



**Animating Injury:
*Trauma Rite as Personal Exhibition and Public Exposition***

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Abstract

Weaving genres of social theory, art critique, poetry and performance, “Animating Injury: Trauma Rite as Personal Exhibition and Public Exposition” explores Cadoux’s 2016 public performance work Trauma Rite in order to investigate lived survivorship and challenge the architecture of public affect. Trauma Rite is an eight-hour endurance piece in which Cadoux discloses their identity as a survivor of rape, attempts to clean their body, and scrubs their skin raw, repeatedly performing a trauma cycle of recognition, redemption, and relapse. Audience culture was recorded through documentation of the intersection of North University and State St, in Ann Arbor, MI, between the hours of 9 AM and 5 PM, and an online forum that passersby could anonymously interact with, logging their responses to Trauma Rite. Cadoux writes on internal and external impacts of giving voice to the survivor body in the public, through their own performance and impactful performed works on gendered violence and psychic injury by other artists. In sections surrounding their address to the audience, audience complicity, and onlooker space-making, Cadoux posits that performance surrounding sexual violence has the capacity to undermine frameworks of public immobility and survivor isolation, unveiling compassionate counterpublics and commons.

Content warning: sexual violence, gendered violence, mental health issues.

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Introduction

The Artist, The Survivor and The Public

In May of 2015, I traveled to Beijing to visit my godmother, and came across the cruelest curio. My godmother is a busy woman. She has always been this way, so I knew that a trip to see her invariably meant spending the majority of my time alone. There I was, wordless in the seat of the Chinese government, in a city inscribed with characters and sounds entirely unknown to me. I was walking close to the Andingmen subway stop, never too far for fear of losing my way irreparably, when I came upon a word I recognized.

rape

There it was amongst 1960s lamps, embroidered silk jackets, and bowls of plastic bead necklaces – a small poster of a flowering plant with yellow blooms, blue sky, emblazoned with the word rape in a comfortable serif font. I went into the shop, pretended to browse the motley collection, before putting my hands on the thin paper. My fingers ran across the word I have held so close to my body. I brought it to the register, where the anglophile shopkeeper (he wore a Union Jack printed shirt) sat smiling at me. What is this? I asked. He explained that it was used to teach Chinese children English.

“As in, ‘R...as in rape?’”

“R...as in rape.” He pointed to the flower.

“R...as in rapeseed.” I breathed.

I envisioned a class of children annunciating

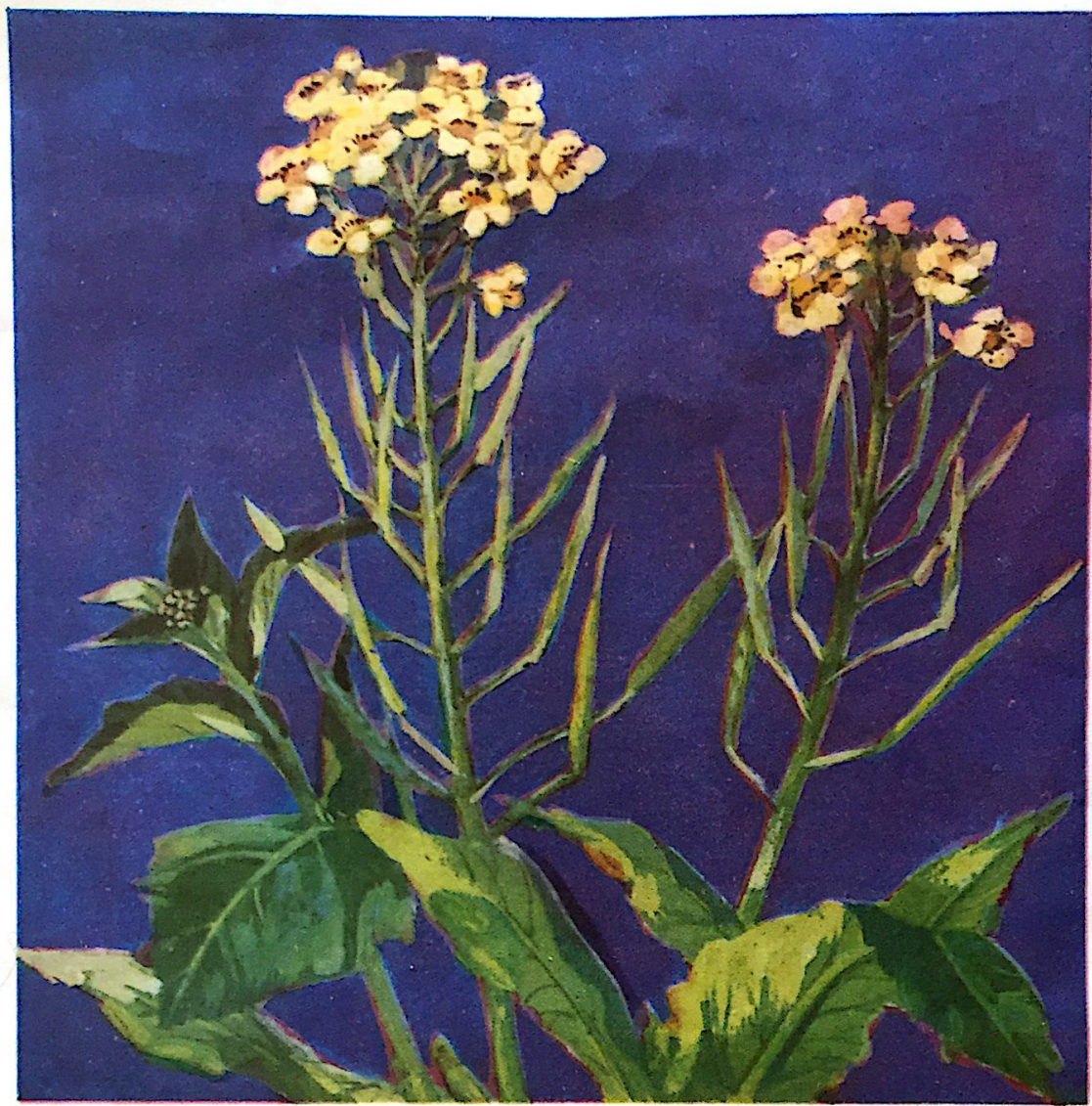
rape

A chorus of voices. Can you hear them? Sincere, working through the word. There was something soothing about a group, a public, all at once moving air through their mouths collectively saying the word I had grown to inhabit. Refreshing and murky. And there the shopkeeper and I were, exchanging the word rape, patiently passing it back and forth. I realized that this felt comforting to me, even if he didn't know that I've been raped, even if he didn't know what it means to be raped. Only rape(seed). Silence, followed by punctuation.

It plants silence that is punctuated by calling its name into being, its contours and shadows. The children saying rape matter of factly, airing it. A public in unison, a public sharing in the shaping of a tone. Unafraid of the word, but afraid of its seeds.

It plants separation. The reality of the word disallows you from saying it like the children do. There is a new border between those that say it and those that breathe it, erase it, approach it, scream it, know it. Feel known by the word's calling into being. It is seldom said, in order to seldom think on it.

It plants terror, the rejection of which is coded as bravery. To not let it grow inside you and strangle



rape

you, called brave.

Survival gives rise to any number of tactics. Perhaps, not all of these take root within you, and you don't need

I needed to say it in public

rape

In order to learn about why I dreamt of washing it from my pores. The product, *Trauma Rite*, unveils what rape plants – social distress, mistrust, and mistreatment; psychological dissonance and despair; emotional storms and surprises; physical breakage; and the deep, fruitless want to “be done with it.”

Trauma Rite aimed to create a public less afraid of saying the word rape, less resistant to feeling societal residue on them, ready to build the next phase of public survivorship. If the architecture of open space is such that we cannot say rape, which affects an enormous proportion of the population, the space is simply not built for the population, it is built for the powerful. Imagine hearing a class of children say the word in public, imagine hearing it regularly not posted on a body in past tense (raped) but in stories and videos of those that survived it. The survivor public lives within the open, silent, hoping that punctuation will be kind to their disposition.

Trauma Rite tells my story of post assault trauma, and according to some it mirrors theirs as well. It poses questions about vulnerability, solidarity, and bravery, and in doing so creates a dynamic between the intentions and attentions of performer and public, the survivor and the audience. I investigate how survivors transformed into a prioritized rather than marginalized audience group and onlookers are transformed into vigilant space-makers via work like *Trauma Rite*.

Trauma Rite

The performance component of this thesis took place on October 7, 2016 from 9 AM to 5 PM, at the corner of North University Ave. and State St. in Ann Arbor, Michigan. In this piece, entitled *Trauma Rite*, I painted, washed and scrubbed my body repeatedly to a 14-minute audio piece containing poetry surrounding my mental and social dealings with my assault, and light percussion. Continuously looping movement and sound, I stood at a busy intersection, performing for anywhere between 5 to 45 onlookers. The result was an endurance piece discussing the mental health repercussions and social negotiations lived post-sexual assault with a fluid, non-self-selecting audience. Audiences were given a link to a website (traumarite.com) intended as an open, anonymous forum on which to record any reactions to the piece. Photography of that day provided here was entirely collected from unpaid members of that audience, demonstrating their experience of receiving the performance as an active part of their time-specific audience group. As the day went on the onlookers built watching communities, some were stale and blank-eyed while others, generous

and emotive. The cultures of looking, that looked different hour to hour, created what one attendee called “a wall-less walled-in place.”

The written portion of this thesis is structured linearly, first addressing the history of performance pertaining to sexual violence and bodily harm, then proceeding onward the creative process of my performance, and lastly the reception of *Trauma Rite*. The purpose of this prose is to put my work in context, and theorize the varied ways in which public performance art confronts the topic of sexual assault. Again, If the survivor identity is made through the exertion of power and subsequent social marking of the body, how are survivors themselves re-marked and re-contextualized in feminist performance art? Is the transformation of a public space into a survivor space in some ways metamorphically analogous with the vulnerable public body becoming an empowered body? This paper will enlist voices from artistic and intellectual communities of the past, anonymous digital voices of the present, photo and video documentation, and my own subjective readings of my performance. I suggest how power is redistributed in public performance that contests claims on open space.

A Structure for Analyzing Injury

My exploration of *Trauma Rite* and survivor publics spans a discussion of historical and theoretical frameworks, followed by three sections, each analyzing a different component of the performer/audience relationship.

First, *Frames* describes the varied tools I use for navigating performance art, mapping out my mode of analysis. I also ground discourse of violence and performance in an imperial performance historiography first put forth by Coco Fusco. The history of coerced colonial performance intersects and informs contemporary performance art surrounding survivorship and bodily injury. Framing performance work as labor that has been racialized and gendered through time, I investigate the emotional residue of this history in contemporary thought. The second frame I bring forward is that of reading performance work for the three relationships that I inquire about throughout this work – address, complicity, and audience authorship. With these theoretical frameworks in mind, I analyze *Trauma Rite* from its inception to its dispersal.

The first chapter, entitled *Speaking the Cycle: Autobiographical Address and Meaningful Disembodiment* discusses *Trauma Rite's* address to the audience. Through a close reading of the text of *Trauma Rite*, I explore the embodiment of the words and the corporal poetry of my movements. The chapter cites specific artworks that reveal tensions, and anticipated or unexpected affects, demonstrating types of performance that have been impactful for *Trauma Rite* as a project and myself as an author and artist. By juxtaposing my address with that of artists I admire, but whose experiences are explicitly stated or implicitly painted, but distinctly different from my own, I form

a conversation between work that punctured my psyche in generative ways and *Trauma Rite*, which sought to capture the affective attention of a transitory public.

This conversation continues in the second and third chapter, in which I theorize around audience complicity via non-interventionist spectatorship, and counterpublic cultures created in physical and digital space.

Framing Complicity: Spectatorship, Survivorship, and Crowd Language interrogates traditional notions of audience/performer relations, as they become progressively more fraught with the presentation of heightened violence. By assessing audience cultures of non-action, I look at the emotional potential of idleness. I am interested in how audiences perform affect for one another, and inaction along the lines of the group's unspoken decorum. Operating under the assumption that most publics abide by some level of emotional contagion, I look at the flocking mechanisms of the crowd of *Trauma Rite* in order to voice some of the repercussions of complicity.

In *Claiming Space: Audience Interaction and Emotional Publics*, I read photo and video taken by audience members, the content of the forum on traumarite.com, and my initial observations of the crowd to paint an idea of what the performance *did*. Analyzing the use of public physical/digital space, I ask how the interplay between reception on the internet and in public affects the architecture of open space. The audiences of *Trauma Rite* shaped a communality, that could be defined as a performative counterpublic or something else altogether. I argue that public performances like *Trauma Rite* have the capacity to rehearse a connectivity that feeds the anti-capitalist imagination of the commons.

This exploratory, multi-disciplinary project intertwines the deeply personal with the lofty theoretical, the artistic with the factually represented. This discussion may be “too close” to me as an author for some readers. To those readers, I challenge you to envision a conversation on assault minus emotional factors and explain the usefulness of such a distancing. The questioning of sexually abusive structures cannot be done unemotionally and without room for corporality. In the search for objectivity we obscure affective and bodily realities, the result of which are useless theories that do not necessarily interact with the public they seek to serve. In my critical reading of my own work, I seek to become a more informed artist and activist, a more embodied producer of scholarship.

Responding to Rape across Location

My academic, artistic, survival work is all coded by the empowerment and disempowerment of identities I hold. For example, gendered violence is not a clear cut matter of masculinity dominating femininity to me; I am a trans identified individual and a queer female, and thereby resist presenting the story of my survivorship through gender normative models of “how rape happens” between “men” and “women.” It is not white straight cisgender able women who are the

most vulnerable to assault – vulnerability grows along axes of marginalization, situating queer people, people of color, and disabled people, amongst many others, within situations of heightened violence. As a white female, performing within a University town setting, drawing upon vocal support systems within academia and beyond, I have the distinct privilege to present my own conjecture into the web of survivorship.

Available knowledge surrounding survivorship and performance is vast but porous. In the investigation of embodied feminist performance and gendered trauma, I am joined by the theoretical, creative, and lived work of academics and artists who have projected their voices into conversations of the performed and/or violated body. This work spans disciplines and discourses, resulting in the creation of multiple founts of relevant knowledge for this work.

Coming into this project, I was sure that I was doing performance, but I was unsure of how to explain what exactly performance art is. The diversity of thought on the subject confounds me, and lends me a great level of flexibility in how I frame the work of this thesis. *To perform* takes two differentiated, intertwined and critically important meanings. One orientation of meaning derives from the canon of gender studies, with the works of the likes of Judith Butler, Rosalyn Diprose, and Marianne Paget. This orientation names the display of social identity via cultural signification as *performative*, employing a repertoire of actions to position oneself in society. Butler defines the performative as, the “iterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names.”¹ The impression of what, say, masculinity should be becomes embedded in the word itself. Naming something as masculine is to aid in the production of masculine performatives. Performance, in its other sense of the word, is a function of art making that involves real time presence, usually in conjunction with other art forms. It places the art in mundane action such as doing the dishes, in conversation with the American Ballet Theatre or Cirque du Soleil; performance creates an opportunity to upset the stratification of worth of body work, as anyone can perform regardless of their ability, racial, economic or gender status. My preferred definition comes from Diana Taylor’s *Performance*, in which the author writes of embodiment as a conduit for meaning, “a way to transmit knowledge by means of the body.”² The two uses of performance intertwine and give meaning to one another. Performance is thereby vast, with the ability to be exacting in its purpose even when the subject is unaware of what their performance is calling into being.

A transmission of knowledge via corporality would strike the likes of theorists like Peggy Phelan as too encompassing a definition. Phelan declares in her prominent piece *the ontology of performance: representation without reproduction*, that performance is defined by, and finds strength in, its impermanence; “Performance’s being...becomes itself through disappearance” (1999:146). In Phelan’s definition performance art cannot or should not be recorded, otherwise it is not

1 Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* New York: Routledge, 1993. 2.

2 Taylor, *Performance*, 36.

performance – a mere capturing that takes its place and locates it in commodity culture, and enlivening capitalist consumption. Feminist media maker’s search for visibility is a search for the productive and lucrative, says Phelan; to live “unmarked” is to further an ontology of the embodied ephemeral, the physical feminist poetic.³ The ephemerality of performance is true to its form, but the “unmarking” overlooks a basic tenet of political performance. Feminist performance art stems from an urgency; as performance theorist Jan Cohen-Cruz writes, “It was violence – in the media and in society –that gave birth to feminist media art.”⁴ Phelan’s anti-capitalist framework for performance invalidates those who reproduce artistic work because they cannot afford to live financially or socially unmarked. It seems that Phelan’s theory supposes that performers have the opportunity to become visible if they so choose. I am drawn instead to work that focuses on bodily experience, grounding the socio-theatrical genre through a validation of intersectional, personal politic. Pam Patterson, performance artist and academic, speaks on this enlivening of personal politic; “In action, (performance) makes a kinesthetic impact on how we know space and our bodies. This activates the materiality of the body, generates emotion and can permit the re-storying of experience in/through a narrative of transformation.”⁵ Opening the floor for materiality in privileging what the *performer* needs is at times is the very visibility that Phelan condemns.

Critical to my use of Diana Taylor’s definition of performance, the imparting of body knowledge, is how certain body work is expected from certain bodies. Motions are associated with the femininity and the female body that are not considered representative of maleness; a swing of the hips, hands placed at the waist, the curl of the wrist. These gender distinctions are socially constructed, and are interwoven with heteronormative institutions –yet their impact on how we read bodies is consistently felt. Questioning construction is not the same thing as negating lived impact. This pattern of associations in performance is what Taylor terms the repertoire, and the logging of these iterations, the archive.⁶ The archive and the repertoire act in conjunction with one another to form gender, race, ability and other socially determined categories. They inform what we expect of what bodies and when we anticipate it. A change in temporality or in embodiment is enough to defamiliarize oppressive notions. A woman doing dishes while on stage with the American Ballet Theatre could evoke the question of what dance is and in what instances female bodies are thought of as delicate, just by removing a motion from its normal place and time. Alternately, Dave Chappell’s impression of as a blind white-supremacist who does not know he is black makes us laugh because it defamiliarizes the repertoire of racist rhetoric – we do not expect that oratory from that body, which

3 Phelan, Peggy. *unmarked: the politics of performance* London: Routledge, 1993. 151.

4 Cohen-Cruz, Jan. *Radical street performance: An international anthology*. London: Routledge, 1998. 38.

5 Patterson, Pam. “Feminist Performance: The Body Grotesque as Transgressive Site.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 10, no. 3 (2008): 389.

6 Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Rerforming Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke U Press, 2007. Print.

is precisely what makes it humorous. This play between the “as is” and “as if,” as Taylor puts it, is essential to performance art as a genre.⁷

For artists displaying trauma, connecting with audiences and creating shared lexicons for the aftermath of violence, this wavering between “as is” and “as if” takes on different repercussions. For those who perform what Kristine Stiles names destruction art, survival of horrifying circumstances is made into art object; “Destruction art is about open wounds...destruction art is about violations, those defilements continually perpetrated against the bodies and the psyche of women and men.”⁸ The continual perpetration incites the need for common lexicons and ways to bear witness as an outsider to trauma. This communally formulated language is one reason why we perform trauma, and how we consume performance that is difficult. Ann Cvetkovich, Maggie Nelson and Jennifer Doyle, along with a few others, have formed and furnished my understanding of the difficult body and public affect.

Embodiment, which is “understood as the politics, awareness, and strategies of living in one’s body, can be distanced from the physical body,” is central to an understanding of difficulty.⁹ Embodied work that incorporates physical pain, intense boredom, or general difficulty falls into the loose category of hardship art, which often intersects with body art, recognized as play with embodiment.¹⁰ The more difficult the work, the more it highlights our want to disavow it. Jennifer Doyle writes on the notion of difficulty in *Hold It Against Me*, making the argument that when a performance is one of violation, we ask it to be beautiful, and when a work is beautiful, we work to violate it. The tension created between beauty and horror demonstrates the complexity of the work – as well as the capacity for the two ideas to not work in binary. Difficulty raises the performer and the spectator to a place of affective limit. By exploring various performances and difficult works, Doyle exposes painful experience not as “an unquestioned zone of personal truth” but content that we move through, and in propelling ourselves forward through difficult performance work we are participating in “history moving through us.”¹¹ By interfacing with the affective field of emotional difficulty, people learn to think in alternate directions about hardship.

Trauma theorist Judith Herman notes that trauma maintains a strange, incomplete history “one of episodic amnesia,” and Cvetkovich voices the importance of this phenomenon in performance.¹² More specifically, the remarkable compatibility between trauma and performance.

7 Taylor, Diana. *Performance*. 6.

8 Stiles, Kristine. *Concerning Consequences: Studies in Art, Destruction, and Trauma*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016: 31.

9 Taylor, *Performance*, 158.

10 Body art does not have to take place on the body, but it has to be in reference to it, such as is the case with Ana Mendieta’s earth works.

11 Doyle, Jennifer. *Hold It against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013. 146.

12 Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery: the Aftermath of Violence, from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Perseus Group, 2015: 5.

She posits that trauma itself is “marked by forgetting and dissociation” and thereby asks to be fused into art that has a similar corrosiveness.¹³ In demanding a somewhat ephemeral medium, trauma as a subject is best suited by performance, which itself, as Phelan noted, *forgets*. We can reference a book to fill out our memory of an important section, we eventually forget performance without hope of re-referencing. We can remember moments of traumatic events, but we do not carefully maintain internal reels. The archive of trauma is riddled with holes just as that our bodies refuse to remember traumatic events. The corpora mimics the corporal.

Performance as Anti-pathology

Corporal representation has to capacity to act as a counterpoint to a pathology of trauma. *Trauma Rite* stems from my own experiences of post-traumatic stress disorder following sexual assault, and my performance of and against that diagnosis. Feminist anti-pathology work helped me reconcile the dissonance I felt with this diagnosis with the manners in which I felt recognized in my pain. In one such text, *Prognosis Time*, Jasbir Puar uses the lenses of affect and queer theory to claim that bodies, particularly those that are vulnerable to violence and systemic oppression are constantly “in prognosis.” To be in prognosis means to never been set in one’s identities or health status, which can be engaged with easily since we are all aging, exploring and coming to new vocabularies and expressions of self, and with difficulty, as we recognize the way that bodies can be brought into disability by societal violence.¹⁴ This insight is helpful in exploring the category of survivor not as a temporary state of being but as a social identity, and understanding the need to uproot the pathology of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Trauma exists dually in lived, corporal experience, and as a set nosological entity. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (309.81) is logged in the DSM I-V, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, as a list of symptoms caused by a trauma; “an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others.”¹⁵ In past versions of the DSM, the wording of what fits into criterion A1 has fluctuated significantly, displaying shifts in epistemology surrounding what trauma itself is. The epistemology has to change as the population who is recognized as traumatized has changed. The crisis of trauma, and what is now called PTSD, started with soldiers coming back from the World War II with “gross stress reaction” which later became known as “post-combat syndrome,” “post-Vietnam syndrome” and

13 Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003. 7.

14 Puar, Jasbir. “Prognosis time: Towards a geopolitics of affect, debility and capacity.” *Women & Performance* 19, no. 2 (2009): 169.

15 Friedman, Matthew. “Considering PTSD for DSM-V.” *PsycEXTRA Dataset*.

finally, PTSD.¹⁶ Situating it not only as a psychological disorder, but as one that pertained to the masculine space of war, has done damage to many communities seeking care and support for the trauma they have sustained outside of the militarized theater.

Using the logic of disorder to describe people who have been harmed by society creates an ideal of someone untouched by peril. Embedded within the DSM is the idea of the normative citizen to whom certain kinds of trauma is accounted for, who is certainly not, say, a colonial subject who has seen the horrors of imperial violence. Cvetkovich argues for trauma not as a ruining of the normative citizen, but as a “grappling with the psychic consequences of historical events and... a central category for looking at the intersections of emotional and social processes along with intersections of memory and history.”¹⁷ My addition to her definition would be that the grappling is with history, but also with power differences as they stand, and breathe and act themselves out onto bodies. Nothing historical lives entirely in the past.

Adopted and Refuted Terms

My terminology within this thesis does not come wholly from my own creativity, but from the hard work of various thinkers in gender, affect and queer theory, as well as clinical psychology and holistic medicine. While I am able to worry through what terms are useful to this endeavor, and perhaps that is agency enough, I will also construct terms within the work for areas of performance/trauma studies that have not been verbalized to my contentment. In the rendering of a public performance piece surrounding trauma and survivorship, it is necessary to contextualize what I mean by *public*, and who I mean by *survivor*.

The word victim has gone out of favor. At this point in time, people who have been raped, assaulted or abused are called survivors. The shift in vocabulary primarily has to do with a much needed refusal of “victim’s connotation with powerlessness and brokenness. In criminal law, the assaulted person is traditionally called “victim” and in legal settings there is significant historical and contemporary trend of survivors being treated badly, by the way of victim blaming and re-traumatization. “Survivor” was introduced to empower victims and allow for an escape from passivity, and has since been nearly unanimously adopted in the U.S. by healthcare providers, universities, sexual violence prevention and awareness groups, and law enforcement. As Parul Sehgal illuminates in her *New York Times* piece “The Forced Heroism of the ‘Survivor’” not all of the usages of survivor are empowering. There are plenty of subjects of sexual violence who do not feel as though they have agency, or are not prepared to assume an active state, to label themselves survivors.¹⁸ Before

16 Scott, Wilbur J. “PTSD in DSM-III: A Case in the Politics of Diagnosis and Disease.” *Social Problems* 37, no. 3 (1990): 298.

17 Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, 18.

18 Sehgal, Parul. “The Forced Heroism of the Survivor” *The New York Times Magazine*, May 3, 2016: MM16.

the victim finds other survivors, encounters confirming communities or inclusive online spaces, isn't it fathomable to not envision oneself as a "survivor"? Is there not room for both words? Just because the empowered exist doesn't mean that powerlessness is not a valid and understandable reaction to assault. I adopt both of the words, survivor and victim, as they describe two separate, valid emotional states. The terms correspond to distinct locations toward violence in my trajectory, and I believe, in the world beyond me. I do not mean to put these terms in binary, but rather along a spectrum, along which the subject of violence may move back and forth depending on the day, month, year's social interactions and textures of "post."

Private and public spheres engage with the survivor to socially define their experience and identity. I focus on the public sphere for a number of reasons. For one, the public/private split is gendered, assuming public influence as masculine and private existence as feminine. Since sexual violence is feminized, open dialogue surrounding it rarely enters public arenas. In Rome, the idea of the forum was envisioned as the pinnacle of democracy – a public setting in which the people could come voice opinions and make governmental decisions. "The people" in this case were wealthy white men, who became the figureheads of a far more diverse society. And so publics, and who has a right to speak within the public realm, became associated not only with maleness, but whiteness and financial power.¹⁹ The bodies that are not allowed safe and lucrative access to the public sphere, a space gendered masculine and regulated by neoliberal ethics, include the survivor body. In *Sex In Public*, Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant conceive of the counterpublic, the interactive state that has a distinct narrative from the script of white, heterosexual, cisgender, wealthy dominance.²⁰ Following in the tradition of Habermas and Arendt, Warner and Berlant think on what public spaces do, and who gets to use them as forum. The counterpublics can exist alongside publics as places, sometimes figurative sometimes literal, for those who have been voiceless to speak and create community with one another. The identification of the group is forged by marginalized status, as well as an intimacy caused by periphery, "an indefinitely accessible world conscious of its subordinate relation."²¹ José Esteban Muñoz makes the case that counterpublics are borne out of "cultural, material, and psychic survival," and are the incubator for liberated, queer futures.²² Within these definitions I will call sexual assault survivorship a counterpublic sphere, complete with its own distinct medias and practices of being visible to other members.

19 Arendt, Hanna. "Public Rights and Private Interests." *Small Comforts for Hard Times: Humanists on Public Policy*. M. Mooney and F. Stuber., New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.

20 Berlant, Lauren, and Warner, Michael. "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry* 24 no. 2, (1998): 547-566.

21 Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public," 558.

22 Muñoz, Jose Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. 161.

Performative Resistance

This is both a text about embodiment and an embodied text. *Trauma Rite* came from my body, from its experiences with assault, and it resignifies my body with the survivorship I portrayed in my performance. This project aims to speak not in emotional and intellectual grammars that induce futility and hopelessness, but rather those that understand the post-trauma experience as a valid transitive state, and one that is constantly evolving. I relish the possibility of producing a text that lies as close to my body as the word rape. Conversely, I resist refusing the new selves that that violence generated, and unavoidably will continue to generate. With my entangled interest in what the recognition or rejection *Trauma Rite* fosters, I investigate how publics articulate care and fear in the face of survivorship. This, I believe, is the key to developing the vivid future-building potential within counterpublic performance.

Frames

Considerations in Reading Performance

The primary lenses and histories I use to lead my analysis of *Trauma Rite* and its companions in contemporary performance are critiques inspired by impactful theorists, and tools I created in order to separate out the complex elements of performed protest. This section contains an oration of hidden performance history, a background in reading photographs, and the enlisting of address, potentiality, and audience input as my primary discursive divisions of art critique and autocriticism.

Decentralizing Western Performance

The supposition that performance art is a medium that one engages in voluntarily is one that has been uprooted by artists and performance studies academics alike. A common assumption is that the artist chooses to have their privacy breached. An image of an artist capable of making oneself more vulnerable than they already are permeates the art world because of privileged visibility, not because of the nature of the art form itself. Art can claim a voice for unvoiced ideas; as Audre Lorde notes in “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” “Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.”²³ This articulation is vital to many communities, and empowerment via bodily poetry is often neglected. In performance it is possible to find the articulation of subjugated realities, vibrant futures and corporeal vocalizations that defy oppressive structures. However, the understanding of performance art as a voluntary breach of privacy is directly at odds with its involuntary past. One of the most influential thinkers for me in performance history has been Coco Fusco, whose writings on her work *Couple in a Cage* were some of the first to reveal white hegemony in performance to me. I consider this framing, largely influenced by Fusco, John Berger, and David Román, as essential to performance texts.

Forms of performance began with those coerced, enslaved and dehumanized by Western colonial powers. Imperial regimes forcibly took lands and their peoples, fascinated by the way indigenous peoples lived in their bodies. Estranged from the daily life of the people they controlled, colonial powers became obsessed with the mundanities and rituals of non-European life. The white body encountered the brown body as specimen, rather than human. The result of this objectifying thought structure was the capture, transport to, and display of “fabulous animals,” people characterized as rare, wild and native specimens, in Western European countries and the

23 Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider* “Poetry is Not a Luxury” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York: Crossing Press, 1984. 36.

United States.²⁴ Indigenous peoples were taken individually at first for their expression of non-white features, such as South Africa native Saartje Baartman or the “Hottentot Venus,” who “performed” throughout Europe and drew crowds due to her large buttocks. Upon her death, her genitals were jarred and preserved; they can be seen on display at the Museum of Man in Paris to this day.²⁵ A plaster cast was taken of her body by French naturalist Georges Cuvier, solidifying the link between performance and what had become the racial science and eugenics movement.²⁶ The display of bodies grew as the interest in racial difference was supported by the pseudoscience of the day. One especially clear example of the implementation of native-turned-spectacle is Germany’s late 19th century, early 20th century development of the human zoo, or “völkeschau,” steered by Carl Hagenbeck.²⁷ Native peoples were displayed with instruments and ceremonial objects taken out of the context of their usage, and put in enclosures for the white public to peruse. There is no reason to believe that the garb and items present were not previously used in a performance setting significant to native people’s own cultures, but the posing of people in ceremonial garb for Western viewership changes the nature of the performance. Silence of the people on display was enforced via discipline and threats of violence, as to make their embodiment more monolithic.²⁸ On their bodies was inscribed the full weight of the Western world’s diminishing snapshot of Eastern and Southern cultures.

The spectacle of the zoo, and the constructed ease of equating native with exotic beast, simply by proximity and treatment, made these exhibits hugely successful. Watching foreign populations was thought of as an educational pursuit – a way to learn from the knowledge imparted by their bodies– and so we can state that one of the primary forms of performance art was coercive. Perhaps the most famous example of this brutality is that of the exploitation of Saartje Baartman, who’s original, pre-colonial name is unknown. It is fair to say that one of the beginnings of performance art was an act of violence; a non-reciprocated, uninvited viewing of the body to the advantage of the onlooker alone.

As John Berger notes in *Looking at Animals*, “All sites of marginalization –ghettos, shanty towns, prisons, madhouses, concentration camps –have something in common with the zoo.”²⁹ The commonality Berger speaks of is the inability to hide from the gaze of the oppressor. The surveillance of marginalized peoples is not dissimilar to an audience. The logic of Foucault’s panopticon, a hexagonal architecture of surveillance from which the guard can see all the prisoners

24 Rothfels, Nigel. *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. 12.

25 Fusco, Coco. “*The Other History of Intercultural Performance*” *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*. New York City: New Press, 1995. 42.

26 Parkinson, *The significance of Sarah Baartman*.

27 Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts*, 14.

28 Rothfels, 12.

29 Berger, John. “Looking at Animals” *About Looking*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. 26.

but no incarcerated gaze can look back, is that the imprisoned must *perform* docility to appease the onlooker. Performance art and surveillance culture hinge on the same assumption: that the body you are presented with is essentially, the person you associate it with. Typically, in traditional theater we make the assumption that the person we see is inhabiting a role that is not themselves, whereas performers are understood to perform themselves.³⁰ This is not a static split, but it helps illuminate surveillance and performance's belief in "the real," even if that real is manipulated for the observer. Embodied performance shares a genealogy with bodily surveillance. And since modern performance art stresses the body and its ability to impart its reality, one of the tools for fighting the lineage and language of colonialism, of dispossession and violence onto people of color, is embodiment. By exercising power over imagery, black and brown artists and markers defend against attacks on their corporeal sovereignty.³¹

In the early 1990s, Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña performed *Two Undiscovered AmeriIndians Visit...* later called *Couple in a Cage*, a series of appearances in both institutional and public settings in which the two artists exhibited themselves as supposed natives of a fictitious newly discovered island in the Caribbean named Guatinau. Passersby were given the opportunity to pay to interact with Fusco and Peña, the "undiscovered AmeriIndians," to see Fusco dance and Peña tell stories in codeswitched jumble or show his genitals. Other onlookers were struck by the need to declare it a hoax, or to save the Guatinai from their plight.³² Audience objectification of Fusco and Gómez-Peña is shameful, humorous, and reflective of a cancerous fascination with domination. Taylor's writings on *Couple in a Cage* remark on the spell the hyperbolized exoticism casts, and the reluctance to see nuance in perception: "The gullibility and deception are flip sides of the same will-to-believe. The first accepts "the truth" of the colonial claim, the other sees only the "lie."³³ Gómez-Peña and Fusco did precisely what they set out to do – expose and critique the persistent colonial unconscious of the Western world.

In Fusco's expository essay, *The Other History of Intercultural Performance*, she puts her own work into the historical context of Western exploitation of exoticized bodies to perform Otherness. In a long, but not at all exhaustive timeline Fusco lists events in the five-century old convention of kidnapping Native peoples to have them perform in Europe and what became the United States. Fusco emotionally writes on the way that people of color identified with her performance differently than white onlookers: "people of color who believed...that the performance was real, at times

30 Performance certainly houses locations where this is not the case. Re-performance and documentary theater are examples of types of performance in which animation of one's "real" identity is not presumed.

31 I refer here to "black and brown artists and makers" with the recognition that systems of race are constantly shifting, and are dependent on historic and territorial context. For reference, most captive peoples in the human zoos I refer to were natives of North and West Africa, the Arctic Circle, and Central and South America.

32 Fusco, Coco. "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," 1995.

33 Taylor, Diana. "A Savage Performance: Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco's "Couple in the Cage"." *TDR/The Drama Review* 42, no. 2 (1998): 167.

expressed discomfort because of their identification with our situation.”³⁴ One Pueblo man from Arizona said, “I see the faces of my grandchildren in that cage” the author/performer lamentingly records.³⁵ Fusco also speaks to her own feelings of emotional unrest, exhaustion, and even guilt. Upon seeing Tiny Teesha, a Haitian “Black woman midget,” at the Minnesota State Fair in 1992, the author saw the melancholy of another body performing, entirely un-ironically, and felt “an ensuing sense of shame.” What Tiny Teesha did for money, objectify her body for the Western eye, Fusco did in the name of political art. Both bodies solicited similar reactions.

In many instances, difficult performance art has gone from the necessity to perform *to* power, through slavery and coercion, to the art of performing *against* power, with the free will to subvert it. This freedom from/freedom to dichotomy has become important to performance art as a genre, even if I find this binary neglects neocolonial forms of control.³⁶ Since *Trauma Rite* and other works I will explore involve the voluntary performance of pain, coming from performers of many national and racial identities, it is important to stress this involuntary beginning. Even when a white performer is lauded in a powerful institution, such as a prestigious museum, one must be aware of how the history of colonialism set up white people as subject and people of color as object, privileging white performance. As I continue on to talk about white performers, including myself, and performers of color, I will note the ways in which this legacy works to code and privilege the performance.

When Roselee Goldberg writes of performance as a “a permissive, open-ended medium with endless variables, executed by artists impatient with the limitations of more established art forms, determined to take art directly to the public,” the impatience she describes is dramatic and marked by social turmoil.³⁷ Taking art directly to the public means that the public is not given access to the art otherwise. Richard Schechner’s transhistorical definition of performance handles this particular political bent to all work in the genre; “Performance art grows precisely at the point where the breakdown in a social structure begins.”³⁸ This project explores a breakage close to my experience and scholarship, that of rape culture, the survivor body and the art that grows from bringing gendered violence and trauma to the public eye.

Utilizing the work of Marina Abramović and Ulay, another famous performance pair (whose impacts and intentions are radically different than those of Fusco and Gomez-Peña), I illustrate the three elements of performance handled by chapters one through three.

34 Fusco, “*The Other History of Intercultural Performance*,” 53.

35 Fusco, “*The Other History of Intercultural Performance*,” 56.

36 I lend the conceptual movement between “freedom from” and “freedom to” from Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

37 Román, David. “Solo Performance and the Body on Stage” *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS*. Bloomington: Indiana U Press, 1998: 119.

38 Schechner, Richard. *Performance studies: an introduction*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Framing Endurance Art

She holds the bow, and he, the arrow. In *The Other: Rest Energy* (1980), Marina Abramović and Ulay (Uwe Laysiepan) are suspended by the tension of the bow, the held breath and clenched fist of potential harm. Their stark white shirts and black bottoms add a touch of formality to the image, as well as a contrast between the brutality of shooting someone in the chest from a foot away and the crispness of a white collared shirt. The audience is held at multiple points of tension. The physical bow and arrow makes a visceral, visual location of anxiety. The fulcrum of the “rest energy” is in the bow itself, changing constantly as the performers lean back on their heels. This weight sharing shows immense trust –in each other, in the material structure of the bow. *The Other: Rest Energy* forces the audience to think about gender in speaking about it: *he* is going to hurt *her*, *she* is steadfast in the face of *his* violence. The directionality of the arrow is visually wrapped in the normative directionality of gendered violence. *Men hurt women.*³⁹

Though injury as we may understand it – blood, beatings, hate speech, mutilations and physical afflictions – does not occur, this piece evokes psychological violence and the terror of having bodily harm held over you. Abramović said in an interview with the Museum of Modern Art that alongside *Rhythm 0*, in which audiences could choose from a table of objects and weapons their preferred mode of interacting with her body/harming her frame, *Rest Energy: The Other* was the most difficult piece she has ever performed. The loss of control, she says, was what made this work so trying.⁴⁰

The intricacies of the performance, from what I can see in the documentation, tell a less polarized story. Both Ulay and Marina’s hands are curled into fists, arms rigidly placed along their side-bodies, mimicking one another’s body language. Their bodies are similarly locked –if the bow was taken away the aggressor would be unclear. To make the perpetration even more ambiguous, Abramović wears a leather archery glove that suggests her implication in the (potential) violence waged against her. *The Other: Rest Energy* can be read multiply; as the story of historical violence against female bodies, as the narrative that in order to have intimate relationships one invites hurt, as a single spectacle to question the audiences’ ambivalence in their bystander position. The second half of the work’s moniker, *The Other*, prods audiences further. If the viewer identifies with one performer, then *The Other* is the one at the opposite end of the bow. Marina and Ulay ask audiences to pick a side, and dehumanize another. The term “the Other” has a long history in philosophy, social theory, anthropology, and identity studies, as a word for the one who is made foreign, and thereby

39 As a genderqueer survivor and performer, I see the falseness of this binary existing not only in the understandings of victimization, but also in the idea of “Men” hurting “Women”, when these categories are themselves malleable. And, importantly, people who surpass the cis-man/woman distinction are some of those most vulnerable to violence.

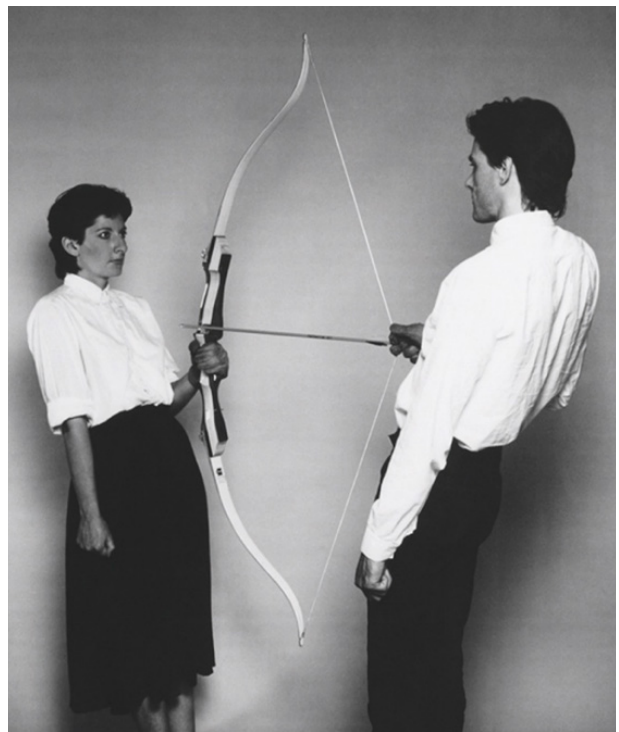
40 Museum of Modern Art. Audio of “Marina Abramović and ULAY. Rest Energy. 1980.” <https://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/190/1976>



Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez Peña, *Couple in a Cage*, 1992. Photo by Peter Barker.



Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez Peña, *Couple in a Cage*, 1992. Photo by Glenn Halvorsen.



Marina Abramovic and Ulay, *The Other: Rest Energy*, 1980. Photo by Andrea Wobel.

rendered vulnerable to mistreatment. Literarily, this is usually enacted by linguistic distancing (“us” vs. “them”), and societally this is mounted via discriminatory policies, institutionalized benefits for some and not Others, and normative understandings of the “average” citizen. By including “the Other,” an inarguably loaded phrase, in the title of this work, the performers ask the audience to think critically about power and who is being Othered. Is it Marina, who is a woman (a recognized social other) preparing to receive an arrow to the heart, or Ulay, who is stuck in a position in which his strength is being relied upon to not cause serious injury? Or, is it you, the viewer, who is frozen via the photograph) in powerlessness, unable to stop the seesaw of potential gore?

Though I have found no documentation of the audiences that surrounded Marina and Ulay’s piece, the audience’s suspense is written into the work. Viewing the photo above, we as readers get a small sense of what it would be like to be in communion with others spectating *Rest Energy*; does this make you nervous? Do you think he’ll actually do it? How should I be reacting? Should I intervene (is anyone else intervening)?

The piercing nature of the above photo of Marina Abramović and Ulay, the one-time wunderkind couple of the performance art world, involves the history of the couple and hardship. *Rest Energy* is a four minute ten second video, currently held in MoMA’s video archives, in which both parties have small microphones above their hearts to record the fluctuation of their heartbeats. In an exhibition of the video, one would hear two concurrent but separate heartbeats, jumping as the artists lean away, tightening the tension of the bow. Marina Abramović is one of the most, if not the most, well known and commercialized, performance artist. Along with Carolee Schneeman, Sophie Calle, Vito Acconci, and others, she ushered in a new era of corporally difficult performance being exhibitable and validated by large art institutions. Despite holding the arrow in this piece, Ulay is the half of the couple who was maimed, at least in the arena of the art world. From 1975 to 1988 Marina and Ulay worked together, creating works such as *Relation in Space*, *Breathing in/Breathing out*, and *The Great Wall Walk*, that catapulted them into the public eye. Since their separation, Marina’s fame has grown while Ulay’s holds the place of the-*once-sidekick*. Ulay successfully sued her for retribution of profits made off of their joint works, insisting at once to be seen in the public eye for his artistry and his rightful claim to their joint work. In this moment, all of these connotations are inscribed in their tipping back and forth, suspending the arrow above Abramović’s heart.

This work is a helpful foothold for violent performance because it also makes the audience actors within the performance –their inaction is an action. They are emotionally trip wired into the piece once they enter the space, making *Rest Energy* a piece that focuses not only the performers, but the onlooker’s internal negotiations. This is the phenomena I am most interested in in regards to performance art, the question of who is made the true subject of the work. With embodied performance, it may seem self-evident that the body is the subject of the art, but such a platitude falls short of understanding the true gravity of performance and its ability to rope the bodies of others.

The subject of the art is *your* body as much as it is theirs.⁴¹

The flexibility of possible understandings of the piece, the potency of Marina and Ulay's embodied tension, mingled with readings of identity in the image, make *The Other: Rest Energy* a good starting point from which to discuss embodied art and sexual violence. I begin looking at voluntary, expressive performance art with *The Other: Rest Energy* not because it was the first of its kind, or because it is my favorite piece, but because it demonstrates major themes in the history of violence and performance; vulnerability and strength, potentiality and enactment, audience complacency and activity.

A performance's address, particularly in displays of violence or signifying injury, is a mediation of vulnerability and strength by the performer. In this negotiation of feelings the performer creates the directionality of the performance –Where is the intended location of corporeal disclosure? The next question becomes one of potential energy and complacency –what is being done and what tension is being built by not doing? Performance surrounding violence almost always points to societal complicity. It asks what we are able to ignore, and why. If we cannot ignore it, we act upon it –protests, political performances, are most effective when they cannot be overlooked. The third aspect of performance I will highlight is audience intervention and empathy. As audiences react and act, they become performers within the art.

A Note on Reading Photography

Since performance art is defined in part by its ephemerality, its ability to live only within the spectators and the author of the work, my words accumulate around experience that I did not have. Although this has become the norm of history, written based on documents, in locations far removed in time or place from the subject matter, my distance is accentuated by writing an art history of a medium that demands to be forgotten. The photographs and readings I cite are attempts to bring the happening of a given performance to larger publics than just the audience that physically attended. Walter Benjamin writes in his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility,” “(reproduction) enables the original to meet the recipient halfway,” –this generosity of documentation and reproduction is given to me in this thesis.⁴² I am met halfway by the captured imagery of performances that were and are formative to the world of performance art. Photography meets me at this current moment to display the past while performance adheres stickily to its own context. Yet as performance fights mobility, photography fights generosity. What we as viewers

41 Importantly, Abramović is known for re-performance – doing works multiple times and, in the case of “The Artist is Present”, her 2010 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, hiring other performers to perform her work. In these cases, there is the question of whether their bodies are symbolically *her* (and Ulay), or if they depart from the work enough to become separate pieces of their own.

42 Benjamin, Walter, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.” 254.

see in the photographs of live performances are de-animated sketches of embodied work, since photography cannot give us animation or, as Benjamin calls it, “aura.”

I am interested in work whose aura punctures the limits of photography, bringing some aspects of a performance’s personality to the present day. In *Camera Lucida* by Roland Barthes, the author posits two terms that I find instrumental in articulating the mechanisms of the photograph. For Barthes, unless one is entirely disinterested in captured images, the photograph has two states of interaction with its onlooker: *studium* and *punctum*. *Studium* refers to “very wide field of unconcerned desire,” a general observance of the photograph in which the viewer sees the information, but is not moved by it.⁴³ To be moved by *studium*, the author argues, the onlooker necessitates political or cultural context –the image is illuminated by its culture, not its self-evident content. Conversely, *punctum* evokes the emotional intrusion of the photograph into the viewer’s life. Barthes writes of images that punctuate our lives as incidents; “that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).”⁴⁴ These “sensitive points” of the photograph are those that create the affective experience of the document.

Various points of personal puncture are housed within the performance photographs I will discuss. My enthusiastic reading of photos of pieces I have never seen, but that have impacted the course of my art and scholarship, is not an act of flippant fabrication but rather a testament to the power of these performed works to precipitate into *punctum*. Somehow, despite formally rejecting permanence, photographs of performance can be evocative, chilling, and outright awesome.

Breaking Apart a Performance

Utilizing the discursive tools of address, complicity and audience authorship, I begin to uncover tendencies and tensions in the history of bodily violence, trauma, and performance art. Hardship births difficult art, which in turn invents new possibilities for understanding and negotiating interpersonal pain. My own endeavors in performed pain seek to harness address, complicity and audience authorship to the greatest potency I could muster. In putting myself in the company of the artists in the following chapters, I am not equating the salience of *Trauma Rite* to their work, but opening the door to autocriticism and a conversation between texts. By discussing and demonstrating some of the lush archive of performed injury, I will use the works above as lenses with which to reveal *Trauma Rite* in all of its thorny complexity, underdeveloped pitfalls and impactful interfaces.

43 Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981. 27.

44 Ibid.

Trauma Rite

Sound Score

Key:

{ - artist's vocal aside

] - various male vocal asides

MARRING

Have you ever tried hiding in public?

I make a habit of finding ways of not being found.

Namely, I smile and pretend that what you are saying
doesn't involve me and my body.

I maneuver around words, defenses.

{ As someone who has experience with that, as someone who has gone through some of
that

If you look in my eye, I am telling you

{ As someone who has experienced sexual violence, I am a survivor of rape and sexual
assault

and the person who receives this information might wince ever so slightly.

Their eyes might grow wide with pity

with an apology

a verbal dance move that

rejects my disclosure or accepts it

but carries it like a screaming newborn that desperately wants its mother.

{ (unison) like a screaming newborn that desperately wants its mother.

The world asks, constantly. It positions itself to face you

puts its hands to its head

clenches its brows.

It proceeds to try to draw a portrait of you, but it only has oil pastel.

Your face is a smudge of the peach tone and your lips clumpy scarlet.

The world wonders why you are so *difficult* to draw.

Wiltingly, you cower and rub out your eyes.

{ (unison) you cower and rub out your eyes.

I wish I weren't. for you, and and to beautify my portrait.

But now, In a café, the one that I work at, and a man came in and I shuttered.

He tried to rape me my freshman year.

He joked with me, at the counter, right then, about that night.

{ difficult to draw with seeing eyes

I recounted the story to my roommate, who said

“you’ve had so much of that shit happen to you.”

(high hat percussion)

I am painted by everything that occurred, and I find new marks everyday.

I stumble into memories that have been sitting, calmly waiting for me to unveil them.

Sometimes it’s physical.

{ Running fast, I tug a pelvic floor muscle and it brings me to the feeling of being
ripped open

Sometimes it’s almost musical.

{ Having a drink with friends I hear a man’s laugh and
it sounds like the way your friend laughed at me.

Gud vad du skredade

“God, how you screamed”

Sometimes it’s almost too direct.

{ Locking a door behind me, my boss on the farm tells me to get on my knees.

Sometimes it’s almost too casual.

{ Joking over lunch my friend quotes Amy Schumer

“Everyone’s been a little bit raped!”

That sex sometimes hurts now, that I have to trust lovers

I have to divulge to them

and hope they don’t think I’m broken.

In them I see the shadows of what you did to me.

Lovers divulge what they think of me and my body

] There’s so much darkness in you.

only after I say it

] You’re just too emotionally complex for me.

and then my body shrivels into a broken thing.

] Why can’t you talk about this rationally?

To be emotional is to be too intense

∫ Well, I mean, you're really intense.
to be shut off is to hide.
To ask for respect is too much.
 ∫ I can't be
 with a rape victim.
I forgive and I forgive
as the men in my bed treat me as ruined.

STEEPING/WASHING

How much of this
trauma business is just me?
A lover once asked this question with a single gesture.
Early morning, I lay in bed naked with the sheet up to my neck
and he, fully dressed, handed me The New York Times.
Headline: "In College and Hiding From Scary Ideas"
It told me that I should not be offered a safe space.
Upon me reacting poorly
My naked body given a confirmation of disrespect
He said
 ∫ I, just wish you could talk about this logically.

(percussion changes to bass drum)

According to certain schools of Buddhism fear and hope are the same thing. The sloshing continuum
of sentences goes something like:

I hope I'll win the game. I fear I'll lose the game.
I am scared of the dark. I hope for the light.
I wish he would show up. I'm scared that he will disappoint me.

But I'm not so sure.

The way I fear you cannot be translated into a hope of avoiding you.

{ (unison) The way I fear you cannot be translated into a hope of avoiding you.

After I was raped I became a bather.
I bathed myself twice a day, every day
my senior year of high school.

Before that, I was afraid of water.
I remember being very alert
Taking baths as a young child, thinking that I was going to hit my head
Fall in
Fall asleep.
It was as if, in my senior year of high school, it didn't matter, the sleep.
I could hit my head, I could float
Warm water, cold water twice a day.
After I was raped I became a bather.

Rolling in it like a comforter but a thorny one.
Most of the time it's not about remembering what happened to me
it's about not remembering, feeling bad, and then realizing why.
It the realization of damage, of new formations
of deep sea dives to see the iceberg.
When I broke out of the room he had me in, they all looked upon me.
One of the loudest moments of my life was followed by one of the quietest.

Quiet now, in the bath.
 } I can't be
 with a rape victim.
Quiet now, in the bath.
 { I still try to forgive.
 Trying with those who frighten me and those who stood by
 while I became a ghost.
Quiet now, in the bath.

SCRUBBING

It starts in bursts, executive function.
Hits of shiny, measures of alchemy
polish, rub
polish, rub.
Until you start to see a gleam, even if imagined.
You are your own gold prospector
in both the curious and colonial ways

digging through vulnerability to take advantage.
I'm trying to fix you.

At speak outs, gatherings of survivors
there's this thing that is often said.
I don't know why, but it has been said at every event I've been to.
Its said that it takes 7 years for the entire epidermis to recycle itself
for not a single old cell to be left.
Which means that by the time I am 26 there will be no skin cells left
that they touched, the men that took so much from me.
Until then
and perhaps after,
I scrub.
I scrub off layers of dead and callous
to reveal chainmail, irritated pink.
My memories of rape ooze to the surface and I scrub
to stone.

New palettes of strong, new colors of "post"
post-event, post-flooding
post-disclosure, post-trigger
I'm trying to fix you.
 { (canon) I'm trying to fix you.

Now I don't put stock in the skin thing.
It isn't about the cell that remembers
not when the skin must know all the "me-too"s
of a world in which 1 out of 3 females will experience
sexual or physical assault in their lifetimes.

I'm not the girl
behind the locked door or the gloomy apartment on Lawrence or the teen in the hospital bed or the
damaged lover who cant get wet for you or the survivor at the speak out or the victim walking home
with airy thighs or the woman who takes subjugation as nature or the New Yorker who anxiously
gnaws at her skin
 { gnaws at her skin

or the promiscuous problem child or the difficult, broken marred body.

{ difficult, broken marred body

no

I'm trying to fix you.

{ (intensifying canon) I'm trying to fix you.

Loop to beginning.

How do we get ourselves clean?

Can we get ourselves clean?

How do we do this for each other in private, loudly?

How do we do this for each other in public, quietly?

Speaking the Cycle:

Autobiographical Address and Disembodiment

The project of *Trauma Rite* began with a fixation – how do we get ourselves clean? Trauma produces grime which can take the form of imposed disembodiment in order to detach from the traumatic event. People produce hurt in each other's bodies, whether it be through intimate partner violence, corporal attacks or verbal disputes, we mark each other. The psychic and physical imprints that are left by sex crimes are unique in the mythology and socially reiterated qualities that surround them. The survivor of an attack with a knife is not generally understood as worth less, or ruined, while survivors of sexual assault are constructed as damaged. The gendered power relation of sexual assault belittles and erodes the agential self of the survivor, regardless of their gender identity. Hyperembodiment, being seen as only a socially framed body, is the condition of rape, so disembodiment becomes a natural reactionary state – If I am only a body to you, I will detach from this body. I use disembodiment here not to signify an anti-corporality, but a state of operating over a new distance or dissonance, the root “dis” meaning “apart.” In this state of disembodiment trauma causes the survivor to engage and disengage with their corporality and memory. One possible result is feeling an internal severance that society then confirms as a weakness instead of an understandable reaction to violence in order to propagate heteropatriarchal power. The landscape of damage is painted by systems of domination, making the props for self deprecation are the ones most evidently available. By in large, survivors experience, classify and confirm their trauma within a punishing framework.

With this recognition of how malignant and widespread rape culture is, my fixation eventually turned a different direction – can we get ourselves clean? Submersion in mundane hostility can make the outlook dreary. Encouragingly, feminist's interventions into this codification of pathological brokenness have been reevaluating debility and empowerment. Survivors of sexual assault are perhaps not intuitively “disabled,” but the treatment of their bodies and minds as defunct, or outside of normative corporal concepts, puts them within the field of debility, or perceived weakness, that makes them less fit in capitalistic systems of productivity. Theorists such as Jasbir Puar, Jose Esteban Muñoz, and Carrie Sandahl, question how ableism informs how we negotiate states of embodied otherness, and performance educators such as Petra Kupperts and Melissa C. Nash explore the realities of creating performance environments that encourage disabled involvement. What these thinkers, who create the wide sphere of disability studies, are doing is creating ways to exhibit so-called debility while questioning the hegemonic idea of a good body. We do not have to disavow the state of our bodies in order to empower them, copying the script that refuses us is not

a route to liberation. For survivors, the preoccupation with the feasibility of becoming “clean” or “healed” from the violence of our assailants could be redirected toward accepting new states of ability as grounds for new selves.

Trauma Rite handles this fluctuation between *how* and *can*, hope and resignation. My address, performed live with recorded audio, gives voice to my experience of dissonant disembodiment, and my efforts to wash and scrub my body of its markings.

When, Where, What

Trauma Rite is a performance art and political protest piece, publically displayed at the intersection of North University and State St., Ann Arbor, Michigan on October 7, 2016. *Trauma Rite* is an audio loop, a movement piece, a testament of endurance. Over the course of eight hours, from nine to five PM, I ran through a cycle of psychological and social distress, symbolically modelling rape trauma’s grasp on the body and mind. It is time-based – evolving as the cycles build on one another while maintaining a core of recognizable repetition throughout. It is a loop that runs through my body and through the sonic landscape of the intersection. It is an interaction between a physical plaza and an online forum, a troubling of what gets unspoken in the division between public and private discourse.

Trauma Rite reflects outward my personal experiences of social interactions and internal difficulty in the years after my assaults. It troubles the post-assault disembodiment of survivors and the plasticine diagnosis of PTSD, which flattens the complex temporal and emotional hybridity that can occur in the wake of rape.

On the corner of two main thoroughfares, the plaza in which *Trauma Rite* took place is the nexus of campus and community life. I wore a simple white calf-length nightgown and nothing else. A board of canvas, a large cradle, and a pile of towels are angled outward, creating a small stage. The “stage” is lined with two planks, one with the information for the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center and SafeHouse hotlines, local Ann Arbor survivor services, and the other with the URL for the *Trauma Rite* online forum, which I will discuss later in this text. The audio originated from an amp, outward into the public space of the intersection.

Trauma Rite follows a thirteen minute thirty-six second sound score of percussion and poetry that guides performer and audience alike through three trauma states, and then back again. All three of these states, marring, steeping and scrubbing, are affective moments in a cycle of traumatic reaction and attempts at redemption or empowerment. The movements that accompany these sections are physically exhausting, characterized by tight muscles and strong motions, but the space that I inhabited was relatively small. I pair an unrelenting narrative with unrelenting movement.

My goal was to put what happens inside the body outside of it, for anyone to see.

Marring

The audio begins with marring, in which I stand against an off-white canvas and paint onto and off of my body onto the canvas with white paint. By starting a stroke on my body until it continues off of it, I make a negative imprint of myself on the canvas. As the day goes on, the canvas and my body are both more covered with paint. When I move off of the canvas, a white on off-white outline resides across the surface. The sound that goes with this motion is a rumination on hiding in public, and the many social gestures that mark the survivor body. Each time the audio details a traumatic repercussion of my assault, I paint a white stripe across myself. Marking takes the form of small slights, remembrances of the traumatic event, physical manifestations of trauma, and triggering things said to me when I disclose my identity as a survivor.

I am painted by everything that occurred, and I find new marks everyday.

I stumble into memories that have been sitting, calmly waiting for me to unveil them.

Sometimes it's physical

{ Running fast, I tug a pelvic floor muscle and it brings me to the feeling of
being ripped open

Sometimes it's almost musical

{ Having a drink with friends I hear a man's laugh and
it sounds like the way your friend laughed at me.

Gud vad du skredade

“God, how you screamed”

I include verbatim comments from a variety of people, from lovers to roommates to friends of an assailant. People can assume performance work to be theatrical, and thereby not true to life, so it was important to me to use entirely real experiences. Because I have experienced three notable acts of sexual violence, the “plot” of the piece is unclear – there is no person being prosecuted by my assertion of pain. By removing all signifiers of my assailants themselves, the piece is distinctly about survivor embodiment, not about, say, survivor justice or testimony *against* anyone. Similarly, I asked male friends to speak the parts of male lovers who have reflected rape culture in their reactions toward my survivorship. Hearing people I trust and love speak horrifying words to me helped me envision empathy toward those utterings, helped me take the sting out of those words. Utilizing verbatim phrases that were harmful to me allowed me to hold them in contempt, and through their repetition gain power over them.

In them I see the shadows of what you did to me.

Lovers divulge what they think of me and my body



Photos by Katie Raymond.

∫ There's so much darkness in you.
only after I say it
∫ You're just too emotionally complex for me.
and then my body shrivels into a broken thing.
∫ Why can't you talk about this rationally?
To be emotional is to be too intense
∫ Well, I mean, you're really intense.
to be shut off is to hide.
To ask for respect is too much
∫ I can't be
with a rape victim.
I forgive and I forgive
as the men in my bed treat me as ruined.

The male voices perforate my spoken stanzas, adding an interpersonal texture to internal struggle. The idea was to have audiences engage viscerally with what it felt like to hear “I can't be with a rape victim” from a significant other, to perhaps feel what shriveling into a broken thing is like. The looping of these phrases semantically satiates them, they become part of the landscape of the piece. Through repetition, audiences watching for more than one round experience the dissonance of my words and those said by male voices. The words “you're too emotionally complex for me” get broken apart, made strange, and placed into a corporal context. The ridiculous nature of calling a rape survivor too emotionally complex permeates the viewer regardless of their position toward or access to survivor discourse. The repetition of other voices makes the incidents, the microaggressions, not bound solely to my body but to a broader exploration of what it means to be a survivor of sexual assault at this current moment.

Looking Capacious

As I paint across my body and onto the canvas, I look defiantly, blankly outward. There is a particular expressive non-expression that I don that echoes and pays homage to many performers before me. In Yoko Ono's 1965 *Cut Piece* she sits on the stage at Carnegie Hall fully clothed with a pair of scissors and a pocket watch to her right. The audience undresses her by cutting away her clothing, bit by bit. A young white man stands above a seated Yoko Ono and excuses himself to the crowd, “Very delicate, it may take some time.” There is a discomforting quiet to the scene despite its violence – the stripping of an Asian woman via scissors, precise and punctuated, on stage in an echoing ballroom. It is unsettling to watch as the young man snips at the center of her bra, a motion not unlike gouging for her heart; she bites her lip and looks upward, milling over his action in her



Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*. Carnegie Hall, New York City, 1965. Screenshots from video by Albert and David Maysles.

mind. Her eyes trace the horizon, she moves her arm and looks at him skittishly. The boy is also attempting to keep his composure, a slight smirk making its way onto his face. After a long patch of time, each bra strap is snipped, and her hands come up to guard her breasts.

She seems to state: you do not know me but you already have all of me. The sole bastion of control she has left is her face, her expression.

Sure as a statue, fleshy and feeling enough to connect to – the Ono emotionally backs away from the audience and in doing so invites them closer. Her expression is static, washed out, and mildly sad – she could be worried about the present or consumed by reality altogether. I will call this look the capacious gaze, a staple expression of embodied artists that expands the capacity of both performer and onlooker to generate and endure the performance. It makes performers like Ono at once present and allegory, painfully embodied but conveniently vacant. It allows a performer like Yoko Ono to perform both as herself, singular, and as a stand in for larger ideas such as femininity, passivity, and victimhood.⁴⁵ There is *a* woman, but there is “women.” Allegorical readings of performance are riddled with problematics – it would be easy to call *Cut Piece* a work about violence against women, but this is flattening of the racial relationships and the complex voluntary vulnerability that Ono presents.⁴⁶

The capacious gaze allows audiences to author the piece. It is utilized to divert attention away from the face and toward other social negotiations, such as how the audience approaches her

45 As an artist associated with the Fluxus movement of the 50s and 60s, Ono makes participants and viewers question the relationship between female art subject and the consumer of art, seemingly noting the predatory nature of such a relationship. Fluxus is a loosely defined movement, exploring the twilight between life and art, subject and object. The gaze is a crucial tool in such a movement because it calls upon audiences to interact with Ono as performer and as piece of art.

46 As Kristine Stiles, Kathy O’Dell and Midori Yoshimoto note, Ono’s crucial contributions to Fluxus and those of other female artists were derided at the time by male Fluxus leaders, and have been belittled in importance by androcentric art historians. Since Fluxus was a movement that resisted capitalist frameworks of commodification, it also left female artists in a position of more vulnerable ownership over their work. Traditional misogyny was impressed upon a radical artmaking movement.

body when her face shows little sign of distress. Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 0*, in which audiences can use an array of tools and objects to mark her body, runs on a similar logic – the capacious gaze instrumentalizes the audience to act upon her body, thereby forming the piece. If Ono and Abramović cried or laughed when they were cut or hit or drawn on, social codes of propriety and protection of fragility, especially associated with femininity, could dissuade audiences from playing along. The capacious gaze demonstrates how violence relies on the estrangement of the violated subject. The pieces would look radically different, hinging solely on facial composure.

The use of the capacious gaze in *Trauma Rite* is meant to allow for my body to become a surface for projection. I am at once objectified and resistant. The resistance comes in not allowing the audience to have your pain. Ono articulates that, eventually, people get impatient with the surface, and want to intrude upon the emotional fields of the body: “People went on cutting the parts they do not like of me. Finally, there was only the stone remained of me. Finally there was only the stone remained of me that was in me but they were still not satisfied and wanted to know what it’s like in the stone.”⁴⁷ In acting like she cannot see, people yearn to be seen in more and more invasive ways. It is through this yearning that extremely emotive performances gratify the onlooker, because the attention is on them, which is comforting to community and individual alike. But the audience is not allowed to know what it is like in the stone, the expression on the face maintains a small boundary of the self. The audience is left unsatisfied, but the performer gets to withhold some level of privacy. The capacious gaze allows for a seemingly paradoxical moment in which the audience believes that you are entirely vulnerable to them when in fact they are simply experiencing their projections onto your open palette.

Marking with Blunt Instruments

Some artists use blunter instruments than the capacious gaze to project violence, such as the address of Ana Mendieta's 1973 piece *Rape Scene*. Mendieta makes strategic moves to disempower and disembody, in order to accuse, discomfort, and disgust the audience. Together with *Rhythm 0*, *Cut Piece* and *Rape Scene* are some of the most cited works in survivor performance, or as Stiles would call it, destruction art. Their differences are striking, creating a long playing field of possible performances between their tactical decisions. *Trauma Rite's* address, while not inspired by either piece, contains strategies deployed in both pieces.

Trauma Rite is gruesome, but *Rape Scene* unflinchingly presents a grisly address. The piece, performed while Mendieta was a student at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, attempts to replicate/retell the crime scene of Sarah Van Otten, a fellow student raped and murdered earlier that month. Mendieta invited peers and community members to her apartment for an undescribed

47 Reckitt, Helena, Peggy Phelan, and Marie Mamet. *Art and Feminism*. London: Phaidon, 2012. 60.



Ana Mendieta. *Untitled (Rape Scene)*, 1973. Photos by Anonymous Photographer.

performance. What they encountered was Mendieta's body bent over a table and bound, naked from the waist down, and thoroughly bloodied. Surrounding her were broken plates, splatters of blood, and cigarette butts, consistent with the description of Van Otten's crime scene.⁴⁸

The horror of the images is clear, but what is unsettling is not just the content of the performance itself, but our location in viewing it. We are examining her as if we are forensic examiners, giving an eerily clinical aesthetic to the work. Yet, for those who have not seen war or other arenas of mass death, venturing close to a dead body, close enough to examine it in an intimate sense, is unusual and unsettling. That was precisely Mendieta's intent: for those who came to see her performance to be shocked into a sense responsibility, of inner unrest. The address is in the gore and assertiveness of the image, but also in the longevity of the performance. Unlike coming across the images of Van Otten's murder, which could subsequently be put away, the audience was made to linger in front of Mendieta's address, or noticeably leave. The difference between putting away and removing oneself is notable. The decision to create a crime scene in the private sphere forces audiences to distinctly *enter* and *exit* the space. The connotations of leaving, after having seen Mendieta bent over and bloodied, become shameful, neglectful of one's invisible duty to stand by an imaginary victim or a very real death.⁴⁹

The address of *Rape Scene* cannot be categorized as entirely generous, giving the audience a site of contemplation, it is also cruel in its reiteration of a gruesome rape and murder committed just

48 Rowe, *Efficacy of the Representation of Rape*, 13.

49 The mystery and horror surrounding Mendieta's own death in 1985 has come to recolor her work with another layer of narrative. She fell from her 34th story apartment on Mercer Street in New York City. Her works, specifically her works in blood, were used as evidence in the defense of her boyfriend to demonstrate her death drive. O'Hagan, Sean. "Ana Mendieta: death of an artist foretold in blood." *The Observer*. September 21, 2013.

weeks earlier. To ignore this tone in the work would be to mischaracterize it. As Maggie Nelson said of the work, “You can’t toss it in the ghetto of feminist protest art and ignore its more aggressive, borderline sadistic motivations and effects.”⁵⁰ It is important to complicate the directionality of Mendieta’s piece – she is not only speaking to create an awareness of and empathy for survivors of assault, she is also speaking for a victim of murder. While addresses always come *from* the artist, they are not always *of* the artist. This puts *Rape Scene* in stark contrast with my work in *Trauma Rite*, or even Ono’s *Cut Piece*, pieces that do not attempt to animate the dead.

Mendieta’s meticulous reconstruction of the Van Otten’s death scene makes it difficult, if not unthinkable, to pass the performance off as not real, or theatrical. Mendieta’s control over the scene in no notable way negates her vulnerability – an accomplice or assistant had to tie her up, smear blood over her, take pictures. Ana Mendieta’s genius is demonstrated within our reluctance to dismiss her performance as an act of theater, to separate Van Otten’s assailant from the artist’s accomplice, and to look away from the violence served to us in *Rape Scene*.

An address is intensified by the signals of reality; if the blood that tints Mendieta’s body is real or looks real, we are more likely to be convinced by the reality of the performer. The onlooker does not feel as though they are buying into a theater, a piece to suspend their reality, but an addition to their own reality. Carolee Schneemann’s famous *Interior Scroll*, 1975, in which she unrolled a scroll from her vagina while standing on a table above her audience, is fascinating because the unravelling is occurring and the fact of its occurrence is visible. We know that she is in fact performing the act, that this is not a theatrical ploy.

At no point are the audiences of *Trauma Rite* given proof that I have been assaulted multiple times. There is no blood, no suggestion of the names of my assailants. If the audience is not given self-evident proof, but instead a sense that what they see could or could not be illusion, the address is made more difficult, and perhaps more intriguing. Aliza Shvarts’s 2008 piece *Untitled*, often referred to as “Abortion Piece,” was a nine-month project of impregnation and self-administered miscarriage via abortifacients, the documentation of which was set to become a photo installation at Yale University’s fine art thesis show. *Untitled* was meant to comment on and destabilize notions of female productivity and the sanctity of reproductive work, which is an undoubtedly contended subject. The photo sculpture was banned, and the work itself became the site of national controversy. Though there is no proof that Shvarts was successful in getting pregnant, or that she therefore aborted a fertilized egg, anti-abortion groups and mass media egged on a sentiment of outrage toward her project. Yale disavowed their student and her work, as ‘fictional’ stating that had these acts been real *Untitled* would have “violated basic ethical standards.”⁵¹ As Jennifer Doyle writes, “The truth of the

50 Nelson, *The Art of Cruelty*, 78.

51 Doyle, Jennifer. *Hold it against me: difficulty and emotion in contemporary art*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013. 30.

piece resides in how one chooses to interpret Shvarts's account of what she did; this quickly becomes identical to how one *feels* about what she did."⁵² Shvart's address was so compellingly tied to *real* acts and framings of productivity, that the plotline of her actions played on without a confirmation of what occurred.

In *Rape Scene*, Mendieta recreates a crime put onto someone else's body; *In Trauma Rite*, I illustrate the impacts of crimes done onto my body, but without the visual evidence that constitutes performative proof.⁵³ One piece seeks vengeance where another pleads for empathy. The blunt instrument of blood and triggering material acts as a source of shock-based proof, while the soft capacious gaze offers a sense of affective proof of experience. In looking back at my audience, onlookers can see melancholic truth of a post-assault body, perhaps eliciting brutality without having to be shown it.

Yet I utilize a blunt instrument that Mendieta does not – publicity. Performed addresses in the public sphere, rather than Mendieta's quiet apartment in Iowa City or intimate gallery spaces, have less specified audiences, and thereby often contain vast societal critiques. A voice projected into a room has to battle the walls before being heard outside of the structure; a piece of protest art performed in a personal space has to confront its boundaries, and often its tastes and assumptions of value, in order to evoke social change outside of that place. Public addresses face boundaries as well, but they do not wrestle built architectures of intimacy and exclusivity in the same manner. They are more likely to boom and fade, than be recorded on microphones and selectively dispersed.

Steeping

Washing, or steeping, is a section in which I break the gaze and instead focus on my body. I move from the canvas where I have been painting onto/off of myself to a large dark wood cradle filled with water. This section explores the at times melancholic, at times frantic, cleansing of the body from the impositions of societal marring. I put my legs in the tub/cradle, sweep water onto myself in order to wipe away some of the white paint. The sound of the water and the wetness of my white gown lend a more intimate feeling to the space – we see street performers, but we rarely see people bathe in public. The audio is quiet and haunting, portraying an introverted milling over survivorship and sadness.

As a whole *Trauma Rite* is explicitly about my reactions to assault, articulating most elements for a reader/onlooker without necessitating much decoding. Steeping is the least direct section of the audio, composed of atmospheric storytelling punctuated by disclosure. I illustrate the texture of a traumatic melancholy.

52 Ibid.

53 I am not questioning Mendieta's identity as a survivor, since that is not discussed in the piece. She is discussing someone else's experience.



Photo (top) by Joseph Xu. Photos (bottom) by Julia Gaynor.

According to certain schools of Buddhism fear and hope are the same thing. The sloshing continuum of sentences goes something like:

I hope I'll win the game. I fear I'll lose the game.

I am scared of the dark. I hope for the light.

I wish he would show up. I'm scared that he will disappoint me.

But I'm not so sure.

The way I fear you cannot be translated into a hope of avoiding you.

{ (unison) The way I fear you cannot be translated into a hope of avoiding you.

Steeping is a meditation on disempowered washing, as opposed to triumphant cleaning. The bath is a flexible sign. Baths can evoke baptism, mundane and lavish domesticity, childhood and wrinkled flesh. Baths can be a site of returning to the womb, retreating from the world, wanting to be rocked and nurtured. For me, a grown female returning to a crib to find it inundated and their body overgrown is part of the embodied dissonance of this section.⁵⁴ Just as I have outgrown the cradle, my body also refuses healing logics provided to me, such as the Buddhist principle of dynamic binarism above.

One such healing logic I subvert is that of the bath as a calming space. In *Trauma Rite*, I describe how after I was raped, bathing became a figurative daily drowning. In seeking to be cleansed, I succeeded in creating a place, the bath, that was steeped in my trauma. My relationship with the bath is one of fear and dependency – throughout my life I was afraid of water, yet I depended on it to submerge myself and escape. By housing water within a wooden crib, I inscribe the bath space as a space in which one is not entirely *alone*. You are still rocked by the impressions that the world has made on you. The tension between the bath described in the audio as a location of psychological violence and self harm, and the innocence of the physical cradle in the plaza creates a connection between “adult” content and infantile uncontrollability. Rape, the nexus of two topics, sex and violence, that are typically kept away from children, has the capacity to turn its victim back to a state of tantrum. Triggering replaces the tantrum, the sensory overload imposes itself within the body instead of outside of it.

Washing as Redemptive

The bath's connotation with purification confront survivorship, which can be rhetorically and socially treated as a state of being made unclean. In the dirt-covered Regina José Galindo piece *Alud*, the Guatemalan performance artist appears nude on a metal table, pacified and muddied.⁵⁵

54 This is not a typo, I use the pronouns they/them/theirs.

55 The Spanish word “alud” means mudslide, rockslide, flood – a large quantity of earthen substance.



Regina José Galindo. *Alud*. Thessaloniki Performance Festival, Tesalónica, Greece, 2011. Photos by Eleftheria Kalpenidou.

The audience approaches the table, and finds implements to wash her with. The audience proceeds to wash her body. A dirtied female frame corrupts concepts of female purity – Galindo’s address seems at surface value to ask you to redeem her. Yet as her naked body is uncovered and she remains limp, the imagery conjures a sense of fixing instead of helping. It becomes unclear who or what the audience is supposed to symbolize – are they altruistic helpers or self-interested saviors? The water, more so than the dirt, makes her seem helpless. The imagery of Ana Mendieta’s *Siluetas* series is evoked here – a woman’s form impressed in the earth, the figure evaporated into the grandeur of nature but not erased, a practice Mendieta called “earth-body art.”⁵⁶ Which begs the question, are they doing good by cleaning her, or violence by uncovering her skin?

Where *Alud* employs the viewer to rub her covering off of her, *Trauma Rite* asks the viewer to watch as I try to wash their impressions off of me. The dirt disguises and hugs Galindo; the white paint builds as the cycle of traumatization continues. The public is what I try to wash off of me, where the public does the washing in *Alud*. I look up to make eye contact with the audience as the audio rings:

When I broke out of the room he had me in, they all looked upon me.

One of the loudest moments of my life was followed by one of the quietest.

In watching my performance, the onlookers are put in the position of the “they” who “looked upon me” in the poem. Washing my body while looking at them after not having done so in many minutes adds a defensive quality to this moment. It acts as a turn in positioning similar to Galindo’s – are you here because you are helping, or are you one of them who causes hurt?

56 Viso, Olga M. *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body: Sculpture and Performance 1972-1985*. Miami: Miami Art Museum, 2005.



Photos by Julia Gaynor.

Scrubbing

The next section is defiant. In *Trauma Rite*, I move from the cradle to a pile of towels, pick up a towel, and begin to rub at the white patches that I could not wash off. Some of the towels were put by my side as the day went on, to show solidarity for my practice. The towels I provided were white and sterile, while the majority of towels donated during the performance were brightly colored and smelled somewhat of their owners. Each time I approached the pile, I took a different towel, using material objects from my audience members to scrub off the dried crusts of marring.

Scrubbing removes some of what marring imparts, but it also takes a toll on the survivor who wishes to resolve their trauma. The pairing of a fixation with fixing the body with an inability to become embodied entirely separate from societal expectation is a toxic duo. The fixation and inability tango with one another to produce corrosive effects. As I scrubbed at the marks on my skin with more intensity, my eczema skin grew redder and rawer. As the day went on it was unclear whether my body would succumb to bleeding.

The association of skin with survivorship is prevalent not only in my psyche but in literature, media and medical discourse surrounding sexual assault. Rape kits test for perforations, cuts and bruises act as physical evidence where emotional distress does not. As an outer barrier, skin becomes the sign and the signifier of personal barriers – the material evocation of corporal sovereignty. In film and TV, the ways that assailants touch their victims is called into question as a metric by which to judge the severity of the assault. On *Law and Order SVU*, children are given dolls, and asked “where did he touch you?” Touch is the most reiterated sensorial aspect of assault, perhaps beside the verbal exchange of consent, and thereby haunts the survivor.

Survivor communities confront this relationship with the skin by validating survivor’s feelings of violation stemming from the skin, and by focusing on the epidermis’s ability to cycle itself. It takes about seven years for the entire epidermal system to be renewed, for not a cell of that felt assault in real time to be left. This medical approximation is utilized by survivor communities as proof that assault does not stay with the body forever, that there is hope for a future without the imprints of sexual violence. Conversely, rape kits are deemed as evidence against the survivor’s claim if the skin is not sufficiently marked. The skin must be both marred enough, and clean enough to be deemed in recovery.

Performing Protest with the Skin

Representing the physicality of their struggle is what the organizers of ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power, and Queer Nation, amongst many others did in employing performances in their fight against erasure and disease during the 80s and 90s AIDS crisis. As government inaction fueled by homophobic rhetoric and a president, Ronald Reagan, who was

“unalterably and irrevocably opposed to anything having to do with homosexuality”⁵⁷ lead to a rapid increase in national and global cases. The 1980s and 1990s AIDS crisis was fought over people’s corporality and their perceived societal worth, and so the resistance and confrontation of illness and disability was fought with bodies. A material to mirror the crisis back to the American public – bodies to confront a malignant assumption about bodies. These impactful performances are important to *Trauma Rite* in that they foreground address from the body to the largest publics they could find.

During the HIV/AIDS crisis, pleading with real bodies instead of hypothetical or theatrical ones lead to some of the most profound moments of queer activism in the United States. Kiss-ins and die-ins were utilized as a formative protest tactic and a pedagogical performance in the communication of suffering to the public en masse. Kiss-ins, one facet of direct actions by the LGBT community in the 70s and 80s lovingly called “zaps,” were theatrical demonstrations of affection in settings hostile to or alienated from issues facing the gay community. Throughout the late 80s and early 90s, Queer Nation and ACT UP staged kiss-ins at churches, the Mall of the Americas, tourist sites in major cities, and the 64th Academy Awards, interrupting straight rhythms of comfort, consumption and prestige with the visual intake of subjugated sexuality. Whether it be snogging during church services or falling limp on the floors of malls, these kiss-ins and die-ins were militant acts of war by “an army of lovers that cannot lose.”⁵⁸ Passionately kissing or pretending to die became performance weapons against unknowing or uncaring oppressors.

Political funerals, processions and protests of activists and loved ones carrying coffins of people who died of AIDS, brought the dead into the daylight so that the government would face the impact of their negligent policies. David Wojnarowicz, multimedia artist and ACT UP figurehead, referred to the die-ins of actual bodies as a “powerful dismantling tool” with the capacity to be cathartic for the HIV positive and surrounding community, to display rage, grief and despair. When bodies are taken away, it recarves their social invisibility with a physical absence, and the reasons they died become harder to call upon. To Wojnarowicz, addresses of reality with necropolitical corporality also served as a historical and relational device:

Each public disclosure of a private reality becomes something of a magnet that can attract others with a similar frame of reference...I imagine what it would be like if friends had a demonstration each time a lover or friend or a stranger died of AIDS... It would be comforting to see those friends, neighbors, lovers, and strangers mark

57 Larry Kramer, one of the founders of ACT UP, in an interview with Democracy Now’s Amy Goodman, on the 20 year anniversary of an ACT UP performance action at the New York stock exchange.

58 Berlant, Lauren, and Freeman, Elizabeth. “Queer Nationality” *Fear of a queer planet: queer politics and social theory*. Warner, Michael, ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. 200.



Protester in the ACT UP Ashes Action, in which the ashes of those dead of HIV/AIDS were scattered at the gates of the White House. Washington, DC. October 11, 1992. Screenshot of AIDS Community Television telecast January 31, 1995.



Queer Nation Cable Car Kiss In. San Francisco, California, July 28th, 1990. Photo by Rick Gerharter.

time and place and history in such a public way.⁵⁹

Performance turns the private public, and in applying the address of a neglected or dead body, visibility for the maimed and hidden is achieved. History is pocked with moments when performances outshone the institutions that sought to silence them.

I do not level my personal grievance with that of Wojnarowicz, who saw friends and lovers die before succumbing to AIDS himself in 1992, but I am aware of how their furious body politic rewrote my concept of public corporeal performance, fueling my need to air my embodied trauma. In *Trauma Rite*, I stand alone in my corporeal protest of rape culture, one out of hundreds of thousands of survivors alive in the United States at this very moment. The idiom “skin in the game” is a Wall Street term describing investing one’s own money to buy stock in their own venture, but I am going to appropriate this phrase to signify performance with one’s own politically-bound skin. To have skin in the game is to reveal the injury a society has done onto the skin out to the public.

Strength in Address

Scrubbing handles interactive survivorships and ideals of the “strong survivor.” The audio contains a rumination on survivor events, such as Speak-Outs, and an enactment of how a fixation on normative wellness keeps the body unwell. My intention for scrubbing was to at once give hope to onlookers and challenge the linear narrative of coming to terms with one’s rape. The repercussions of sexual violence change you, and their roots are not easily washed away. These new fusions call for alternate kinds of redemption, through survivor community building and individualized care practices. The contention between what works for an individual and what is supposed to work is modelled in this section, and the exacerbated societal pressure under which the survivor feigns being okay, ultimately to their detriment.

As this feigning “okayness” grows, to the point of proudly standing in front of the audience seemingly “healed,” the percussion cycle in the audio score does as well. I am brought back to the canvas, indignantly hitting it and clawing at it, trying to rub away the impression of myself made by the traumatic markings of Marring. I am attacking the survivor others have made me. The drums fade away and I stand in front of the canvas, look directly at the audience, and start the cycle once more.

My intervention is that trauma is not about the skin that remembers, but the ways we communally and personally build our survivorship. Fixations on normative wellness, on the skin, or on what helps other survivors, keep the body unwell. Acceptance of the survivor body as its own state, instead of the dirtied slate of a pure human, that has the capacity to be plentiful and beautiful

59 Wojnarowicz, David. *Close to the Knives: a Memoir of Disintegration*. New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 1991. 121.



Karmenife Paulino, *Reclamation*, 2015. Photo by Karmenife Paulino and Tess Altman.

in its own right is central to my art and my feminism.

Of course, this is only my way of finding purpose in pain. *Reclamation*, Karmenife Paulino's performance and photo series portrays a decision in another direction, based on the experience and needs of the artist. In the wake of Paulino's rape in a Wesleyan University fraternity house, she suffered immense psychological struggle after the event, with her own silence and eventual disclosure. As a black woman, she did not believe that the University would bring her the kind of justice she wanted, and she notes her decision to disclose her rape, "it was very dark time. the administration basically laughed at me."⁶⁰ Seeking her own strain of healing, Paulino made *Reclamation*, 2015, which stages a S&M play between dominatrix, the artist, and her submissives, college boys wearing "Frat Filth" shirts, on the steps of the frat house the artist was raped in.

The address is direct: "I am the boss here." Her decision to don dominatrix wear is rooted in her identification as a black woman. It is garb that makes the artist feel beautiful in her body, and clothing that confronts expectations of black bodies: "I'm tired of black respectability politics and people of color's bodies being viewed as vulgar and 'too much.'"⁶¹ Leather, mesh and chains

60 Frank, Priscilla. "Sexual Assault Survivor Stages Powerful S&M Photos At Frat Where She Was Raped." *Huffington Post*. March 15, 2016.

61 Solis, Marie. "Meet the Sexual Assault Survivor Who Rewrote Her Experience in A Powerful Photo Series." *MiC*. N.p., 29 Feb. 2016.

enable her to feel empowered in her body image and black identity while they aesthetically fight the institutional background of the images. Paulino is centered amongst the white columns of a white dominated institution – triumphantly the nucleus of a scene in which she would otherwise be vulnerably on display. She is the hero of the scene, against all odds.

Paulino's *Reclamation* is more complex than simply being “powerful” - the adjective that MiC and The Huffington Post headlines used for the piece. Descriptors such as brave, powerful, and strong do very little for describing individual survivors, despite being repetitively and instinctively uttered. These words only have significance in comparison to derided traits of cowardess, powerlessness and weakness. By calling a survivor powerful we evoke the cultural norm of survivors as weak and powerless. The survivor, victim, artist becomes the exception to a larger rule that we are not objecting to, but restating.

Where journalists use powerful, I describe *Reclamation* as radically, self-reflexively imaginative. Implicitly within her address, which evokes binaries of pain and privilege in a deceptively delineated manner, the artist leaves clues to the more complicated nature of the piece. She presents herself as the black woman regaining her power from a white institution's negligence, as the dominator to a system of corporal control and disregard. Under these blanket understandings of *Reclamation*, the piece undoubtedly concurs with its title. However, negotiating a post-assault body does not have an on-off switch, and Paulino's photos reveal a more nuanced perception of survivorship. For one, the photographs are the performance itself. The pose is not a freeze frame of a larger act that continues off camera, but the act alone. In many shots, the men do not seem to be doting upon her in live action, but showing their allegiance to the camera. This is the direction of the artist herself, who has them neatly gagged and chained.

The relationship between top and bottom is not articulated between their bodies as it could be through sight lines and body language, but it is broadcast outward to you, the viewer. Paulino looks to the camera triumphantly, seemingly asking the onlooker to confirm or recognize her act. The potential for the arbiter of power to be the viewer, the discursive dom, disrupts the dualism of the piece. Inquiry into what party is redeemed, the autonomy of their body restored, is distributed amongst three people – the survivor/artist, the archetype of her assailant, and the viewer (who could themselves be either one of the former). The import of the freeze frame is muddied, why distill a moment of reclamation when it could occur in real time?

The snapshot citation of sadomasochism does much more for *Reclamation* than the advertised reversal of power dynamics – it positions the piece within a rich canon of BDSM performance. BDSM is an erotic culture that anchors itself in a lexicon of consent and respect, pain and play. In its emphasis of sexual scripts that consider every individual's experience of embodiment and trauma, sadomasochism shares a fixation with current anti-gendered violence work. As Kathy O'Dell writes in the prolific *Contract with the Skin*, contractual negotiation of submission and

masochism is part and parcel of sociality – masochistic performance just exhibits it.⁶² Sheree Rose and Bob Flanagan, a legendary couple of the Los Angeles BDSM performance scene of the 80s and 90s, lived together in their respective top and bottom roles, domesticating the sadomasochistic structure. As organizers of the L.A. kink scene, practitioners of BDSM, and live artists, Rose and Flanagan made work dealing with the contracts of mundanity, sadism, masochism, sex and illness. After a lifelong battle with cystic fibrosis, Flanagan died in 1996, leaving Rose to carry the SM art torch without her dedicated partner and bottom. Their foregrounding of consent rewrote their entire lives; as Jennifer Doyle writes, “Consent, agreement, negotiation – all of this was, for Rose and Flanagan -- part of their daily poetics (and this is part of SM political culture). They wrote contracts, for example, describing Flanagan’s obligations as a slave and Rose’s obligations to him... They sought to recover all that the marital contract removes in its naturalization of the structures of domestic relationships.”⁶³ Where Rose and Flanagan could alter their contract, Paulino produces alternate documents of her experience, rendering a consensual vengeance into being. In viewing the SM portraits and recognizing the woman with the whip as herself, the artist identifies as agential. The bodies of the men do not need to be struck or humiliated in live time in order to redraw the bodily boundaries between willful and nonconsensual violation. In this instance, the pose is enough to encourage healing for the survivor/artist, becoming the person she creates in the light of the flash. Under its layers of site-specific context and trauma negotiation, *Reclamation* is about construction of the self, and how the survivor self can be in particular need of reconstruction

Masochism is in some ways intrinsic to the dialectics of the performance of violence. Normative social logic presents a care of the self that is not supposed to involve the infliction of harm or sorrow, especially not in front of others. Why relieve, or create pain, in front of an audience? Perhaps to form new contracts with one’s experience, with the public and with one’s own body. To form a non-normative address that calls to the worst corners of trauma, because ignoring the masochism of the survivor mind is to further perpetuate the punishing stringency of strong survivorship.

Peeling Autobiography Outward

A major endeavor of this work was extroverting the insular process of coping with the personal impacts of rape. Exposing my affective world means creating a body-specific vulnerability (me) that can be connected to larger vulnerabilities (survivors at large) and people who unknowingly render others vulnerable (assailants, bystanders, those who have not recognized their histories of

62 O’Dell, Kathy. *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970’s*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

63 Doyle, Jennifer. “Sheree Rose: A Legend of Los Angeles Performance Art.” KCET. June 20, 2013. <https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/sheree-rose-a-legend-of-los-angeles-performance-art>.

abuse).

While *Trauma Rite* is autobiographical, it is not confessional. Confessional works are directional, presenting to a recipient, where *Trauma Rite* invites audiences to spar with its material. It is rooted in my experience, but I do not divulge the details of my assaults, or my assailants, or my journey in reporting or not reporting, or other pieces of information that one might expect of a piece about sexual assault. By never exacting a plotline and removing names and places, the onlooker is able to engage with the piece at anytime in the cycle, listening to not to a specified story but to an emotional landscape. In that way the address of *Trauma Rite* is about the act of disclosing, not the content of disclosure.

The effort of not making *Trauma Rite* hyper-personal echo my scholarly efforts to keep this thesis sufficiently depersonalized as to be research not memoir. Of course, the walls between research and memoir are porous, otherwise I would not attempt to critique my own work, but the difficulty that grows at this meeting point is notable.⁶⁴ Original drafts of *Trauma Rite* included one with grisly detail of my rape, another called *Rites* which sought to do the transformative purification that I now troubleshoot as potentially abusive. In my artwork I sought to be more atmospheric and in my scholarship I allowed myself to be the location of inquiry. The seesaw between intimacy and distance is indicative of the unstable division of art and theory, lived life and life explained.

64 Media critics have linked the artistic choice of claiming a work as universal to male privilege in artmaking. Tehching Hsieh, a Taiwanese performance artist renowned for his extensive endurance work, spoke of *Rope Piece*, his collaborative yearlong work with Linda Montano, as a piece “about all people.” Attached by the waist with an eight foot rope for a full year, Montano stated that “it felt like strangling in total dependency and lack of privacy.” In *Roped*, C. Carr’s essay musing on the work, Linda is recorded saying “this is the way the man traditionally talks about his work. Most women traditionally talk about their personal feelings, while the man says, ‘I am everybody.’” While I find this instance humorous and helpful for my feelings toward “universal” performance, it also relies on a binaristic mentality that is counterintuitive to me as a genderqueer individual.

“So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what
caused the suffering”

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 91

Framing Complicity:

Spectatorship, Survivorship and Crowd Language

Trauma Rite asks a lively, day-lit intersection to become involved with survivorship – a significant request from a stranger performing on a corner. Between address and reaction lies a fruitful plane of potential energy. This unacted dynamism can be harnessed to provoke self-reflection, shame, and hope in the onlooker and performer. In the see-saw of *Rest Energy*, there is the potential for a performer to be shot with an arrow, and for onlookers to witness it, having done nothing; in the die-ins Wojnarowicz writes on, the open casket of oozes the potential of a life lost to state negligence. The performer's tools of intervention, accusation, illusion, and solidarity work on audiences to illicit internal responses that may not register in the documentation. In the history of performance, this is one moment where the social justice implications of performance find salience. Audience absorption of media can cause audiences to recognize their complicity in systems of oppression, the solidarity present amongst/within marginalized groups, and their inaction in stopping violent behavior. Performers who embody the impacts of structural violence use this plane of potentiality to find interpersonal efficacy for their work. Audience's internalized reactions that have the capacity to spark liberatory practices, whether that be confronting their position as a bystander, perpetrator, or survivor of violence.

Potentiality is not always redeeming – it can also spark a sense of performative allyhood to avoid complicity in the violence being articulated. Rape culture is understood widely as the social systems and beliefs that embed and normalize gendered violence, dictating the treatment of survivors and assailants at all levels of intimate and institutional settings. I personally prefer Alexandra Rutherford's brief definition of rape culture as “sexual violence as a public reality.”⁶⁵ Rape is a public act even when it occurs in private, an act informed by broader social power. Since rape reflects publicness, its dissidents sometimes claim themselves in open-air sites, as public spaces that carry the connotation of both their specific violation and society at large. Being an audience to the public complaint that was *Trauma Rite* does not excuse the onlooker from that public, but folds them into it. How complicit or excused people feel depends for the most part on audience culture fostered by the transient members of the crowd.

In the network of a crowd, people create norms of inhabiting space, and emotional contagion ensues. The way in which we “catch” each other's affect in a crowd is the subject of many psychological and sociological texts. Social and affective contagion is scientifically substantiated, and

65 Rutherford, Alexandra. “Sexual Violence Against Women: Putting Rape Research in Context.” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2011): 342.

at times, distinctly visible and felt. One example, used by psychologist Elaine Hatfield and historian Robert L. Rapson on the NPR show *Invisibilia*, is that of the elevator that opens on one side.⁶⁶ In an episode of *Candid Camera*, Hatfield and Rapson witness this phenomenon: someone enters an elevator and everyone is facing away from them, toward the back wall. Another person enters and also faces the back wall, and the first person looks around confused, and slowly turns toward the back wall as well. When one of them turns forward, they all turn forward, afraid of being caught acting the fool. The phenomenon of syncing up with one another is called social contagion, and its affective equivalent, emotional contagion. Audiences set up the expected or permissible emotive dispositions of a certain area. What's more, research by Hatfield and Rapson posits that not only do we mimic each other's body language, subconsciously and consciously, we also feel the emotions associated with that corporality.⁶⁷ In other words, if you cover your eyes *as if* you were afraid, you are more likely to experience fear. This conjecture has huge repercussions for analyzing audience cultures. How people mimic one another in an audience has the capacity to alter not only their visible emotional responses but their internal sentiments.

Performing Voyeurism

Audience cultures are bound by looking together, having the same subject of study. If that subject is pain, the question of how audiences negotiate their role has to do with the social contagion and permissibility I have discussed. Michel Melamed's *Regurgitofagia*, 2004, electrocutes the artist proportionally to the amount of audience vocalization in the room, making audiences directly responsible for the pain that Melamed experiences. The charismatic Melamed stimulates reaction from the audience with jokes and skits, maneuvering limbs clamped with positive and negative charges on opposite legs and feet, as well as a pulley system that lifts weighted boxes when his arms wither and writhe from the electricity. He stands alone, dressed in black on a black stage, manipulated by the visceral proof of his own ability to entertain. Melamed is asking for laughter for his jokes and exclamations for the lashing motions of his body, rarely pleading for silence. At the punchline of each joke, there is a person who decides to laugh, inciting general laughter.⁶⁸ Viewers follow other onlookers in confirming his structure of pain. The effect is a jaw-dropping show in which the fourth wall is continually punctured by input, output, and the repercussions of audience

66 "Contagion + Maria Bamford." NPR. January 30, 2015. 23:02. <http://www.npr.org/2015/01/30/382455221/contagion-maria-bamford>.

67 Hatfield, Elaine, Cacioppo, John T. and Rapson, Robert L. *Emotional Contagion*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, England, 1993.

68 The floaty ambivalence of Melamed perhaps references the 1970s Tropicália movement in Brazilian art, which had tones of dissent within its dreamlike works. This piece is similarly political without being committed to a particular set of politics.

Cotter, Holland. "When a Burst of Sunshine Swept Over Brazil's Art World." *The New York Times*. October 12, 2006. Accessed April 01, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/13/arts/design/13trop.html>.



Sophie Calle, *The Sleepers*, exhibited by 1979. Photos by Sophie Calle.

decision making.

In a 2008 adaptation of *Regurgitofagia* for New York's Public Theater, Melamed invites an audience member onstage to test the machine, to show that he is not feigning the origins of his bodily jolts. The crowd laughs as he asks a white female if she has health insurance, heart problems. Despite the fact that one of "them," one of the crowd, is in the crosshairs of their sonorous reactions, they continue to laugh. When culpability is diffused and non-identifiable, art viewers generally move more decisively within the art work. Desire to inflict pain outlasts the performer subject, the audience's capacity to write the piece writes on the audience itself. The title of the piece, *Regurgitofagia*, illuminates the excessiveness of the regurgitation of the audience, the plentitude of sounds married with the shocks of merry ill will, accepted violence, normalized pathology. We need to vomit up what we have taken in in order to assess what we want to take back, Melamed says of this performance, illuminating his intention for to make the audience aware and critical of their role. An active search for the reactions of others is an injurious and integral part of community building, of figuring out what "we want to swallow back."⁶⁹ In that way Melamed's piece becomes a laboratory for what makes you feel bad, what pain is difficult to impose and what is understood as just the laws of interaction.

Voyeurism can become the rule instead of the exception within painful or precarious performance. To confront this, some artists make the audience their subject of study. If Melamed constructs a laboratory for voyeuristic pain and pleasure, Sophie Calle's *The Sleepers*, 1979, is one that flips the position of voyeur. Calle awakes in her bed and photographs strangers sleeping, vulnerable to the gaze of her lens. The audience, the 23 beddwelling strangers who spent eight hours or more sleeping in her bed, inhabiting the space twenty four hours a day, is the focus of the photograph. As the negotiator of the frame, Calle restates herself as the subject of the piece, and the beddwellers

69 Melamed, Michel. *Regurgitofagia*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Objetiva, 2004. 72.

objects of study. In letting people in, she is responsible for any abusive acts of audience authorship. Conversely, she is credited for their beauty. As Anna Watkins Fisher notes, gendered parasitism becomes an important factor to consider in Calle's work. The artist views the beddweller as she would a slumbering lover, with the impression that she can smell their skin, hear the rhythms of their diaphragm. She feeds off of their willingness to grab at the quiet spotlight, the artistic invitation she provides them, and produces a work that is "hers." Calle feeds on the ego driven participation of others to her own artistic ends. Parasitism is not meant as a disparaging word in Fisher's understanding of the term, it simply describes a relationship of (ab)use that can be found all around us.⁷⁰

Through this parasitism, Calle seemingly inverts structures of voyeurism, subvert norms of privacy and intimacy, performer and audience. The precarious stranger, who brings the public realm into the private notion of a bed, thereby holding the potential to symbolize an assailant, is put under a microscope. Here Calle disciplines the public where the gaze would usually follow the performer. Where audiences usually regulate themselves, Calle takes the reins. In *Trauma Rite* audiences monitored their voyeurism and that of others to create an ethical hierarchy within a public plaza.

Contagion and Complicity

The crowds of *Trauma Rite* disciplined and mimicked one other, twisting the shape of public space as well as their concepts of complicity. I performed facing outward toward the intersection of two major thoroughfares, from which the usual pedestrian path cuts diagonally, approximating a forty five degree angle through the plaza. This place acts as the joint between the University of Michigan campus and the city of Ann Arbor. In positioning this piece it was important to chose an open air location where both students and residents of Ann Arbor would come upon it. I distinctly did not want *Trauma Rite* to seem University-specific, because it is not. I was not assaulted on campus, nor did I want to focus on college survivors specifically. The intersection of North University and State St., facing outward toward a Walgreens drug store, geographically positioned me in a third-place, an accessible location with no entrance fees, planted between the jurisdiction of two large institutional bodies. Crowds are used to speedily moving through this contested space, but my performance did not allow for that.

With the evocation of rape in the public sphere, the thin line between being an audience to a performance and a bystander to an event becomes clear. Thereby, whoever looked long enough to vaguely understand the content of the piece found themselves in a moral predicament. The choice to ignore a street performer discursively becomes the choice to ignore the aftermath of sexual assault. As

70 Fisher, Anna Watkins. "Manic Impositions: The Parasitical Art of Chris Kraus and Sophie Calle." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1-2, 2012: 223-35. doi:10.1353/wsqs.2012.0029.



Photo (top) by Julia Gaynor. Photo (bottom) by Andrea Kopitz.



Photo (left) by Andrea Kopitz. Photo (right) by Julia Gaynor.

I performed, I saw this register on passerby's faces – the change between a casual smile leftover from speaking to a friend or a neutral walking face, to a clenched eyebrow examination, to a sneaking melancholy on their mouths as they realized what they had been roped into. And then, for most, the notable work of shaking off however many seconds or minutes they watched me so they could continue through the plaza. Leaving, or passing through, seemed to hold some of the burden of my survivorship with it. Crowd members often mouthed “I’m sorry” at me before leaving, or pressed their hands to their hearts and then at me. These interactions could be understood as moments of pity, but I believe them also to be moments of recognition if their positioning as both an accidental audience member and a witness to my pain.

As onlookers gathered for short spurts or long expanses of time they impeded people's ability to mozy through the plaza without looking at *Trauma Rite*. The sphere of influence for the audience was set by the person farthest away from me who was attentively watching, as onlookers noticed that they were crossing someone's gaze. One onlooker called this the “creation of a wall-less walled-in place.” It was amphitheater set by resistance and adherence to physical and emotional contagion.

At one point, the crowd encircled me, creating a near perfect semi-circle, and crossed their arms. There is no way to know who positioned themselves this way first, and who followed suit, nor does it matter particularly. Individuality is somewhat lost to crowd sentiment – and this has a purpose. In the photograph, one can see that the majority of people present are females who are holding their bodies, as if protecting their chests.⁷¹ Legs strongly beneath them, planted. They are asserting their presence while also positioning themselves in a casual, guarded stance. The semicircle creates a zone of serious spectatorship, eliminating the capacity to use that area for anything else. In this way, these onlookers, and those like them throughout the day, assert an emotive unity with each other and a commitment to the piece. This unity is contingent upon people's unconscious susceptibility to social contagion, or conscious willingness to play by the group's rules.

71 In this photo the majority of onlookers are female *reading*, I do not know how they identify in terms of sex and gender.

Those who stopped to watch claimed an innocence by staying by my side, and read a cruelty into passing me. The logic of “I am here for her, and they are not,” was palpable and displayed in the audience cultures of *Trauma Rite*.⁷² The crowd disciplined and surveilled the area with their gazes and body language, deeming certain types of spectatorship more or less respectful than others. In one post on *traumarite.com*, which I will explore more in chapter three, an onlooker said, “There was a man who stared at you out of the side of his car. He stopped at the light, reversed, and just stared. He stayed, eventually turned the corner, and stared again. I wonder in many ways what he was thinking, and I felt angry at him for watching.” Many things are clear in this comment; the onlooker is comfortable looking at others, the onlooker disapproves of the actions of the man, and the onlooker feels that there a power dynamic between the man and me. There is a source of anger originating not from the content of my piece, but from surveillance of others watching *Trauma Rite*. The onlooker recognizes that the significance of looking at a survivor, at a female in a white dress, drenched in water and paint. They want to be on the right side of seeing, they want to not be complicit in rape culture.

Oddly enough, when a truck of men came around the block not once, but twice, shouting “Trump 2016!” no one called back or intervened. In fact, multiple audience members laughed at the political theater evolving before their eyes. Some people visibly scowled, perhaps aware of the distinct context of that comment in terms of survivorship. I performed on that corner less than 24 hours after the story broke on October 7th, 2016 that a microphone had recorded Donald Trump describing assaulting women.⁷³ Chanting “Trump 2016!” at me, in that setting, on that particular day, is as poetic as it is horrible. In all likelihood, the men who shouted at me had no idea that I was performing a piece about what happens when people in powerful social positions are sexually violent. In all likelihood, those men simply saw a scantily clad woman on a corner, and proceeded from there. Nonetheless, none of the onlookers, who were quite aware of the content of the piece, said or did anything about it. Inaction became part of the acceptable range of audience reaction, where it would have taken one person to call out to begin resetting the boundaries of spectatorship.

The assessment of certain types of looking at performance as more correct than others is analogous to deciding that certain types of public assembly and protest are more impactful than others. Protest culture is just as performative as audience culture, similarly creating spheres of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. In John Berger’s essay “The Nature of Mass Demonstrations”

72 I use they/them/their pronouns but in the online forum, which I address in chapter three, people nearly unanimously identified me as a woman by using she/her/hers.

73 “I’m automatically attracted to beautiful [women]—I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. Just kiss. I don’t even wait. And when you’re a star they let you do it. You can do anything ... Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything.”

Mathis-Lilley, Ben. “Trump Was Recorded in 2005 Bragging About Grabbing Women “by the Pussy.” Slate Magazine. October 07, 2016. http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2016/10/07/donald_trump_2005_tape_i_grab_women_by_the_pussy.html.

he applies theatrical language to protests, calling them rehearsals for the performance of the revolution. It is during these rehearsals that the values of the movement are decided upon. One of the most important parts of this rehearsal, Berger writes, is the maintenance of innocence in comparison to the state or oppressive power.⁷⁴ One of the values agreed on must be that the assembly is providing better options than the world outside of it – the assembly portrays justice in an unjust world. The difference between rehearsed innocence for a cause and audience complicity is a fine line. It is a question of when rehearsal ends and impact begins. In the next chapter I handle the impacts that Trauma Rite did have, and how audience authorship realized those discernable manipulations of public space.

74 Berger, John. “The Nature of Mass Demonstrations.” *John Berger: Selected Essays*, ed. Geoff Dyer. London: Bloomsbury, 2001: 248.

“The political as a place of acts oriented toward publicness becomes replaced by a world of private thoughts, leanings, and gestures. Suffering, in this personal-public context, becomes answered by survival, which is then recoded as freedom.”

Lauren Berlant, *Poor Eliza*, 641

Claiming Space:

Audience Interaction and Emotional Publics

Audiences change the architecture of open space. With their attitudes and with their bodies they make implicit walls, doors, and windows. Accessing a piece of artwork becomes a matter of who surrounds it and the affective world they create. As a performer, I can only take some credit for the power of a work, because, as Marcel Duchamp noted, it is the public who completes the work of art. The artist creates the arena that viewers play, fight and are viewed within. How the viewer consumes the piece and creates the edges of its influence is integral to its identity. It is audience interaction that makes it possible to separate the art work from the artist – the artist is not the audience but the art work is imbued with the consumer’s presence. The art is not only filtered through the interiority of the viewer, but crawls into their corporality, changing their body language and their identification with the material. The audience performs in response to the performance, and in response to the social climate built around it. Is it okay for me to yell, to clap, to weep? While the answers to those questions may lie in instructions within the performance, they are more likely answered by the invisible contracts between viewer and performer and the affective architecture of the crowd.

The fact that my piece was performed in public necessitates an overhaul of the assumptions that come with what “public space” is presumed to be. Publicness connotes an openness, and an anonymity combined with visibility. To be in public is to be accessible to the gazes of others. To be in public is to be distinctly not at home. The public separates from the private in falsely natural ways, assuming certain acts to be public acts and others private. How we interact with our bodies in public animates our public bodies in ways that constrain us or expand us dependent on our social power and privilege. Confronting capitalism and its appropriation of open social space is critical to understanding how people interact with public art.

Dominant Publics, Common Space

The open space that we operate within is inherently unjust. The late form of capitalism we live within further encloses shared land, making “common areas” such as parks and plazas sites where privatization and social hegemony triumphs. The commons and performative counterpublics both create just spheres within unjust public arenas. They differ in their understandings of power and visibility; the common seeks to create resources that replenish themselves, regardless of the identity of the participants, where the counterpublic seeks to foster community for subaltern and marginalized communities, and in doing so creates a new fount of resources for that community. One relies on

a leveling of power, where the other assumes unequal social dynamics. Public performance has the capacity to foster spheres within open space that fuse the goals of common and counterpublic alike.

Along with anti-capitalist thinkers Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis, and Giorgio Agamben, I object to capitalism's large scale consumption of shared land and denaturalization of the ethic of the commons. The concept of a public space being "open to everyone," but in fact owned by a municipality and policed according to its own ideas of propriety and population control has been normalized so thoroughly that it is difficult to imagine that for the majority of human existence we did not organize shared space along the lines of capitalistic discipline.⁷⁵ The commons was the major ruling system of open land for centuries before the dawn of globalized accumulation and predation, and still remains at the heart of many societies worldwide. The concept of the commons is a contemporary source of optimism in the fight against neoliberalism. Theorists, academics and artists are reclaiming this concept that our consumptive amnesia has blinded us to – open land regulated by the people for the people. In Federici and Caffentzi's *Commons: Against and Beyond Capitalism*, the authors explore the commons and how to bring such a state into fruition while avoiding unproductive nostalgia for a past that does not at all resemble our present. The words "the commons" are widely known in conjunction with Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons," which works as a capitalist parable that ties commonality with irresponsibility and unmediated resource use.⁷⁶ Considering capitalism's propensity for depletion, it is a near brilliant deflection to explain environmental degradation on the system one is decimating. Social and economic organization by the commons is not without its rather enormous challenges, but it has in no way been disproven in practice, only in myth.

As we lose the last commons we have left, whether it be the right to fish in shared waters, to hydrate ourselves with close by fresh water, or to express oneself on the internet, we become aware of what we have to lose. We become eager to engage in "commoning."⁷⁷ Commoning is the conception of a interface, physical or digital, in which people create publics that share resources and visibility horizontally, in the face of state-sanctioned, hegemonically ruled public space. A heterogeneous social group exercising control over a domain. This restructuring mandates the humanization of the space that accounts for those marginalized and silenced by institutional violence, rejecting the mandates of capitalist productivity and multiplying resources through collaboration. Commoning creates space accessible to all where there was only the illusion of it before.

The counterpublic, formulated by Fraser, Warner, and Berlant, has important likenesses to the common. Characterized by how we share stories, goods, and emotions with one another, the

75 Caffentzis, G., and S. Federici. "Commons against and beyond capitalism." *Community Development Journal* 49, no. Suppl 1 (2014): 92-105. doi:10.1093/cdj/bsu006.

76 Hardin, G (1968). "The Tragedy of the Commons". *Science*. 162 (3859): 1243–1248.

77 Caffentzis, G., and S. Federici. "Commons against and beyond capitalism." *Community Development Journal* 49, no. Suppl 1 (2014): 92-105. doi:10.1093/cdj/bsu006.

commons and counterpublics are both ways of resisting white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and other forms of domination. Frustrated by the assumption that we all hold equal power in public space, Nancy Fraser's *Rethinking the Public Sphere*, conceives of subaltern counterpublics that live within mass publics, subverting white Western male power and aiding minoritarian efforts toward justice.⁷⁸ These counterpublics slowly injure the enforcement of ruling class power by inventing their own lexicons for their experience, altering social reality to account for their cultures of struggle and joy.⁷⁹ Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant apply this term to queer populations in *Sex in Public*, writing that "mass publics and counterpublics, in other words, are both damaged forms of publicness, just as gender and sexuality are, in this culture, damaged forms of privacy."⁸⁰ In public (as well as in private, but in distinctly different discursive ways) we see the constructed boundaries of identity play themselves out. The severing of mass publics from counterpublics, the cordoning off of the population by means of discipline and structural stratification, necessitate processes of commoning. Both theoretical tools bring light to the margins of society, whether it be through the creation of media to speak to their lived experience in the case of counterpublics, or through the redistribution of resources in the case of the commons. José Esteban Muñoz's queer of color disidentifactory counterpublics and Gavin Butt's performative commons further the project of broadening what medias and environments recruit forces of resistance, and why performance is essential to more just futures.⁸¹

Commoning and creating counterpublics meet at public performance, which assembles people in the open over a source of community knowledge. The architecture that was formed by the counterpublic of my piece *Trauma Rite*, demonstrates "commoning" in conventional and unconventional ways. In the last chapter I discussed audience complicity, what the onlookers of *Trauma Rite* did not do; in this chapter I will ruminate on action and creation. With a public pronouncement of survivorship, the audience completed the performance by creating a survivor counterpublic, and more than that, a heterogeneous commons for the shared resources of coping with trauma. Exploring audience articulations in physical and digital realms, I seek to model the power of performance to reify resistance against rape culture.

78 Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 63.

79 Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." 67.

80 Berlant, Lauren, and Warner, Michael. "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry* 24 no. 2, (1998): 547-566.

81 Butt, Gavin. "The Common Turn in Performance." *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22.1 (2012): 46-61. Web.

Digital Decisions

The Internet is inevitably part of how people share art and media. Online, people choose to self educate, find those who think similarly or pick on those who think differently. Having learned about survivor communities through online discussions and resources such as the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network's site, staging the abused body online makes as much sense to me as in the flesh. Digital interfaces are producing survivorship at incredible rates, giving people hope, insight and new formations of what this injury identity could mean. In an effort to make *Trauma Rite* more dialogic and in tune with modern ideas of the survivor, I created an online platform to capture audience responses to the piece.

The website opens with a confirmation page that states "The following materials are unfiltered and unmoderated. By proceeding I recognize that these materials may be triggering to myself or others in regards to gendered violence and sexual assault, and what I write anonymously on this site will be used as part of the artist's thesis. (I understand and wish to proceed.)" This cover page acts dually as warning and permission. *Trauma Rite* is a piece with the distinct capacity to trigger⁸² survivors of abuse and assault, especially since I had no idea of what people would post on the website, so the content had to have a barrier to it so that a conscious decision could be made on the part of the user to interact with the material. The effect of the words "unmoderated and unfiltered content" is a warning to ready oneself for the unpredictable ugliness of the Internet. The shibboleth also asked consent of the viewer. The fact that there is no "cover page" to seeing my performance in the intersection is something that troubled me greatly, so providing a discursive question of consent in *Trauma Rite* felt like an important component in the world of the piece.

There are two pages to the site itself: an open forum with the prompt "Reactions Here" and an artist statement.

The discrepancies in what people say and do in physical space and what actions they take digitally inspire me hugely as an artist. Emma Sulkowicz's *Ceci n'est pas un viol* acted as an influence in deciding to incorporate a digital component to the largely tactile and embodied mediums of the piece. *C'est ci n'est pas un viol*, 2015, says more about the onlooker than the survivor/artist herself, making it a perfect case study in audience interplay.

Sulkowicz gained international notoriety with her thesis at Columbia University, *Mattress Performance: Carry That Weight*, 2014, which gave an artistic voice to campus movements for sexual assault policy reform such as Carry That Weight, Know Your Nine, and No Red Tape. For the entirety of her senior year, Sulkowicz, along with friends and strangers, carried the 50-pound college dorm mattress she was raped on around campus. *Mattress Piece* faced significant praise and backlash; some were taken with the metaphoric play, reveling in the symbol of a community helping a survivor

82 By the word trigger I mean eliciting an emotional reaction rooted in trauma, causing unforeseen psychic effects.



Emma Sulkowicz, *Ceci n'est pas un viol*, 2015.

Here are a few questions to help you reflect.

- Searching:
 - Are you searching for proof? Proof of what?
 - Are you searching for ways to either hurt or help me?
 - What are you *looking* for?
- Desiring:
 - Do you desire pleasure?
 - Do you desire revulsion? Is this to counteract your unconscious enjoyment?
 - What do you *want* from this experience?
- Me:
 - How well do you think you know me? Have we ever met?
 - Do you think I'm the perfect victim or the world's worst victim?
 - Do you refuse to see me as either a human being or a victim? If so, why? Is it to deny me agency and thus further victimize me? If so, what do you think of the fact that you owe your ability to do so to me, since I'm the one who took a risk and made myself vulnerable in the first place?
 - Do you hate me? If so, how does it feel to hate me?

carry the weight of her assault, others were skeptical if the events of her rape had transpired at all, questioning if Sulkowicz's piece was just an accusatory attention grab for the sake of art. The press was in a flurry of covering and uncovering Carry That Weight as virtuous or venomous. The "Rules of Engagement" of the piece more or less spell out both a personal and public goal – she will carry the mattress until the man who raped her leaves campus, until the University seeks justice for survivors.⁸³ Sulkowicz's alleged assailant denied raping her and continued attending Columbia despite the allegations against him, gaining a large following of naysayers.⁸⁴

C'est ci n'est pas un viol, Sulkowicz's sophomore work on her assault, activates skepticism of survivors and wields it to her artistic advantage. The title, an allusion to Rene Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (i.e. "This is not a pipe,"), wittily mimics the attempts to deny her experience and the apparent difficulty of deciphering the lines of consent. *C'est ci n'est pas un viol* is in the form of a website, on which there is a treatise by Sulkowicz regarding how to view a video, "please do not participate in my rape," which is divided into quadrants, each camera angle showing a different viewpoint of one dorm room. The video is a reenactment of her rape. She enters the room with a white male, whose face is blurred out, making the viewer hyperaware of Sulkowicz's expressions. They kiss and undress, making their way to the bed. Of all of the camera angles available in this piece, not one allows for the audience to see what occurs on the bed fully. They try out a few positions before Sulkowicz's hands are on her face, seemingly curling into herself. The room and documentation are sterile and cold, almost nauseous with their fluorescent tube lighting and bare mattress. The man gets up and leaves, leaving the artist on the bed with a single hand on her forehead, exasperated or exhausted. She then showers and makes her bed. The guiding questions that Sulkowicz sets for viewing the piece encourage audience analysis of their interaction with the work.

Where the digital environment of *Ceci n'est pas un viol* questions the viewer, *traumarite.com* simply asks for input, "Reactions Here." The prompt of Sulkowicz's comment section reads "Please

83 Smith, Roberta. "In A Mattress, A Lever for Art and Political Protest." *The New York Times*. September 21, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/22/arts/design/in-a-mattress-a-fulcrum-of-art-and-political-protest.html>.

84 Young, Cathy. "Columbia Student: I Didn't Rape Her." *The Daily Beast*. February 3, 2015. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/02/03/columbia-student-i-didn-t-rape-her.html>.

be mindful of what you desire to gain from expressing yourself in the comment section below.” confronting the fact that people have something to gain by interacting with rape on the internet. The un-provocative nature of “Reactions Here” asks for immediate insights, were Sulkowicz’s prompt explicitly asks the commenter to ruminate on own position toward her film. Another major difference in prompt is that the media that renders her vulnerable, the video of her re-enacted rape, is available at all times, where *Trauma Rite* was only available in an embodied moment. Her work was distributed to a broad audience, while *Trauma Rite* seemingly stayed close to the realm of Ann Arbor, MI. Trolls can more readily de-humanize her because she is not breathing in front of them, the way that I was in front of the crowds of *Trauma Rite*.

The poignancy of *C’est ci n’est pas un viol* is in the interactions of desperate people across the world taking part in an open video comment section that is appalling, enlightening and undeniably frightening. Each person at their computer watching *C’est ci n’est pas un viol* is performing viewership and voyeurism – they are taking part in Emma Sulkowicz’s rape. They are taking part in the aftermath of her assault, in her trauma, in the private made public, public made extreme. The website creates an arena for trolls, well meaning art viewers, and the sections of humanity you would hope do not exist. More nauseating than the video is the number of people who actively got off on it, one user writes “Thank you for letting me participate in your rape. I intend to rape you again and again for a very long time.” The color of the artist’s skin and her ethnic heritage as a Japanese American Jew is also the site of hateful comments, some of which are poised as attacks on her, others surround eugenics, the fallacy of the Black Lives Matter movement. There are people who punctuate the tirades of trolls with small notes of appreciation for Sulkowicz’s vulnerability, though they are few and far between. What this horror illustrates is not that there are rape porn enthusiasts hiding among us, but what circumstances need to be implemented in order for rape culture to be performed in clear, irrefutable ways. Within the digital frame of *C’est ci n’est pas un viol*, in which audiences are given a document of rape, as well as the intention of the survivor/artist, viewers author their own rape culture, which happens to closely mimic and amplify the one that we all live in. If we imagine the digital sphere as the physical one, actions are replaced by comments and the comment section speaks volumes; abusers are allowed to continue as they are, and interventions are made with love but are seldom and quiet in comparison to the violence that necessitated them. Sulkowicz asks, if I give them (the world) everything, will they show themselves? And we did, and we do.

C’est ci n’est pas un viol, at the time I am writing this in March of 2017, has over 5,300 comments. Every input adds to the conversation, interjects or confirms the toxic culture of the video. When I view it and do not act, I may be complicit – my silence on the internet symbolically equating to my lack of protest to the continual abuse of women, trans and non-binary people. One of Sulkowicz’s guiding questions asks, “do you think I’m the perfect victim?” The resounding inquiry of the piece is not so much what we think of her, but if we believe ourselves to be the perfect



Reactions Here

Say something...

Submit

There is power in this thing you've done, in this thing you've made, in this thing you've shown to the people. There is so much power in this and it makes my survivor body feel stronger. It makes my mind feel better and worse. It's a strong strong very strong performance. You're a strong strong person.

still can't stop thinking about this show. congratulations, eliza, on your courage and your ability to confront something so massive, and yet you confront it with such grace and nuance and power. so, so inspiring. what a joy and a treat to know you, and to know that i will be able to witness your life as an artist, a thinker, a person.

xo

I know you. Not super well, even though sometimes I think we pretend to know each other better. I couldn't see Trauma Rite, I don't live in Michigan anymore. But I can't really stop thinking about what you did. On that corner, just around the corner from where I was raped when I was a kid. Anyway, thank you for doing what you did. The white paint. The visibility. You're right, theory and expression. For some of us, they are necessarily intertwined. Thank you for bringing the abstract and the violent into the theoretical and the tangible.

hyped

Thank you for doing what you did

Had to take a couple hours to sit down and write after seeing you there. Someone else wrote in reaction, "Your work touched something inside me which I've been trying to put away for a long time." As a survivor, I've been trying to put away my experiences for a long time, thinking if I didn't engage with them, they'd just go away.

What I'd been trying to put away your performance made me realize I need to pull those experiences away from those hiding places inside me I'd assigned them to. You put a survivor's voice out in the open where it had only been inconvenient before. Thank you.

from friends at the performance: "please let her know she is loved."

this piece pulled at something so deep within me I can't find the words to describe it. so powerful, riveting, and beautiful. it hurt to walk away .

"They are scared of the voices they have managed to squash for so long revealing the cowardly masculinity they hide behind. I will not let you win." -- Some of the best responses to the society that oppresses others for what we have or don't have. Thank you. Thank you for bringing the braveness to the world that forces you to be brave because it doesn't hear your voice otherwise.

Your work touched something inside me which I've been trying to put away for a long time. I love you.

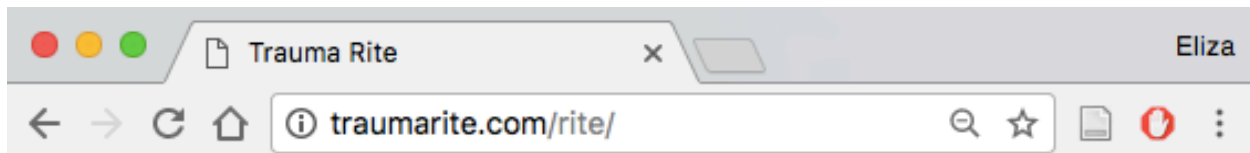
audience.

Trauma Rite's presence on the internet and in physical space look vastly different from that of Sulkowicz's work, evoking a far more hopeful reaction from the audience. The forum on *traumarite.com* reads as a distinct counterpublic sphere, where *Ceci n'est pas un viol* offers a glimpse at the heart of rape culture. Both publics are important and demonstrate what Warner and Berlant cite as the damage to publicness – the epistemological and emotional gaps between the haves and have nots, the perpetrators and the survivors. The inability to see the corporality of people on the internet makes for disembodied commentary. The very person who voices support for rape porn on *Ceci n'est pas un viol* certainly knows people who are survivors, or may be a survivor themselves, but they do not have to reckon with the corporal and emotional repercussions of their sentiments in people who may come across it in a comment section. Digital decisions have corporal impacts, but the instigator of pain deriving from internet interaction does not usually have to be accountable for their actions. This distinction from corporal realities changes the entire tone of online forums, making them all the more interesting to juxtapose with live physical space.

Bravery and Public Redemption

If messages of hate and predation are the dominant thread within *Ceci n'est pas un viol's* comment section, concepts of strength and bravery pervade *Trauma Rite's*. *Traumarite.com* reads as a list of complimentary and heartwarming words about my piece, with two fairly innocuous but nonetheless troublesome projections onto it. One theme evident in the commentary was that of redemption – the salvaging of the survivor from the trap of trauma. Another was that of the exceptional survivor – the one that is brave or strong compared to the others. As I noted in chapter two, audiences created a sense of absolution from complicity in rape culture, but they also actively wrote about a want to protect or save me from other onlookers, forming an interesting paternalistic narrative.

“I was looking at men walking by, wanting to yell out at anyone who looked like a frat boy that he needed to stay and watch this.” reads a comment, “I felt such anger towards any man who had assaulted you personally and any woman ever. Your performance also evoked deep sadness and concern for you –I wanted to come over and hug you, give you a robe.” This note is chock full of emotions, projections, and ideals of action. The main sentiment present is one of the righteous, impassioned savior. In this comment the onlooker displays a sense of worry based in a concern that I was, in that moment, in need of defense. There is also a sense that my uncovered body was a sign of vulnerability that must be shielded – that the viewer did not like how others were looking at me. Another commenter agreed with this point of wanting remove the aspect of nakedness from the piece: “I want so badly to reach out to you and cover you, to stop the brush and wipe all the scars



amazed by your bravery, I wasn't even able to stand and watch because it hurt too much, so amazed by you
Your piece provided me with empathy for my own deep battle. Though I was there to watch you, I really felt like you were there for me. Thank you so much for being brave enough to be there for me, and many others, through your own performance piece. It's chilling to know that others go through this, but it's comforting to know that I'm not alone in how the experience has made me feel.

I'm so honored to have witnessed your work.

you're so brave

Eliza your performance made me think about myself in a way I wasn't brave enough before

I love you

I was riveted by your piece and stayed as long as possible. I was looking at men walking by, wanting to yell out at anyone who looked like a frat boy that he needed to stay and watch this. I felt such anger towards any man who had assaulted you personally and any woman ever. Your performance also evoked deep sadness and concern for you- I wanted to come over and hug you, give you a robe.. I found your physical performance with the audio track incredibly powerful, triggering a visceral, deeply emotional response. I think I will always remember your story and will likely think of you and your pain, bravery and strength when I think or read about sexual violence or observe it portrayed in film or theatre. Thank you for expanding my understanding.

I wanted to stay longer than I was able, to talk to you, to tell you I understood, to let you know that you were giving voice and expression to thing I had also felt. Thank you for laying us bear with your vulnerability.

a perfect show in the perfect setting. you gave voices to us all. our doubts, our fears, our coping mechanisms. you explained what we cant. thank you. thank you.

I will carry this performance with me for the rest of my life. I've heard every statistic about how likely it is that I will be sexually assaulted, but nothing made it hit home the way that you did. I simply could not stop watching you.

I came in the morning and could only stay for ten minutes but knew I had to come back, and came back twice

I was only able to catch s glimpse of your performance, but i so wish that i had been able to stay. You are so brave.

i only saw the last five minutes and was moved. i was like "wow" in my head. you're brave for doing this.

Thank you. You have brought so much love and strength into the world today

i cried as i was reminded how i feel in my own survivor body and how many survivors feel in their bodies, but glad i came and stayed and felt a connection with you

it felt like a betrayal to come and watch and leave, but i did not really leave, it is with me now too

i stayed and watched for a while and it felt wrong to leave. it felt like a violation to stop watching and experiencing.

Heavy. I want so badly to reach out to you and cover you, to stop the brush and wipe all the scars away. I hope this process is healing. I love you so much.

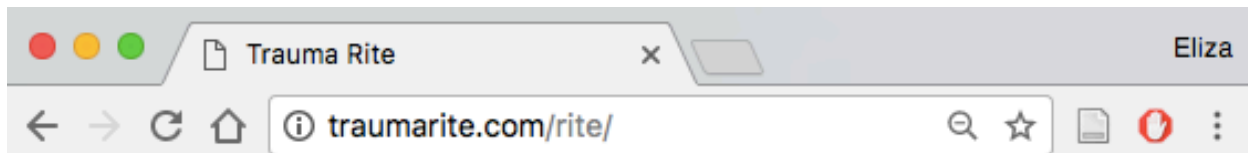


Photo by Elle Gover.

away. I hope this process is healing. I love you so much.” The visibility of so much skin making these two commenters deeply uneasy was likely incited by the discomfort with the mixture of sexualized skin and violence. The wish to conceal the skin is somewhat like the “slut-shaming” of survivors, the mentality that if they were covered up, the violence would not occur or stop occurring. Protectiveness came not solely out of care but discomfort with the type of survivorship I portrayed.

One friend took a photograph of two men in the foreground, who read as men of color, talking to each other, with my body in the background. The man in the striped polo looks concerned, disapproving, or uncomfortable. The frame of the photograph is tight – an intimate shot of the pair. My friend’s choice to take this photograph displays a particular disposition toward my survivorship and my piece. It seems to be both documenting these men and checking in on their behavior, seemingly eavesdropping. Security was enacted not only by those who were uncomfortable with my piece, but those who did know me and were suspicious of those who do not.

I realize that the vocabulary of empowerment surrounding survivorship comes, in part, out of bravery and strength, but the prevalence of these terms within the forum is astounding. Out of sixty seven entries in the comment section, twenty three use the words strong, brave, or strength to describe me and my performance. That is thirty four percent of responses using this specific vocabulary out of all the reactions possible under the umbrella prompt of “Reactions Here.” In writing their comments on the forum, onlookers wrote a discourse around bravery and strength onto the performance. As I discussed earlier in this piece, brave and strong are comparative terms; then there must be weak and cowardly survivors, too. If I am positioned as the brave survivor within the



such an undertaking, inspired by the sacrifice of your time and energy, watching you experience this helped me think about logic

Thank you

The look on the face of the person in a group walking by who clearly wants to stay but is too nervous to say You looked strong and defiant in the face of all the bullshit. It was beautiful. I felt a twinge of discomfort at the rawness and vulnerability - a necessary discomfort, probably. I felt like it was impossible not to stop and watch and listen, and legitimately hated every man who walked by without even a glance. Your words are still ringing in my ears hours later. So much love and luck to you and your healing process.

This was an incredible performance. I felt so powerful being embraced in your presence, like I could catch any questionable judgement and reaction from a distance and throw it forcefully right back. Rarely has art given me empowerment like that.

Never been more awed by your capability. So much love for you. So much love for all your rituals.

I love you so much

Walking by it again I feel the eyes on you. Uncomfortable/comfortable

Sending love, feeling raw.

This performance pulled at my heartstrings like few performances have. The mans voice is still ringing in my ears with memories of my past. You are so brave for displaying your grievance in front of a crowd and letting us share in your healing process. You are an inspiration. I hope that the saying is true, and 26 will bring a release of the painful memory.

This event was so incredibly moving. You are such an inspiration to us all.

YOU are so brave. You are SO brave. You are so BRAVE.

I saw you perform after several hours of performing and wondered how tired your body felt

Incredibly powerful, moving, and important. I hope you being so brave inspires others to confront the epidemic of sexual violence towards women that exists everywhere in the world and especially on college campuses. I feel deeply touched and privileged to have been able to witness your strength.

I am so, so proud of you, Eliza.

Moving and brave. I want to know more and yet, I probably have no business knowing more.

The voice-over with the man speaking is still running through my mind. Men always seem to argue for logic, for reason and for rationality. There is an automatic assumption made that because they are male they are naturally always logical. Always reasonable. But what is logic anyways. And why is logic and emotion considered so incompatible. It all seems like a cover-up, a lie, and a terrible excuse to avoid taking responsibility and being an actual human being.

Incredibly brace and powerful. The sounds of people walking by juxtaposed with the disclosure was jarring.

What

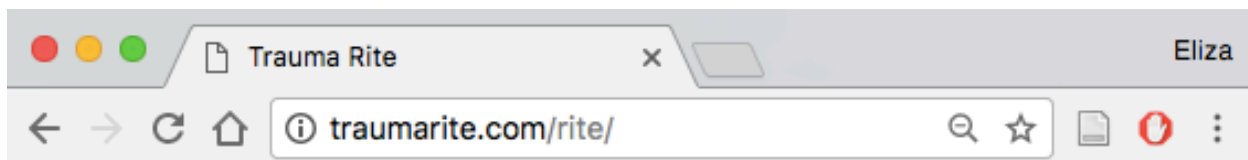
commentary of the forum, what constitutes the cowardly survivor?

I believe that the major instigator for the narrative of bravery and strength is the appearance and vocalization of a survivor, alone, in public, telling their story of psychological, social, and emotional dissonance. People have a concept of how high the stakes are for such a venture, or they at the very least recognize that they have likely never seen it happen in their lives. Strong and brave become monikers for the survivor who has the environmental affordances to be able to inform others. The characterization of a strong survivor ignores the manner in which people sometimes must remain silent for their safety, and privileges the usefulness of the assault experience in educating others. One viewer writes, “I hope you being so brave inspires others to confront the epidemic of sexual violence towards women that exists everywhere in the world and especially on college campuses.” Bravery is not taking risks for you and those you love in the face of a large foe, such as rape culture, but the willingness to disclose for the sake of the public at large. In this understanding of the strong survivor, it is those who are too intimidated and fearful to disclose, for good reasons, who are holding the anti-rape movement back. This undertone to bravery and strength discourse is detrimental, even to those heralded as brave because it implies that once they were not strong. Experiencing violence and surviving it takes strength, regardless of whether or not the survivor chooses to disclose.

The Forum as Counterpublic

Traumarite.com displays a counterpublic that felt present in the physical space of the performance, but was never made overt. Through reception of the performance, and resonance with it, some onlookers found a sense of identification with the performed or articulated injury. It is through this identification, with a pain, a joy, or a predicament that the differentiates oneself from positions of power, that people form counterpublics. The posts on the online forum surrounding *Trauma Rite* are by in large breathtakingly sincere, voicing various levels of identification with sexual assault trauma. This was a relief to me as an artist, but also made me question my perceptions of survivor spheres of emotional reaction and the ethics of public disclosure.

Retraumatization is at stake when performances publicly disclose assault. Revealing social or corporeal injury can evoke similar experiences within the onlooker, leading them to relive their trauma and/or experience emotional distress. This evocation of pain is not something I take lightly, and it was factor that I mulled over quite heavily as I prepared the performance. I wanted to understand the burden I put on the viewer to sift through their own experience, and the potential negative repercussion that could have. I alerted Safe House, a center for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in Ann Arbor, and SAPAC, the University of Michigan Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center, of my performance, in the hopes that they would disperse news of



The voice-over with the man speaking is still running through my mind. Men always seem to argue for logic, for reason and for rationality. There is an automatic assumption made that because they are male they are naturally always logical. Always reasonable. But what is logic anyways. And why is logic and emotion considered so incompatible. It all seems like a cover-up, a lie, and a terrible excuse to avoid taking responsibility and being an actual human being.

Incredibly brace and powerful. The sounds of people walking by juxtaposed with the disclosure was jarring.

What

Hi

I'm still thinking about this

i love you, 26 is on its way

Needed a minute before I wrote my reaction. Stayed with me as I watched and as I walked away. I didn't understand a lot of the symbolism, but I felt it, and it left me raw. I was looking around at people watching this art and movement and thinking she's already been here for 3 and a half hours!!! Strength. Not forced, simple.

Made me angry. Made me think

Pauses time

Took several listens through to hear everything in the recording and to understand it. It was in the later cycles through when suddenly it would strike me what was being said (about the their being no hopeful inverse of the fear you had and the physical ways of remembering) that I would get chills realizing that you had been saying it all along.) thinking of it as a protest against sexual violence and likely many people passing by are the ones whose actions are being protested against, very disturbing. Piece is so beautiful and disturbing.

Shivery and shakey. I can't tell what temperature it is right now. Your words are making my brain hot and my body cold.

goosebumps

There was a man who stared at you out of the side of his car. He stopped at the light, reversed, and just stared. He stayed, eventually turned the corner, and stared again. I wonder in many ways what he was thinking, and I felt angry at him for watching.

A moving piece. It made me think a lot, even as someone who would call themselves your friend. I'm proud of you for doing this and hope that this performance is more healing than traumatic.

Very moving. Glad you're making people stop and stare, and confront this topic head on! Much love to you.

Proud to know you!

trauma

submissive

bed/carriage

dark

my performance and help survivors navigate whether or not they wanted to interact with it during their day. In addition to this, I also had the numbers of both organizations clearly printed on wooden boards, which ended up loosely delineating a stage. However, in the U.S, where sixteen percent women and three percent of American men suffer completed or attempted rape, the inevitability of surprising a passerby with the content of my piece seemed unavoidable.^{85 86} The question became how audiences would connect with my performance and whether it would cause solely psychic distress, or something approaching understanding over a shared wound that Wendy Brown sites as the origin of identity politics.⁸⁷ Naturally these two provocations can exist at once – the trigger and the creation of solidarity. There does, however, seem to be a membrane that can cause them to reject one another, separate out into empowerment and disempowerment. At what point does a performance surpass the prickly surface of provoking pain to the powerful nexus of connecting across experience? And does the isolation of the survivor not further perpetuate their invisibility and mistreatment? With these inquiries in mind I went forward with my performance, and with the creation of *traumarite.com*, an un-surveilled interface for gaging audience impressions.

While I could expect that survivors, having identified me as a vocal figure, would come to me to tell me their stories, but I did not expect for that to happen in any explicit, public manner. The addition of a digital element to this piece facilitated open disclosure of survivor identity, largely addressed to me, the performer. Out of sixty seven entries on the forum, nine directly disclosed the writer's status as a survivor. The first post that articulates survivorship reads: "i cried as i was reminded how i feel in my own survivor body and how many survivors feel in their bodies, but glad i came and stayed and felt a connection with you." Before this comment, there are no posts that situate the writer/onlooker's body in solidarity with me, but after it there is an abundance of survivor voices, commenting on how the performance resonated with them. Disclosure is not a necessary component of a counterpublic, but the disembodiment of the internet calls for an implication or explication of identity as a sign of intention and solidarity. Since the comment section lacks facial expressions or corporal traits, proclaiming one's identity allows the author to color the comment as not just empathetic, but holding an adjacent experience. And so disclosure formats the online text, and formats the reader's understandings of the writer's stake in the issue. Disclosure invites disclosure, which in turn punctures survivor isolation. There is a feeling of unity amongst the

85 National statistics surrounding the incidence of sexual violence in TGQN (transgender, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming) populations are not cited here due to the lack of available national research on these groups. However, statistics surrounding TGQN university students are, and as a predictor they are very grim. According to the Association of American University's 2015 Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct, twenty one percent of TGQN students have been sexually assaulted.

Cantor, David, Chibnall, Susan, Fisher, Bonnie, and Townsend, Reanna et. al. *Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct* Association of American Universities (AAU), 2015.

86 "Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics | RAINN." *Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics | RAINN*. <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence>

87 Brown, Wendy. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in late modernity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton U Press, 1995.



Photos by Julia Gaynor.

comments – they reference each other and the content of *Trauma Rite* as if the media and crowd together encompassed a recognizable “we.” The implied “we” is that of the survivor public: “you gave voices to us all. our doubts, our fears, our coping mechanisms. you explained what we cant. thank you. thank you.”

The Common Wealth of Survival

These moments of feeling known, of clenching an “us all,” are a vital resource to survivor communities, and a rare one to find in the open of a plaza. Identification with a predicament, with an incited pain, can not be understated as a social force. What is provided within physical and digital bounds of *Trauma Rite* is a flourishing of that resource. The disclosure that is shared in quiet rooms, with trepidation or exasperation or terror, is felt within a public of strangers. At once, there is an abundance of intimacy. As Hardt and Negri write in *Commonwealth*, the project of the commons is one that creates common wealth, an abundance only made possible by the multitude.⁸⁸ Capitalism enforces isolation of many kinds, whether it be through stripping the worker of union activity, necessitating a single mother to work multiple jobs that keep her away from her children, or, in this case, through writing the survivor as a shameful figure who is less valuable to the market due to their damaged productivity or reproductivity. The free market creates a scarcity in survivor’s compassion for themselves through an isolation from others who have experienced abuse. Self-compassion has many sources, but one particularly socially potent one is identification with and recognition of post-sexual-assault trauma in other people – it happened to them and I do not blame, shame or belittle them.⁸⁹ The question of how to produce this in abundance is one worthy of consideration.

88 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009: viii.

89 Close, Angele. *Self-Compassion and Recovery from Sexual Assault*. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, University of Toronto 2013. <http://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1631129544?accountid=14667>.

I believe that we can manifest this common wealth both digitally and physically. If we conceive of common space as we currently know it as a place of extreme depletions and stockpiles, where the delineations between those who are marginalized and those are centered are visible, then it follows that an abundance were there is not meant to be one would be notable. The disembodied comment section and embodied photography of *Trauma Rite* display this amplified, visible affect along a seam where there was depletion. The lack becomes more recognizable when momentarily satisfied. As Federici writes of Hardt and Negri's digital commons, "organized through the internet, a common space and common wealth are created that escape the problem of defining rules of inclusion or exclusion because access and use multiply the resources available on the net, rather than subtracting from them, thus signifying the possibility of a society built on abundance."⁹⁰ By escaping enclosure, the digital rattles the paradigm of silence surrounding rape by rattling who feels allowed to speak. The non-traditional wealth of disclosure, and the discord and unity that can transpire at its announcement, grows under the conditions of the commons. Disclosure has the capacity to create a counterpublic, which in turn flourishes under and builds abundance, practicing the commons. While *traumarite.com* is a small example of this, it is a potent one.

The Commoning of Care

This abundance does not only benefit survivors. Exposure to narratives of injury, in this case rape, help people who have not experienced that injury better know how to navigate violence. Or, at the very least, feel sympathy for the people affected by it. One onlooker wrote on *traumarite.com*: "I will carry this performance with me for the rest of my life. I've heard every statistic about how likely it is that I will be sexually assaulted, but nothing made it hit home the way that you did." The emotional pedagogy of the piece adds sensorial explanations to statistics, allowing any onlooker to investigate a survivor brain without invading someone's privacy. Through modes of emotional contagion, viewers with no experience with assault may begin to feeling emotionally affected by it in a way they were not before. One possible impact of this is teaching new modes of caring, that were perhaps inaccessible to those unaffected by sexual violence.

By sitting with a survivor's story, allowing themselves to steep in its thorny world, audience members with no history of assault begin to learn the contours of caring in public. Performance as a place of practicing care is not unusual. Ron Athey's *Incorruptible Flesh, Dissociative Sparkle* speaks to how we handle each other when we are vulnerable, ill, or pitied. It is a haunting piece in which audience members rubbed, caressed, barely touched performer Ron Athey's body with petroleum jelly while he lay suspended on an uncomfortable metal hammock, his eyes and cheeks attached to the metal façade with piercings. Athey's body, tattooed and shiny from multiple latherings, lies

90 Federici, Silvia. *Revolution at Point Zero*. Oakland, CA. PM, 2012: 142.



Ron Athey. *Incorruptible Flesh, Dissociative Sparkle*. Artist's Space, New York City, 2006. Photo by Julia Portwood Hipp.

utterly helpless, unmoving to avoid hurting himself further. Athey injected his scrotum with saline solution as to look like a bloated central object on his body, effectively de-eroticizing the act of touching him.⁹¹ As audiences approach, they put on latex gloves. His eyes are forced open and his body exposed to interaction that he cannot reciprocate. Concerned and fascinated participants touch him delicately, with intense pity and little sadism. Yet their touches invariably comfort him with company, but cause him pain as his body moves farther from the headboard. Care can cause further harm.

Incorruptible Flesh is a series of performances by Ron Athey and collaborators, most notably Lawrence Steger, produced between 1997 and 2007. It began as a project between Athey and Steger, both HIV positive American artists, commissioned by the Institute of Contemporary Art in Glasgow. The men, focused on the world of saints and martyrs and their always revered incorruptible flesh, created rituals for caring for and “curing” the body. The duo made the other’s bodies sacred through a sequence of performative actions that drew from Catholic practice, BDSM club culture, and pagan ritual. “Curing” takes on both of its meanings; the curing of the body as a frame ill with HIV and in need of a remedy, and as flesh, to be cured as not to rot and decay. Lawrence Steger died in 1999, and ten years after the performance Athey returned to the work, but without his formative collaborator.⁹² The addition of the new title, “Dissociative Sparkle” came from Athey’s conclusion that “The Best Are Already Dead” and his subsequent resignation and disassociation from his grief.⁹³ *Incorruptible Flesh, Dissociative Sparkle* makes every participant an Athey collaborator, a shadow of Steger, someone to aid in his taxidermy of his own living flesh.

91 This is not to say that people did not get off on the power play of Athey naked strung up on the table.

92 Doyle, “The ‘Incorruptible Flesh’ of Ron Athey.”

93 Doyle, *Hold it against me: difficulty and emotion in contemporary art*, 57.

If you are touching Athey delicately on the *Sparkle* table, how are you touching those you love, those who are alien to you, outside of the museum or gallery space? When this touch is not so abstract, when it is visceral but not covered with petroleum jelly and painfully pierced skin, it is guided by a different set of affective factors. Athey's piece asks how we care. In everyday life, if you are touching someone so intimately, you either know them or have consent, or you do not and that very action is no longer delicate. Athey's body is positioned as a loved one, consenting to your touch, or as the victim of your physicality, unable to become less visible and raw. The onlooker lives in a place of potential – to hurt the body, to comfort the person, to put yourself in the role of caretaker or destroyer.

In *Trauma Rite* the audience takes on a non-tactile version of the same role. Instead of lathering or curing the body, *Trauma Rite* allows viewers to practice listening to disclosure of sexual violence. This may seem like a simple request, it is a serious one that can similarly turn the listener into a caretaker or destroyer. Studies by Ahren and Ullman found that the impact of negative social reactions to sexual assault disclosure is immense, with a very correlation between negative reaction and the appearance of maladaptive coping mechanisms (substance abuse, self-blame, denial) and PTSD.^{94 95 96} This psychological work shows the inherent risk of disclosing, and the immeasurable importance of receiving disclosure. Learning to listen to those who have experienced violence can be a life or death, as a reported thirty three percent of women who experience completed rape contemplate suicide.⁹⁷ It is a matter of a person's mental health trajectory over a lifetime, how they will react to and cope with the world.

Listening is a matter of seeking community wellness. My multiplying the resource of compassionate listeners, we model another mode of commoning. When people who have not experienced assault get better at recognizing those that need support, a survivor counterpublic is furthered. There is a multiplication of a vital survivor resource: identification with the problem, with the inciting pain. This resource can not be understated.

Toward a Theory of the Survivor Commons

Coping itself can be a scarce resource. Victims and survivors of various types of violence and abuse may know this. The energy and tools to feel vital are not always available, in fact, they

94 Ahrens, Courtney E., Stansell, Janna, and Jennings, Amy. "To tell or not to tell: The impact of disclosure on sexual assault survivors' recovery." *Violence and Victims* 25, no. 5, (2010): 631-48.

95 Ullman, Sarah E., Peter-Hagene, Liana. "Social Reactions To Sexual Assault Disclosure, Coping, Perceived Control, And PTSD Symptoms In Sexual Assault Victims." *Journal of Community Psychology* 42 no. 4, (2014): 495-508.

96 Vocabulary like "maladaptive coping" is more or less not useful in this thesis since it presumes normative ways of coping that may not include, for example, hardship art.

97 Kilpatrick, Edumuds, and Seymour. *Rape in America: A Report to the Nation*. Arlington, VA: National Victim Center and Medical University of South Carolina, 1992.

are restricted from us. If and when survivors do trade tools for coping, it happens behind closed doors, and their survivor identity is unspoken otherwise. The word rape becomes difficult to say. The public self is understood as not a survivor self; the public self must pose as as powerful as possible, whether that be more mentally stable or more affluent or less gender-bending, in order to be safe in the productive orientation of public sphere. The enclosure of the commons to create so-called public space comes with the enclosure of emotional knowledge, a subjugation of the affective world under that of profit. Audience authorship of survivor spaces within public areas creates dynamic, generative emotional spheres that a true multitude of people benefit from. The augmentation of our ability to cope is an anti-capitalist force.

Conclusion

Producing the Survivor



The prognosis of survivorship is played out in real time, in public and in private. Rape, abuse, and sexual assault constitute loud intrusions into an ecosystem of self, threatening the victim with a seesaw of hypercorporeality and disembodiment. In the aftermath of abuse or corporal harm, carrying oneself through the world necessitates immense energy and care, an effort often as invisible as it is laborious. The focus of this thesis is the artistic action taken by myself and others to unveil the survivor body from obscurity, to dance it to the illuminated centers of society. What is it to perform a survivor body? When carrying turns into performing, unassuming strangers are audiences to transgressive theater, allowing for new interpersonal realizations of justice to bloom. A loud intrusion calls for a loud disruption of power.

Feminist artistic production is my primary source of volume and optimism. The relationship between the creation of art and new futures can prove to be lush and productive. When silenced groups produce art, they produce versions of their own identities, they take control over their representation. We build identity and feel in relation to it, through what is impressed upon us and through our actions. The royal we that I elude to does not refer to a survivor community, an institutional system, or a group of like-minded individuals, I am speaking of a theorized broad public, heterogeneous and tumultuous in nature. There is no social group that is not touched by the repercussions of sexual violence, there is no gender that does not feel its chaos.

Together, we make what survivorship means. We “make” survivor bodies. I mean this both crudely and delicately; humans are responsible for the violence they directly inflict upon each other, and the indirect production and reiteration of the societal vulnerabilities that propel violence. The significance and individual meaning of the body victimized by sexual assault does not appear out of nowhere –it is formulated collectively and historically, at any given moment creating new realities, founts of power and discord. Within model of distributed responsibility, no one and everyone

is to blame, just as audiences distribute shared sentiment and culpability. *Trauma Rite* produces survivorship as much as it comments on it. I call rape culture to the surface, and by vocally invoking it, I take part in survivor identity construction. I am produced and in reiterating, I too produce.

Trauma Rite represents my personal intervention, my attempt at creating meaning. The sphere of reception of *Trauma Rite* becomes a collective presentation of how the survivor lives and copes in public, and how others understand and reject them.

While *Trauma Rite* and the writing surrounding it counts undoubtedly an endeavor originating from my own experience, I hope that others might find it such introspections useful to discussions of performance theory and its nuanced entanglements with social justice. Dr. Cornel West stated, “Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public.” I take this to be a guiding principle of creative authorship and research as well – a labor of tenderness can equal an act of justice, and this thesis presents my path toward public justice as it collides with an enormous, exhausting expression of love. I find justice in expressing empathy with other survivors and for one another. The reactions of the public only compounded the teachings of feminist theory for me, and helped me shape my own interjections. *Trauma Rite* showed me that audiences, by in large, emoted swooping affection. Audience-driven intimacy generated an amphitheater of emotion. There is nothing simplistically beautiful about the art of assault, if anything it leaves only a grizzly maze of trauma and societal refusal in its wake. But public performance such as *Trauma Rite* can act as an invitation for commoning, creating a more compassionate networks of strangers and survivors. With this writing I aim to reveal the immense, justice-bound struggle of survivorship as one that restructures public space to form less caustic environments. The survivor body and the public it is borne from can be remade through art and spectatorship, with communal displays of political love.

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