. Cinematic records are valued as an aid to this performative collaboration. When reenactors role-play their own past experiences of trauma, which may not require literal movement-by-movement recreations of past experiences, their activity is not exactly acting. The experience of indexicality requires the touching of subjective, historically conditioned ways of seeing and marks or gestures in the world that momentarily suggest the historical activity of other beings that once moved, or their own future in which they may encounter

⁵²¹ Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, 39.

⁵²² I owe insights into the commonalities between cine trance and reenactment experience to conversations with Bennetta Jules-Rosette, whose forthcoming writing addresses the concept of cine trance in the context of Rouch’s career, legacy in visual anthropology, and influence on African filmmaking.

threat. In Walker's terms: "Reenactments are powerful not just because they resurrect what was but because they constitute something that is not there. Like the psychic impression that an event is recurring, documentary reenactments reexplore and help work through events that are in the past but still refuse to release their grasp on the present."⁵²³

Participants in reenactment express through performance this quality of the past lingering in the present, usually in ways that camerapersons cannot detect through observational recording of everyday life and that participants cannot articulate verbally. In this case, the observational cameraperson's "humility" as non-provocateur tends to actively mislead viewers about certain aspects of post-traumatic phenomenology. Observed records of inarticulate, distracted, quiet, and disengaged subjects may suggest past traumatic experiences, but they neither engage the subject's ways of understanding these watershed moments and their relation to the present, nor aid in the subject's capacity to work through them. Observational filming and related low voltage participatory forms, in short, prioritize aural and visual presence over absence. Those who do not say or show are rendered opaque; they signify "history beyond representation," in MacDougall's terms, and stand in such films as a category of non-subject.⁵²⁴ MacDougall claimed that observational film triggered "sensory thought" through its "enactive" manner of representing the past, highlighting "neither image nor word, but gesture—experience recalled, one might say, in the muscles."⁵²⁵ In reenactment, however, it is *the body re-enacting* that functions as the enactive observational record of MacDougall's description. What the camera documents is an

⁵²³ Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, 110.

⁵²⁴ MacDougall and Castaing-Taylor, *Transcultural Cinema*, 236.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.

absence that is present, or an absence that becomes present-once-removed through the performance. Through reenactment, a “history [otherwise] beyond representation,” to adapt MacDougall’s phrase, confronts us as an ongoing presence, the point of contact between the personal and the collective.

Staging reenactments for the cameraperson to record observationally, in this context, can offer traumatized subjects an intervention akin to therapy, and the filmmaker ways to communicate something about the sensory residues of everyday life under conditions of oppression. This filmmaking praxis can have far reaching personal and political implications. Though Rouch came to call his accidental staging of a reenactment scene with Holocaust survivor Marceline “an intolerable mis-en-scene, like some spontaneous sacrilege” that he would “never do again,” the process of collaborating on *Chronicle* led Marceline to become a significant filmmaker in her own right.⁵²⁶ She married Dutch experimental filmmaker Joris Ivens in 1963, and collaborated on films with him until his death in 1989. In 2003, Marceline Loridan Ivens completed her first fiction feature, *The Birch Tree Meadow*, about a Holocaust survivor who returns to Auschwitz sixty years after her imprisonment to face her own memory. Reenactment helps social actors to recall past activities associated with the experience of trauma; observational recording enables the thick communication of affect and gesture to viewers, which would be lost in written descriptions of the reenactment or talking head interviews.

I conclude with three points from these observations:

First, as I argued in Chapter 1, the concept of indexicality as filmic inscription is too narrow, and too grounded in a technological understanding of the term. Even in

⁵²⁶ Rouch and Feld, *Ciné-Ethnography*, 153-4.

Peirce's writing of the late 1890s, which did emphasize technical instruments and the compulsion of their indications by forces of nature, there were examples of perceiving indexical signs in the subjective, performed behavior of others. Key to indexicality, then, is not medium but perceptive orientation, the experience of a break in the continuity of routine, like the thunderbolt.

Second, I have argued that thinking about documentary as resemblance is too cynical. The idea that indexicality no longer matters or is possible in the digital age because the image is binary code like a computer program relies too heavily on the technological understanding of the concept. It's too cynical because resemblance is also the centerpiece of simulation theory like that of Baudrillard, which disavows the very possibility of documentary in a media saturated society. Baudrillard gave up on the very idea that phenomenology might offer insight into material relations that structure the social, and so, as Sobchack has pointed out, he missed out on the possibility for merging semiotic phenomenology and Marxist dialectics in a way that might offer a theory of the materiality of perception.

Third, I offered instead that we consider embodiment as the location of indexicality. I find this a promising direction for three reasons. First, in the digital context, recording technologies are more widely distributed, cheaper, and smaller. They are more like parts of the extended body, or the lived body, than technologies reserved for professionals (which is not to say that I endorse equating the spread of such technologies with democratic empowerment). While the photographic medium as a phenomenon is no longer as wondrous as it was in the 19th century, its capacity to register subjective expression has become signally important in our contemporary context.

Second, embodiment is promising for media production that welcomes intersubjectivity and hybridity, an increasingly relevant orientation toward everyday life in light of processes of globalization. Research that follows Arjun Appadurai's theory of "scapes" and Marcus' methodological proscription of "multi-sited ethnography" is necessarily working in a realm of hybridity and geographically dispersed, intersubjective processes of meaning construction.⁵²⁷ Third, embodiment is promising for understanding the internalization of cinematic affects, which I suggested in the case studies on military training simulations at the Fort Irwin National Training Center and the historical reenactment of a lynching conducted in Walton County, Georgia. Reenactments carried out multiple times over months and years start to resemble electronic media, as Sobchack and Doane have theorized this category, embodied in live performance. While reenactments remain cinematic, in Sobchack's theorization of the term, for their connection to the body and the representation of movement, they are also producing new orientations to time. Reenactments are ritual performances of activities collectively understood to be "of the past" that nonetheless change subtly in the context of the digital or electronic present. In this way, they offer a forum, or an alibi, for the experience of personal pleasure or working through in the name of passing on heritage, preparing for the future, or engaging in activism. Reenactments trouble linear time in ways that offer productive possibilities for mediated agency in a simulation society.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁷ Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Public Culture* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 1-24; George E. Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24 (1995): 95.

⁵²⁸ For a consideration of the relation between affect, agency, and queer temporality, see in particular Sedgwick and Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*.

Conventionally understood, documentary is historical, and performance is outside of lived time. Performance *within* a documentary thus realigns the form of temporality and agency expressed by the film *in the real time* of a screening. Expressing performance, the film is no longer historical in the same way. The performer takes greater control over the affect communicated by their body in such moments. The blend of documentary and performance practices in media production allows a particular kind of marginalized, experimental cinema to make new kinds of time, the foundation for new organizations of thought, ideology, and collectivity. This trend will expand with digital proliferation. Given these theoretical conclusions, I want to offer a small group of films that might constitute a new categorization sensory ethnographic media practice and documentary film, what I am calling a *reparative cinema*: *Killer of Sheep* (1977) by Charles Burnett, *S21: The Khmer-Rouge Killing Machine* (2003) by Rithy Panh, *Close Up* (1990) by Abbas Kiarostami, *The Arbor* (2009) by Clio Bernard, *Tarnation* (2003) by Jonathan Couette, *Tongues Untied* (1989) by Marlon Riggs, *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) by Cheryl Dunye. I would also include in this category a lineage of cinematic production that originates in the world of performance art and theater, which has increasingly employed video cameras to document and in some cases actualize performances. There has been a recent trend in the dramatic arts toward “documentary theater” and verbatim theater, as in Anna Deveare-Smith’s play and film *Twilight Los Angeles*, in which she performs verbatim transcripts of interviews she conducted with a variety of Los Angelinos in the wake of the 1992 revolt. Such integrated performance-video works include: *Time Piece* (1980-1) by Tehching Hsieh, *Domestic Tension* (2007) by Wafaa Bilal, *Testament* (2009) by Natalie Bookchin, *Sick* (1997) by Kirby Dick and

Bob Flanagan, *Operation Atropos* (2006) by Coco Fusco, and *Dar He* (2012) by Rob Underhill and Mike Wiley.

All of these films integrate elements of performance and documentary practice in the interests of expressing an intention to repair, in a context that takes ostensible injustice, tragedy, or dystopia as a starting point. They tend to focus on sensory, affective expression rather than discursive argument. They are often, but not always, personal, autobiographical, and intercultural—between two cultures, in the conception of Laura Marks. Their time structure tends to be recursive, their narratives soft, movement through the accumulation of detail rather than plot. And the projects tend to originate at the margins of normative sociality. Dysfunction is more clear and urgent from this situated position, and time rather than money better leads to this sort of cinema. Suppressed histories *must* be accessed through imagination and performance rather than archives or observational recording. This form of cinema has a digital future in a world-horizon that otherwise offers little hope for avoiding social, economic, and environmental devastation.

A portion of the Conclusion is under review at *Visual Anthropology Review* and may appear in 2014.

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