12

Friday 7 December 2012 to Sunday 16 December 2012

ARCHIVING CANE

A durational performance and installation by Loo Zihan at The Substation Gallery, Singapore

12pm – 9pm Daily

Rated R(21): Nudity and Homosexual References

S/No:

1

Saturday 23 October 1993

Josef Ng, 22, performs *Don't Go Swimming, It's Not Safe* as part of the 2nd Sculpture Symposium Seminar at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts' Gallery.

His performance was in response to reports of the entrapment of gay men in public cruising areas. He invited audience members to hit him with a violin and if his invitation is refused, Ng hurled himself against a wall. He repeated his gesture until audience members intervened. To conclude, Ng utters: "I am guilty of the acts due to public disturbances, but I am not shameful."

2

Tuesday 23 November 1993

"12 men nabbed in anti-gay operation at Tanjong Rhu" report was published in *The Straits Times*.

These men were entrapped by the police in mid-September 1993 for alleged sexual offenses. Their names and professions were published in the article as an act of public shaming. 6 of the 12 men pleaded guilty and the rest claimed trial. Those who pleaded guilty were given a jail sentence of two to six months and three strokes of the cane each.

3

Sunday 26 December 1993 to **Saturday 1 January 1994**

***The Artists' General Assembly* (AGA) took place at the 5th Passage Contemporary Art Space in Parkway Parade Shopping Centre. It was organized by 5th Passage Artists' Ltd and The Artists Village.**

Ray Langenbach curated a selection of experimental videos for AGA. Three of the videos were excised by the Board of Film Censors. These included **Tongues Untied** by Marlon Riggs (USA) because of its homosexual content.

The videos were exhibited in their erased state as white noise on a television set.

Josef Ng performs **Brother Cane** on 1 January 1994 as part of the 12-hour AGA New Year's Eve show. His performance was part of a performance art component curated by Lee Wen. Some pieces in this component were performed within proximity and in response to the erased videos.

4

Monday 3 January 1994

Local English language tabloid The New Paper ran a story on the performance, on the front page, labeling *Brother Cane* a "Pub(l)ic Protest."

Chinese language tabloids **Lianhe Wanbao** and **Shin Min Daily News** also ran stories about his performance. The first wave of Mandarin articles labeled pubic hair as '阴毛' (a clinical usage) and in subsequent reports the term evolved into '耻毛' (which is loosely translated as 'hair of shame').

5

Tuesday 4 January 1994

The National Arts Council (NAC) released a statement to the media regarding the performance. They were listed as one of the supporters of AGA in a pamphlet that was distributed during the show.

"NAC finds the acts vulgar and completely distasteful, which deserve public condemnation. By no stretch of the imagination can such acts be construed and condoned as art. Such acts, in fact, debase art and lower the public's esteem for art and artists in general."

6

Thursday 6 January 1994

The police charged Josef Ng with committing "an obscene act, to wit, by cutting [his] pubic hair and exposing [his] buttocks to the annoyance of the public", based on section 294 (a) of the Penal Code.

Section 294 (a) reads "whoever, to the annoyance of others, does any obscene act in any public place shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 3 months, or with fine, or with both."

Josef Ng posted a 3,000 SGD bail, insured by fellow artists Lee Wen and Zai Kuning.

7

Monday 16 May 1994

Josef Ng's case was scheduled to be heard in Court. However, the defense was withdrawn following a request by the judge for a conference in his chambers.

Ng pleaded guilty to his charge in order to avoid possible double prosecution under both civil and military courts since he was fulfilling his National Service at that time.

On 17 May, he was sentenced to pay a fine of 1,000 SGD. The military chose not to pursue a case against him.

8

2004

Ray Langenbach completes his dissertation, *Performing the Singapore State: 1988-1995*, for his PhD program at the University of Western Sydney, Australia.

The dissertation was an expansion of Langenbach's essay in **Looking At Culture** (1996), entitled **Leigong Da Doufu (The Thunder God Strikes the Tofu): Looking Back at Brother Cane.** It is a detailed examination and historicization of the events surrounding **Brother Cane.**

9

Saturday 19 March 2011

Loo Zihan, 28, re-enacts Josef Ng's *Brother Cane* in Chicago, Illinois at the Defibrillator Gallery as part of performance art event *Touch Then Push or Pull and Maybe Nothing*.

Loo based his re-enactment on a detailed description of the performance provided by Ray Langenbach in his PhD dissertation, which was quoted from the official trial affidavit. Loo recited Langenbach's text before executing each section of the performance and faithfully adhered to the allocated time specified by Langenbach.

10

Tuesday 15 November 2011

Loo Zihan performed *Performing Josef – It's Not Safe* as part of *Rooted In The Ephemeral Speak* (R.I.T.E.S.), at Goodman Arts Centre, Singapore.

Loo re-enacted Josef Ng's **Don't Go Swimming, It's Not Safe** based on Langenbach's dissertation. Loo recited Langenbach's text and invited four members of the audience to perform scripted roles of interventionists in the original performance.

Among the arts community, opinions towards Loo's performance were sharply divided.

11

Sunday 19 February 2012

Loo Zihan performed Cane in Singapore at The Substation Theatre, as part of the *M1 Singapore Fringe Festival* organized by The Necessary Stage.

Loo performed six accounts of **Brother Cane.** The final account was a post-show dialogue moderated by Thai performance artist Michael Shaowanasai, who was invited by Josef Ng to perform as **Brother Cane.** Shaowanasai's surprise appearance was Ng's curatorial intervention for **Cane.**

The detailed score for this performance is included in this folio.

Archiving Cane **consolidates and present performance remains and documentation from the reenactments of Josef Ng's work by Loo Zihan.**

Loo will be stationed in the gallery throughout the duration of the exhibition performing the archive and activating the remains as part of a work titled *Performing Remains.*

This folio of texts will be distributed to all participants of *Archiving Cane.*

Participants will be invited to contribute by providing artifacts related to *Brother Cane* or *Cane* for photo or video documentation.

These contributions can be actual or fictional artifacts from the performances and the events surrounding them. Participants will be encouraged to provide an oral or written account.

The documentation will be consolidated and presented as an online resource after the conclusion of *Archiving Cane.*

Folio of texts edited by Louis Ho and Loo Zihan

Designed in collaboration with TRIPPLE

Exhibition managed by Subi Le

1. “It is desire to turn belatedness into becomingness, to recoup failed visions in art, literature, philosophy and everyday life into possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations, to transform the no-place of the archive into the no-place of a utopia”
   Hal Foster, *An Archival Impulse* (2004)

2. “The archive cannot be described in its totality; and in its presence it is unavoidable. It emerges in fragments, regions, and levels, more fully, no doubt, and with greater sharpness, the greater the time that separates us from it ...”
   Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969)

3. “I am suggesting that the current will to archive in dance, as performed by re-enactments, derives neither exclusively from “a failure in cultural memory” not from “a nostalgic lens.” I am proposing “will to archive” as referring to a capacity to identify in a past work still non-exhausted creative fields of “impalpable possibilities”.
   Andre Lepecki, *Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances* (2010)

4 “What does it mean to mistake a memory, to remember by mistake, or even to remember a mistake?”
   Tavia Nyong’o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance and the Ruses of Memory* (2009)

5. “If the past is never over, or never completed, “remains” might be understood not solely as object or document material, but also as the immaterial labor of bodies engaged in and with that incomplete past: bodies striking poses, making gestures, voicing calls, reading words, singing songs, or standing witness.”
   Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains* (2011)

6. “Brother to Brother, Brother to Brother,
Brother to Brother…
Silence is my shield - it crushes
Silence is my cloak - it smothers
Silence is my sword - it cuts both ways
Silence is the deadliest weapon.”
Opening sequence from Marlon Riggs’ *Tongues Untied* (1989)

7. “Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.
And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.”
(Genesis 4:14, 4:15)

8. “Shame effaces itself; shame points and projects; shame turns itself skin side out; shame and pride, shame and dignity, shame and self-display, shame and exhibitionism are different interlinings of the same glove. Shame, it might finally be said, transformational shame, *is performance*...
Shame is the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, between absorption and theatricality, between performativity and – performativity.”
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003)

9 “It is important to know that we call him a counterfeit artist not only because he is a fraud, a con man, a knave, a cheat and a phony. When we held him up against the light, like counterfeit currency, we saw nothing, nothing but the inky shadows of our own fingertips.”
Alfian Sa’at, *We Are Not Yet Free (For Josef Ng, A Poem in 12 strokes), Part VIII (12 Crimes of the Counterfeit Artist), A History of Amnesia* (2001)

10. “What was unfortunate was that there was no platform for critical discussion about implemented policies or artistic development. There was no real public engagement for people to be involved in, or that allowed the general public to gain understanding of the nature of art and its different forms. Why it was important to have art in society and why the country needs to allow different art expressions? How do we look at these issues and understand them? How do we give respect for the artist? These have, up till today, not been seriously discussed.”
Amanda Heng, when asked about the withdrawal of funding support in 1994 for performance art, in *Speak to Me, Walk with Me* (2011)

11. “This secular-conservative society [Singapore] needs to allow history to take place and take its place, instead of thwarting, erasing and forgetting the work to be done and the work already done. In always starting anew, it is therefore operating in perpetual nascence, and never renascence.”
Susie Lingham, *A Quota on Expression: Visions, Vexations and Vanishings, Negotiating Home, History and Nation* (2011)

12. “The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”
Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History, Thesis IX* (1940)

Archiving Cane started out as a means of resolving conversations which should have happened, but never did, and conversations that happened, but were not communicated. Like a lens, the present exhibition refracts. It fractures, into past and future temporalities, the events since *Brother Cane.*

It was via the written and the spoken word that I encountered and reconstructed *Brother Cane*, and it seems appropriate to conclude my research and investigation with this folio of texts in your hands, and the durational performance in the space titled *Performing Remains.*

Admittedly, throughout this year, my faith in the veracity of words was tested. I failed to recognize that the beauty of words is that they are purely symbolic representations of truth. They point the way but should never be assumed to replace the absent centre.

Most notably, this textual world was shaken when I found a hairline crack in the mirror. For the longest time, I had taken the affidavit Ray Langenbach had provided for the trial, and reproduced in his Ph.D. dissertation, as the absolute truth. After Josef Ng stubs out the cigarette on his forearm, he utters '*Sometimes*, a silent protest is not enough'. I reproduced that line in my reenactment of *Brother Cane* in Chicago, teary-eyed and indignant, believing that I was a shaman channeling the ghost of *Brother Cane.*

When I returned to Singapore, I visited Ray in Kuala Lumpur. He showed me a seldom seen video documentation of the original performance. I was in his apartment, re-encountering the performance for the very first time, leaning in towards the computer screen, getting as close as I could get to the centre. That was when I heard it – after Josef stubs out the cigarette he utters '*Maybe* a silent protest is not enough.' I paused the video, scrubbed it back a few seconds in disbelief, and played it – I heard it again. *Maybe*.

A slight difference, s*ometimes* and m*aybe,* but what a change it made. From a performative utterance of certainty and indignation, guiding the way to multiple temporalities, to one of self-doubt and possibilities. This encounter triggered the way I structured my February performance of *Cane*, as a construction of accounts, all of which point to, but should never be taken for, the truth. It became less about re-creating *Brother Cane,* but re-presenting facets of it.

When I highlighted this discrepancy to Ray, he directed me to the work of Harold Bloom, and his writings on the idea of *Misprision*, on how great poets misread the works of their predecessors, and, in the act of misreading, these works are renewed and regenerated.

Along the way, I re-discovered the texts of scholars like Rebecca Schneider (who has generously allowed us to reproduce her essay *Performance Remains* as part of this folio), and others who have debated over how to reconcile the flesh of the performance with the bone of the archive.

Over the course of my research, I have witnessed how text has been wielded as a weapon of oppression and control, more often than it has been used as a key to liberate and expand minds. Perhaps this has to be attributed to the power granted to ideological state apparatuses like the law and the media in Singapore.

Such texts of legality includes Section 294 (a) of the Penal Code under which Josef Ng was charged.[1] Questions asked then, which are still relevant today, include: What is the definition of "annoyance"? Who is this "public"? What is considered "obscene"?

Others embroiled in the battle with legal texts includes Iris Tan from *5th Passage*. She was penalized with the *Public*

Entertainments Act for allowing her exhibition license for the *Artists' General Assembly* to expire, when it has been clarified to be an oversight on the part of the licensing officer.[2] This Act, and the need for state validation in the form of a license, still haunts every exhibition, presentation and performance.

Then there is the *Films Act*, an archaic model which restricts the exhibition and distribution of any work of moving image, and - last but certainly not least - Section 377(a) of the Penal Code, which criminalizes the consummation of male homosexual love as an act of "gross indecency."

The power of the media shapes public opinion to influence how works of art are defined. *Brother Cane* is a prime example, the performance stemmed from a protest against media reports[3] and was persecuted by the media's use of words to shame and condemn, any "public annoyance" towards the piece was triggered by the media. Till today, despite the advent of alternative voices in new media, the state media remains in control of how we access and process information.

Archiving Cane is a proposal to reparate my relationship to texts and criticism. From a tool of intimidation and control, how can one transform criticism into a productive force? This is especially pertinent in the climate of the new media that permeates our lives, where words are being scattered so quickly and callously. Can one respect discourse, discussion and the verbal transmission of information? Can one accord texts and thoughts equal value alongside the 'visual' in art?

"Sometimes / Maybe a silent protest is not enough." In 1994, this was a call to arms for us to pick up the words we have abandoned or misplaced, to speak, to write and to be heard. In 2012, it is my hope that we ensure conversations continue to occur in and across time.

I see myself standing in the middle of the space, I am staring at you – you behind the kino-eye, you who are hidden across the veil of time. I will be here, frozen at twenty-eight, bald, exhausted and relieved. Every time I encounter myself, I will be different, and in my difference I will see myself change.

I hold a pair of scissors in my right hand, repurposed as an infinite loop that binds my thumb and my index finger; the blades remain sharply sealed. In my left hand, from the fingertips my modesty dangles, a black cotton fabric with a white elastic band.

I turn slowly to each and everyone of my selves, we are both under the glare of light. I see my refusal, my avoidance, my mis-recognition. I see my gaze lowered, face flushed, bathed in projected, protracted shame. I see myself disguised by proxies of mechanical reproduction - my mediated projections, my camera phone, my photocopied texts.

You and I may not see eye to eye, but we must acknowledge each other.

NOTES

1. See point 6 on the inside cover of this folio. Section 294 (a) reads "whoever, to the annoyance of others, does any obscene act in any public place shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 3 months, or with fine, or with both."
2. Singapore Academy of Law, "Public Prosecutor v Tan Khee Wan Iris" Singapore Law Reports (Reissue), pg. 168, [1994] 3 SLR(R)
3. See point 2 on the inside cover of this folio. 12 Men nabbed in Anti-gay operation at Tanjong Rhu - 23/11/1993, The Straits Times

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CONTEXTS

(1)

I first heard about *Brother Cane* in 1997. I was a 16 year-old wannabe poet-playwright back then, and I'd somehow ended up in correspondence with a 19 year-old Alfian Sa'at, who was in between Officer Cadet School and medical school. We had tea at Fat Frog Café at The Substation Garden on a random Sunday and talked politics and race and sexuality, though we didn't actually dare to tell each other we were gay. Fuck, we were young.

Alf later e-mailed me the manuscript of what would eventually become *One Fierce Hour.* This included the following line in the fabulous rant-poem, *Singapore You Are Not My Country*:

> Tell that to Josef Ng, who shaves my infant head amidst a shower of one-cent coins, and both of us are pure again.[1]

He explained that this was a dream-fusion of the *Brother Cane* incident and a Muslim ritual of head-shaving he'd experienced as a child – an authentic example of the hair-shaving as purification practice that Ng had alluded to in his performance. He hadn't been at the actual show: he'd been a bystander to the maelstrom of censorship and artistic oppression that broke out in 1994 over his performance.

As for me, I was learning about the incident from him third-hand, maybe fourth-hand, some three years late – and remember, three years is a long time when you're an adolescent.

So, to my teenage ears, the affair wasn't news. It was legend.

(2)

A huge part of being a queer writer or artist in Singapore is the issue of taboo. Say what you like about being a gay Asian destination: theater companies still get funding cuts for "promoting alternative lifestyles" [2]; television stations are still fined for acknowledging that we kiss, that we marry, that we have kids.[3]

There are really only three possible responses to this repression. The first is to hide, playing games of concealing and revealing in subtle codes, as in Cyril Wong's early poetry collections, where the "him"s and the "he"s in love poems are changed to non-gender-specific pronouns.[4] The second option is to negotiate with audiences and authorities in good faith, presenting the LGBT community in the best possible light. We get in a lot of local gay theater and literature, including Singapore's first gay play, *As If He Hears* in 1989, and our first gay novel, *Peculiar Chris*, in 1992.[5]

The last option, of course, is to rebel – "Not gay as in happy but queer as in fuck you," as the slogan says. Few LGBT artists in Singapore dare to venture into this territory, but Josef did, with his gasp-worthy ministrations of scissors, cigarette, tofu and cane.[6] This was "protest art", he proclaimed to The New Paper when their reporter came to view the show, and the same statement was broadcast on page one, though in a smaller font than the eye-catching "PUB(L)IC PROTEST" headline.[7]

If you'll allow me to digress, I'd like to draw attention to the role of the journalists who broke this story: reporter Ng Li-San and photographer Kenneth Ko. Remember, *Brother Cane,* was performed at midnight on New Year's Eve in a dinky art space in Parkway Parade, when all the cool people were at parties and all the uncool people were home in bed. It would've been a mere footnote of a footnote in art history, were it not sensationalized by the media. This exhibition would not have been possible, if not for them.

Thus I came of age as an artist in the wake of *Brother Cane*. As a young gay person, I was in awe of Josef Ng's bad-assery – perhaps I even believed his actions were exemplary, that I should try to become Josef, as it were. This may be why I've ended up adopting a similarly confrontational, performative stance in my poetry; why most of my plays are political to some degree; why I've been involved in documenting cases of censorship; why I've been censored and censured myself.[8]

I'm nowhere as committed to activism as many others in the arts community. But at least I'm part of it. I stand by the words that Alfian used as the title of another poem dedicated to Ng: "We Are Not Yet Free."[9]

(3)

Brother Cane might be a work of performance art, but it means a lot to us theater-makers. It's a little insane, really: we've more or less co-opted it as part of Singapore theater history. This year, at the Esplanade's 10th anniversary celebrations, there was even a split-second, fully clothed reenactment of *Brother Cane* included in a revue of the last thirty years of Singapore drama.[10] The actress, by the way, was none other than Janice Koh, our current Arts Nominated Member of Parliament.

Truth is, our kinship with Josef Ng was thrust on us. I learned this during my time with The Necessary Stage, as part of the Playwright's Cove mentorship scheme of 2000 to 2001. I was an NS[11] boy by then, so I'd book out of camp to workshop scripts under playwright Haresh Sharma and director Alvin Tan at the spanking new Marine Parade Community Club. Even worked there for a while after ORD[12], filing paperwork and talking, talking.

The story they told me was this. In the early '90s, they'd attended a forum theater workshop in New York with famed Brazilian director Augusto Boal. They'd then returned to create forum theater pieces of their own like *Mixed Blessings* (about interracial love) and *MCP* (about spousal abuse). During the

plays, audience members were invited to intervene by taking over the parts of characters, allowing them to empathize with different perspectives and consider possible routes of agency.[13]

Trouble was, this improvisation resulted in texts that couldn't be vetted in advance by censors. When the *Brother Cane* story broke, the National Arts Council (NAC) decided to kill two birds with one stone, conflating performance art and forum theater and banning them in one fell swoop:

> *"[The Government] is concerned that new art forms such as "performance art" and "forum theatre" which have no script and encourage spontaneous audience participation pose dangers to public order, security and decency, and much greater difficulty to the licensing authority.*
>
> *"The performances may be exploited to agitate the audience on volatile social issues, or to propagate the beliefs and messages of deviant social or religious groups, or as a means of subversion," the [Ministries'] statement said.*
> ...
> *The NAC will bar 5th Passage from getting any grant or assistance. It will also not support "performance art" or "forum theatre" staged by other groups, but their other projects will be considered."*[14]

Theater was at the time (and arguably still is) a more politically provocative art form than performance art. In the 1970s and '80s, Kuo Pao Kun and the members of The Third Stage had been accused of being Marxists and detained under the Internal Security Act. By the late '80s and early '90s, theater artists were tussling regularly with the Public Entertainment Licensing Unit and the Ministry of Information, Technology and the Arts over the sexual and political content of our plays: *Lest the Demons Get to Me, As If He Hears, The Lady of Soul and Her Ultimate S-Machine.*

So it was a bit of a surprise that Haresh and Alvin got off so lightly. They'd been expected the worst, especially after *The Straits Times* journalist Felix Soh pointed out the Communist roots of forum theater.[15] As it was, NAC Chairman Tommy Koh intervened and spoke up about their "good track record", assuring them of their continued support.[16]

Ultimately, it was Josef – poor, personally banned, exiled Josef – who became the iconic figure of artistic oppression in Singapore, even among the theater community.

Haresh and Alvin fully supported this. They were the ones who snuck his video art back into the Singapore Art Museum in defiance of the ban, during their 1999 festival *Brainstorm*. And of course, it was they who curated Loo Zihan's *Cane* as part of the *M1 Singapore Fringe Festival* of 2012. They helped to keep him alive in our minds, long after he'd disappeared.

(4)

Of all the plays I've written, the best known is probably *251*. It was presented at the Esplanade Theatre Studio in 2007, and it was a biographical drama about the infamous Singaporean porn star Annabel Chong.

Annabel – née Grace Quek – was at one point the most famous porn actress in the entire world, thanks to her 1995 movie *The World's Biggest Gangbang*, which was filmed, of course, in Los Angeles, not Singapore.[17] It recorded her engaging in 251 sex acts with 70 different men over a ten-hour period. (Much of the publicity said it was 251 men, but she later revealed that the men had been recycled.) Her fame only grew with the release of the documentary *Sex: The Annabel Chong Story*, which exposed the complexity of her character: a young Singaporean intellectual who'd rebelled against her elite education to create something utterly outrageous.[18][19]

By several accounts, my script wasn't very good.[20] Still, one of its features deserves discussion: the way I drew direct parallels between Chong and Josef Ng. Obviously, both were young Singaporeans engaged in controversial, sexually provocative performances in the mid '90s. They were even the same age, 22, when they did the shows that would define their careers.

What's less known is that Chong, too, was an artist. She'd dropped out of law school to study art at the University of Southern California, and had only started doing porn when her furious parents wouldn't pay her school fees. In a *BigO* interview, she even revealed she "was doing a lot of performance art" by the late '90s.[21]

It's not a stretch to see her porn work as performance art in itself. In her documentary, she describes how she sometimes stitched together her stripper costumes herself, and in the case of *The World's Biggest Gangbang,* she'd arranged for a faux-Roman backdrop and cameramen in togas, so as to reference the orgies of the nymphomaniac Roman empress Messalina – the original female stud. Plus, she was always ready to discuss the feminist, postmodern, post-Freudian theory behind her practice.

Like Ng, Chong was crucified by *The New Paper*. The tabloid reported the release of her documentary with a cover story, headlined "Gifted S'pore student turns porn star"[22], exposing her and her family to the wrath of public opinion in Singapore. Both were practitioners of unconventional art forms, fundamentally misunderstood by a scandal-hungry press.

I'd initially envisioned *251* as a triumph of the arts over censorship. It was to be staged at the Esplanade, a government-backed institution that isn't legally required to submit theater scripts to the Media Development Authority. It closed with a topless female reenactment of *Brother Cane,* performed by lead actress Cynthia Lee Macquarrie, but this wouldn't be an issue; the show was rated R(18), after all.

Of course, as it turned out, Singaporean censorship was alive and well. The Esplanade insisted on changes at the request of Media Development Authority, a process that they insisted was mere editing, since they saw themselves as co-producers of the play.[23] These amendments weren't serious, and they didn't affect the integrity of the play, which performed to fifteen sold-out houses. But it was testament to the fact that censorship, in our country, was still alive and kicking.

(5)

I've been hiding something. Throughout this essay, I've positioned myself as a man of ideas, a crusader for freedom of thought. The truth is, I earn a lot of my keep through part-time journalism.

And though I've been blasting folks at *The New Paper* and *The Straits Times*, I'm rather happy with my fellow arts reporters at *Life!* and *TODAY*: youngish people like Adeline Chia, Corrie Tan and Mayo Martin who see themselves as part of the arts community; part of the movement towards a more open culture. When I've been sidelined by the authorities, they've been my allies rather than my attackers. I trust them as people, even though I'm still wary of their institutions.

Last year, while I was covering the Singapore Biennale 2011, I uncovered an act of censorship.[24] I was writing for *Fridae*, a pan-Asian LGBT website, and I'd scored an interview with a gay 28 year-old Japanese-British artist named Simon Fujiwara. (The photo I took of him is awful, but it's his own damn fault: he never e-mailed me a better one, like I'd asked.)

Like Ng and Chong, Fujiwara was a young, unconventional creator of performances which explored sexuality. The difference was that he wasn't confrontational; he delivered sedate performance lectures in conjunction with his splendid installation, *Welcome to the Hotel Munber*, evoking the tavern his parents used to run in Spain under Franco's regime.

Yes, it was unsettling that these lectures explored the fantasy of his father being a gay man, engaging in the kinkiest possible sex with jackbooted soldiers and furniture items. Yet his performances were drily delivered to small audiences at the Singapore Art Museum, with the full approval of international critics here. No danger of this man being labeled a "counterfeit artist".

The censorship took place after Fujiwara flew home. A fundamental dimension of his installation was the hidden gay elements within: bits of erotic fiction, full-frontal gay porn magazines. Out of concern for the law, museum officials removed these. They did not request his approval, nor did they agree to his demands that the work be restored to its original form.

I was ready to upload our interview, when he told me what had happened. I added a lengthy introduction, lambasting the officials for their conduct. I saw no reason to make a pretense at impartiality – I had my own little moral crusade going on. And I'll have to be honest: I was proud of the fact that I got to break the story, even before *The Straits Times* did their more even-handed, better-researched story.[25]

These articles didn't result in a burst of public outrage at Fujiwara. In fact, he later commented to me that coverage had been reassuringly unsensational, a mark of maturity in the local press.

And yet I feel guilty at times. Should I have been so eager to upload that article? Could I not have given Fujiwara and his curators more time to negotiate with the officials? I've become friends with some of them, and I realize that personal homophobia had no part to play in the decision.

Given the right circumstances, the situation just might have resolved itself to everyone's benefit, leaving me with no story to tell, with no rage to expend.

In his poem *We Are Not Yet Free*, Alfian lays blame on *The New Paper* reporter and the photographer who documented *Brother Cane*:

> "*I was one of those*
> *Deceived into believing*
> *That the obscenity was in what*
>
> *You did, and not*
> *In the hands of that one in the audience*
> *Who decided to frame you in a photo"*.[26]

I've tried to become Josef Ng. But with all my desire for confrontation, sometimes I worry I've become Ng Li-San and Kenneth Ko instead. Seeking out scandal for the sake of scandal. Regardless of the consequences.

(6)

I met Josef Ng, briefly, in 1999, during that *Brainstorm* festival by The Necessary Stage. I remember very little of our encounter. My mind pictures me passing him in a crowd on Bras Basah Road, where the Kopitiam food court stands today. He was introduced to me, perhaps by Heman Chong. I didn't recognize him then, and I wouldn't recognize him now.

And this is the frustrating thing about Ng: he's vanished. Come to think of it, Annabel Chong did the same. They both fled Singapore: he went to Bangkok, she to LA. Eventually, both even left the practice of art, to become a curator and a yuppie web developer/consultant, respectively. They left behind tiny bodies of work that we're free to interpret however we wish, without the difficult business of them being around to contradict us.

It's been useful for most of us in Singapore to think of them as martyrs to repression. But other victims – Kuo Pao Kun, Haresh and Alvin, for instance – didn't leave. They stayed and worked it out, same as what most of us do today.

How should we live in Singapore, eighteen years after *Brother Cane*, when everything and nothing has changed?

We get to answer this question, because we've survived. That, too, is pretty heroic.

NOTES

1. Alfian Sa'at, "Singapore You Are Not My Country", *One Fierce Hour* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1998), p. 39.
2. Adeline Chia, "NAC cuts funds to company", *The Straits Times*, May 6, 2010, p. C4.
3. Loretta Chen, 'The Kids Are Not All Right: The Curious Case of Sapphic Censorship in City-State Singapore", *Queer Singapore: Illiberal Citizenship and Mediated Cultures*, eds. Audrey Yue and Jun Zubillaga-Pow (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), pp. 175 – 86.
4. See Cyril Wong, *Squatting Quietly* (Singapore: Firstfruits Publications, 2000).
5. For further information, see Ng Yi-Sheng's "Introduction", *GASPP: a Gay Anthology of Singapore Poetry and Prose* (Singapore: The Literary Centre, 2010).
6. I've heard conflicting accounts about whether Josef Ng was straight, gay or bisexual at the time of *Brother Cane*. He identifies as straight today. Regardless, his work has been absorbed into Singapore gay history. See William Peterson, "The Queer Stage in Singapore", *People Like Us: Sexual Minorities in Singapore*, ed. Joseph Lo and Huang Guoqin (Select Publishing, 2003), pp. 78 – 96. 1st edition.
7. "Pub(l)ic Protest", *The New Paper*, 3 January 1994, p1.
8. My most public brush with authority is probably my expulsion from the Creative Arts Program mentorship scheme. See Alex Au, "Education ministry looks like it has something to hide", *Yawning Bread*, October 3, 2009. <http://www.yawningbread.org/arch_2009/yax-1070.htm>.
9. Alfian Sa'at, "We Are Not Yet Free (For Josef Ng, A Poem in 12 strokes)", *A History of Amnesia* (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2001), pp. 71-86.
10. *Rant and Rave*. Directed and written by Chong Tze Chien. Esplanade Theatre Studio, October 14, 2012.
11. National Service, colloquially referred to as NS, is compulsory military service undertaken by all able-bodied Singaporean males.
12. The Operationally Ready Date (ORD) refers to the date on which a national serviceman completes his term of service.
13. For more information on these 1993 performances, see Sanjay Krishnan, "What Art Makes Possible: Remembering Forum Theatre", *Ask Not: The Necessary Stage in Singapore Theatre*, eds. Tan Chong Kee and Tisa Ng (Singapore: Times Editions, 2004), pp. 97 – 106.
14. "Govt acts against 5th Passage over performance art", *The Straits Times*, January 22, 1994, p. 3. No author given.

15. Felix Soh, "Two pioneers of forum heater trained at Marxist workshops", *The Straits Times*, February 5, 1994, p. 23.

16. Tommy Koh, "Necessary Stage still has NAC's support", *The Straits Times*, February 7, 1994, p. 29.

17. The World's Biggest Gangbang. Dir. John T. Bone. 1995.

18. Sex: The Annabel Chong Story. Dir. Gough Lewis. 1999.

19. For more on Annabel Chong, refer to Gerrie Lim, S*ingapore Rebel: Searching for Annabel Chong*, (Singapore: Monsoon Books, 2011).

20. A representative review is Vivienne Tseng's "The Empress' Nude Clothes*", The Flying Inkpot Theatre Reviews*. <http://www.inkpot.com/theatre/07reviews/0408,251,vt.html>.

21. Gerrie Lim, "Grace Under Pressure", *BigO*, April 1999. Archived at <http://bigozine2.com/feature/?p=166>.

22. "Gifted S'pore student turns porn star", *The New Paper*, 27 January 1997. P1.

23. Ng Yi-Sheng, "Singapore Censorship Report", *FOCAS: Forum on Contemporary Art & Society*, ed. Lucy Davis (Singapore: focas, 2007), p. 346. Also see Hong Xinyi, "Some tweaks made to phrasing", *The Straits Times*, April 7, 2007, p. L15.

24. Ng Yi-Sheng, "Simon Fujiwara: Censored at the Singapore Biennale 2011", *Fridae*, March 25, 2011. <http://www.fridae.asia/newsfeatures/2011/03/25/10744.simon-fujiwara-censored-at-the-singapore-biennale-2011>.

25. Corrie Tan, "Museum censors explicit art work", *The Straits Times*, March 28, 2011, p. C7.

26. Alfian Sa'at, "*We Are Not Yet Free (For Josef Ng, A Poem in 12 strokes)*".

5. Breaking the Silence

A love letter to the arts community

Editors' Note to ***Breaking the Silence***

The prelude: a front-page article in the *Life!* section of *The Straits Times*, in October, 2011. Over an image of Josef Ng, caught in the split second before he yanked his underwear down to execute the now infamous pruning of his pubic region, the headline hollered, "REMEMBER THIS?"

"Artist and film-maker Loo Zihan, 28, will re-enact *Brother Cane*, the controversial 1993 performance by Josef Ng," it announced.

In the weeks leading up to the occasion on February 19, public clamor intensified – to the extent that Loo felt the need to address the hullabaloo. On Valentine's Day, he posted a missive on Facebook, titled *Breaking the Silence - A love letter to the arts community*. He discussed, in it, the more controversial aspects of his performance, including the idea of reenactments and bureaucratic regulation of the arts in Singapore, as well as his decision to stage *Cane* as a ticketed event, a move that had been labeled an act of "selling out."

Almost immediately, the manifesto – for manifesto it was – appeared on *For Art's Sake!*, a blog run by the arts journalist for the *Today* paper. Comments multiplied, fast and furious. There was doubt: "You can recreate the content, but what implications are there from restaging it in such a different time/context."

There was indignation: "A re-enactment is one thing, a re-enactment for the purposes of commodification and to piggyback on a prior controversy I find unsettling." There was cynicism: "Well one thing for sure Mr Zihan Loo, good or bad

you have certainly gained a lot of publicity for yourself, well done." There was also lots of reciprocal love, with more than a few members of the local arts community voicing their support for Loo: "If any attempt to talk to another artwork/art moment is an appropriation—a parasitical [one], capitalizing on the original, hallowed event, then we can forget art history. Then we may as well stop trying to make meaning from artworks."

The Straits Times waded into the fray as well. An article appeared, asking: "Is it art-making? Or is it a publicity stunt?" In response, one letter-writer quite emphatically replied: "There is absolutely no meaning in performing such an act. It is so silly, weird and crude. Performance should be something one can enjoy and not cringe with embarrassment when watched." Local performance veteran Lee Wen made a rejoinder of his own: "I was going to answer … with just 4 words: "Because it is art." Although I would prefer to answer with 5 words: "Because it is good art."

Lee went on to deliver his final verdict: "That is why we want to see *Brother Cane* performed again and again for we have learnt to see that his was an act worthy of art."

The day after that decisive retort, *Cane* took place at The Substation Theatre.

Breaking the Silence

A love letter to the arts community

Posted as a note on Facebook by Loo Zihan

Tuesday, 14 February 2012 at 11:56 a.m.

Over the past 4 months, since the re-enactment of Josef Ng's *Don't Go Swimming, It's Not Safe*[1] as part of *R.I.T.E.S* on 15 November 2011, friends have been asking how I have been taking the comments that are being posted on Facebook regarding the performance and my work.

It took a lot of self-restraint and discipline to remain silent. There are times when it is tempting to correct empirical errors. I kept to the silence as I held on to the fundamental belief that a work is co-created by two parties, the audience and the artistic team. The artistic team (I am labeling this as a team as it includes the curator, administrator etc.) sets out the frame for his work, puts the content within and opens it up for interpretation. The audience reads the work and forms a discourse around the work.

I can control the frame and content of the work, but I cannot dictate how an audience chooses to read a piece of work. I absorb the comments and I learn how my work is misinterpreted and I contemplate how I should amend the framing of my next work and sharpen the clarity of my intent.

It is with this spirit that I am breaking this silence now, not as a defense of my past work, but to clarify the intent for my upcoming performance.

On Re-enactments

Re-enactment is a label and a misnomer - to enact is to make. The question is how to re-make something that is supposedly transient or ephemeral. There is nothing new about re-

enactments, it has been happening in various other instances beyond the artistic realm. (i.e. historical re-enactments, religious re-enactments)

Wen has already pointed out in his writings the impossibility of re-enactments.[2]

The very act of re-enacting is an interpretation. It can never be the same performance, never be the same body, and is never intended to be, it is the act of striving towards the impossible, which is the desire to recreate, that should be acknowledged with a critical eye.

In science experiments we have a 'control', a constant, and it is this constant that we measure all the other results by. *Brother Cane* is the control we measure our State, measure our audience and measure our artists against.

To reiterate, I cannot control how the audience receives the work, but I will urge the audience to acknowledge that the work lies in the differences between these two performances and not in how faithfully I represent the original performance.

On the Third Co-creator

If we are to function as artists within Singapore, we have to acknowledge the presence of a third co-creator in addition to the two in the equation above. Besides the artistic team and the audience, this third co-creator is the State and the apparatuses that shape their ideology. This is not unique to our country alone but is part and parcel of various other countries in the region.

When we made the choice to practice in Singapore, we have chosen to acknowledge this presence. We can choose to engage or ignore their role in this three-way relationship. The ideal situation they would like is for us to ignore their presence, for their role to be invisible. It is the opponent who remains in the shadows in a three-cornered fight who will win the match.

When artists choose to engage with the State, the State's hand in the creation process becomes visible. Many of the most visible methods of engagement within the arts community have been in brute opposition.

Recently, we have witnessed a shift within the arts community in line with the political shift in the nation. This shift has been brought about by the apparatuses of transparency and accountability that are made available to artists and the audience – one of these key devices being the infrastructure that started this discourse itself, new media.

We see the first semblance of this in Tan Tarn How's *Fear of Writing*[3], and I hope to continue this trajectory in *Cane*. We are rendering the State's hand visible in our creation process, and acknowledging them as a co-creator.

We are not meeting them in opposition, but forming a dialogue with them in the creation of our work. We are inviting them to meet us on our terms, in our territory (on stage, in performance) and acknowledging the compromises we have to make as part of our work.

Cane will be entirely scripted, in line with the Media Development Authority's requirement that all scripts for performances will have to be submitted for vetting and licensing. We submitted our script on 15 December 2011 and we received our license to perform on 10 February 2012. This is acknowledged as part of the performance. Audience members will receive a copy of the script when they enter the performance space and I will be adhering to the script faithfully.

On Selling Out

One of the most unexpected threads that came out of the conversation surrounding *Cane* was this notion of 'selling out'. Besides the obvious pun on the state of the ticket sales, it was directed mostly at the argument that performance art should be free and that it should not be ticketed like theatre.

My question is 'why not?' How is a form like performance going to remain sustainable and viable in the long run if the only economic model we adopt is state funding? I would like to highlight the model of the three co-creators, the State, the Artist and the audience. If the audience does not start to support the form economically, it will always remain the role of the State and the Artist to foot the bill for staging the work. How many works can the Artist stage before he has to file for bankruptcy? How can an artist create 'autonomous' and critical work while subscribing to the funding structures of the State?

There is a second part of the argument that is more disturbing to an arts practitioner - the line on the ground drawn between and within art forms, namely between theatre and performance art. Given the limited size of the talent pool in this country, and the state of the arts internationally, isn't it time to eradicate these lines drawn on the ground, lines originally drawn by the State, and emphasized further in 1993 by the distinction of forum theatre from performance art, with the intention to divide and conquer?

The Quest for the Impossible

A nation will get the art that it deserves. You as an audience member shape *Cane* with your reading as much as I shape it with the frame I have placed around it. The question I am seeking to address is whether 're-enactment' is a viable mode of creation for an art form that prides itself conventionally in spontaneity and the 'live' presence. *Cane* is part of that quest for the impossible answer.

For those who managed to secure tickets, I would invite you to be part of this work on 19 February 2012 (Sunday), 8 p.m. at The Substation Theatre. This will be the most direct method of accessing the work.

Due to limitations in resources we have to restrict the number of tickets sold, The Substation Theatre can only take so many people safely. We kept it a one-night only event as an artistic and logistical choice.

I will be releasing documentation from the performance and making it available for public access, this should be acknowledged as another method of experiencing the work, no less important than being there in person. I will value your opinion and input after the performance to help shape the direction of my practice in the future.

Thank you to all the people who have helped me in one way or another to realize *Cane*, and those who have supported and defended the work these past months, it is the last leg of this marathon and I have to focus my energy in completing it.

Have a great Valentine's Day.

Sincerely,
Zihan

NOTES

1. See point 10 on the inside cover of this folio for details.
2. Performance Artist Lee Wen posted an entry on his blog titled '*The Impossibility of Re-enactments leads to our inevitable desire to attempt it…*' in response to Loo Zihan's performance at R.I.T.E.S dated 15 November 2011. <http://republicofdaydreams.wordpress.com/2011/11/15/the-impossibility-of-re-enactments-leads-to-our-inevitable-desire-attempt/>
3. Theatreworks, a local theatre company, stages *Fear of Writing*, written by Tan Tarn How and directed by Ong Ken Sen from 1 till 10 September 2011. The play ends with a staged 'raid' of the performance by the Media Development Authority, challenging verisimilitude and the passivity of spectatorship.

TEXTS

Time 8pm
Date 19 February 2012 (Sunday)
Venue The Substation Theatre
45 Armenian Street, Singapore 179936

Submission of score to the Media Development Authority for approval on 15 December 2011. License for performance granted on 10 February 2012 (R18: Nudity)

Editors' Note: This is the performance score that Loo Zihan distributed to all audience members before his performance on 19 February 2012.

Description of space: The seating in The Substation Theatre is completely retracted, leaving an empty space. 24 white chairs are placed along the length of the space, 12 on each side. There is a white strip of linoleum flooring which stretches across the length and center of the floor. Two projection screens are in the space, one on each end. There is a microphone stand in the center of the space.

Audience enters space, house lights at fifty percent.

Introduction

General lighting fades up with a spotlight on the microphone stand. Loo Zihan will be providing the following introduction at the microphone stand. His head is completely shaven and he is dressed in formal white attire with a bow tie and gloves:

> Good evening and welcome to this evening's performance of *Cane*. *Cane* is a reconstruction of Josef Ng's *Brother Cane* in 1993 based on multiple accounts from various agencies. Six accounts will be presented over the course of this evening, the performance will last approximately ninety minutes.

As you must have realized there is no fixed seating, you are welcomed to occupy any of the available chairs at the side, and move around during the performance.

Tonight, we will lift the usual rule in cinemas and theaters about not taking photos or video recordings of this performance; you are encouraged to do so via your smart phones for your own keepsake or memory. You are also welcome to provide your account of tonight's performance online. Please 'check-in' to tonight's performance and tweet about it real-time if you wish to do so.

There will be a post-show discussion immediately after the show. Samantha and Teck Siang will be helping to document tonight's performance and as part of the piece, documentation will be uploaded online for public access. By joining me this evening, you have consented to be part of this performance and it's documentation. Are there any questions at this moment?

* Zihan will answer any immediate questions or clarifications from the audience, if any.

I hope you enjoy tonight's performance and thank you for being part of *Cane*.

1st Account: The Singaporean Media

20 minutes: Zihan will provide this chronological account of the media's reporting of the incident at the microphone stand, he reads excerpts from articles while corresponding scans of these articles are flashed on both projection screens at the end of the space.

This first section is the Media's account of *Brother Cane*. I will be reading excerpts from twelve articles culled from the media reports of this incident.

House lights fade down, leaving a spotlight on the microphone stand. After Zihan finishes reading each excerpt he will pass the photocopied article to audience members for circulation.

(1)

The New Paper, 3 January 1994
Reported by Ng Li-San

Two Singaporean artists saluted the New Year early on Saturday with unusual versions of the traditional "bottoms up".

One vomited. The other turned his back on the audience, bared his buttocks and then trimmed his pubic hair. They said they were protesting against media reporting.

It was part of a 12-hour New Year's Eve event put up by members of 5th Passage Artists Ltd and Artists Village on the open corridor at the fifth floor of Parkway Parade.

Artist Josef "Brother Cane" Ng pasted a *Straits Times* report on the arrests of 12 men during an anti-gay operation in November 1993 on each of 12 tiles. He then placed tofu and a packet of red liquid on each tile.

Cloaked in a black robe, he danced around the hall with a cane, whacked each tile and said: "They were three strokes of the cane". The liquid splattered and stained the mashed tofu red. Then, Mr Ng did his trimming-of-pubic-hair act.

He piled the hair on a tile, and asked for a cigarette. Suddenly, he pressed the lit cigarette against his upper arm, burning himself.

Mr. Ng explained: “It’s a protest performance. I agree those men (who were arrested) were guilty of soliciting. But the press didn’t have to print their names. And why were the men caned when they had already received a jail term?”

(2)

The New Paper, 5 January 1994

The National Arts Council (NAC) find the acts vulgar and completely distasteful, which deserve public condemnation. By no stretch of the imagination can such acts be construed and condoned as art. Such acts, in fact, debase art and lower the public’s esteem for art and artists in general.

If the artist has any grievances there are many other proper ways to give vent to their feelings. Artists with talent do not have to resort to antics in order to draw attention to themselves or to communicate their feelings or ideas.

(3)

The Straits Times, 22 January 1994

“The performances may be exploited to agitate the audience on volatile social issues, or to propagate the beliefs and messages of deviant social or religious groups, or as a means of subversion” the statement said.

The following action will be taken:

Police will reject all future applications by the group, 5th Passage, for a public entertainment license to stage any such performance without fixed scripts.

The two men involved in the acts will be barred from future public performances. The police will reject applications for

public entertainment licenses for any performance or exhibition by 5th Passage or any other group involving artist Josef Ng Sing Chor, 22 and art student Shannon Tham Kuok Leong, 20.

The NAC will bar 5th Passage from getting any grant or assistance. It will also not support “performance art” or “forum theatre” staged by other groups, but their other projects will be considered.

(4)

The Straits Times, 23 February 1994
Reported by Koh Buck Song

In a faxed statement last Thursday, Ms Sherry Giang, National Institue of Education’s Assistant Manager (Public Relations) wrote: “Taking performance art off the curriculum has never been an issue. Performance art per se is not a module taught within the Division of Art. It is one of the topics covered in a module called *Art Criticism and Contextual Studies*.

In surveying contemporary developments in this module, the inclusion of performance art as a topic is necessary and inevitable for completeness.”

Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) principal Dr Soh Kay Cheng said performance art was not on the academy’s curriculum. “The graduation show is only for what we have taught the students, so there is no place for it,” he explained.

Mr Goh Ee Choo, a senior lecturer in fine arts and an artist himself, said that the academy could have taken a more accommodating view of Miss Tan’s proposed act if not for the 5th Passage incident.

He said that NAFA’s 100 fine arts students are specifically taught that art must not speak out on race and religion or express anti-government views.

(5)

The Straits Times, 11 March 1994
Reported by Martha Bayles
republished from *The Atlantic Monthly*,
an American neo-conservative magazine

Obscenity is shocking because it violates our sense of shame. In puritanical cultures, the slightest reference to the body causes undue shame. But that does not mean we should never feel shame. It is a natural response to nakedness, eroticism and suffering.

One may hesitate to place too much faith in the aesthetic judgment of common people. But better they than the shock artists, with their fond belief that if something is shockingly degrading and dehumanizing, it is, perforce, art.

At least the mainstream is likely to weigh the claims of art against those of decency and morality.

Yet, all this stale posturing proves is that some artists are so isolated from the rest of the world that their ideas never undergo a reality check. In one breath, they vow to disrupt the (presumably) repressive social order. In the next, they complain that the power behind that order – the government will not pay their bills.

(6)

The Straits Times, 11 March 1994
Reported by Koh Buck Song

Shock art only works once; the deviant cannot keep on surprising. After a while, the audience has seen it all. And then confrontation defeats its own purpose. Also, without public support – in the form of a shared concern in appreciable numbers for the same issues – those who protest soon become rebels without a meaningful cause.

(7)

The Straits Times, 16 March 1994

The recent controversial performance by the arts group 5th passage was a good opportunity to define which areas are off-limits to the arts in Singapore, Minister for Information and the Arts Brigadier-General George Yeo said yesterday.

He said he applauded and encouraged the NAC for taking a firm stand against the performance.

"When we promoted the arts, we said, look, the old OB markers have to be widened and we will determine the new OB markers when it is clear where they should be. And when this incident took place, I said, ah, this is a very good spot to plant a new OB marker."
Noting that it was good to define the boundaries in the long-term, BG Yeo added: "When the boundaries are clear, then those who act within the boundaries are free. But when the boundaries are not clear, those who act within the boundaries become unfree."

(8)

The Sunday Times, 13 November 1994
Commentary by Tan Tarn How

If society is a tree, and its fringes are the leaves at the tree's outermost reaches, then trimming the fringe, where the youngest, tenderest leaves grow nearest to the light, can only stunt the growth of the center. That is how you get the little bonsai plants, pretty but poor imitations of the real thing.

Now that the storm over the so-called "Josef Ng affair" – made an affair by the media and subsequent government actions – has blown over, we can get on with our lives. It looks like nothing significant has transpired. But the past, no matter how much it may be forgotten, has a way of catching up with us.

The difficulty with art is it lies midway between the public and the private, personal choice to be part of it. By censuring Josef Ng and proscribing his art form, the Government is making clear its view on two things, that art is as public as any of the speeches that politicians make, and that art in itself is no defence against the restrictions imposed on such public acts.

(9)

The Straits Times, 20 November 1994
Commentary by Sumiko Tan

As far as *5th passage* was concerned, I suspect that many Singaporeans supported the NAC's action. Notwithstanding the artistic reasons offered in defence, what Ng did was clearly disgusting. The public has a right to be protected from this.

(10)

The Straits Times, 8 February 1994
Commentary by Koh Buck Song

The 5th Passage incident is now teaching a new lesson of patience, at some cost to the development of the arts here. People change slowly, and it is only by a long process of education and exposure that they might come to accept what they used to condemn.

Some do not change at all, and might never accept that some forms of expression have the right to exist and even to deserve applause.

That is why any artist who wants to project the darker side of life and challenge social norms must take his time. He must take time to gain acceptance from sectors of the audience he is unfamiliar with, and so unfriendly towards, his aims. He must take time with thought and technique, so that if he wishes to make a statement, even a political one, he can craft it with some style, substance and subtlety.

There are other avenues for dissent: the press, Members of Parliament and other voices of civil society. And as anyone who has spoken before through these means will know, such things also take time. A lot of time.

(11)

The Straits Times, 8 February 1994
Commentary by T. Sasitharan

Art is born of inspiration, not prescription. So each time the parameters of the permissible are re-drawn to diminish artistic space, more artists – often the more committed and imaginative ones – will be forced either to give up entirely or turn their sights on safe but dead and fossilized forms imported enbloc from elsewhere or the past.

If this goes on long enough, all that will come out of the multi-million-dollar ovens of the Singapore Arts Centre will be a flat, distasteful cultural cake, condemned to stand forever on the shelves of the international marketplace of the arts.

Sure, you will always have your *Cats* and your *Les Mizs* and your *Chorus Line* and your *Tresors*. But you will have nothing of the soul of Singapore and nothing of ourselves holding it all up. What the likes of Ng and Tham do now may be nothing more than a minor footnote in the history of Singapore art when it is finally written. But if artists here lose the verve, conviction and imagination to go on doing honest and uncompromising work, that history may not be worth writing at all.

(12)

Asiaweek, Volume 7, July 1995
Staff interview with Brigadier-General George Yeo

Performance art relies on strong psychological interaction between the performers and the audience. It makes for a more intense experience and it's a device which is as old as society. All religions use it. If you attend a charismatic revival, they require you to do things that make the experience a more psychologically involved one. The Communists use it in cells, where they encourage young recruits to narrate their experiences and make certain commitments. Group therapies employ the techniques, like Alcoholics Anonymous.

So there's nothing new about performance art. But we are mindful that if misused, it can be exploitative and manipulative. But well used, it can make an artistic performance more interesting and more fulfilling.

2nd Account: The Trial Affidavit

2 minutes: General lighting fades up. Zihan will be providing this account at the microphone stand.

> The police charged Josef Ng on 6 January 1994 for committing , "an obscene act, to wit, by cutting (his) pubic hair and exposing (his) buttocks to the annoyance of the public" and his trial was on 17 May 1994. Josef Ng pleaded guilty to the charges and was sentenced to pay a fine of one thousand dollars.
>
> 5th passage gallery manager Iris Tan was convicted of, "providing entertainment without a license" and was sentenced to pay a fine of seven hundred dollars.
>
> The following account of *Brother Cane* is an adaptation from Josef Ng's trial affidavit, provided by academic and fellow performance artist Ray Langenbach, and is also collected in his PhD Thesis.

> I would like to invite Ray to perform a 'live' reading of his account.

3 minutes: Ray comes to the microphone and reads his account. Zihan adjourns to strip down to a pair of black briefs and wears a black robe in preparation for the 'live' reenactment. Zihan will be performing this transition at a corner of the performance space.

> "15 minutes: Josef Ng, dressed in a long black robe and black briefs, carefully laid out tiles on the floor in a semi-circle. He placed the news cutting, *12 Men nabbed in Anti-Gay Operation at Tanjong Rhu* from *The Straits Times* on each tile. He then carefully placed a block of tofu on each tile along with a small plastic bag of red poster paint.
> 1 minute: Ng crouches behind one tile and read random words from the news cutting.
>
> 5 minutes: Ng picked up a rotan and striking the floor with it rhythmically, he performed a dance, swaying and leaping from side to side, and finally ending in a low crouching posture.
>
> 3 minutes: Muttering softly, "Three strokes of cane, I will give them three strokes of cane", Ng approached the tofu blocks, tapping the rotan rhythmically on the floor. He tapped twice next to each block, counting, "One, two three", striking the bags of paint and tofu forcefully on the third swing.
>
> 1 minute: After striking all the tofu blocks, Ng says "I have heard that clipping hair could be a form of silent protest". He walks to the far end of the gallery space. Facing the wall with his back to the audience, he lowers his briefs [about 2/3 of the way down] his buttocks. He carried out an action that the audience could not see and returns to the performance space placing a small amount of cut pubic hair on the centre tile.

> 1 minute: Ng asks for a cigarette from the audience, and has it lit. He smokes a few puffs, and then, saying, “Sometimes silent protest is not enough,” stubs out the cigarette on his arm. He says “Thank you,” and puts on his robe. He receives enthusiastic applause from the audience, and requests help in cleaning up the tofu. A few members of the audience assist in this process.”

3rd and 4th Account: The Re-enactments

35 minutes: Ray clears the microphone stand after he finishes. Zihan returns to the center of the performance space and speaks without a microphone.

> I re-enacted *Brother Cane* for the first time as part of a performance module in Nanyang Technological University conducted by Amanda Heng in 2007. The second re-enactment was as part of a graduate student showcase in Chicago while I was pursuing my Masters of Fine Arts.
> My main interest in the re-performance of this piece lies in using my performing body to recuperate the public memory of *Brother Cane.* I will be presenting this re-enactment for the final time this evening in cadence with video documentation of the piece performed in Chicago.

General lights fade down, with a focus on the center performance area covered with the white linoleum flooring. Video documentation from Chicago will be played on one screen in the space. On the opposite screen, ‘live’ feed from the camera documenting Zihan’s performance will be projected in real time.

The audio recording of the Chicago documentation can be heard in the background. The ‘live’ performance by Zihan will be carried out largely in silence, with the documentation stating the instructions for each stage of the re-enactment.

A timer will be used to keep time, and similar to the Chicago performance, Zihan will wait for the timer to go off after each stage of the re-performance is completed.

Zihan in the ‘live’ performance will restate two lines – “they have said that a clean shave is a form of silent protest” and “maybe, a silent protest is not enough”, that the wording of these two lines are different from Ray’s affidavit account is intentional, these are the two lines that are transcribed from video documentation of Josef Ng’s performance.
Zihan’s actions will deviate from Josef Ng’s original performance significantly in two instances.

The first instance, when it comes to the moment when Zihan re-enacts Josef Ng’s snipping, Zihan will lower his briefs instead to reveal a clean shaven crotch to the audience, he will have a pair of scissors in his right hand and will be directing his gaze at each member of the audience. *There will be no ‘live’ snipping of pubic hair in this performance.*

The second instance, Zihan will ask the audience for a cigarette as per Josef Ng’s original performance and will say:

> Due to the National Environment Agency’s prohibition on smoking in indoor spaces, this section of the performance will have to take place within the smoking area outside. You are welcomed to follow me to witness this section of the performance.

The video recording of the performance in Chicago will be paused and Zihan will adjourn to the smoking area outside of The Substation to complete this section of the performance. He will return to the theatre after this section and the video recording will resume playing. This section will take approximately ten minutes.

5th Account: The Video Document

20 minutes: After Zihan has completed his re-enactment, the lights will fade to blackout and the video recording of Josef Ng's performance documented by Ray Langenbach will be played on both screens at each end of the space. Zihan will continue his performance of cleaning up in the darkness, clearing the tofu and red dye as the video progresses. The photographer Samantha Tio will download the photos she has documented over the course of the evening onto a computer while this video is playing.

6th Account: Post-Show Dialogue

30 minutes: House lights fade up, Zihan, dressed in a black robe is standing in front of a screen at the far end of the space. There are two chairs in front of it.

> Thank you for being part of this evening's performance. We will now have approximately half an hour for a brief post show dialogue. I would like to invite *Brother Cane* to moderate this evening's discussion. Please join me in welcoming him.

Josef Ng steps up to take a seat in one of the two chairs, the discussion commences. While the discussion is ongoing, photo documentation of the evening's performance will be projected on both screens.

Editors' Note: At this point in the 19 February 2012 performance, Thai performance artist Michael Shaowanasai stood up and removed a scarf and hat which disguised his identity. Shaowanasai walked to the center of the performance space and revealed himself as Brother Cane*. He proceeded to conduct the post-show discussion in Josef Ng's stead. Shaowanasai's surprise appearance was Josef Ng's curatorial intervention for* Cane*.*

Indexical Remains

A selection of photo and video documentation

1. *Cane* (Chicago) - The 'Live' re-enactment, 2011
   Documented by Miao Jiaxin, edited by Subi Le
   Medium: Inkjet print on archival paper
   Dimensions: 30cm by 45cm

   "5 minutes: Ng picked up a rotan and striking the floor with it rhythmically, he performed a dance, swaying and leaping from side to side, and finally ending in a low crouching posture." *Excerpt from Josef Ng's trial affidavit recounted by Ray Langenbach*

2. *Cane* (Chicago) - "*12 Men Nabbed in Anti-Gay Operation at Tanjong Rhu*", 2011
   Documented by Miao Jiaxin, edited by Subi Le
   Medium: Inkjet print on archival paper
   Dimensions: 30cm by 45cm

3. *Cane* (Singapore) - The 'Live' re-enactment, 2012
   Documented by Samantha Tio
   Medium: Inkjet print on archival paper
   Dimensions: 40cm by 60cm

   "3 minutes: Muttering softly, "Three strokes of cane, I will give them three strokes of cane", Ng approached the tofu blocks, tapping the rotan rhythmically on the floor. He tapped twice next to each block, counting, "One, two three", striking the bags of paint and tofu forcefully on the third swing." *Excerpt from Josef Ng's trial affidavit recounted by Ray Langenbach*

4. *Cane* (Singapore) - *"*Do not proscribe political art*"*, 2012
   Documented by Samantha Tio
   Medium: Inkjet print on archival paper
   Dimensions: 40cm by 60cm

   "What the likes of Ng and Tham do now may be nothing more than a minor footnote in the history of Singapore art when it is finally written. But if artists here lose the verve, conviction and imagination to go on doing honest and uncompromising work, that history may not be worth writing at all." *Excerpt from* Do not proscribe political art*, The Straits Times, 8 February, 1994, commentary by T. Sasitharan*

5. *Mark of Cane* (Cigarette burn on artist's body), 2012
   Documented by Kelvin Chew
   Medium: Inkjet print on archival paper
   Dimensions: 33.6 cm by 42 cm

6. *Mark of Shame* (Chancre scar on artist's body), 2012
   Documented by Kelvin Chew
   Medium: Inkjet print on archival paper
   Dimensions: 33.6 cm by 42 cm

7. *Cane* (Singapore) - Video Documentation, 2012
   Documented by Lim Teck Siang
   Medium: HD Video
   Running Time: 103 minutes
   Rating: M(18), Nudity

   Presented as part of the *M1 Singapore Fringe Festival 2012* organized by The Necessary Stage (Singapore).

8. *Chancre*, 2011
   Directed and edited by Loo Zihan
   Medium: 16mm film transferred to video, HD video
   Running Time: 17 minutes
   Rating: R(21), Nudity and Homosexual References

   Camera: Joey Carr, Randy Sterling Hunter, Blake Sangbum Heo and Adam Van Eeckhout
   Voices: Judd Morrissey (Gauguin), Georgia Wall (Skeat), Randy Sterling Hunter (Eliot)

   A transmission and transmutation of a memory couched in shame. This video includes, among others, excerpts of text from *The Writings of a Savage* by Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *Malay Magic* (1900) by Walter William Skeat and *Fragment of an Agon* from T. S. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* (1927)

Performance Remains

A selection of performance materials

1. ~~Cigarette butt – June Yap~~
   ~~used in Cane (Singapore), 2012~~

2. Cigarette butt – Chris Yap
   used in *Cane* (Chicago), 2011
   stored in neon pink envelope measuring 22 cm by 11 cm
   donated for a charity auction of artworks in Singapore

3. 3 rattan canes (broken in performance)
   used in *Cane* (Singapore), 2012
   Dimensions: 150 cm in length

4. Scissors
   used in *Cane* (Singapore), 2012, *Cane* (Chicago), 2011 and *Annuit Cœptis*, 2011

5. Enamel spittoon with traditional Chinese wedding motif
used in *Cane* (Singapore), 2012 and *Taman Negara*, 2011
Dimensions: 22 cm in diameter by 23 cm in height

6. Enamel basin with traditional Chinese wedding motif
used in *Cane* (Singapore), 2012, *Cane* (Chicago), 2011, *Solos*, 2007 (Experimental Feature Film) and *Embryo*, 2006 (Experimental Short Film)
Dimensions: 35 cm in diameter

7. Luggage
used in *Cane* (Singapore), 2012, *Cane* (Chicago), 2011, *Aemaer*, 2011 (Experimental Essay Film) and *Sophia*, 2007 (Experimental Film)
Dimensions: 55 cm by 37 cm

8. Violin case and fragments (broken in performance)
used in *Performing Josef – It's Not Saf*e, 2011

9. Black underwear
used in *Cane* (Singapore), 2012 and *Cane* (Chicago), 2011

10. Black bathrobe
used in *Cane* (Singapore), 2012 and *Cane* (Chicago), 2011

11. 12 white ceramic tiles (2 tiles broken in performance)
used in *Cane* (Singapore), 2012
Dimensions: 20 cm by 20 cm

12. White ceramic jar with hair
used in *Annuit Cœptis*, 2011 (Performance Installation)

CRITICAL TEXTS

The peculiar burden and problem of the theatre is that there is *no original artwork at all.* Unless one maintains that the text is the art work (which repudiates the entire history of the theatre), there seems no way of avoiding this difficult fact. Every other art has its original and its copies. Only music approximates the theatrical dilemma, but notation insures that each musical performance will at least come close to the composer's intention.

Richard Schechner (1965)[1]

Dance exists at a perpetual vanishing point. [...] It is an event that disappears in the very act of materializing.

Marcia Siegel (1968)[2]

In theatre, as in love, the subject is disappearance.

Herbert Blau (1982)[3]

Performance originals disappear as fast as they are made. No notation, no reconstruction, no film or videotape recording can keep them. [...] One of the chief jobs challenging performance scholars is the making of a vocabulary and methodology that deal with performance in its immediacy and evanescence.

Richard Schechner (1985)[4]

Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance. [...] Performance [...] becomes itself through disappearance.

Peggy Phelan (1993)[5]

We need a history that does not save in any sense of the word; we need a history that performs.

Jane Blocker (1999)[6]

This essay is about performance and the archive, or the positioning of performance in archival culture.[7] It takes up the long-standing invitations of many in performance studies to consider performance "always at the vanishing point."[8] Taking up these invitations, I've set myself the following question: 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 "saving,"[9] 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?

Troubling Disappearance

The archive has long been habitual to Western culture. We understand ourselves relative to the remains we accumulate, the tracks we house, mark, and cite, the material traces we acknowledge. Jacques Le Goff stated the Western truism quite simply, noting that history, requiring remains, has been composed of documents because "the document is what remains." Even as the domain of the document has expanded to include "the spoken word, the image, and gesture," the fundamental relationship of remain to documentability remains intact.[10] But the "we" of this mode of history as remains is not necessarily universal. Rather, "archive culture" is appropriate to those who align historical knowledge with European traditions, or, even more precisely, those who chart a (mythic) descent from Greek Antiquity.[11] As Derrida reminds in *Archive Fever,* the word archive stems from the Greek and is linked at the root to the prerogatives of the archon, the head of state. Tucked inside the word itself is the house of he who was "considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law," and to uphold, as Michel Foucault has written, the "system of its enunciability."[12]

In the theatre the issue of remains as material document, and the issue of performance as documentable, becomes complicated - necessarily imbricated, chiasmically, with the live body. The theatre, to the degree that it is composed in live performance, seems to resist remains. And yet, if live theatre in the West is approached as that which refuses to remain, as performance studies scholars have quite fulsomely insisted, it is precisely in live art and live theater that scores of late 20th- and early 21st-century artists explore history - the recomposition of remains in and as the live.[13] If we consider performance as of disappearance, of an ephemerality read as vanishment and loss, are we limiting ourselves to an understanding of performance predetermined by our cultural habituation to the logic of the archive?

According to the logic of the archive, what is given to the archive is that which is recognized as constituting a remain, that which can have been documented or has become document. To the degree that performance is not its own document (as Schechner, Blau, and Phelan have argued), it is, constitutively, that which does not remain. As the logic goes, performance is so radically "in time" (with time considered linear) that it cannot reside in its material traces and therefore "disappears."

The definition of performance as that which disappears, which is continually lost in time, is a definition well suited to the concerns of art history and the curatorial pressure to understand performance in the museal context where performance appeared to challenge object status and seemed to refuse the archive its privileged "savable" original. Arguably even more than in the theatre, it is in the context of the museum, gallery, and art market that performance appears to primarily offer disappearance. Particularly in the context of visual art, performance suggests a challenge to the "ocular hegemony" that, to quote Kobena Mercer, "assumes that the visual world can be rendered knowable before the omnipotent gaze of the eye and the 'I' of the Western cogito."[14] Thus there is a political promise in this equation

of performance with disappearance: if performance can be understood as disappearing, perhaps performance can rupture the ocular hegemony Mercer cites. And yet, in privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain, do we ignore other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently? The ways, that is, that performance resists a cultural habituation to the ocular – a thrall that would delimit performance as that which cannot remain to be seen.

The predominant performance-studies-meets-art-history attitude toward performance as disappearance might overlook different ways of accessing history offered by performance. Too often, the equation of performance with disappearance reiterates performance as necessarily a matter of loss, even annihilation. Curator Paul Schimmel made this perspective clear in his essay "Leap into the Void," writing that the orientation toward "the act," which he historicizes as a post-World War II preoccupation, is an orientation toward destruction. "Although there are instances of lighthearted irreverence, joy, and laughter in this work, there is always an underlying darkness, informed by the recognition of humanity's seemingly relentless drive toward self-annihilation."[15] In his analysis, performance becomes itself as void. It may be a medium of creation, but a creation subservient to a disappearance understood as loss, "destruction," and "darkness."

If we adopt the equation that performance does not save, does not remain, and apply it to performance generally, to what degree can performance interrogate archival thinking? Is it not the case that it is precisely the logic of the archive that approaches performance as of disappearance? Asked another way, does an equation of performance with impermanence, destruction, and loss follow rather than disrupt a cultural habituation to the imperialism inherent in archival logic? A simple example may serve us well: on a panel at a Columbia University conference in 1997 on documentation, archivists

Mary Edsall and Catherine Johnson bemoaned the problems of preserving performance, declaring that the practices of "body-to-body transmission," such as dance and gesture, mean that "you lose a lot of history."[16] Such statements assume that memory cannot be housed in a body and remain, and thus that oral storytelling, live recitation, repeated gesture, and ritual enactment are not practices of telling or writing history. Such practices disappear. By this logic, being housed always in the live, "body-to-body transmission" disappears, is lost, and thus is no transmission at all. Obviously, the language of disappearance here is hugely culturally myopic. Here, performance is given to be as antithetical to memory as it is to the archive.

Should we not think of the ways in which the archive depends upon performance, indeed ways in which the archive performs the equation of performance with disappearance, even as it performs the service of "saving"? It is in accord with archival logic that performance is given to disappear, and mimesis (always in a tangled and complicated relationship to the performative) is, in line with a long history of antitheatricality, debased if not downright feared as destructive of the pristine ideality of all things marked "original."[17]

Performing the Archive

> It is thus in […] *domiciliation*, in […] house arrest, that archives take place.[18]

If the twentieth century was famous for, among other things, criticizing the concept of historical facticity, such criticism has not resulted in the end of our particular investments in the logic of the archive. Rather, we have broadened our range of documents to include that which we might have overlooked and included the stockpiling of recorded speech, image, gesture in the establishment of "oral archives" and the collection of "ethnotexts." The important recuperation of "lost histories" has gone on in the name of feminism, minoritarianism, and its compatriots. In light of this, what does it serve to remind

ourselves that this privileging of site-able remains in the archive is linked, as is the root of the word archive, to the prerogatives of the archon, the head of state? In what way does the housing of memory in strictly material, quantifiable, domicilable remains lead both backward and forward to the principle of the archon, the patriarch? The Greek root of the word archive refers to the archon's house and, by extension, the architecture of a social memory linked to the law. The demand for a visible remain, at first a mnemonic mode of mapping for monument, would eventually become the architecture of a particular social power over memory.[19] Even if the earliest Greek archive housed mnemonics for performance rather than material originals themselves, archive logic in modernity came to value the document over event. That is, if ancient archives housed back-ups in case of the failure of localized knowledge, colonial archives participated in the failure of localized knowledge - that failure had become a given. The document, as an arm of empire, could arrest and disable local knowledges while simultaneously scripting memory as necessarily failed, as Ann Laura Stoller has amply illustrated. The archive became a mode of governance against memory.[20] The question becomes: Does the logic of the archive, as that logic came to be central to modernity, in fact demand that performance disappear in favor of discrete remains - material presented as preserved, as non-theatrical, as "authentic," as "itself," as somehow non-mimetic?

In the archive, flesh is given to be that which slips away. According to archive logic, flesh can house no memory of bone. In the archive, only bone speaks memory of flesh. Flesh is blind spot.[21]

Dissimulating and disappearing. Of course, this is a cultural equation, arguably foreign to those who claim orature, storytelling, visitation, improvisation, or embodied ritual practice as history. It is arguably foreign to practices in popular culture, such as the practices of US Civil War reenactors who consider performance as precisely a way of keeping memory alive, of making sure it does not disappear. In such

practices - coded (like the body) primitive, popular, folk, naive - performance does remain, does leave "residue."[22] Indeed the place of residue is arguably flesh in a network of body-to-body transmission of affect and enactment – evidence, across generations, of impact.

In scholarly treatments, the question of the performance remains of history, or more specifically history that remains in performance practice (versus written or object remains) generally falls under the rubric of memory versus history, and as such it is often labeled "mythic." Oral history also often falls under the rubric of ritual. In turn, "ritual" generally (or historically) has fallen under the rubric of "ethnic" - a term which generally means race- or class-marked people but which Le Goff cites as "primitive" or "peoples without writing."[23] Clearly, concatenations of primitivism and attendant racisms attach, in turn, to attempts to acknowledge performance as an appropriate means of remaining, of remembering. Is this perhaps because performance threatens the terms of captive or discrete remains dictated by the archive? Is this in part why the logic of the archive - that utopic "operational field of projected total knowledge" - scripts performance as disappearing?[24] Because oral history and its performance practices are always decidedly repeated, oral historical practices are always reconstructive, always incomplete, never in thrall to the singular or self-same origin that buttresses archontic lineage. In performance as memory, the pristine self-sameness of an "original," an artifact so valued by the archive, is rendered impossible - or, if you will, mythic.

Performance practice has been routinely disavowed as historical practice.[25] Though historiographers such as Pierre Nora claim that this attitude has shifted in favor of a "new" history that incorporates collective memory and performative practices, nevertheless that "new" history is manifested in the constitution of "radically new kinds of archives, of which the most characteristic are oral archives."[26] The oral is not here approached as already an archive, a performance-based archive. Rather, oral histories are constituted anew, recorded

and "saved" through technology in the name of identicality and materiality. Though this "new" archiving is supposedly against loss, doesn't it institute more profoundly than anything the loss of a different approach to saving that is not invested in identicality? Doesn't it further undo an understanding of performance as remaining? Do not such practices buttress the phallocentric insistence of the ocularcentric assumption that if it is not visible, or given to documentation or sonic recording, or otherwise "houseable" within an archive, it is lost, disappeared?

It is interesting to take the example of battle reenactment into account and look at the particular case of Robert Lee Hodge - an avid Civil War enthusiast who participates in reenactments. As Marvin Carlson described him in an essay on theatre and historical reenactment, Hodge has attained significant notoriety among reenactment communities for his "ability to fall to the ground and contort his body to simulate convincingly a bloated corpse."[27] The question is obvious: under what imaginable framework could we cite Hodge's actions as a viable mode of historical knowledge, or of remaining? Is Hodge's bloat not deeply problematic mimetic representation, and wildly bogus and indiscreet at that? Does Hodge, lying prone and fake-bloating in the sun, attempt to offer index of - as well as reference to - both the material photograph and the photographed material of Civil War corpses? Is the live bloater only offering a mimetic and perhaps even ludicrous copy of something only vaguely imagined as a bloated corpse? Yet, within the growing "living history" and reenactment movement, Hodge's bloating body is, for many enthusiasts, evidence of something that can touch the more distant historical record, if not evidence of something authentic itself.[28] In the often-ridiculed "popular" arena of reenactment, Hodge's bloat is a kind of affective remain - itself, in its performative repetition, a queer kind of evidence. If the living corpse is a remain of history, it is certainly revisited across a body that cannot pass as the corpse it re-calls. If it cannot pass, what kind of claim to authenticity can such a faulty corpse demand?

I am reminded of Charles Ludlam's queer Theatre of the Ridiculous in which the replaying of classics or the "camp" reenactment of the folk art of "vulgar" commercial entertainment (such as B-movies)

offers a different though perhaps related kind of "living history." Ludlam's parodic evenings offered a fractured re-entry of remainders - a history of identifications, of role-playing and its discontents. In Ludlam's theatre, as Stefan Brecht described it in 1968, "Removal of cadavers, necessitated by the high onstage death-rate, is done with exaggerated clumsiness, the corpse does not cooperate – but mostly the dead just sit up after a while, walk off, reparticipate in the action."[29]

When we approach performance not as that which disappears (as the archive expects), but as both the act of remaining and a means of re-appearance and "reparticipation" (though not a metaphysic of presence) we are almost immediately forced to admit that remains do not have to be isolated to the document, to the object, to bone versus flesh. Here the body - Hodge's bloated one - becomes a kind of archive and host to a collective memory that we might situate with Freud as symptomatic, with Cathy Caruth with Freud as the compulsory repetitions of a collective trauma, with Foucault with Nietzsche as "counter-memory," or with Fred Moten with Baraka, Minh-ha, and Derrida as transmutation.[30] The bodily, read through genealogies of impact and ricochet, is arguably always interactive. This body, given to performance, is here engaged with disappearance chiasmically - not only disappearing but resiliently eruptive, remaining through performance like so many ghosts at the door marked "disappeared." In this sense performance becomes itself through messy and eruptive re-appearance. It challenges, via the performative trace, any neat antimony between appearance and disappearance, or presence and absence through the basic repetitions that mark performance as indiscreet, non-original, relentlessly citational, and remaining.

Indeed, approached in this way, performance challenges loss. Still, we must be careful to avoid the habit of approaching performance remains as a metaphysic of presence that fetishizes a singular "present" moment. As theories of trauma and repetition might instruct us, it is not presence that appears

in the syncopated time of citational performance but precisely (again) the missed encounter - the reverberations of the overlooked, the missed, the repressed, the seemingly forgotten. Performance does not disappear when approached from this perspective, though its remains are the immaterial of live, embodied acts. Rather, performance plays the "sedimented acts" and spectral meanings that haunt material in constant collective interaction, in constellation, in transmutation.

Death and Living Remains

Let us not too rapidly dispose of the issue of disappearance. If Schechner, Blau, Phelan, and others are correct and performance is given to become itself through disappearance - to resist document and record, to deny remains - we find ourselves in a bit of an awkward bind regarding the argument so far. In fact, Blau's work on this bind, particularly his *Take Up the Bodies: Theatre at the Vanishing Point,* has been particularly trenchant:

> Whatever the style, hieratic or realistic, texted or untexted – box it, mask it, deconstruct it as you will – the theatre disappears under any circumstances; but with all the ubiquity of the adhesive dead, from Antigone's brother to Strindberg's Mummy to the burgeoning corpse of Ionesco's *Amedée,* it's there when we look again.[31]

Upon any second look, disappearance is not antithetical to remains. And indeed, it is one of the primary insights of poststructuralism that disappearance is that which marks all documents, all records, and all material remains. Indeed, remains become themselves through disappearance as well.

We might think of it this way: death appears to result in the paradoxical production of both disappearance and remains. Disappearance, that citational practice, that after-the-factness, clings to remains - absent flesh does ghost bones. We have already noted that the habit of the West is to privilege bones as index of a flesh that was once, being "once" (as in both time and singularity) only after the fact. Flesh itself, in our ongoing cultural habituation

to sight-able remains, supposedly cannot remain to signify "once" (upon a time). Even twice won't fit the constancy of cell replacing cell that is our everyday. Flesh, that slippery feminine subcutaneousness, is the tyrannical and oily, invisible-inked signature of the living. Flesh of my flesh of my flesh repeats, even as flesh is that which the archive presumes does not remain.

As Derrida notes, the archive is built on the domiciliation of this flesh with its feminine capacity to reproduce. The archive is built on "house arrest" - the solidification of value in ontology as retroactively secured in document, object, record. This retroaction is nevertheless a valorization of regular, necessary loss on (performative) display - with the document, the object, and the record being situated as survivor of time. Thus we have become increasingly comfortable in saying that the archivable object also becomes itself through disappearance - as it becomes the trace of that which remains when performance (the artist's action) disappears. This is trace-logic emphasizing loss - a loss that the archive can regulate, maintain, institutionalize - while forgetting that it is a loss that the archive produces. In the archive, bones are given not only to speak the disappearance of flesh, but to script that flesh as disappearing by disavowing recurrence or by marking the body always already "scandal."

An instituted loss that spells the failure of the bodily to remain is rife with a "patriarchal principle." No one, Derrida notes, has shown more ably than Freud how the archival drive, which he labels as a "paternal and patriarchic principle," is both patriarchal and parricidic. The archival drive posited itself to repeat itself and returned to reposit itself only in parricide. It amounts to repressed or suppressed parricide, in the name of the father as dead father. The archontic is at best the takeover of the archive by the brothers. The equality and liberty of brothers. A certain, still vivacious idea of democracy.[32]

Ann Pellegrini has stated this Freudian schema succinctly: "son fathers parent(s); pre-is heir to post-; and 'proper' gender identification and 'appropriate' object choices are secured backward" - a "retroaction of objects lost and subjects founded."[33]

Elsewhere I have discussed this parricidal impulse as productive of death in order to insure remains.[34] I have suggested that the increasing domain of remains in the West, the increased technologies of archiving, may be why the late 20th century has been both so enamored of performance and so replete with deaths: death of author, death of science, death of history, death of literature, death of character, death of the avant-garde, death of modernism, and even, in American playwright Suzan-Lori Park's brilliant and ironic rendition, *Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*.[35] Within a culture that privileges object remains as indices of and survivors of death, to produce such a panoply of deaths may be the only way to insure remains in the wake of modernity's crises of authority, identity, and object. Killing the author, or sacrificing his station, may be, ironically, the means of ensuring that he remains.

For the moment let me simply suggest that when we read this "securing backward" Pellegrini discusses, this "retroaction" of objects, we are reading the archive as act – as an architecture housing rituals of "domiciliation" or "house arrest" - continually, as ritual, performed. The archive itself becomes a social performance space, a theatre of retroaction. The archive performs the institution of disappearance, with object remains as indices of disappearance and with performance as given to disappear. If, in Derrida's formation, it is in domiciliation, in "house arrest" that "archives take place" we are invited to think of this "taking place" as continual, of house arrest as performative - a performative, like a promise, that casts the retroaction of objects solidly into a future in which the patriarchic principle Derrida cites will have (retroactively) remained.

To read "history," then, as a set of sedimented acts that are not the historical acts themselves but the act of securing any incident backward - the repeated act of securing memory - is to rethink the site of history in ritual repetition. This is not to say that we have reached the "end of history," neither is it to say that past events didn't happen, nor that to access the past is impossible. It is rather to resituate the site of any knowing of history as body-to-body transmission. Whether that ritual repetition is the attendance to documents in the library (the physical acts of acquisition, the physical acts of reading, writing, educating), or the oral tales of family lineage (think of the African American descendents of Thomas Jefferson who didn't need the DNA test to tell them what they remembered through oral transmission), or the myriad traumatic reenactments engaged in both consciously and unconsciously, we refigure "history" onto bodies, the affective transmissions of showing and telling.[36] Architectures of access (the physical aspect of books, bookcases, glass display cases, or even the request desk at an archive) place us in particular experiential relations to knowledge. Those architectures also impact the knowledge imparted. Think of it this way: the same detail of information can sound, feel, look, smell, or taste radically different when accessed in radically different venues or via disparate media (or when not told in some venues but told in others). In line with this configuration performance is the mode of any architecture or environment of access (one performs a mode of access in the archive; one performs a mode of access at a theatre; one performs a mode of access on the dance floor; one performs a mode of access on a battlefield). In this sense, too, performance does not disappear. In the archive, the performance of access is a ritual act that, by occlusion and inclusion, scripts the depreciation of (and registers as disappeared) other modes of access.

Remaining on the Stage

Artists such as Parks and Piper attempt to unpack a way in which performance (or actions, or acts) remain - but remain differently. Such works are interested in the ways in which history is not limited to the imperial domain of the document, or in which history is not "lost" through body-to-body transmission. Is this less an investigation of disappearance than an interest in the politics of dislocation and relocation? That idea that flesh memory might remain challenges conventional notions of the archive. By this reading, the scandal of performance relative to the archive is not that it disappears (this is what the archive expects, this is the archive's requirement), but that it remains in ways that resist archontic "house arrest" and "domiciliation."

To the degree that it remains, but remains differently or in difference, the past performed and made explicit as (live) performance can function as the kind of bodily transmission conventional archivists dread, a counter-memory - almost in the sense of an echo (as Parks's character Lucy in *The America Play* might call it). If echoes, or in the performance troupe Spiderwoman's words "rever-ber-berations," resound off of lived experience produced in performance, then we are challenged to think beyond the ways in which performance seems, according to our habituation to the archive, to disappear.[37] We are also and simultaneously encouraged to articulate the ways in which performance, less bound to the ocular, "sounds" (or begins again and again, as Stein would have it), differently, via itself as repetition - like a copy or perhaps more like a ritual - like an echo in the ears of a confidence keeper, an audience member, a witness.

Arguably, this sense of performance is imbricated in Phelan's phrasing - that performance "becomes itself through" disappearance. This phrasing is arguably different from an ontological claim of being (despite Phelan's stated drive to ontology), even different from an ontology of being under erasure. This phrasing rather invites us to think of performance as a medium in which disappearance negotiates, perhaps becomes, materiality. That is, disappearance is passed through. As is materiality.

Works in which the political manipulations of "disappearance" demand a material criticism - works such as Diana Taylor's *Disappearing Acts* or José Esteban Muñoz's "*Ephemera as Evidence*" - thus create a productive tension within performance studies orientations to (and sometime celebrations of) ephemerality. It is in the midst of this tension (or this "pickle" as Parks might put it) that the notion of performance as disappearance crosses chiasmically with ritual - ritual, in which, through performance, we are asked, again, to (re)found ourselves - to find ourselves in repetition.

Pickling
[performance] is trying to find an equation
for time *saved* / saving time
but theatre / experience / performing /
being / living etc. is all about
spending time. No equation or ... ?[38]

NOTES

1 Richard Schechner, "Theatre Criticism," *The Tulane Drama Review*, 1965, vol. 9, no. 3 (22, 24), emphasis in original.

2 Marcia B. Siegel, *At the Vanishing Point. A Critic Looks at Dance*, New York: Saturday Review Press, 1968, p. 1.

3 Herbert Blau, *Take Up The Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982, p. 94.

4 Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, p. 50.

5 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 146.

6 Jane Blocker, *Where is Ana Mendieta: Identity, Performativity, and Exile*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1999, p. 134.

7 The essay is here altered somewhat from the original 2001 publication - modifications that bear the marks of the essay's promiscuous afterlife, including references to texts that post-date 2001. The original appeared as "Performance Remains," *Performing Research*, 2001, vol. 6, no. 2, 100–8. For commentary on that afterlife, and another "re-do" of the essay, see Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, New York: Routledge, 2011.

8 Herbert Blau, op. cit., p.28. The approach to performance as "an ephemeral event" has been a cornerstone to Performance Studies and has been evident as basic to performance theory since the 1960s, as evident in the epigraphs to this essay. Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, another longstanding member of and influential thinker in the field, employed the term "ephemeral" in 1998 claiming that: "The ephemeral encompasses all forms of behavior - everyday activities, story telling, ritual, dance, speech, performance of all kinds." Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, p. 30. In an excellent 1996 essay, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," Jose Esteban Munoz turned the table on ephemerality to suggest that ephemera do not disappear, but are distinctly material. Munoz relies on Raymond William's "structures of feeling" to argue that the ephemeral -"traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things" - is a "mode" of "proofing" employed by necessity (and sometimes preference) by minoritarian culture and criticism makers. José Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory,* 1996, vol. 8, no. 2, 5-16 (10). See also Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

9 Building explicitly on Phelan's work, Jane Blocker has employed the equation of performance with disappearance to suggest that performance is the antithesis of "saving" (op. cit., p. 134). See also Blocker's important complication of this position in her subsequent book, *What the Body Cost* (Jane Blocker, *What the Body Cost*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), in which she engages (pp. 105-7) with this essay as it appeared in *Performance Research*, op cit.

10 Le Goff, op. cit., p. xvii.

11 See Richard Thomas, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*, New York: Verso, 1993. The articulation of Greek antiquity as fore-fathering history itself is mythic. The "disremembering" of other lineages ultimately served Eurocentric, geopolitical, racializing agendas. See Martin Bernal, *Black Athena*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989.

12 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 2. In the late 1960s, reaching English readers in the early 1970s, Michel Foucault had expanded the notion of "the archive" beyond a material, architectural housing of documents and objects to include, more broadly, structures of enunciability at all. Foucault articulated "the archive" as essentially discursive - invested of an investment in preservation - determining not only the "system of enunciability" (what can be said) but also the duration of any enunciation (what is given to remain becomes what can have been said). An excerpt from Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* bears repeating: "The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped together in distinct figures [. . .] The archive is not that which, despite its immediate escape, safeguards the event of the statement, and preserves, for future memories, its status as an escapee; it is that which, at the very root of the statement-event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset the *system of its enunciability.* Nor is the archive that which collects the dust of statements that have become inert once more, and which may make possible the miracle of their resurrection; it is that which defines the mode of occurrence of the statement-thing; it is *the system of its functioning*." In *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* translated by Alan Sheridan, London: Tavistock, 1972, p. 129, emphasis in original.

13 See, for example, Keith Piper's installation *Relocating the Remains* in Keith Piper, *Relocating the Remains*, London: Institute of International Visual Artists, 1997. The work of Suzan-Lori Parks is also exemplary: Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play: And Other Works*, New York: Theater Communications Group, 1995. See Harry Elam and Alice Rayner, "Unfinished Business: Reconfiguring History in Suzan-Lori Parks' *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*," *Theatre Journal,* 1994, vol. 46 no. 4, p. 447–61.

14 Kobena Mercer, "Unburying the Disremembered," in *New Histories*, Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1996, p. 165.

15 Paul Schimmel, "Leap Into the Void: Performance and the Object," in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object*, curated and edited by Paul Schimmel, Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998, pp. 17-120 (17).

16 Comments made at the panel "Documentation in the Absence of Text," during the conference "Performance and Text: Thinking and Doing," sponsored by the Department of Theatre Arts, Columbia University, New York, May 2–4, 1997.

17 See Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981; Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium,* New York: Fordham University Press, 2004. That a distrust of mimesis should develop simultaneously with the development of archives in ancient Greece deserves greater analysis, especially given the fact that the first Greek archives did not house originals but seconds. The first archives were used to store legal documents that were not originals but official copies of text inscribed on stone monuments placed around the city. The documents were copies of stone markers that were themselves "mnemonic aids" - not, that is, the "thing" preserved. See Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 86-7. Thus the first archived documents backed up a performance-oriented memory that was intended to be encountered live in the form of monuments, art, and architecture. On the classical art of memory as performance-oriented, see Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory,* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966, pp. 1–49.

18 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 2.

19 Jacques Derrida unpacks the meaning of the word archive thus: "The meaning of 'archive,' its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house (private house, family house, or employees' house), that official documents are filed." (Ibid, p. 2). But ancient archival practice is more complicated than Derrida lets on. In ancient Greece the word archive was not used to refer to the housing of original documents (cf. James P. Sickinger, *Public Records and Archives in Classical Athens*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, p. 6). I have alluded to this briefly in the endnote above, but to complicate matters, the first official (though not the only) storeroom for documents in Ancient Greece was called the Metroon - the sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods. The Metroon was established in part to bring some order to official documents which had been scattered in the keeping of the magistrates.

20 See Ann Laura Stoller, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science,* 2002, vol. 2, nos. 1&2, pp. 87–109; and her *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009. See also Richard Thomas, *Imperial Archive*, op. cit.

21 Psychoanalysis certainly posits flesh as archive, but an inchoate and unknowing archive. Is it a given in all circumstances that body memory is "unknowing" and "blind"? See Rebecca Schneider, "Judith Butler in My Hands," in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler,* edited by Ellen Armour and Susan St. Ville, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

22 In his influential book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Walter Ong makes the claim that because they are performance based, oral traditions do not leave "residue," make no "deposit," do not remain. Arguably, this claim is debunked by his own insistence that many habits from oral culture persist (Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 11). On the issue of body memory in general see Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Connerton surprisingly situates bodily memory as extremely fixed and unchanging. This aspect is critiqued by Neil Jarman in *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland,* Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1997, p. 11.

23 Le Goff's work provides an example of the troubled leap from oral history to ritual to ethnicity and from ethnicity to "peoples without writing." Le Goff, op. cit., p. 55.

24 Richard Thomas, *Imperial Archive*, 1993, op. cit., p. 11.

25 Cultural historians now accept popular and aesthetic representation generally as social modes of historicization, often under Maurice Halbwachs's rubric "collective memory" (cf. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press). Still, the process of approaching aesthetic production as valid historiography involves careful (and debated) delineation between "memory," "myth," "ritual," and "tradition" on the one hand and the implicitly more legitimate (or supposedly non-mythic) "history" on the other (cf. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, New York: Vintage Books, 1993, pp. 25–32).

26 Le Goff, op. cit., pp. 95-6.

27 Marvin Carlson, "Performing the Past: Living History and Cultural Memory" *Paragrana* 2000, vol. 9, no. 2, 237–48; see also Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War*, New York: Vintage, 1999, pp. 7-8.

28 See Vanessa Agnew on the myriad problems that arise for historians who attempt to credit live reenactment as any kind of access to history or any kind of complement to the historical record. Agnew accuses reenactment of "theatre." She rather reductively associates theatre with one of its historical modes - romantic sentimentalism - rather than, say, associating theatre with Brechtian alienated historicization. Agnew's primary critique of living history and reenactment is that the focus on reenactors' experiences sentimentalizes and subjectivizes history. Vanessa Agnew, "Introduction: What is Reenactment?" *Criticism* 2004, vol. 46, no. 3 (335). But the case of the corpse is problematic. For, at least as described by Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic,* 1999 op. cit. pp. 7–8, Hodge is not naive enough to think that he fully experiences what it means to be a corpse, even if it is true that his (mock) fallen body may (mock) alarm other (mock) soldiers who come upon it on the (mock) battlefield.

29 Stephan Brecht, "Family of the f.p.: Notes on the Theatre of the Ridiculous," *The Drama Review*, 1968, vol. 13, no. 1 (T41), 117-41 (120).

30 See Fred Moten and Charles Henry Rowell, "'Words Don't Go There': An Interview with Fred Moten," *Callaloo,* 2004, vol. 27, no. 4, 954–66.

31 Herbert Blau, *Take Up the Bodies,* op.cit. p. 137.

32 Derrida, op. cit., p. 95.

33 Ann Pellegrini, *Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race*, New York: Routledge l997, p. 69.

34 See Rebecca Schneider, "Hello Dolly Well Hello Dolly: The Double and Its Theater," in *Psychoanalysis and Performance*, edited by Patrick Campbell and Adrian Kear, London: Routledge, 2001.

35 Parks, op. cit.

36 See Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, pp. 152–3, for engagement with oral history and "official" history in the example of Jefferson's descendents and the "hidden in plain sight" theory of quilting patterns. Nyong'o, reminding us fulsomely throughout his book of the race politics always sedimented in debates about history and memory, writes that "at issue was less a choice between the archive and memory and more a context over black representative space in memory [...] less a competition between 'elite' and 'folk' knowledge and more of a competition between academic and mass culture over the pedagogic stakes of remembrance" (p. 153). Nyong'o's comments of the generative aspects of "myth," "error," and "mistake," and the palimpsest of racial politics that inform the stakes in mistake, are extremely useful as well.

37 See the chapter on Spiderwoman in Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance,* New York: Routledge, 1997.

38 Parks, op. cit., p. 13.

9. Making Live Again: Between Josef Ng's *Brother Cane* (1994) and Loo Zihan's *Cane* (2012), Ho Rui An

The image was that of a back view of young man, naked except for a pair of black briefs, apparently snipping his pubic hair. Beneath it, the headline: "PUB(L)IC PROTEST". For over a decade, this was the face of obscenity held up in Singapore by the powers that be to testify against the social menace that was performance art, that unfettered hotbed of libidinal discharge that threatened the prevailing Confucian order of the day. Yet, this face was not so much a face as a face *averted*, and if one were to speak of the obscene as the *o-skenè*, that which, after Carmelo Bene, is the off-stage, the unrepresentable[1], we are left with an almost tautological expression: the face of obscenity was one that could not be seen.

Yet the curious thing is that this ocular gap was, from the moment of its appearance, never seen as an occlusion as such; instead, one was likely to have encountered the image already *filled*, its gap having been not just covered, but *overridden* by a series of bogus presences—the first of which was that sensational headline—as if the gap never existed in the first place. Even today, almost twenty years on, one can still never quite restore the fundamental lack at the centre of the image that continues to exert its overdetermined, fictitious presences upon the public imaginary, each competing to claim ontological priority. How strange, indeed, that of all the events that constituted the controversy of Josef Ng's 1994 performance of *Brother Cane,* it is the single photograph captured and published in a moment of journalistic opportunism that has been isolated as the precise point of trauma for the arts community in Singapore. In fact, in the flurry of statements issued by both sides of the artistic fence following the controversy, what is most striking is the fact that among those who spoke up, only a handful had actually witnessed the performance in the flesh. The rest had mostly only "seen" the work and thus made their pronouncements through that

one photograph and the scandalizing article through which it circulated. The charged relationship between the photograph and its referent here is further complicated by the nature of the referent concerned, for the event depicted here is a performance, steeped entirely in the "liveness" of real time, or what Peggy Phelan refers to as the "maniacally charged present"[2]. Perhaps then, the lack concealed by the averted face in that photograph is merely symptomatic of the larger lack that is the photograph's lack of liveness, and by this logic, that notorious photograph of Ng is merely passing off as the thing itself, as flesh; it is a profound illusion, a bogus presence.

But deeper questions beg to be addressed. For one, must this transference between performance and photography, this medial leap from a "live" form into one marked by an inevitable belatedness, necessarily be articulated in terms of a loss—of liveness, of context, of presence? And before we vilify the photographic image for its feigned liveness, should one not first reexamine what exactly constitutes the claim to liveness that performance has but is denied to photography? The common recourse of indicting the photograph for its decontextualizing force is specious, for it conflates the medial displacement with that of the temporal: the photograph is wrong because fails to capture the performance in its moment of liveness. Such a charge privileges the original performance as ontologically prior on the basis of a linear temporality, which itself privileges the moment of production over that of reception. So what exactly is this liveness that so enthralls us? If in speaking of an originary context we equate liveness with a certain authenticity and self-available presence, perhaps we should first question if the liveness of performance really does exist in a state as such, and by extension, if photography's expression of the live need only be considered in terms of an ersatz presence.

For this, I turn again to Phelan. For her, the liveness of the performing body works by way of a disappearance, by metonymy:

> 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."... performance uses the body to frame the lack of Being promised by and through the body—that which cannot appear without a supplement.[3]

What this means is that even in the moment of its liveness, the performing body is already supplemented, whether it is by the spectator's gaze or a recording camera. Performance, in other words, "becomes itself through disappearance"[4]; the photograph, the recording, the written account do not constitute the performance per se but are rather the supplements that add to the lack at the core of performance's being. In this light, if performance can be said to have a materiality, and if such materiality were to be approached as what has hitherto gone under the name of "liveness", this is a liveness borne not out of presence but its deferral. The live is, above all, a *call* to supplement.

Given this revised understanding of liveness, how then can we make new sense of the photograph? Detached from notions of presence, can the liveness in the photograph now be conceived not as an illusory passing off as flesh, but rather, also as a call beckoning a response from a spectator that is yet to come at the time of its capture, such that the supplement that is the photographic record of a performance is itself an instant in an endless chain of deferrals calling out to be supplemented? To these questions, Rebecca Schneider seeks in the "stillness" of the photograph a possible answer. Building on the double meaning suggested by the word "still"—of a literal stillness (death) and of an "ongoingness" (live)—she describes the photograph as "a call toward a future live moment when the image will be re-encountered, perhaps as invitation

to respond"[5]. Revising Barthes' famous declaration of the photograph being the "*That-has-been*"[6], she calls instead for a consideration of photography in terms of "the liveness of temporal deferral, the real time of our complicities"[7], such that between the performance and its photographic record what happens is not so much a negation of liveness but its "drag": the photograph is the live *again*[8]. If in his premature prognosis of both theatre and photography as mediums of death Barthes had made a critical oversight, it was because he overlooked "the face of the live" across which death/ disappearance takes place.[9] If the performing/ photographic body dies, it does so only so that it can pass on the chain of supplementarity and live again. And it is only when we can free ourselves from the simplistic binary of "live" and death that we can move from a metaphysics intent upon the excavation of a bogus originary presence to a conception of the live that implicates the spectator's real time, supplementary investments in the image, such that in my present re-encounter with that image of a nearly naked body marked in turns by shame, defiance and trauma, seen now through the luminance of my computer screen, I am left only with the question: What does this body want of me?

Meanwhile, in another photograph, another performance, another body calls. The body here too is clad only in pair of black briefs and looking down at its crotch, its head clean shaven just like that of the conscript that was Ng in 1994. However, any hopes for a perfect match cut between this image and the one of Ng is thwarted by a single detail: one sees the body not from its back but its front. In fact, the body here appears to display itself precisely for the camera; the shot, resultantly, is a spectacle. The setting, of all places, is a theatre, framed at a sufficiently wide angle to encompass most of the audience looking on. In the centre, the body stands surrounded by splatters of tofu and red dye, the remains of an earlier performative gesture. In a few moments, it will be stark naked. "Zihan lowered his briefs to reveal a clean shaven crotch to the audience," reads the caption to the Facebook photograph.

Yes, this is the body of Singaporean performance artist Loo Zihan, and the photograph concerned was taken at none other than *Cane*, Loo's reenactment of *Brother Cane* held at the Substation Theatre during the 2012 edition of the M1 Singapore Fringe Festival. But the word "reenactment" here may be a bit of a misnomer, for clearly deviations from the original performance have been made. Let us first consider the most glaring alteration—the "re-verted" body. Why is the body facing me? Why is it naked? What does it want of me? In the programme notes to the performance, Loo states that that piece was made as a way of reexamining the relationship of the Singaporean audience to *Brother Cane* eighteen years on, with the complicity of the audience watching the recreation being the key to this inquiry.[10] It's a statement that articulates pretty much what drives most, if not all, projects of reenactment, for the reenactment, at its base, is an attempt at "reworking" the past that acknowledges that events become past only "by virtue of both their ongoingness and their partialness, their incompleteness in the present"[11]. One can thus perhaps speak of the reenactment as a "making live again", which in the context of *Cane*, can be read as an attempt to disturb the sedimentations that have settled upon the original performance, to re-mark it as incomplete and ultimately, to reinstigate the liveness of its performative call.

Yet, something remains amiss in the reenactment, for if there was a call, it was not heard, or at least was rudely truncated by the naked body turned precisely to meet not just the spectator's eye but also the camera's. As the spectator, albeit one watching a video recording of the actual performance,[12] I was poised to respond, but instead found myself abruptly repelled by the explicit body at the centre of the spectacle, with "explicit" here referring not just to the physical body of Loo, but the explicitness of its call to look. All that struck me was the body's stillness, or rather, how hard it was trying to be still. This is a stillness purely of death, photographic in the Barthesian sense: "full, crammed: no room, nothing can be added to it."[13] The body here will not admit the supplement. Besides, the big question remains: Why the choice to deviate

from the original? Why the turn? There are two ways of looking at it, neither of which is unproblematic. The first considers the act as one of ritual, meant to exorcise communal or perhaps even—I shudder at the thought—personal demons. But if so, how does such catharsis figure in the mode of spectatorship that has been set up? What is the point of the audience looking upon a body performing what essentially can be reduced to a shamanistics of history or—I shudder again—a therapeutics of the self? The second reading is more palatable. Could the act be one more of a critical desperation? Perhaps an exact reenactment wasn't enough to make live again, utterly inadequate for dispelling all the bogus presences that have been sedimented upon that particular site of trauma over the years. Could the choice to make the turn and disclose the flesh then be read as Loo's valiant attempt to "out-live" the original live act in the name of compensating for its lost liveness? But even if so, the effort is in vain, for its method of literalizing the notion of flesh as physical flesh serves only to truncate the call of liveness. For flesh to become live, it cannot proclaim itself; it must, by all means, disappear, otherwise, I, the spectator, cannot but conclude that the body wants nothing from me.

But more needs to be said about the utterly peculiar, if not problematic, spectatorial situation that Loo had orchestrated. *Cane*, after all, consists of a total of six "accounts", to use Loo's term, of which the reenactment is the fourth. I will, however, for brevity's sake, devote the rest of the essay to unpacking just the reenactment itself, for there is much more at work in it than what has so far been described. Specifically, my primary point of interest lies in the two video projections, placed opposite to each other, that Loo had chosen to introduce into the performance. One screens an earlier version of *Cane* that Loo performed in Chicago where he was pursuing his postgraduate studies in 2011—this was more or less a straightforward reenactment and figures in the 2012 edition of *Cane* as the third "account"—while the other projects a live feed from the camera recording the reenactment as it unfolds. While the purpose of the latter is not exactly clear, the presence of the former adds another layer of temporality with

which the live performance runs in cadence, such that what we are witnessing is almost equivalent to a reenactment trying to repeat itself. All these set the scene for a truly bizarre viewing experience for the spectator, for one is made to continually alternate between two views, made to labor through the very operations of the gaze.

Yet, as previously suggested, this reenactment is at best only a repetition in name: even if we were to discount the explicit turn that Loo had introduced, it still strays too far from its model to "touch" and re-affect it, thus failing to charge and sustain the liveness of the space in between them where the spectator labors. To illustrate what this means in detail, it will be necessary to make a comparison between *Cane* and a performance with which it shares, in one particular segment, a rather fortuitous resemblance. The performance that I'm referring to is the Wooster Group's 2004 production of *Poor Theater* and the segment concerned is a reenactment of the last twenty minutes of Grotowski's adaptation of *Akropolis*, recounted in great detail in Schneider's *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, from which I've been quoting extensively thus far. Specifically, what interests me in that sequence is how the relationship between the spectator and the spectacle becomes one that is thoroughly embodied, and this is achieved by way of a seemingly paradoxical "absorptive theatricality", a condition which *Cane* fails to attain, or perhaps even consciously rejects, to its detriment.

Directed by Elizabeth LeCompte, *Poor Theater* is typical of the Wooster Group's maddeningly self-reflexive and kleptomaniacal style that is at once parody and homage to its theatrical forebears. In the sequence concerned, the Group's actors are reenacting the final minutes of Growtoski's Akropolis in step with a recording of a version of the play performed and filmed in London in 1968 that runs right behind them. The similarity here to Loo's staging here is striking, except that the sheer exactitude of the reenactment here is so impressive as to come across as a stunning feat of gestural, facial and intonational

mimesis, not forgetting that the actors also had to speak Polish to play the parts. As Schneider describes:

> [T]he tiniest or most specific of Grotowski's Lab actors' details are attended to—tilt of head, toss of hair, stamp of feet, furrow of brow, pitch of voice, direction of gaze, intake of breath.[14]

Yet, at the same time, certain "unruly details"[15], may it be that of gender or physiognomy or the inevitable error or two, still manage to surface through the cracks in the interface between the model and its copy, so much so that the more the doggedly the actors pursue the "hard labour" of replication, the more obvious the slippages become and the more the actors appear to flicker "like shadows in their frenzied liveness". [16]

While it is the labor of the actors that Schneider chooses to focus on in her investigations of the relationship between the copy and its original, it is, I believe, the concomitant labor of the spectator here that is of greater relevance to our project of remaking live the spectatorial relation in *Cane*. This labor is made possible by what I will call, not without irony, "absorptive theatricality", and the two words that constitute the term come from none other than Michael Fried's seminal but also widely criticized *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. Granted, Fried's definitions of theatricality may today appear incredibly narrow, but they offer useful coordinates at least for the discussion at hand.

Fried's treatise was written mostly in critique of what he perceived as the rise of certain forms of Minimalist art that sought to establish what he calls "a theatrical relation to the beholder"[17], which means that in those works, the presence of the spectator was always hinted at, if not directly addressed. In contrast, the works that Fried advocated were "anti-theatrical"—they treated the spectator as if it wasn't there.[18] Referring specifically to figurative painting, he argues that the more the figures within the painting appear immersed in their activities, the more they seem to declare their obliviousness to

the spectator's presence and the greater the chance of securing the spectator's actual placement before and absorption by the painting.[19] In other words, it is only by making the spectator forget its physical presence before the painting that it can give itself fully to the image. For Fried, this mode of absorbing the spectator by paradoxically negating its existence finds its highest expression in Diderot's concept of the tableau, a way of arranging figures on a stage such that what matters most is a self-contained pictorial unity, as if the tableau exists "only from the beholder's point of view"[20].

In this light, one could say that the tableau abounds in reenactments, though not necessarily by way of a pictorial unity, but by virtue of the need for the reenactor to disacknowledge the spectator in order to secure the double movement that is the reenactor's total immersion in a different time and space and the spectator's total absorption in the resultant spectacle. Where the Wooster Group breaks new ground in this respect is how it absorbs only with the intent of intensifying its moments of theatricality, and what this achieves is a movement from a purely ocular to an overwhelmingly embodied spectatorial experience, one in which the spectator is made to reckon with its own fleshy existence as skin. In Poor Theater, this initial absorption is secured by the moments when the Group's reenactment unfolds in near-perfect synchrony with the onscreen performance of their progenitors, when the two become a unified tableau. But as this is happening, what is not apparent is how the spectator is no longer just beholding from a position of exteriority, but already operating as skin, for the site from which it carries out its absorptive activities is also the chiasmatic space of touch between the screen and its mime. It is through the spectator's absorptive gaze that the seams are smoothed and the two performances joined as one. The spectator, in other words, becomes skin without even knowing it, for at these moments when the touches of the two temporalities against it are almost indistinguishable from each other, the spectator as skin becomes so porous as to render imperceptible its own workings as a mediating interface. But at some point, this skin does become highly charged, and this

happens during the moments of clear disparity, of syncopation, or of what Schneider calls "inter(in)animation"[21], when the divergences between the two versions of *Akropolis* become too unruly to be smoothed over by a merely absorptive gaze. It is at these junctures that the two temporalities can be truly said to touch and re-affect each other, when the skin truly begins to feel its own fleshiness as it becomes a crucial part of what Merleau-Ponty calls a relationship of "reversibility"[22]. Of course, the theories of Merleau-Ponty will require more room than this essay can offer to be explicated in detail, but succinctly expressed, what "reversibility" basically means here is that between the original and its reenactment[23] exists not a simple binary between model and copy, but a decidedly non-dualistic relationship in which each *reversibly* occupy the positions of touching and being-touched: the copy touches, re-affects and makes live again the model as much as the same is being done to it by the model, *though never at the same time*. The function of the skin or spectator here is thus to negotiate the gap between touching and being touched, to direct the tactile transferences between the A*kropolis* of two different times. The spectator, in such moments of inter(in) animation, is itself made live again, called upon to labor not in the literal sense of working hard, but more generally, of reworking the image. Such quietly dramatic turns strike one with nothing short of a "palpable force" in direct proportion to synchrony that has been achieved between the original and its reenactment, registered almost as a succession of haptic jolts that resensitizes the skin to its own fleshy being. Together, they constitute the essential theatricality of the piece, a theatricality that could not have been reached without absorption, for it is the original condition of plenitude experienced by the spectator in his captivation by the image—a condition so idealized by Fried himself—that makes those erratic moments of unruliness a matter of negotiation, such that the spectator, by way of a somatic urgency, cannot but do something with them.

This call to rework the image, expressed most compellingly in the Wooster Group's ambitious reenactment as an inner, embodied necessity on the part of the spectator, is experienced in *Cane* instead as a critical lack. If the Group's achievement is that of an absorptive theatricality, what one finds in *Cane* is in turn a pure theatricality without absorption, a theatricality that can in fact be said to resist any form of absorptive activity. If the spectator labors in *Cane*, it is only because it is beseeched to look at the gamut of bodies the performance continually serves up, may it be the live body of Loo, his recorded body or the bodies of the spectators themselves as projected on the live feed. These are bodies that, far from disregarding the spectator, demand to be beheld, that in fact assert their own individuality and vie for the attention of the spectator.[24] As such, the spectator, made to look here, then there, then there, is never quite situated in between things, never made to work as the skin across which things touch each other. Between the spectator and the bodies it receives, the relationship remains obstinately ocular. Consequently, the labor of looking is an alienated one, for it is directed towards bodies that we feel no impetus to do anything with, that do not implicate us as skin, and as such, it expresses itself as pure form, as literal hard work expended to no certain ends. Herein lies the naiveté in *Cane*: it presumes that the spectators' complicities can be enlisted just by making them look. But the call to look, made so peremptorily, is not much of a call at all when it blocks its own channels of reply. Eventually, the theatricality collapses upon itself—it is full, crammed, no room. "Look at me," the body commands, "but do no more." And if by returning the gaze we turn into stone, it is perhaps only by being touched as skin, by feeling against ourselves the brush not unlike that of Rama's feet against the stone-cold Ahalya, that we can become live again.

NOTES

1. Antonio Attisani and Marco Dotti, *Bene crudele* (Viterbo: Stampa Alternativa, 2004), p. 90.
2. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 148.
3. Phelan, pp. 150-1.
4. Ibid, p. 146.
5. Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 141.
6. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 77.
7. Schneider, p. 142.
8. This "drag", which draws heavily from Elizabeth Freeman's notion of a "temporal drag", is explained by Schneider as a condition in which "the past can simultaneously be past—genuine pastness—and on the move, co-present, not 'left behind.'" Ibid, pp. 14-5. See also Elizabeth Freeman, "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations," *New Literary History 31, no. 4 (2000)*: 728.
9. Ibid, p. 138.
10. Loo Zihan, "Cane," M1 Singapore Fringe Festival 2012: Art & Faith, http://www.singaporefringe.com/fringe2012/cane.html (accessed November 24, 2012).
11. Schneider, p. 33.
12. But given what I've just said about the liveness of the photograph, a liveness that should also extend to the video recording, this should not matter so much.
13. Barthes, p. 89.
14. Schneider, p. 112.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid, p. 121.
17. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 5.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid, p. 103.
20. Ibid, p. 96.

21. This word, which Schneider borrows from Fred Moten, who in turn borrowed from John Donne, refers to a relationship of co-constitution between the putatively live and the putatively past, such that the liveness or deadness of one or the other is no longer decidable or relevant. Schneider, p. 7.
22. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 130-55.
23. Schneider, p. 112.
24. Here I'm not implying that *Cane* should have just adopted the strategy of the Wooster Group and have the two reenactments play against each other in near synchrony. The main point is that for *Cane* to have functioned as the site of spectatorial negotiation that it could and should have been, it must first find ways to absorb the spectator on the level of skin, and what the Group did with Grotowski's *Akropolis* is just one way of doing so. This need to implicate the spectatorial body is especially crucial in the case of a reenactment of an earlier performance (as opposed to that of a major historical event as in Civil War reenactments), for here the spectator is more likely than not to have come without any prior investment in the original performance that is being reenacted.

"Can we go to Long Pig? They have toys." - Transmetropolitan

A document in advance: a few months after the publication of this text, Loo Zihan's *Cane* is set to occur. Although it was first realized some months ago in Chicago, situating it in Singapore is of particular note, adding layers of associations and references to an act which, in simple terms, could be described as a reenactment of Josef Ng's *Brother Cane*, the public reaction to which resulted in a ten-year ban on public funding for performance art in Singapore.

Beyond its status as reenactment, *Cane* could also be said to resemble a form of document-engaged performance I described in my essay for *Future of Imagination 5*.[1] Built atop an eyewitness account by Ray Langenbach, incorporating visual records and other oral documents, *Cane* may well embody a tipping point between performance and its document(s), or vice versa. In other words, if the overall accumulation and circulation of documents relating to *Brother Cane,* in all of their disparate, branching threads, constitute mycelia, *Cane* would then be a sporocarp – a fruiting body, which emerges for the dispersal of informational and performative spores.

Opinions, of course, are divided. Some might allege that this amounts to no more than cynical reappropriation, hijacking an established, even iconic work for the sake of self-aggrandizement. Still others might cite Marx's comment concerning the repetition of history[2] – if Ng's realization precipitated tragedy, would Loo's then amount to farce? Or would the opposite occur, with Loo's work highlighting the significance of the circulation of documents (up until, one assumes, the fateful document that probably didn't read, "no more tax money for dirty yuck. Rgds G.Y.") in establishing the iconicity of Ng's performance?[3]

Apart from the issues which entangle *Cane* specifically, we may also find that – in the present time, some decades after

the emergence of performance art – the inter-territorial zones at the limits of performance find themselves populated by an increasing profusion of chimeras and other strange fauna. Not quite a Cambrian explosion, perhaps, but nonetheless diverse. One of these rests at the tipping point of the performance and its subsequent documents, or vice versa, which we may see in *Cane*. Another inhabitant, referred to by Claire Bishop as "outsourced",[4] or delegated performance, would count amongst its exponents Santiago Sierra and Elmgreen & Dragset,[5] in which the fleshly presence at the apparent performance site is found in individuals engaged, whether by financial or other inducements, to undertake actions as directed by the artist.

In discussing the more general aspects of these far and distant territories of performance, I do not think it would be unreasonable to posit some degree of correlation between developments in technology and socio-economic organization, in relation to changes in artistic theory and practice.

For instance, it is perhaps not by mere chance alone that the emergence and rise of performance art, with its fixation on the body as the locus of expression, coincided with such socio-political and financial involutions as the end of the Bretton Woods system, the rise of economic deregulation, as well as the emergence of digitally augmented society through the increasing ubiquity of computers, satellite tele-communications, and the birth of the Internet itself – changes which saw concentrations of power achieve orbital velocity even as they (and their constituent entities) became diffuse and distributed. In the face of such societal discorporation, the reaffirmation of the embodied real, though reactive, would have remained coherent.

Thus – on one hand, the period of time from the origins of performance art to the present day, during which we may note an increase in the critical and popular acceptance of performance art – with a particularly notable instance of recent

institutional imprimatur in Marina Abramovic's *The Artist is Present* at New York's Museum of Modern Art, which had hopeful visitors camping out for nights on end for a chance to enter the presence and be shriven.

On the other hand, covering a similar time period, we may chart the asymptotic rise of globalization and its appurtenances. For instance, globalized finance now marks (or mars) the world with such hyper-kinetic hijinks as the innocuously named high-frequency trading (which have been described as algorithmic terrorism), as well as such dislocative oddities as Special Economic Zones. In the same period of time, personal computers and internet access have become increasingly ubiquitous, while transgenic organisms, once objects of academic study, are now firmly entrenched in the global agricultural infrastructure.

While, of course, correlation does not necessarily imply causation, it does waggle its eyebrows rather suggestively, and it behooves us to explore possible links between the upward trend in acceptance of performance art's embodied expressivity with upward trends in social, political, and technological diffusion, dislocation and disembodiment.

Such trends lend credence to the notion that the past few decades of, as Bojana Kunst framed it, "an obsessive romance with self and the body"[6], were in truth a palliative blind – that these objects of desire became desirable for the simple reason that they had passed beyond our reach. In much the same way that recent research in dopamine addiction suggests that it is the anticipation of dopamine, and not dopamine itself, which is sought, we may remain in indefinite anticipation of the embodied self – a dizzying paroxysm in parallel to the staggering madness of the present economic condition.

To extend the thought further, we might also consider the possibility that such a palliative blind conceals not the loss of the body through the machinations of capital (as enacted by disembodied, continent-spanning corporations, which have

been characterized as both the dominant life-forms of the present time, as well as being immortal, amoral sociopaths), but its own (unconscious or not) collusion in this dissolution.

If we are then facing (or have been facing all along) the irretrievable loss of the body and self, works of performance art which took them as points of origin might be reconsidered in terms of mourning, longing, or farce. However, in a 2009 TED talk, activist and athlete Aimee Mullins[7], in relation to changing perceptions of disability and prosthesis, proclaimed that the focus was shifting from the overcoming of deficiency to the augmentation of potential. If the body and self, as conceptual grounds for aesthetic articulation, are lacking, how then could they be augmented – what conceptual prostheses could be supplied?

In relation to this question, it is worth noting that the human body – as both the reification of individuality and the common ground of experience across our species – may soon be (or already is) obsolete on those very terms. Donna Haraway's 1985 cyborg manifesto suggested that the cyborgization of our species has already taken place – that each of us, in varying degrees and directions, are already amalgamations of mechanism and organism.[8]

The cyborg according to Haraway is the product of lived social relations, an ambiguous creature which disregards collective origins and organic wholes – partial, ironic, intimate and perverse. As the output of a social framework that has been mechanized, digitized and mediatized in advance, we find these qualities internalized within ourselves. For instance, the Taylorist division of labor which helped birth the epoch of mass production might well find itself reflected in the possibility of internalized division of identities – poly-pseudonymity – in response to the aggressive transparency of social media software.

Though material cyborgization is far less apparent, we may consider our increasing integration with technology in relation

to new and emerging technologies. The Internet now serves as collectivized prosthesis of memory and communication, while the advent of direct neural interfaces and cybernetic limbs suggest the possibility of the infinite editability (and thus differentiation) of the body. Although technologies for the enhancement of our bodies have long existed, they pale in comparison to recent, current, and projected capacities.

Within the flesh itself, we observe once again the advent of editability and the transgression of boundaries, with active research in cross-species organ transplantation and the J. Craig Venter Institute's recent claims of having developed the first synthetic life form.[9] Furthermore, as equipment costs fall and technical information spreads, it seems reasonable to expect experimentation beyond the novelty of glowing rodents. Once the abstracted preserve of hypothetically faceless men in white coats (and, by extension, entrenched institutions beholden to corporate and governmental requirements), genetic experimentation is now increasingly accessible, a situation summed up by OpenPCR's rallying cry – DNA is DIY.[10]

Returning once more to the specific instance of *Cane*, we may of course note that a body is still very much involved – an artist's body, no less! Fixating on that shibboleth, however, may well elide the potential for exploring performativity in the creation, editing, and circulation of data across informational networks and archives. We could, indeed, conceive of performative bodies not so much in terms of supposed fleshly immediacy and authenticity, but (to invert the earlier, earthier metaphor) fragmented, performative, informational avatars – gestural, affective user interfaces, even.

In the context of shifting normals in the technological and social spheres – fleets of Theseus, in constant, churning states of becoming – it seems less than helpful for the spheres of artistic activity to possess key anchors and (however blurred and uncertain) boundaries of genre and medium. Within such complex, evolving situation, artistic classification might do well to take a leaf from biological taxonomy.

Where once the ponderous kingdoms of Linnaeus reigned, classifying life forms on the basis of apparent structural similarities (One stamen? Line A, please. Two? Line B), current techniques of biological systematics include cladistics, in which groups are defined by shared evolutionary history of given characteristics, and molecular phylogenetics, which decodes genetic legacies – as datasets grow ever larger and more complex, so too do our techniques of analysis.

Applying this coarse-to-fine grain transition to artistic classification, then, might take the form of data-informed interrogations of aesthetic practices, in which sliding scale(s) of performativity might well supplant the blocky-yet-contentious general field of performance art – and likewise for the numerous fields of art, with the general upshot of migrating from definitional, territorial disputes, to a more diverse, complex field of discussion.

Editors' Note: This article was published in November 2011 as part of Future of Imagination 7, International Performance Art Event *catalogue. It is reproduced here with the kind permission of the organizers.*

NOTES

1 Bruce Quek, "Document & Performance or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Lens" in *Future of Imagination 5* (Singapore: FOI 5, 2008), pp. 20 – 28.

2 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York, 1852). Project Gutenberg, June 2006. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1346/1346-h/1346-h.htm>

3 George Yeo was Minister for Information and the Arts at the time of the *Brother Cane* controversy.

4 Claire Bishop, "Outsourcing Authenticity? Delegated Performance in Contemporary Art," in *Double Agent*, eds. Claire Bishop and Sylvia Tramontana (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2008), pp. 111 – 14.

5 See Santiago Sierra, "Group of People Facing the Wall and Person Facing into a Corner" Lisson Gallery, London, October 2002, and Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, "Reg(u)arding the Guards." Bergen Kunsthall, 2005.

6 Bojana Kunst, "Strategies of Subjectivity in Contemporary Performance Art," in *Maska*, Performance Territories (2002, Year XVII), no. 74 – 75.

7 Aimee Mullins, "Prosthetic Aesthetics: It's Not Fair Having 12 Pairs of Legs" (February 2009) Video file retrieved from: <http://www.ted.com/talks/aimee_mullins_prosthetic_aesthetics.html>

8 Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 149 – 52.

9 Daniel G. Gibson *et al*, "Creation of a Bacterial Cell Controlled by a Chemically Synthesized Genome", *Science*, vol. 329, no. 5987 (2 July, 2010), pp. 52 – 56. Published online 20 May 2010. Retrieved from: <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/329/5987/52.full?sid=89f5641b-d168-43c5-873e-a7546acab376>

10 Tito Jankowski, "DNA is now DIY: OpenPCR ships worldwide." *OpenPCR*. 6 Jul 2011. <http://openpcr.org/2011/07/dna-is-now-diy-openpcr-ships-worldwide/>

Body

There are various sorts of bodies here: nude bodies, soiled bodies, individual and collective bodies, bodies of work.

The equivalent of the proverbial money shot occurs in *Cane* (2012) when Loo Zihan, clad only in his underwear – to which he has successively stripped down, over the course of the performance, from an all-white ensemble and a black dressing gown – finally discards even that last shred of modesty. He removes his briefs, and, for about forty seconds, stands stark naked in the center of a ring of red paint splashes, slowly turning around so as to afford every member of the audience a clear view of his privates, the triangle of skin above his genitals revealed to be smooth, hairless, as clean-shaven as his depilated pate.[1]

Loo's full frontal nudity marks the latest moment in a trajectory of corporeal confessionalism. The confessing body is materialized by more than the mere fact of nakedness: it is uncomfortably, obsessively exposed; it confides, displays and psychologizes its own secrets; it is admission, accusation and autobiography, an act of self-interrogation and self-flagellation at one and the same time. As, say, in Anne Sexton's poems of somatic immediacy – her masturbating wife, for instance ("I am spread out … My little plum is what you said. At night, alone, I marry the bed."), or coital dissection ("Whereas last night the cock knew its way home, as stiff as a hammer … Today it is tender, a small bird, as soft as a baby's hand.")[2] – uncovered flesh stands in for divulged confidence. In this slippage, the physical, *in puris naturalibus*, betokens the personal, *sub rosa*. Loo's reiterated gestures of bodily revelation, compulsively enacted at various junctures across his oeuvre, conflate the tropes of the undressed soma and the

excavated self, offering up corporeal disclosure as an analogue of narrated subjectivity. The artist's body, laid bare in all its obscured dimensions, operates as a nexus of intersecting strands: of material and social taboos, trauma and amnesia, abjection and repressed histories.

Let's backtrack a little: *Taman Negara* marks a particularly cogent instance of this confessional bent. Staged in 2011 as part of the annual *Singapore Survey* show,[3] the piece, notoriously, involved public urination. For several hours, Loo moved between two pillars, alternately standing stock-still and drinking from a number of Chinese chamber pots filled with water; in the midst of the performance, when the need arose, he simply wet himself, with puddles of clear-colored pee slowly collecting in his wake on the floor of the gallery. Pictures taken during a childhood vacation to Malaysia were displayed on one pillar, and on the other was mounted a television screen playing footage of these photographs, over which was superimposed visual effects of running water; also included was an audio recording. The performance, according to Loo, was rooted in the memory of that eventful trip, one colored by shame and silence in his recollection:

> I traveled to Taman Negara, the national park of Malaysia in 1994 at the age of 11 with my Mother on a camping trip. While descending a mountain track, I decided to run ahead, [and] somewhere along the way I took the wrong fork in the road and ended up deep in the jungle. This was my first experience being displaced from civilization, I had no conception of how should one behave in such a situation. My bladder was bursting and I didn't know what to do. I ended up wetting myself. When I eventually found my way back to the camp, my mother was looking all over for me. There was a wet patch running down my shorts. We never spoke about the incident. I asked my mother in preparation for the exhibition if she remembered this incident, she claimed that she was not aware.[4]

The piece is, on the one hand, an aesthetic exorcism, a working-out of adolescent trauma via the vehicle of the performative. The physical demands were voluntarily rigorous: Loo spent as many as three hours simply walking back and forth, remaining stationary, and drinking liberal amounts of fluids – the result of which was a protracted case of water intoxication.[5] These corporeal ordeals, perhaps not unlike that of Catholic flagellants in the Middle Ages, their self-mortification executed as public penance, represent a redemption of psychological proportions carried out in the somatic register, the absolution of personal complexes through the open, ritualistic chastening of flesh.

No less significant, though, is the interposition of bodily waste in a landscape clearly demarcated by notions of public hygiene. Anthropology provides us with an explanation for considering dirt – and other unclean substances – as "matter out of place": "It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements."[6] Pollution here is less an issue of essence, but rather one of trespass, of violated boundaries. The conflict between the mutually constitutive realms of the pure and the impure, between cleanliness and contamination, entails the banishment of "inappropriate elements" to a sphere beyond the acceptable – a system that thus also delineates the parameters of the acceptable. Loo's transgression of those borders signals a disruption of the presentable, culturally consumable body, i.e. *sans* traces of messy, unhygienic excreta. In *Taman Negara*, the act of disclosure is twofold: the ceremonially soiled body (an admission of its less salubrious functions that constitute the 'outside', or the realm of abjection, to corporeal orthodoxy) dovetails with the admission of a secret childhood shame (the episode reimagined in excruciating, ritualized form), a collapse of biological necessity and psychic expiation.

The gesture of confession, in *Cane*, is imbricated in several layers of intertextuality. The performance is an interpretation of Josef Ng's *Brother Cane* (1993/94), based on an account by artist and scholar Ray Langenbach; various textual sources, including Langenbach's, are recited aloud to the audience; there is footage of an earlier enactment of *Cane* in Chicago, as is a real-time recording of the present performance while it happens; a rarely-seen video clip of Ng's original rendition is also incorporated into the piece. Loo's reconstruction, in its explicitly mediated character, is overdetermined, enmeshed in a web of descriptions, deferrals, interventions, retroprojections. He notes: "… presenting all these accounts is a way of emphasizing the fragmented nature of memory, the constant repetition drowning out the original piece … A reminder that there is no single definitive representation of *Brother Cane* that will do it justice, and it is not the intention of my piece to do so."[7] *Cane*, in other words, deliberately locates itself within a matrix of interconnected narratives; even its points of departure are premised on a preordained script, contrived from a variety of materials and sedulously cited. Crucially, the climactic moment of Loo's genital exposure evinces a calculated deviation from its counterpart in *Brother Cane*. According to Langenbach, the climax of the earlier performance occurred as such:

> Ng said, "I have heard that clipping hair can be a form of silent protest" (not verbatim quote), and walked to the far end of the gallery space. Facing the wall with his back to the audience, he then lowered his briefs just below the top of his buttocks and carried out an action I could not see. He returned to the performance space and placed a small amount of hair on the centre tile …… At no time did Josef Ng expose his genitals to the audience. He carefully faced the back wall of the performance space … No one actually observed him cut his pubic hair. The audience only became aware of what appeared to be cut hair when Ng placed it on a plate before us.[8]

The video clip – which was also shot by Langenbach – bears out this verdict.[9] The originary moment is partially obscured: the only source of illumination emanates from the rear of the outdoor space, which is otherwise shrouded in gloom. (Ng performed his piece shortly past midnight on January 1, 1994.) It ekes out a sliver of light through the shadows, in which the performer's figure may be discerned. Having destroyed cubes of soybean curd and bags of red dye with a rattan cane, Ng slips out of the bathrobe he is wearing and, clad only in a pair of black briefs, strides purposefully to a white-tiled wall some distance behind him. There, with his back to the audience and his underwear pulled down, he appears to perform certain gesticulations in the area around his crotch, their exact nature hidden. For a few seconds, when the camera zooms in on Ng's bare bottom in an attempt to decipher the goings-on, even the meager source of light is cut off, and the entire *mise-en-scène* is plunged into near total darkness.

What is at stake is not, of course, the actual performance of *Brother Cane* itself, distanced from us now by almost two decades. Rather, as Loo asserts, it is the "fragmented … memory" of the piece that concerns him, the numerous documents which structure our access to the prototype, and which provide the basis of (future) contestation. Watching the recording of Ng's performance is to witness ontological ghostliness at work; the originary event is always already deferred, and contemporary audiences, withdrawn from experiential privilege, are reduced to watching the camera watching the performer, whose body becomes little more than a ghost in the machine. And, in the case of the video capturing *Loo's* reenactment, in which Langenbach's recording is embedded, we are set at yet another remove – obliged to contemplate a vestige of a trace of a happening. The phenomenon of obscuration, then, is doubled: in its original iteration, *Brother Cane* was discharged in a milieu where visibility – and thus comprehension – is rendered contingent,

and Langenbach's recording of the performance further determines our only means of ocular approach *post hoc*, the frame of his camera establishing the boundaries of permissible vision-knowledge.[10] Put another way, not only was the authentic moment one that failed to vindicate the attendant discourse (the furor over Ng's pube-snipping stunt, which, as it turns out, was barely discernable during the performance), but the sole visual transcript of the event overlays that particular occlusion with its own (the close-up of Ng's buttocks captured on screen under conditions of poor light and even pitch-blackness). Here, both cognition and sight are virtually, effectively gainsaid.

Juxtaposed against this scenario, in a temporal and spatial continuity, is the bodily disclosure of *Cane*'s climax. Contra the limited accessibility of Ng's denouement, as it has been bequeathed to us, Loo's entire performance was conducted in the glare of the spotlight, metaphorically and literally. The lead-up to *Cane* was met with intense media and public attention. Some six months prior to the fact, a front-page article in the *Life!* section of *The Straits Times* featured an image of Ng with uncovered bottom, presumably in the infamous act of trimming his pubic area, and asked: "Remember this?" A few days before the performance, another piece in the same publication queried: "Is it art-making? Or is it a publicity stunt?" It went on to quote a local playwright: "I think what Zihan is doing is not merely a re-enactment, but a neutering of the work for consumption by a new generation of audience …" A reader's letter declared in response: "Cutting pubic hair again? What is it trying to show? There is absolutely no meaning in performing such an act. It is so silly, weird and crude."[11] As if transposing the effect of the public's gaze, its unrelenting scrutiny, into the realm of the sensorial, *Cane* was performed under the vividly bright lights of the Substation Theatre, the site of the staging flushed in a tract of effulgence that left little to the imagination – a fact well attested to by the video recording. As the antithesis to the finite, shrouded view of Josef Ng's performance – or Langenbach's rehearsal thereof

– Loo's reenactment extends the trope of visual transparency, instituting a series of dichotomies: the dimness of an outdoor arena vs. the clarity of the interior space; the purported act of hair-snipping in *Brother Cane* vs. the already shaven crotch in *Cane*; Ng's interruption of the audience's gaze, his back turned to them at the culmination of his "protest", vs. the revelation of Loo's genitalia unabashedly exhibited to the watching crowd, the performer's body swiveling around for maximum exposure, Loo observing the spectators while they survey his nude form, the mutual lines of regard, in fact, writ large on the screen behind them – almost, seemingly, for *our* benefit.

May we be allowed to read Loo's gesture, in all its purposive divergences, as a confession? What exactly, though, would he be confessing to? If the abject body of *Taman Negara*, for one, reifies through its prescribed self-pollution the desire for psychological penance, what does the naked form in *Cane* suggest? Could semantic substance be encountered in the slippage between the individual soma and the corporate corpus – extrapolated from the one, germane to the other? After all, the leap from the singular body to the body politic is but a synecdochical shift, albeit one of socio-cultural import: "Just as it is true that everything symbolises the body, so it is equally true … that the body symbolises everything else." More critically, "the body is a model which can stand for any bounded system … The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures."[12] If human and societal anatomies are homologous, what does the fact of Loo's denuded corporeal complex – enacted in Singapore, in the year 2012 – signify about its particular historical and cultural moment, or the body politic as it is generated by the sum total of its constituent bodies at this specific juncture?[13]

Bodies

Not too long ago, sometime in early 2009, a young couple takes a stroll around the popular Holland Village neighborhood in nothing but their birthday suits and flip-flops. The following year, a man walks into a MacDonald's restaurant in the wee hours of the morning, *au naturel*, to purchase a cup of coffee. Hot on his heels, a middle-aged woman disrobes at a bus stop and boards a bus, and, shortly after that, at the Art Stage Singapore fair, Hyderabadi artist T. Venkanna poses for pictures before a Frida Kahlo painting – in the buff. In 2010, *The Straits Times* reported: "Police received 166 reports of indecent exposure last year [2009], up from 146 in 2008 and 136 in 2007. And 2010 is set to be a record-breaking year. In the six months to June, there were 105 cases - one every other day."[14] This rash of exposed bodies, including Loo's, are nothing if not disruptive, deviant. They are insistently exhibitionist, as if their normally concealed aspects, the appareled areas and privy functions, ached to be free of some mass delusion of propriety, some universal stricture of repression – as if, in the act of physical revelation, psychical catharsis stood a chance. To return to the idea of the collective body, then, the mechanism of repression is clear enough. Cultural taboos forbidding public nudity are ubiquitous in the industrialized, civilized world; in Singapore, the legal interdict against what is termed 'indecent exposure' is well-known:

> Any person who appears nude (a) in a public place; or (b) in a private place and is exposed to public view, shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding $2,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 3 months or to both. (2) For the purpose of this section, the reference to a person appearing nude includes a person who is clad in such a manner as to offend against public decency or order.[15]

The body politic is thus enjoined, by the threat of punitive force, to keep its clothes on; the aggregate body of the citizenry performs its obligations by emerging appropriately clothed.

Failure to comply constitutes a denial of those legal and social frameworks that regulate membership in the corporate body, which confers and, consequently, sanctions forms of permissible selfhood. Judith Butler provides us with a theory of subjectivity. According to the Butlerian paradigm, the subject is materialized only through a citational accumulation that is not a singular act, but requires instead "reiteration of a norm or set of norms"[16] to function as the 'citing' of power – as the bringing into being of the "I". Of interest are the critical elements involved: on the one hand, the processual nature of the performance through which the subject comes into being, stabilizing over time to realize the effect of a unitary entity; and, on the other, the repeated performances of this subjectivity by which it is brought into line with hegemonic discourses, or becomes cognizable as the 'self'. In other words, selfhood is not a prior quantity, but is always derived from the compulsion to repeat normative standards, thus agreeing with a pre-determined modality that confers on it the privilege of existence. She channels Derrida's writings on the efficacy of the signature: "Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a "coded" or iterable utterance, or … if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a "citation?"[17] The act of repetition, then, is that which allows the self to be identified as such, a (re)citation of power that constitutes the legitimacy of a subject.

The prescriptions of the law governing nudity, in this case, inaugurate one channel through which the citizen-subject is constructed: the compliant, clothes-wearing individual. However, the power cited here – the power of legislation, of enforcement – is not simply ascribed to political ascendancy, but is inscribed by the collective. The reach of the statute is telling: "the reference to a person appearing nude includes a person who is clad in such a manner *as to offend against public decency or order*." (Emphasis mine.) The standards of decency here are not simply those of the law, but that of the communal body. The individual who veils his/her nudity in

public does so not only to avoid the wrath of the state, but, in assuming those norms upheld by the body politic as a whole, materializes his/her integral viability to the mass. It is no coincidence, perhaps, that the phenomenon of public nudity is commonly ascribed to other, underlying forms of perversion. A report in *The New Paper* opines: "… exhibitionism is characterized by having intense sexual urges or fantasies … It is a psychiatric disorder because it is deviant … in certain cases … it may not be exhibitionism, but merely a case of seeking attention."[18] There are any number of common explanations: aberrant sexual fetishism; mental disturbance; narcissism run amok. The undressed form suggests unruly, ungovernable states of being. Indecent exposure is undesirable confession, a disclosure of individualities otherwise camouflaged by the dictates of polite society, an inscription of stigmata on the collective corpus. The amenable, productive member of society may be traced not to some pre-social body, an organic entity, but rather to the disciplined citizen who demonstrates one fundamental facet of belonging – namely, acquiescing to the group dynamic. While prior existence may of course occur, the privilege of subjecthood takes place only through regulatory modes of being, reiterated as recognizable signs of the socialized, functional citizen-subject.

As Butler would have it, public nudity is a performance of dissent. In its deliberate manifestations, it articulates a refusal to repeat the signs of acculturation, of assimilation into the broader social body. The individual soma that insists on its own physiological realities, its brazen flesh and biological functions, embodies subjective positions otherwise masked by a semiotics of the normative; it repudiates overarching power systems imposed by the nation-group. Of his decision to diverge from the original rendition of *Cane*, Loo comments:

> I decided that the exposure of a shaven crotch was artistically more relevant to the piece today … Ultimately by not replicating Josef's piece exactly, I guess it is also a form of protest, a refusal to allow the authorities to co-opt Josef's original action. I am also excited by this permutation because of the variety of ways it potentially can be read – if cutting hair is a form of silent protest – and there is no hair left to cut, how can the protest still happen?[19]

The climactic revelation bespeaks a resistance to intrusions by the state apparatus. *Brother Cane*, of course, furthered the cause of censorship in Singapore: the National Arts Council condemned the act, Ng was charged in court and fined 1,000 SGD, and both funding and licensing for performance art of all stripes was embargoed, a ban lifted only in 2003, almost a decade later. In simultaneously reimagining and jettisoning Ng's key gesture, Loo presented a *fait accompli*: openly abjuring the original verdict, as well as sidestepping the possibility of renewed censure. As he points out, the process of obtaining the necessary permission to stage *Cane* was centered on the pivotal moment in the original performance: "…it was made clear to me via proxy that they [the Media Development Authority] are still finding the snipping of pubic hair in public problematic. The exact reason why it is problematic was not made clear … It is ironic that there is more 'nudity' in the new piece than Josef's piece."[20] If official disapprobation indeed hinged on the act of trimming one's pubic hair in public, then an already shaven genital area, put on overt display, encompasses that very act and at once elides the rationale behind possible objections.

The sight of a clean-shaven Loo, the hair on both his crotch and his head trimmed down to the skin, also conjures other associations that imply opposition to official ideologies. The manifestation of nudity suggests an eschewal of the national discourse of procreation – or what has been dubbed "an obsession with ideal replication … transformed through acts of state power into a large-scale project of *biological* reproduction …"[21] In the National Day Rally speech of 1983, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew controversially sparked off the so-called Great Marriage Debate by exhorting more educated women to propagate, in order to address what he perceived as the preference of men with university degrees to pick wives

of a lesser educational background. "We must amend our policies," he proclaimed, "and try to reshape our demographic configuration so that our better-educated women will have more children to be adequately represented in the next generation … In some way or other, we must ensure that the next generation will not be too depleted of the talented."[22] Nearly three decades later, the anxiety over the state of the body politic remains. In a scenario of uncannily self-fulfilling proportions, Lee's son, current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong – the offspring of two Cambridge graduates, himself an alumnus of Harvard and his parents' alma mater – noted in his National Rally Speech earlier this year: "… we are having too few babies … Married couples are having fewer children … they are not making up for those who are not marrying and having children and 20-30 plus per cent now are not marrying, not having children. So we have a problem."[23] What the elder Lee identified as the distortion of social patterns by recalcitrant, un-regenerative (female) bodies, is, in the new millennium, a non-reproductive tendency of collective dimensions. Rather than being diluted by inadequate genetic potential, population numbers are simply deteriorating beyond those rates necessary for replenishment, thus ensuring a thinning of the gene pool both qualitatively *and* quantitatively. The citizenry is expressly being called upon to replace itself, its component bodies to perform their patriotic duty.

Therein lies the nub of Loo's confession in *Cane*, his performance of dissenting subjectivity: he falls into that insubordinate minority, the twenty to thirty percent, openly indicted by the Prime Minister for its contumacy. The deliberate corporeal inflections here are critical. Standing 169 cm tall and tipping the scales at 60 kg,[24] the artist is nothing if not slender of build; despite his twenty-eight years, he resembles an adolescent youth, an impression naturally accentuated by the sight of his hairless genitalia, which connotes prepubescence, and a foreclosure of sexual reproductivity. Ditto the appearance of his shaved scalp: while perhaps an acknowledgement of Josef Ng's own number-three cut in *Brother Cane*,[25] it more saliently appropriates the

symbolic force of a monk's tonsure, thus evoking the surrender of sexual self-propagation. In these mutually reinforcing crosscurrents of signification, the procreative process is emblematically abnegated, a fact that signals the irruption of autobiography into the ostensible reenactment of Ng's piece. Loo is a self-identified gay man. His queerness is here inscribed onto his anatomy by the simulation of other corporeal geographies – the bald crotch of the child, the depilated head of the cenobite – that likewise elude the imperatives of the mature, heteronormative body, the reproductive capabilities of which are ideally exercised in the service of the nation's needs. The signposts are triangulated: adolescence, renunciation and homosexuality are bonded by the failure of the procreative principle, by their common denial of the required regeneration of the body politic. As has been pointed out,

> … states undertake a process not only of assigning biological sex … but also (re)inscribing sexed/gendered subjectivity … States also have a keen interest in the sexual activities of bodies found within the borders of the nation-state, most often expressed through legislation (who can have what kind of sex with whom). They actively seek to subdue, subsume or erase the voices of sexualised Others as a way of ensuring the legitimacy of their own claims to represent the Nation.[26]

If the communal body requires of its individual units the capacity and the willingness to regenerate, then what is represented by the prohibition of forms of sexual behavior that do not abet this need, is a corporeal coercion – or a triple strike of subduing, subsuming, and erasing the incarnation of somatic, sexual alterities, a harnessing of biopower in the name of the collective good. Homosexuality, like public nudity, is outlawed in Singapore, a legacy of the colonial era that synchronizes all too neatly with the demands of the contemporary nation-state. According to the pertinent legislative expressions, the "indecent exposure" of the latter lexically resonates with the "gross indecency"[27] of the former,

a reiterative enunciation that seems to ally, in the eyes of the law, the offenses of public immodesty and non-reproductive coitus. The *corpus delicti*, as such, is figured literally in the openly nude, avowedly queer soma. More than merely revisiting *Brother Cane*, the disclosure of Loo's un-procreative body, volitionally, suggestively hairless, is a richly polysemic move: it coalesces, in the moment of fleshly revelation, various forms of somatic transgressions, while at the same time amalgamating the aesthetico-political considerations of the performance and the meta-register of the performer's own homosexuality. Beyond the formula of a pre-written script, then, acts of self-referentiality are insinuated into the purported reenactment, acts which, at the same time, recuperate Ng's protest against the victimization of gay men, a detail now generally lost to popular view by the moralistic cacophony eclipsing the afterlife of the original work. Re-presentation slips into autobiography, which feeds again into the socio-political imperatives that inform both moments.

As an embodiment of the queered, non-acquiescent body, manifested in a milieu where its desires and articulations are proscribed, the homosexual performative – like the public enactment of nudity – is caught up in dialectics of occlusion and legibility, conformity and confession. It is, concomitantly, encoded (its admission of sexual alterity bound up in corporeal mimesis) and exposed (urgently, publicly, confrontationally nude); it is teasingly elliptical, and insistently visible. Loo's short film, *Chancre* (2011), perhaps instantiates the queer body at its most intimate and its most evasive: four different narratives are recited in turn over the course of the film's shifting images, including excerpts from Paul Gauguin's Tahitian memoir, *Noa, Noa*, English anthropologist Walter Skeat's study, *Malay Magic*, and the "Fragment of an Agon" scene from T. S. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes*, as well as, unsurprisingly, a report of personal significance – a recording of Loo discussing his contraction of syphilis. These fractured bits and pieces of narratives are interspersed over an equally motley visual montage: Gauguin's 1894 painting, *Day of the God (Mahana no Atua)*; an old Malay film from the 1950s,

Sumpah Pontianak; footage of an American family's vacations, which include scenes of Hawaii's lush landscape; sequences of Loo's naked body performing a variety of explicit acts, from masturbating, and trimming his pubic hair, to exposing his anus. As that paratactic litany of sources would suggest, the thematic connections here are tenuous, fleeting: Eliot's verse references Gauguin, conjuring the "Gauguin maids in the banyan shades", with Sweeny promising to carry Doris off to "a cannibal isle." Depictions of Hawaii seem to evoke the South Seas setting of the French painter's adventures, which, of course, involved his transmission of syphilis to the native female population of Tahiti – a fact reiterated by Loo's own experience with the disease, having caught it from engaging in anonymous oral sex in Amsterdam.[28] The allusions to indigenous Malay mythology, especially Skeat's detailing of *langsuir* folklore – the figure is believed to be the ghost of a woman who died during childbirth – obliquely associate demonic and diseased bodies, spectral and bacterial infection, aligning both forms of corporeal plague.[29]

The sense of semantic nebulousness is generated at the iconographic level by the series of ambivalent images in *Chancre*. The many close-ups of Loo's body, in particular, evade immediate understanding. The proximity of the camera emphasizes the plurality of textures in the film: the wrinkled, pinched furrows around what looks to be an expanding and contracting orifice, later revealed to be, indeed, the artist's anal region; the webbed surface of a thick fold of flesh, beneath which protrudes a smoother, pink expanse, his foreskin and penis; a flow of yellowish, semi-opaque ooze slowly trickling over flesh, which, rather than the syphilitic discharge one suspects it to be, turns out to be the contents of an egg. Save for a few brief instants, these compositions are framed so closely that other contextual information, like the larger bodily unit and its most distinguishing feature, the face, are omitted; tactile nuance is emphasized almost to the exclusion of visual comprehension. The film ultimately forswears the visual dimension of knowledge, substituting instead the sensuous, haptic pleasures of bodily fragments and surfaces

as an analogue for Loo's testimony of personal affliction. The admission of the artist's disease and sexuality is narrated over the succession of images, yoking, once more, somatic divulgence and subjective experience, in a spliced loop of bare flesh and fraught confession.

The trope of occlusion, in fact, extends from motif to theme to, finally, the censorial discourse dictating the film's accessibility. It was first screened locally as a fringe event at the Singapore International Film Festival in 2011, where it received a R(21) rating. As Loo relates it, further plans to show the film were derailed: "I planned for it to be screened at Valentine Willie Fine Art's annual *Singapore Survey* showcase in August 2012. However, due in part to the fact that private galleries showing work of mature rating are required to apply for a license that entails a payment of a 10,000 SGD security deposit, the idea was scrapped." For its inclusion in the present show, *Chancre* suffered a similar fate: "It was recently an R(21) rating for the *Archiving Cane* exhibition; again, this is a one time license ... The frustrating thing is the fact that we have to submit the film for rating every time we plan to screen it in public here in Singapore ..."[30] The oscillation between censorship and (limited) display, occlusion and perception, is enacted by the regulatory framework of bureaucratic fiat, resulting in a game of peek-a-boo with the public eye, the film slipping into and out of popular consciousness in a pattern superintended by the authorities. An all-too-routine scenario in Singapore, the vicissitudes surrounding each desired screening of the film engenders a mercurial program of exhibition; what ensues are alternating channels of access and denial – now you see it, now you don't – that correspond to the pictorial ambiguity and narrative open-endedness of the film. The cumulative affect, at last, is one of spectatorial uncertainty, a play of observability and obscuration attending the catalogue of Loo's bodily parts: served up as corporeal components that do not quite cohere into the individual, a constituted subject, no more than visual intimations of the terse, disquieting narrative recited by a voice discarnate.

Self-pollution, public nudity and the homosexual performative are commensurate indices. In their particular ways, each measures the subject-effect of subalternity. The subaltern is the subject of "inferior rank", "whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way."[31] The distinguishing characteristic of the subaltern classes is, fundamentally, their exclusion from the mechanisms of power and control, i.e. dominance: "subordination cannot be understood except as one of the constitutive terms in a binary relationship of which the other is dominance"[32]; Gayatri Spivak has remarked that the "work involved ... is indeed a task of "measuring silences"[33], of what a text cannot or refuses to say. The soiled body, the nude body and the queered one, then, figure forth the articulation of subjectivities otherwise foreclosed by hegemonic configurations. The "silences" here register beyond speech. The adherence to both social and legal norms regulating admissible forms of behavior – appropriate hygiene, appropriate dress, appropriate intercourse – embodies the silence of compliant corporealities, those individual bodies that conform to the operations and requirements of the aggregate body. In declaring somatic vulgarities as verities, *his* verities, Loo Zihan's work hypostatizes the subaltern condition; the body revealed is the subject disclosed, its flesh and its functions a signal of critical, fundamental identities displaced by collective dispositions.

There are, then, various sorts of bodies here: normative bodies, homosexual bodies, bodies of state and of subject, confessional bodies.

NOTES

1. *Cane* was staged for the first time in Singapore in February 2012. A video of the entire performance is archived online: <http://vimeo.com/37993908>.
2. See Sexton's *The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator* and *The Fury of Cocks*.
3. The annual *Singapore Survey* exhibition is organized by Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore.
4. Loo Zihan, in a personal e-mail to the author, October 30, 2012.
5. According to the artist. Loo, e-mail to the author, October 30, 2012.
6. See Mary Douglas's classic study, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 36.
7. Loo, in a personal e-mail to the author, October 23, 2012.
8. Ray Langenbach, "Leigong Da Doufu: Looking Back at "Brother Cane" in *Looking at Culture*, eds. Sanjay Krishnan *et al* (Singapore: Chung Printing, 1996), 123 – 136. See p. 127.
9. The footage is included in the recording of *Cane*, on Vimeo; see note no.1 above.
10. See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1994), for a study of the sight-knowledge complex.
11. The articles and letter are, respectively, Adeline Chia, "Controversy revisited", *The Straits Times*, October 20, 2011; Corrie Tan, "Cane re-enactment draws debate", *The Straits Times*, February 16, 2012; Pek Li Sng, "Why show Brother Cane again?", *The Straits Times*, Life! Mailbag, February 18, 2012.
12. Mary Douglas, qtd. in Anthony Synnott and David Howes, "From Measurement to Meaning. Anthropologies of the Body", *Anthropos*, Bd. 87, H. 1./3. (1992), pp. 147 – 166. See p. 159.
13. For a sustained interrogation of the relations between performance art and the state in Singapore in the 1990s, see Ray Langenbach, *Performing the Singapore State 1988 - 1995* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Western Sydney, 2004).
14. Chua Hian Hou, "More cases of people going nude in public", *The Straits Times*, December 15, 2010.
15. So states Section 27A of the Miscellaneous Offences (Public Order and Nuisance) Act (Chapter 184).
16. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.

17. Butler, p. 12.
18. Hedy Khoo, "Thrill or mental disorder?", *The New Paper*, April 20, 2009.
19. Loo, e-mail, October 23, 2012.
20. Loo, e-mail, October 23, 2012.
21. Geraldine Heng and Janadas Devan, "State Fatherhood: The Politics of Nationalism, Sexuality, and Race in Singapore", in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, eds. Andrew Parker *et al* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 343 – 64. See p. 344.
22. See the transcript of Lee Kuan Yew's speech, "Talent for the Future", *The Straits Times*, August 15, 1983.
23. The text of Lee Hsien Loong's 2012 National Rally Speech is located on the website of the Prime Minister's Office: <http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre.html>.
24. These figures are provided by the artist himself.
25. Ng was, at the time of his performance in 1994, fulfilling his national service obligations.
26. See Leonore T. Lyons, "Sexing the nation: normative heterosexuality and the 'good' Singaporean citizen", *University of Wollongong Research Online* (2004), pp. 2 – 3. The essay is found at <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1091&context=artspapers>.
27. Section 377A of Singapore's Penal Code proscribes "any act of gross indecency" between two men.
28. As revealed in a personal conversation with the artist, November 15, 2012.
29. The theme of diseased/ghostly bodies is first broached in Loo's student film, *Sophia* (2007), viewable online at <http://vimeo.com/24251657> and <http://vimeo.com/24252599>.
30. Both quotes are from an e-mail to the author, November 19, 2012.
31. See Ranajit Guha's Preface in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 35.
32. Guha and Spivak, p. 35.
33. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271-313. See p. 286.

Please, allow me to describe the scene for you. The Artist stands in the center of the stage wearing a black bathrobe, holding an implausibly long rattan cane. Twelve oblong blocks of gleaming white tofu are arranged in front of him in a semi-circle, each placed carefully on a white ceramic tile and a sheet of newspaper. On top of each block of tofu is a small sachet of red dye. An audience watches in silence. The Artist raises the cane and mutters something that could almost be a prayer, then strikes the first block of tofu, smashing it into glistening pieces and spilling red dye over the tile. The audience gasps in excitement and horror. Without a moment of hesitation, he moves to the second slab of tofu, which seems to shiver perceptibly as if in silent anticipation, and repeats his action. You may think all this sounds like a point of indifference or even bemusement, but for me it is a matter of the utmost seriousness. I am the twelfth block of tofu.

I don't mean to invite sympathy, but it is not an easy thing to be bean curd. Tasteless, colorless, odorless, and with a texture somewhere between congealed chicken fat and partially dried toothpaste, we impart no very distinct flavor to a dish. There are those who find us a pointless ingredient. How humiliating it is to watch children pick through their seafood tofu soup to remove the tofu! How shameful to see us molded and flavored into pallid imitations of meat in vegetarian restaurants! We are not widely regarded. But I don't think that is a good reason to smash us into little pieces with a rattan cane.

Oh dear! The third and the fourth blocks of tofu are gone. I only took my eyes off them for a moment, but that was all that the Artist needed to have his brutal way with them. A tiny drop of red dye has landed on my ceramic tile, a little red dot to remind me of my powerlessness. I am no hero: if I had legs, I would run. But I am nothing more than a gelatinous brick of bean curd, and there is nothing I can do but to wait for what is coming to me.

In any case, I would put it to you that tofu is an unfairly maligned foodstuff. It may be true that we don't taste of anything very much, but that is hardly the point. Our role in the dish is not to change but to integrate. We take on the taste of the ingredients around us, preserving the delicate flavor of spices, softening the cruel taste of meat, harmonizing and enhancing tastes. We hold the dish together, obliging the other ingredients to observe and reflect upon each other. We make sense of things: we bind the components into a coherent dish. You might say that we are the conscience of a meal.

The cane comes down on the fifth block and lands off-center, so that it merely creates an enormous wound in one end. The packet of red dye has been punctured, and a sticky pool of red slowly radiates out from the injured tofu. The audience laughs and recoils at the same time. They want to watch the performance, but they don't want to be stained by the red dye. A thick wave of nausea washes over me. How is it possible to be so callous, to split something open and leave it to suffer? Surely the Artist will at least have the decency to finish the job off? And then a kind of cold anger starts to replace the horror. What could possibly lead someone to imagine that he has the right to inflict such damage on the body of another, even a lowly block of tofu?

I turn my attention to this strange creature, this Artist. He is stripped down to his underwear now, and is waving the rattan cane around as if in some sort of dance. His skin is smooth, but firmer and darker than the blocks that surround him, so that he looks a little like a single piece of dried tofu. My anger softens slightly. It seems as though it could be lonely there, in the center of the stage, with the eyes of the audience on his every gesture. It occurs to me that he too is absorbing the flavor of the ingredients that surround him, as the silent spectators project their tastes and expectations onto his actions. Perhaps our fates are not so very different. For a moment, I feel a strange kind of kinship with this Artist, who in another life could have been

much like me. But the spirit of brotherhood evaporates in an instant as he ruthlessly destroys the sixth and seventh blocks of tofu.

The tile that I sit on is white and cold and clinical and sterile. I can almost detect a faint scent of antiseptic. All twelve of the tiles are evenly spaced, and each one is rotated exactly fifteen degrees relative to its neighbor, so that together we present a precise geometric pattern. Perhaps from where the audience is sitting this orderliness looks like harmony. But from my position, all I can really see is the figure in the center, the one who wields the cane. And from here, it doesn't look like harmony at all. It looks like violence.

I find myself wondering what it will feel like when the cane lands on me, when it splits me open, and the red liquid seeps out of my ruined form. I have to say that the whole thing rather offends me. It is not just the brutality, but the awful arbitrariness. If I had been a little further back on the supermarket shelf this morning, I might have escaped all this. Another block of tofu could have been nabbed in my place. Some charming lady might have found me still on the shelf, massaged me through my packaging to assess my firmness, and then taken me home and prepared me lovingly to include in her *ma po* tofu. But instead I am here, and the eighth block has just been splattered across the floor.

To tell you the truth, it is all making me a little depressed, so I look around the room for something to take my mind of things. My gaze finds its way to Number 11. Amidst all the death and destruction, I hadn't noticed it before, but it is a pretty little thing. Perhaps it is my imagination, but it seems whiter and more glistening than the other blocks, more oblong, more perfect. Deep inside, I know that its sweet soy protein could take on the flavor of any recipe. I smile at it, which is not an altogether easy thing for bean curd. Nervously, innocently, it asks me for some words of reassurance. And for a moment, in

its vulnerability and its purity, I find a last glimpse of peace, and like so many that have been condemned before me, I fall in love on the steps of the guillotine.

My mind is racing now, and I search through all of my memories and imagination for something to say, something that will make some slight sense of the fate that we will soon share. As the last moments of my existence blaze past, I turn to the sheet of newspaper underneath me and read of others, people, but not so very different from me, who also found themselves the victims of capricious circumstance, whose crime it was merely to taste different from the other ingredients in the dish, and whose fate was to be split open by this same retributive instrument. I am not the first to fall victim. As the tenth block of tofu explodes, and as the Artist moves closer, I begin to understand why I am here. Maybe a silent protest is not enough.

I turn to Number 11, and I start trying to tell it, as fast as I can, that we exist to take on the flavor of other ingredients, other histories and performances and emotions. I don't get very far, because it is difficult to put these kinds of things into words when you are about to be beaten to a pulp, but I want to think that it has understood. Its surface does not tremble any more; nothing worse than a sweet, bright constancy defines its five visible planes. It goes next before me – is gone; the girl beside me in the knitted cardigan counts eleven and wipes a small patch of red dye from the sole of her shoe.

The artist stands before me, and I am hardly surprised to see no trace of anger in his face, but merely the sincere solemnity of a ritual that must be reenacted again and again until life and tofu are allowed to exist in their many varieties, until people are able to speak of all things rather than beating each other, and until the Artist can put down his cane knowing that his work is done. Until then, I will give myself willingly to this moment, knowing that I become immortal and transcendent in sacrifice. I am no longer tofu. I am a work of art.

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'Archiving Cane' is an independently funded exhibition, for further enquiries about contributing to the performance and installation please contact us at

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