

California Institute of the Arts

Re: Performance in Southern California

Queer and Corporeal Feminist Politics

in the work of Yve Laris Cohen and Julie Tolentino

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of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
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by

Allison C Smith

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Readers:

1st Reader: Arne DeBoever

2nd Reader: Ariel Osterweis

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Abstract

What is “re-performance”? Or rather, what do I consider “re-performance”? Contemporary feminist performance scholars reference “re-performance” under varied terms, including: representation, reproduction, re-enactment, iteration, or repetition (with difference). I build from (re)performance’s ontology as “live body art” traced to a 1990’s corporeal feminism and reinforced in a late 2000s and early 2010s nostalgia for the “lost golden age” of 1970s and 1980s performance art in Los Angeles. I offer two parallel case studies in the politics of contemporary queer re-performance studies on Julie Tolentino’s *THE SKY REMAINS THE SAME* (2008-Ongoing) and Yve Laris Cohen’s *al Coda*, from *D.S.* (2014). These two works and artists reflect discourses around re-performance while at the same time rejecting the ways feminist performance studies scholars and artists have historically approached re-performance. I open onto larger theoretical questions asking: what are the politics of re-performance? How is re-performance queer? And what does it mean to queer approaches to re-performance?

INTRODUCTION

Consider line dancing— a synchronized, repetitive, and sequenced choreography, performed by a group of people facing the same direction (or wall) usually in rows or lines. Different line dances consist of a different number of walls, meaning the orientation dancers face at any given time in a choreographic sequence. For example, the Cha Cha Slide Part II by DJ Casper is a four-wall line dance because performers end a choreographic sequence by facing the wall 90 degrees to the right or left of the starting wall before repeating. In a one-wall line dance, such as the YMCA, the orientation remains the same and performers do not change the direction they face. Given line dance's repetitive, orientational, and choreographic quality, I am led to ask: How does line dance disrupt linearity? What is a *line* in dance and performance? A cut, a crease, a gut, a string, a tunnel, a bridge, a street, a wall? Line dance serves as an iconographic both of a binary line, linearity that threatens a queerness or something not-straight, as well as danced choreographies repeated that may either enforce or disrupt linearity. In asking how line dance complicates linearity, representative of a binary or duality, I open onto larger theoretical questions asking: what are the politics of re-performance? And how is re-performance queer?

Queer is, after all, a spatial term, which then gets translated into a sexual term, a term for a twisted sexuality which does not follow a 'straight line.'

Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 67

What is “re-performance”? Or rather, what do I consider “re-performance”? Contemporary feminist performance scholars reference what I think of as “re-performance” under varied terms, including: representation, reproduction, re-enactment, iteration, or repetition

(with difference). With these fractured considerations, I want to be very specific about my personal understanding and research background. I use the term re-performance as a container to explore these multiple considerations of the “re-” in performance studies, described (sometimes interchangeably) as ruptive, habitual, performative, citational, appropriative, parasitic, etc... However, by using the term “re-performance” rather than reiteration, reproduction, or representation, I specifically aim to highlight properties of the “re” in performance art rather than “iteration” “production” or “presentation.” While performance as art generally (and debatably) concerns live body arts, theater, and dance, “performance” alone I consider any (in)action and/or movement. In this way where every action is a live action, for example, line dance may enter conversations and re-performance studies.

By beginning my work on re-performance with an example of line dance, I aim to release re-performance from a limited discourse within live body arts. In my first introductory chapter, I focus on performance’s ontology as “live body art” traced to a 1990's corporeal feminism and reinforced in a late 2000s and early 2010s nostalgia for the “lost golden age” of 1970s and 1980s performance art in Los Angeles.^{1 2} I then offer two parallel case studies in the politics of contemporary queer re-performance studies on Julie Tolentino’s *THE SKY REMAINS THE SAME* (2008-Ongoing) and Yve Laris Cohen’s *al Coda*, from *D.S.* (2014). These two works and artists reflect discourses around re-performance while at the same time rejecting the ways feminist performance studies scholars and artists have historically approached re-performance. Both Tolentino and Laris Cohen come from (and complicate their) backgrounds in formal dance training. Tolentino danced with David Roussève's Dance Theatre Company, 'Reality' from 1990

¹ Meiling Cheng. *In Other Los Angeleses: Multicentric Performance Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 185.

² Thus purposefully ignoring figures like Marina Abramović, whose exhibitions, *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) at the Guggenheim Museum, and *The Artist is Present* (2010) at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, often serve as centerpieces to corporeal feminist discussions of re-performance.

through 1999. Cohen has a formal background in ballet training, attending programs at the American Ballet Theater, studying at the University of California, Berkeley, and earning his MFA from Columbia University in art. In Laris Cohen and Tolentino's backgrounds queering the intersections of dance and live body performing arts, I also find line dance as an interesting example of the intersection between these two categories that typically stand alone in (re-)performance studies. I continue my introductory question, if re-performance can be queer, then: What does it mean to queer approaches to re-performance?

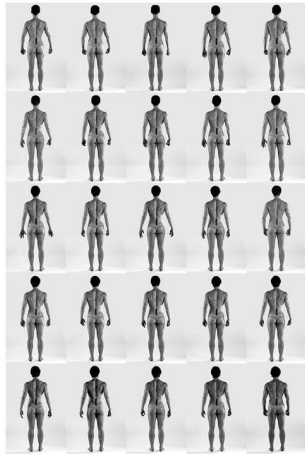


Figure 1. Cassils

Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture, 2011-2013

Performance, video, photography

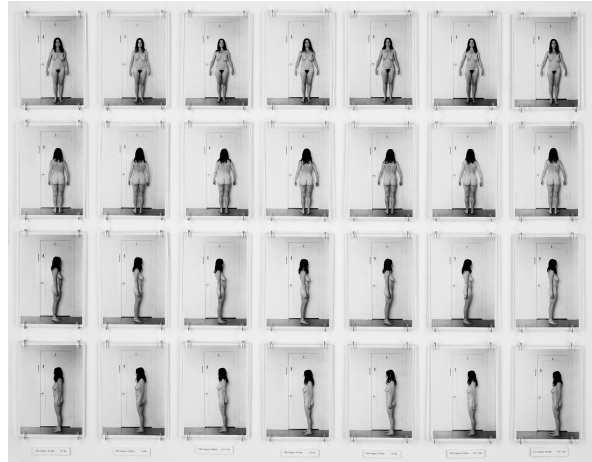


Figure 2. Eleanor Antin

Carving: A Traditional Sculpture, 1972

148 silver gelatin prints in complete piece



Figure 3. Suzanne Lacy

Three Weeks in January:

End Rape in Los Angeles, 2012

Performance Installation



Figure 4. Suzanne Lacy

and Leslie Labowitz

Three Weeks in May, 1977

Performance Installation

CHAPTER I LOS ANGELES GOES LIVE

Live Art in LA. Didactic materials for the exhibition *Los Angeles Goes Live: Performance Art in Southern California, 1970-1983* asks: “How can one revisit performance art after the event and why?”³ Presented at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) as a part of the Getty Museum’s 2012 *Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945-1980*, this exhibition serves as an important site in the queer politics of (re-)performance studies. The LACE exhibition included commissioned re-enactments by artists including: Cassils’ *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture* (2011 - 2013), a durational performance documenting body transformation that calls on Eleanor Antin’s *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972) and Lynda Benglis’s *Advertisement* (1974); and Suzanne Lacey and Leslie Labowitz’s *Three Weeks in May* (1977) re-presented under the title *Three Weeks in January: End Rape in Los Angeles* (2012). Essays within the exhibition’s publication, *Live Art in LA: Performance in Southern California, 1970-1983* highlight reactions by feminist performance artists and scholars in the early 2010s to the commissioning of re-enacted 1970s southern Californian performance art for *Los Angeles Goes Live* and *PST*. Reactions in the publication *Live Art in LA* point to the paradox of the LACE exhibition *Los Angeles Goes Live* commissioning reenactments while still retaining a “live” ontology—both of which have titles outlining “live” as a precursor to performance.

In the same year as *Los Angeles Goes Live*, Amelia Jones alongside Adrian Heathfield published the edited volume, *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*. Here, Jones acknowledges the popularity of “live” body art in performance studies in the 2000s and early

³ “Los Angeles Goes Live: Performance Art in Southern California 1970-1983,” Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), last modified September 27, 2011, <https://welcometolace.org/lace/los-angeles-goes-live-performance-art-in-southern-california-1970-1983/>.

2010s.⁴ This biological dependence on the “live” in early 2010s southern Californian performance studies builds from a 1990’s (post-structuralist) corporeal feminism. Sources such as, Phelan’s *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), Elizabeth Grosz’s *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), and Rebecca Schneider’s *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997) all reference post-structuralist works by Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze, Jaques Derrida respectively informing an understanding of (re-)performance studies through the performative, repetition (and difference), and iteration.⁵ However, conflicts in this 1990 corporeal feminist approaches are evident within LACE’s exhibition and subsequent publication, *Live Art in LA*. In the introduction of an essay for the publication by Peggy Phelan, “Violence and Rupture: Misfires of the Ephemeral,” she writes on reactions in live body art to violent histories in Los Angeles:

Taken together, the creative responses to this violence suggest the particular relationship between live art and destruction at work in the history of performance in Los Angeles. What is most striking about this entwining is how persistently it repeats itself; it is as if each generation must confront anew the same rupture and develop a creative response to it.⁶

Phelan’s introduction outlines the pleasures, myths, and fantasies (e.g. Hollywood, Disney) of California as the “golden child” contrasted by histories in violence. Works such as LACE’s re-commissioning of Lacey’s *Three Weeks in May* retitled *The Weeks in January: End Rape in Los Angeles* exemplify this repeated creative response to locational/geographical violence specifically in southern California. She specifically recalls The Watts riots/uprising (1965), and the 1992 Los Angeles riots/uprising in response to Rodney King. I now add 2020

⁴ Amelia Jones and Adrian Heatherfield. *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), 12.

⁵ As well as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche.

⁶ Peggy Phelan, “Violence and Rupture: Misfires of the Ephemeral,” in *Live Art in La: Performance in Southern California, 1970 - 1983*, ed. Peggy Phelan (New York: Routledge, 2012), 2.

Black Lives Matter protests in response to George Floyd to this list of events where violence and performance meet the LAPD.

How could a creative response based in re-performance, such as line dance, possibly negate these repeated instances of police violence in L.A.? I witnessed my first example of line dance as a protest method attending the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Pasadena's Juneteenth town hall and march in the summer of 2020. Stopping at an intersection, protest organizers played music and led people in line dances including the Wobble and Cha Cha Slide. Looking at the contextual history of dance, party, and celebration as alternative protest tactics alongside marches, town halls, and forums, (how) does line dance negate linearity in re-orienting a march moving down a street in one direction? Or Redirecting traffic? Or confronting police kettle lines? What are the consequences of leaving these instances of linearity alone in a binary state? What happens when re-performance is *not* queer?



Figure 5. Screenshot from *I!Alive* video
“Watch: National Guard troops dance in the
streets with protesters,” June 4, 2020



Figure 6. Screenshot from “Cha Cha Slide
Part 2,” DJ Casper, Universal Records
a Division of UMG Recordings, Inc., 2000

1990s Corporeal Feminisms. A non-queer and bi-ological approach to performance's ontology as "live body art" can often be traced to a 1990's corporeal feminism and reinforced in a late 2000s and an early 2010s nostalgia for the "lost golden age" of 1970s and 1980s performance art in Los Angeles.⁷ Phelan in *Unmarked* outlines this definition of performance art as live body art in a chapter titled "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction." The chapter's opening line states: "Performance's only life is in the present."⁸ Phelan continues to write:

Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.⁹

Here, Phelan positions live body art as ontologically opposite to the reproduction of live body art (e.g. photography or video recording). Phelan continues to bear down on how "performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive," and therefore opposes the ontology of re-performance.¹⁰ In this opposition, I read re-performance as an anesthetic of performance (an absence of sense or aesthetic).

Phelan's definition of performance as live body art closely resembles and restricts the way in which southern Californian performance artists and academics have produced art, scholarship and exhibition. Within the 1980 *Performance Anthology: Sourcebook of California Performance Art*, an essay by Linda Frye Burnham positions Chris Burden and Allan Kaprow as the most important artists in Californian performance history, as well as possibly Suzanne Lacy, Eleanor Antin, and Barbara Smith.¹¹ In this classification, Burnham obviously creates a

⁷ Cheng, *In Other Los Angeleses*, 185.

⁸ Peggy Phelan, "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction," in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1993), 146.

⁹ Phelan, "The Ontology of Performance," 146.

¹⁰ Phelan, "The Ontology of Performance," 148.

¹¹ Phelan, "Violence and Rupture," 3.

gendered hierarchical divide on performers, as well as focuses on two performers working with the body and a live temporal constraint. Kaprow's live body works, "happenings," exemplifies these constraints as "an event that could be performed only once."¹² Kaprow often serves as a central piece in not only southern Californian performance discourse but also in re-performance studies conversations on re-enactment (or rather what cannot be reenacted).

Start Living in the Present. Burnham additionally enforces the definition of performance as live body art within her publication *High Performance*. The Los Angeles-based magazine, which Burnham edited from 1978-1997, was well-known for its "Artists Chronicles" section in which they held an open-editorial model publishing any performance submission for a live body work performed in the past year with a photograph and written description. *High Performance* excluded works pertaining to dance or theater, further setting up a historical canon that defines performance works as live body art. However, Burnham's inclusion of a photograph and written description, as well as publication dedicated to the reproduction of performance, already points to the ways in which feminist performance artists and scholars considered performance in way that contradicts how they produce, write on, and exhibit works.

This paradox between ontologies of performance versus re-performance becomes clearer as Phelan's 1990 ontology is reconsidered throughout the 2000s by feminist performance scholars, to name a few includes: Philip Auslander (1999), Fred Moten (2003), José Esteban Muñoz (2009), Rebecca Schneider (2011), and Phelan (2012) in reflection of herself.¹³ Schneider

¹² RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present (World of Art)*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2011) 132.

¹³ Moten's critique states: "This is the question of whether the performance of subjectivity... always and everywhere reproduces what lies before it; it is also the question of where performance in general is ever outside the economy of reproduction. This is not to say that Harman tries but cannot make disappear the originary performance of the violence subjection of the slave's body," (Moten, "Resistance of the Object," 4). Moten continues in a footnote, "Here begins a major element of this book: a respectful challenge to Peggy Phelan's ontology of performance that is

offers a thorough reading of Auslander’s critique of Butler and how he draws attention to the binaries already seen between “liveness” and a “recording.” This interrogation in feminist re-performance studies by figures such as Schneider and Auslander on binary opposition in post-structural approaches to (re-)performance I see similarly interrogated by feminist new materialists (Pitts-Taylor 2016, Kaiser 2016, Barad 2007, Alaimo 2008) for a dependency on a biological approach to the “live.” Victoria Pitts-Taylor in *Mattering* (2016) outlines a focus on removing the dualism and the “bi” from biology in feminist new materialisms— rejecting an “adherence to binary sexual difference.”¹⁴ Grosz specifically has been criticized for her Darwinian reading and bi-ological approach to movement and action (Cheah 1996, Wirth-Cauchon, 2016, Schneider 2011). I next question how to move beyond corporeal feminist bi-ological ontologies of performance as live body art in corporealism towards something closer to new materialism. I aim move these conversations around re-performance in early 21st century southern Californian performance out of the “bio” and towards a “re” non-dualist approach turning to queer works by artists Julie Tolentino and Yve Laris Cohen. At risk of a literal line dance, I follow two lines of thought— two parallel case studies in contemporary queer (re-)performance studies.

predicted on the notion of performance’s operating wholly outside economies of reproduction,” (Moten, Notes to “Resistance of the Object,” 258).

¹⁴ Victoria Pitts-Taylor, “Mattering: Feminism, Science, and Corporeal Politics,” in *Mattering: Feminism, Science, and Materialism*, ed. Victoria Pitts-Taylor, (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 4.

In Julie Tolentino's lifetime work *THE SKY REMAINS THE SAME* (2014), transports a white gallery wall from (2008-Ongoing), artists are invited to choose a work of their own to "endow... into/onto" Tolentino.¹⁵ The invited artists to date include: Franco B, Ron Athey, Lovett/Codagnone (Jon Lovett and Alessandro Codagnone), David Rousseve, and Stanley Love. Each artist enters into a two-part informal contract, first in a "private, live event, which in turn serves as the research and archive of their chosen original."¹⁶ Second, in the artists' own unique approaches to the work, possibly in multiple iterations or forms. For instance, Athey chose one work performed four times between 2008 and 2011. In contrast the collaborative duo Lovett/Codagnone chose three different works

Laris Cohen in *al Coda*, from *D.S.* the previous location of the Whitney Museum of American Art on Madison to the (current) building while under construction in the Meatpacking District, and back again. The wall is presented as a work entitled *D.S.* (2014) as a part of the Whitney Biennial. An account for *Artforum* describes the work as something you could miss, a seam with a five foot height and six foot width embedded in the Whitney building's greater wall on the third floor near the stairwell.¹⁷ The seam already points to the removability and therefore mobility or performance of the wall. The title of Laris Cohen's work *al Coda* from *D.S.* also begins to position the work as a re-performance, referring to the abbreviation

¹⁵ Julie Tolentino, "An Unruly Archive By Each of Us Towards Each of Us...*" in *Queer Communion: Ron Athey*, ed. Amelia Jones and Andy Campbell, (Chicago: Intellect, 2020), 276.

¹⁶ Tolentino, "An Unruly Archive," 276.

¹⁷ David Velasco, "Yve Laris Cohen," *Artforum International* 9, Vol. 52, Iss. 9, (May 2014): 304-307.

to archive into/onto Tolentino in three for *dal segno*, meaning “from the sign,” a different forms. music notation instructing a musician to repeat a passage *al Coda*, to the *Coda* ☉

Writing on *THE SKY*, Tolentino states “The title is an anchor.”¹⁸ This is also evident in Laris Cohen’s work. Both serve as a container and direction. Tolentino describes *THE SKY*’s title as “too-long,” and “not-tidy, slick, nor well-behaved.”¹⁹ Before continuing— maybe here it is best to question if I can access the artist-to-artist relationship that *THE SKY* foregrounds — or am I in a relationship closer to Laris Cohen and the Whitney Museum?²⁰ Am I able to take a queer approach as an academic at an arts institution?²¹ Why am I trying to make sense of these queer artists’ intentionally vague/interchangeable/shifting languages and subject/object hierarchies? Is it a (non)queer (or violent) practice to try to organize something purposefully “not-tidy, slick, nor well-behaved”?²² These queer artists and work deserves a queer approach—a non-binary and trans-corporeal intervention on technology, language, and politics. What does it look like to contrast a theoretically forgiving or “low theory” approach against a potentially more traditional “High Theory” approach? Following these questions, I want to take a colonoscopic approach to Tolentino’s work in contrast to Laris Cohen’s (non)performative wall.²³

¹⁸ Tolentino, “An Unruly Archive,” 273.

¹⁹ Tolentino, “An Unruly Archive,” 273.

²⁰ Nodding towards my personal professional history as an unpaid curatorial intern for the Whitney Museum in addition to other arts institutions in New York City.

²¹ However, as someone with an art making practice, when do I lose my “artist” status?

²² Tolentino, “An Unruly Archive,” 273.

²³ Reminiscent of how High Surrealists condemned Georges Bataille as an “excremental philosopher.”

THE COLON CHAPTER

What does it mean to develop a colonoscopic approach to *THE SKY*? Tolentino explains that the first part of the title itself “*THE SKY REMAINS THE SAME*” serves as an archive using language as a container of record. The second part of the title “Julie Tolentino Archives [artist’s name, artist’s work]” is where Tolentino describes the collaboration happening. The colon serves as a point of difference between the title’s first-part, the archive, and second-part, the collaboration. For the 2011 performance of *THE SKY REMAINS THE SAME: Julie Tolentino Archives Ron Athey’s Self-Obliteration #1* in New York, Tolentino describes:

The title has already positioned its audience members to witness their own relation to the space and their alliance with the distance from the two lit and raised platforms that compose the simple pre-set.²⁴

THE WALL CHAPTER

Turning to the wall prop used by Laris Cohen in *al Coda*, I look at how Sara Ahmed writes on orientations of the wall in her book *On Being Included* (2016). Ahmed describes higher education’s institutional diversity habits experienced by employees metaphorically as similar to “banging your head against a brick wall.”³¹ In this way, the wall does not physically perform in itself, but rather bodies perform while “the wall keeps its place, so it is you who gets sore.”³² Here it appears the wall does not perform, rather enacts what Ahmed calls “non-performativity” exemplified in an embodied workplace labor, such as a Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI).³³

²⁴ Tolentino, “An Unruly Archive,” 274.

³¹ Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 26.

³² Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 156.

³³ Note: I am developing RSI in my wrists while writing this thesis work.

Tolentino and Athey face each other in *THE SKY*, both on their hands and knees between two sheets of plate glass, mirroring the grammatical structure of the colon in *THE SKY*'s full title. I see the colon in the distance between Athey and Tolentino's respective platforms, their bodies between two plates of glass, and the time between Athey's first *Self-Obliteration* then second alongside Tolentino. They both wear a long blonde wig pinned to their scalps with five needles---they are the same but different.

Athey brushes and swings his blonde wig aggressively, then removes the needles and starts to bleed. Rubbing the sheets of plate glass on his body until they are both covered in his blood, Athey then re-stands the glass on either side of his platform. Athey resumes his original position on his hands and knees, re-pinning his blonde wig into his scalp with the same five needles. A light above Tolentino

Ahmed references Judith Butler's understanding of performativity from *Bodies That Matter* (1993). Butler writes on how gender performativity becomes material reality through re-performances, stating that performativity "must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names."³⁴

Ahmed directly amends Butler's writing to define non-performatives as "the 'reiterative and citational practice by which discourse' *does not produce* 'the effects that it names.'"³⁵

In this seeming antithesis to performativity, the non-performative could be perceived as an anti- or a failed performative utterance. However, Ahmed expands on J.L. Austin's concept of failed

³⁴ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, (London: Routledge, 2011), xii.

³⁵ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 117.

turns on and suddenly I realize she has been in the dark the whole time during Athey's performance. While reading Tolentino's account in *Queer Communion*, I also realize that Tolentino was first in the audience. Tolentino's wig and sheets of plate glass are both shiny and clean compared to Athey's matte with drying blood. Together, Athey and Tolentino begin to brush their hair.



Figure 7. Still from *THE SKY REMAINS THE SAME: Julie Tolentino Archives Ron Athey's Self-Obliteration #1*, Friday, December 16, 2011

performatives to differentiate from a non-performative:

In my model of the non-performative, the failure of the speech act to do what it says is not a failure of intent or even circumstance, *but is actually what the speech act is doing.*³⁶

Again, rather than failed intent or circumstance (e.g. a divorce, breaking wedding vows, not doing the “I do”) the non-performative names what it intentionally/purposefully “does not bring into effect.”³⁷ ³⁸ Here, is Ahmed's non-performativity queer because it “does not produce”?³⁹

Although Ahmed builds on non-performatives from Butler, I plan to briefly touch on criticisms of Butler's *bi*-ological corporeal feminisms next expanding on a trans need to turn to new

³⁶ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 117.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ In this way I view how people often use the word “performative” in popular language to actually mean “non-performative.” Also here, non-performatives could contrast a failed performative possibly described as anti-climax in Laris Cohen's body of work written on by Ariel Osterweis in “Disavowing Virtuosity, Performing Aspiration: Choreographies of Anticlimax in the work of Yve Laris Cohen, Narcissister, and John Jasperse” (2019).

³⁹ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 117.



Figure 8. Julie Tolentino, *THE SKY REMAINS THE SAME: Ron Athey's Self Obliteration # 1*, 2011. Performance. Photo: Thomas Qualmann.

Here, is Tolentino re-performing Athey? Although I want to move forward and past citational work with Tolentino where Athey is primarily referenced, this chapter ultimately serves as a jumping off point to how I want to talk about Tolentino's work in the future. First, I need to address the primary issue in the politics of re-performance studies which concerns *if* Tolentino is re-performing Athey. While Tolentino insists on resisting or

materialism. After which, I outline three properties of Ahmed's non-performativity exemplified in *al Coda*, specifically the ways in which the performance "does not produce." First I look at how Laris Cohen's wall labels disrupt subject/object hierarchies in order to not bring "into effect what they name."⁴⁰ I next compare administrative restrictions placed on Laris Cohen by the Whitney Museum and Turner construction company to Ahmed's understanding of an "institutional will" as similar to a brick wall. I finally highlight differences between failed utterances and non-performativity in the ultimate cancellation of *al Coda*, looking back at line dance as a possible "solution" to this non-performativity.

⁴⁰ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 126.

REMAINS THE SAME: Julie Tolentino not only by its insertion into the museum's
Archives Ron Athey's Self-Obliteration #1 architecture but also with two wall labels
 (2011) within the essay "An Unruly Archive one pasted over the other to "abjure some
 By Each of Us Towards Each of Us..." for potentially sensitive reference to the
 Jones and Andy Campbell's recent edited government's Occupational Safety and
 publication *Queer Communion: Ron Athey Health Administration codes.*"⁴² The
 (2020). Reflecting on *THE SKY*, Tolentino layered wall labels are unclear as to if an
 writes: "I/She/They are not about to act of administrative error and censorship
 re-perform. But that's a technicality, a political or purposeful— a precursor to an obscurity
 point, and a language thing."²⁶ That between Laris Cohen's intended
 technology, politics, and language of performance and the Whitney Museums'
 re-performance is what I want to expand on institutional effect/restrictions on the
 further. performance that continues throughout *al*

When I asked Tolentino to discuss *Coda*— a continued scepticism as to what
THE SKY further in a conversation on is "live" and what is rehearsed.⁴³ Once
 November 16, 2020, we both had one question downtown at the Whitney's new building
 for each other before we began talking: what construction site, the legal status of the
 do you mean when you say "re-performance"? wall changes. Used as a performance prop,
 Here is where it is important to decide the wall becomes the responsibility of
 whether or not to accept Tolentino's rejection Laris Cohen, and he will have to reinstall
 of re-performance. Rather than choose one

²⁶ Tolentino, "An Unruly Archive," 276.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

route, I aim to weave between both considerations. Tolentino's *THE SKY* seems to both reject Phelan's ontology of performance as live body art while still embracing a "commitment to live-ness." The artist-to-artist relationship and performance contract which they enter into/onto with Tolentino is both a "commitment to live-ness" and a queer archival practice.²⁷ However, the concept of an archive versus live-ness seem to oppose each other. Feminist coporealism feels queer here, rejecting an economy of reproduction (a hetero libidinal economy) and therefore resisting capital. Maybe the question should be: is it anti-queer to enter into an economy of reproduction (in terms of queer anti-capitalism)?

To move forward from this point, I need to ask the question: When Tolentino asserts *THE SKY* is not a re-performance work—in that it is ontologically irreproducible—does this mean their work

the wall at the biennale at the end of *al Coda*.

The title *D.S.* points to the biennial as a place of return in relationship to *al Coda* performed at the "new" Whitney building. Together as a music notation, *D.S. al Coda* instructs a performer to repeat a passage from the sign S , and after repeating play ahead to the *coda* C . The layered wall labels, the dirt on the white corners, and even the title *al Coda*, all point to a history of this specific wall as well as Laris Cohen's body of work in general.

New Materialism. The work *al Coda* is a repeat performance for the wall prop first used by Laris Cohen in the 2013 exhibition *Landing Field: Vito Acconci and Yve Laris Cohen* at Bard College's Hessel Museum of Art and CCS Galleries. A defining feature of the wall is the word

²⁷ Tolentino, "An Unruly Archive," 278.

more closely engages with **corporeal** feminist performance theory and Phelan's original ontology of performance? Despite the *bi*-ological issue of corporealism, if Tolentino is creating something "new" in *THE SKY*, then is it "live" and therefore supporting Phelan's original ontology of performance? For example focusing on the conflicts in corporealism, how is Lepecki's reading of Tolentino's "body as archive" limited in a corporeal feminism and ultimately a return to Phelan's ontology of performance as live body art? When Phelan re-addresses her own "The Ontology of Performance" (1993) in "Violence & Rupture" (2012), she writes on the performance of Eva Hesse's sculpture work and the performative force of their immaterial properties (i.e. shadows). However, Tolentino wants to maintain the live seemingly outside a "bio" approach to the corporeal. Ultimately *THE SKY* seems to

"transsexual" written across the bottom, specifically the second "transsexual" listed as a part of a material list wall text for the second performance of *Landing Field* "carbon dioxide, The Robert Mapplethorpe Gallery, Vito Acconci, Vito Acconci, Vito Acconci, The Robert Mapplethorpe Gallery, transsexual, transsexual." The word "transsexual" points to a subject-object hierarchy which Laris Cohen obscures by listing his corporeal trans identity as a material.

Laris Cohen also listed "transsexual" as a material on the wall label for his performances *Coda* (2012) and *Waltz* (2012). The listing of "transsexual" as material can seemingly lead to an objectification of Laris Cohen's body in performances where "there was no question as to who or what was the transsexual in the room."⁴⁴ However, the

⁴⁴ Yve Laris Cohen, "Among, Within, and Elsewhere: Yve Laris Cohen," interview by Jenny Jaskey, *Mousse Magazine* 42 (February-March 2014), <http://moussemagazine.it/yve-laris-cohen-jenny-jaskey-2014/>.

allow the body to take on multiple different considerations of materials/subjects/ontologies and "ism"s.

What is a "body" and why does it (not) matter? A bundle of nerves? An erogenous zone? A politic? A package of

meat? Looking again at Tolentino's use of language as an archive or container of record, the queer and lesbian nightclub, Clit Club, also begins to answer and confuse the corporeal question of what is a body. Co-founded by Tolentino and artist Jaguar Mary, starting in the summer of 1990, they held parties on Friday nights primarily as a space for lesbian and queer women-identifying women. Located in Manhattan's Meatpacking District over the span of a decade, Clit Club moved in 2000 and lived in different venues downtown until it's final night in 2002.²⁸ A journal article and collective interview, "The Sum of All

wall label for *Landing Field* successfully destabilizes a subject-object relationship in the reiteration of materials— listing "transsexual" twice obscuring the signifier and signified. In an interview, Laris Cohen explains:

"Fog" and "carbon dioxide" are alternate listings of the same material. If reiteration could happen in this way, then perhaps Vito Acconci could be the transsexual, or the transsexual could be the fog. Upsetting a subject-object hierarchy has become more about disrupting the sovereignty of each named entity.⁴⁵

In *al Coda*'s isolation of the second "transsexual" from the *Landing Field* wall label, does Laris Cohen's body become objectified or does the signifier remain ambiguous enough as to "who or what" is the "transsexual"? In some ways a transsexual orientation of the wall seems

²⁸ Julie Tolentino, Vivian A. Crockett, Tara Hart, Amira Khusro, Leeroy Kun Young Kang, and Dragon Mansion, "The Sum of All Questions: Returning to the Clit Club," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 24, no. 4 (2018): 468.

⁴⁵ Laris Cohen, interview.

Questions: Returning to Clit Club,” for *GLQ*: more possible in *al Coda* where the *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, *Landing Field* wall label’s second recounts:

Meat carcasses hung from hooks underneath warehouse awnings, and the industrial neighborhood smelled of the previous day’s detritus of intestines, blood, and fat.²⁹

Clit Club’s location in the meatpacking district (now home to the current Whitney Museum building) informs and queers the above question of how does a body *matter*? What defines the *matter* in a body? “Though its name referenced a body part, the Clit Club did not seek to claim or put forward notions of sexual experience, identity, or relationality based on gynocentric or essentialist notions of biological sex.”³⁰ Here, Clit Club directly rejects the biological for something non-binary and queer.

“transsexual” becomes isolated. An account of *al Coda* in *Artforum* by David Velasco describes: “The floating signifier at first seems obvious, pointing to Laris Cohen, who identifies as trans, but it also gestures to the earlier performance... and perhaps to the wall itself...”⁴⁶ In the re-performance of the wall, the re-appearance of the “transsexual” signifier maintains its ambiguity as to what it is signified.

The “transsexual” signifier on the wall does not signify as to which sex or gender the wall may identify, exemplifying a possible non-binariansim in queer identities. This choice of the word “transsexual” rather than “transgender” points to a need of biology in a trans turn to materialism. There is a trans necessity to be educated in queer bio-technologies such

²⁹ Tolentino, “The Sum of All Questions,” 467.

³⁰ Tolentino, “The Sum of All Questions,” 468.

⁴⁶ Velasco, “Yve Laris Cohen.”

as hormonal therapies, reconstructive surgeries, aftercare, etc... Where the fog, the wall, and Acconci are all speculatively and interchangeably transsexual, I see a trans-corporeal *need* to turn to science and feminist new materialisms described by Pitts-Taylor as the removal of the binary from the “bio.”⁴⁷ In feminist new materialist Karen Barad’s *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), they critique Butler’s connection between materialization and performativity as only “limited to the production of human bodies.”⁴⁸ I am interested in how Barad critiques Butler’s failure to address “technoscientific practices” on the body in relation to a trans* need for feminist new materialisms.⁴⁹

Interlude question: Does a colonospic approach queer subject/object hierarchies similar to Laris Cohen’s queering of subject/object hierarchies with his double “transsexual”

⁴⁷ Emphasis on *need* here reminiscent of Pitts-Taylor's call for a need for feminists to turn to new materialism.

⁴⁸ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 145-146.

⁴⁹ However, Analies Kaiser in (2016) outlines Barad’s argument and questions if it is possible to reach a gender-neutral state in biology.

wall label? Writing about *THE SKY*, Lepecki addresses the intentional uncertainty of Tolentino’s language specifically the “into/onto” moment where Tolentino archives “onto (into?—the preposition remains uncertain in Tolentino’s language, and this uncertainty must remain open) her body.”⁵⁰ This also recalls language Tolentino uses to describe memories of bodies at Clit Club: “People were turned *on* and sometimes, turned *out*.”⁵¹ (Emphasis added.) I view the interchangeability of “into/onto” as similar to the interchangeability of subject/object hierarchies in Laris Cohen’s work made available by the double “transsexual” wall label.

Preparing for a Colonoscopy. Can I **In Laris Cohen’s *Coda* (2012)**, he translate the grammatical properties of the constructs a “hyperfunctional” colon to a possible biological and overall dance-floor-like-structure hung on the wall colonoscopic approach? A colonoscopy of a hallway he then *chaîné* turns down.⁷⁹ entails an examination of the large intestine, The wall structure was built excessively colon, and rectum— a turn to the anorectal similar to a dance floor with shock conditions, a spotlight on excess and absorption and a black marley surface excrement. How do you prepare for a material. Being built similar to a dance colonoscopy? Restricting intake to clear floor, the wall materially “contained the liquids and fluids (while needing to avoid capacity for movement,” despite being foods with red, blue, and purple dye). What is hung as a wall structure.⁸⁰ However, the considered a colon? I identified briefly how “capacity for movement” (even if the

⁵⁰ André Lepecki, “The Body as an Archive: Will to RE-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances,” *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (winter 2010): 32.

⁵¹ Tolentino, “The Sum of All Questions,” 468.

⁷⁹ Laris Cohen, interview.

⁸⁰ Laris Cohen, interview.

the colon functions grammatically as a punctuation mark, and biologically as the gut in connection to the rectum, anus, and what it produces (or fails to produce). However, I am interested in translating properties of the colon to other possible considerations such as the throat/mouth and other holes. Spectifically as a hole and in its fluids/excrecions, I look to the **queer** properties of the colon in:

1. *Being Non-Reproductive.* The colon resists heterosexual reproduction and intercourse by being a hole with fluids that biologically do not procreate. These non-reproductive functions may be an avenue to explore how Tolentino does not re-perform. While the anus is biologically unable to sexually reproduce, it does reproduce non-gendered bodily fluids and excrement.
2. *Everybody has one.* The colon (or at least the digestive funtion of a large intestine in connnection to the rectum)

structure of these materials were used for their intended purposes) does not equate the material capacity to autonomously move.



Figure 10. Yve Laris Choen, *Coda*, 2012.

Laris Cohen reflects in an interview with Jenny Jaskey: “Ultimately, I’m not making autonomous objects. The

is intersectional across sex, gender, sculptural-architectural materials are sexuality, race, class, religion, and always in service to the performance.”⁸¹ additional social identifiers. However, Here these materials, the floor, the wall, do in some cases a person may have not perform themselves as objects but in surgically removed or been born the corporeal labor of bodies in contact without a large intestine and/or rectum. with them. Whereas Ahmed’s brick wall This opens onto the question of symbolizes a material where the body itself colostomies and colostomy bags, has very little effect, Laris Cohen’s white where a colon is fabricated and wall itself seems to embody each new functions similar to a large performance through new markings—skid intestine/rectum without the organ(s). marks along the bottom, dirty fingerprints on the corners, and wall labels pasted over each other. An administrative and choreographic history imprints on the material white gallery wall as Laris Cohen Tolentino’s fluids could be an example of the queer interchangeability of my use of the term “colon” as a signifier. In *Queer Communion*, Tolentino reflects on the starkness and bloodlessness of her body compared to Athey’s:

“Without access to my own blood during performance ... the archival action of *Self-Obliteration #1* jostled me and drove me to a desperate extraction of any fluid I had available to fulfill the performance contract. I accessed sweat, snot, spit, blood from any hole or cut in order to move and

Non-Performatives in *al Coda*.

For the start of *al Coda* at the Whitney Museum building in-construction on Gansevoort, the wall is out-of-view behind

⁸¹ Laris Cohen, interview.

slide the glass plates across themselves and the surface of my skin...”⁵² the audience. A video recording from March 28, 2014 shows Laris Cohen Tolentino here attempts to access fluids interchangeable with blood in order to fulfil her performance contract with Athey for *THE SKY*. The interchangeability of fluids, specifically blood, points to larger connections between excess and the colon. “These archival dives allow a chance to taste the pact of solidarity on and around our relationship to blood and excess...”⁵³ The point of an excremental philosophy is a turn to bodily excretions from holes— wax, snot, slime, spit, flem, and of course blood, urine, and scat. In Amelia Jone’s essay “Holy Body,” she often references Wayne Koestenbaum’s “The Queen’s Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire” while making the connection that “Snapper’s throat is Athey’s anus.”⁵⁴ Where holes typically represent the audience. A video recording from March 28, 2014 shows Laris Cohen beginning the performance by hanging over the shoulder of a man we learn later is named Tom. Standing behind a shoulder-high stack of construction materials, Laris Cohen repeatedly climbs on and off the shoulders of Tom (reminiscent of a construction worker carrying building materials over their shoulder). The obscuring of his and Tom’s lower-halves is similar to the set-up of Laris Cohen’s 2011 performance *Call Home*. In *Call Home*, he builds a waist-height walled structure then stands behind it and appears to give an audience member a hand job. In both *Call Home* and *al Coda*, these moments in the performance remain partially hidden to the audience.

⁵² Tolentino, “An Unruly Archive,” 282.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Amelia Jones, “Holy Body: Erotic Ethics in Ron Athey and Juliana Snapper’s Judas Cradle,” *TDR/The Drama Review* 50, no. 1 (2006): 159–69.

female or feminine, Jones notes the way Koestenbaum moves towards a more non-binary queer (not heteronormative) and nonreproductive hole: “Koestenbaum recognizes as the female, indeed lesbian aspect of the diva—the holes (mouth, cunt, anus, ears) that might be understood as metaphors for this queerness.”⁵⁵ The colon I see here connects the mouth and throat to the colon and rectum, through the gut and digestive system as a whole.⁵⁶ For example the sphincter muscles live throughout the digestive system, such as the upper esophageal sphincter, lower esophageal sphincter, and the anal sphincter. Where the sphincter, colon, or anus is released from a binary I am interested in the non-gendered queerness of the colon as any another genitalia, passage or hole (to fuck). In this connection to the digestive system and the sphincter muscle— as well as everyone has one and non-reproductive while



Figure 11. iStock images.

⁵⁵ Amelia Jones, “Holy Body.”

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Wilson coined the term “gut feminism” in a call for feminists to look at the connections between psychology’s biological effects. I am reminded here of all the queer friends in my life suffering from IBS.

still being a non-gendered sexual organ/hole to fuck— I also see the throat or mouth as a colon.

Excremental Philosophy. Taking a colonoscopic approach, I want to address a longer history of the anus and excremental philosophy in performance and live body arts— and why it brings my attention to Tolentino’s colon. I am primarily concerned with the way in which performance artists have approached excrement and the anus that builds from (and moves beyond) Georges Bataille and his work published in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*. Bataille speaks on the anus as something that ejects, transcribing digestive characteristics to earthly holes:

The terrestrial globe is covered with volcanoes, which serve as its anus. Although this globe eats nothing, it often violently ejects the contents of its entrails.⁵⁷



Figure 12. (still from) *al Coda*, from *D.S.*, 2014. Performance, Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial, new Whitney building construction site, New York, NY. March 28, 20. <https://vimeo.com/93365217>



Figure 13. (still from) Yve Laris Cohen, *Call Home*, 2011. Movement Research @ the Judson Church. 12.19.2011

After climbing off of Tom’s back, Laris Cohen erects a ladder leading up to the future sound-and-lighting booth of the museum’s performance space. Laris Cohen

⁵⁷ Georges Bataille and Allan Stoekl, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 8.

Rebecca Schneider in *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997) outlines how over to the corner window that faces the Andre Breton and other “high” Surrealists Hudson. Laris Cohen re-appears in the categorize Georges Bataille as “an sound-and-lighting booth, and announces: ‘excremental philosopher’ (Breton 1969: 184; “So Tom— the performance has to see also Stoekl 1985).”⁵⁸ Schneider continues change.” This moment is speculative, as if to write that this positioning of the “explicit it is a real administrative hiccup, or a body and primitive practice” both rehearsed performance. These speculative reconstitutes a “Western art-canonical tenets moments continue to reappear throughout of vision,” and creates a “formal aesthetic the performance. Laris Cohen continues to distance,” whereas Bataille sought to explain, “Only one worker on the site is “interrogate and disrupt those tenets.”⁵⁹ licensed-certified to move the heaters.” Meaning that a rejection of excremental This appears to be an example of philosophy by “high” Surrealists constructs non-performativity in the way Ahmed what is accepted in a Western canon of references G.W.F. Hegel to describe a brick aesthetic and *sense*. In this way excremental wall as an “institutional standing,”⁸² or an philosophies may be an access point to embodiment of “what an institution is not expanding and therefore queering an willing to bring about.”⁸³ In this case, the institutionalized arts canon— Whitney Museum or Turner Construction opening/stretching the intact anus that is the Company act as a non-performative, as a

⁵⁸ Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 145.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁸² Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 129.

⁸³ Ibid.

canon— a tight sphincter, unpenetrated, brick wall, in taking an “institutional ringlike, surrounding, contracting, with the standing” on the heaters and what they are ability to open/close a passage or opening. unwilling “to bring about.”⁸⁴

Beyond a heteronromative form of penetration, how do we fistfuck this canonical asshole open? How do we tear, injure, damage, fracture, and bloody virginal, and sexed? In the case of Laris Cohen’s heaters, we see how a non-performative brick wall or “institutional standing” only becomes noticeable “when one attempts to cross a limit.”⁸⁵ As an alternative, Laris

Ron Athey’s work most directly reflects on these connections between Bataille and a canon of performance studies. In an interview with Dominic Johnson, Athey reflects on how he resonated with Bataille’s excrementail philosophies and the way “he elevated filth to sacred status - Mother, Perverted Priests - while completely destroying familial, cultural, and societal myths.”⁶⁰ Most notably Athey builds from Bataille’s essay “Solar Anus” to inform his heaters to the audience: “Really let them see and feel how the space would have looked and felt.” As Tom describes moving twelve large heaters turned on and warming the room “excruciatingly,” this feat seems impossible to begin with - a fire hazard even in the proposal phase. In a recording of *al Coda*, audience members laugh a little as Tom describes the overwhelming heat.⁸⁶ Here, it also becomes clear that Tom is recalling choreography

⁶⁰ Dominic Johnson, “Perverse Martyrologies: An Interview with Ron Athey,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 18, no. 4 (2008): 533.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Yve Laris Cohen, “Yve Laris Cohen: *al Coda*, from *D.S.*, 2014 - Excerpts,” filmed March 28, 2014 at Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial, New York, NY, video, 12:31, <https://vimeo.com/93365217>.

performance *Solar Anus*. In the interview, Athey expands on the rectum:

There is a homophobic repulsion at the idea of the rectum as a receptacle for sex; or further, a more general body-phobia (that many gay men also share) of the turned-out asshole as fist-hole: punch-fucking, double fisting, dark red hankies, and the elbow-to-armpit fist. There's also the pathology of shit-eaters, a direct link to cannibalism. But more importantly, in our time, this particular hole garners more phobias for its symbolic potency as a receptacle for disease. Leo Bersani's essay, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" is useful here, but closer to home is Coil's "Anal Staircase." Bataille's revelation is that the anus is both the day and the night.⁶¹

I often see assholes in theory and philosophy spotlight either the underage virginal girl (intact) or the homosexual cis-male (defiled). Athey notes how Bataille fetishizes "a young girl's anus"⁶² in the way

from Act 2 of the ballet *Giselle* (a nod towards Laris Cohen's formal dance background and training).⁸⁷ The heaters embody a non-performativity in being announced by Laris Cohen because he is naming what he is not willing/able to bring about— physically in labor, in recalling *Giselle*, and in administrative restrictions by the Whitney Museum and Turner Construction Company. In this way, Laris Cohen's announcement of the failure to use heaters is "*actually what the speech act is doing*," rather than a failed performative utterance or failure in the *al Coda* performance.⁸⁸

⁶¹ Johnson, "Perverse Martyrologies," 533.

⁶² Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ariel Osterweis, "Disavowing Virtuosity, Performing Aspiration: Choreographies of Anticlimax in the Work of Yve Laris Cohen, Narcissister, and John Jasperse," in *Futures of Dance Studies*, ed. Susan Manning et al., (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin, 2020), 35.

⁸⁸ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 126.

Bataille writes: “The solar annulus is the intact anus of her body at eighteen years to which nothing sufficiently blinding can be compared except the sun, even though the anus is the night.”⁶³ At they also references Bersani who wrote about anal sex and the heterosexual fear of AIDS. Bersani briefly references females (or possibly queer, trans, non-binary, gender-non-confirming, etc... individuals), in terms of performing masculinity: butch-fems, sadomachosts, lesbian machiso, and S&M practices. The woman is also talked about in terms of the prostitute (relating to the multiple orgasm, the gay male stereotype of having multiple partners and/or engaging in criminal activity), or wife who has anal sex to fulfil her husband’s homosexual fantasies (and vice versa relating anal sex between two men as fulfilling a feminine or heterosexual fantasy,



Figure 14. (still from) *al Coda*, from *D.S.*, 2014. Performance, Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial, new Whitney building construction site, New York, NY. March 28, 20.

Coming down from the sound-and-lighting booth, Laris Cohen approaches the audience standing in a huddle on the opposing side of the room as Tom. Laris Cohen walks behind the audience to finally reveal the wall which he then pushes through the Whitney Museum’s construction site. He uses quick movements, thrusting hips, pressing his whole body against the surface, and seems to struggle at times while everyone

⁶³ Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 9.

where the asshole acts as a vagina).⁶⁴ And while Bersani acknowledges that lesbians alongside gay men experienced social violence due to AIDS, he continues to speak around the subject in terms of the gay male asshole, ending the essay with a statement on male homosexuality. While I am interested in Bersani's work in terms of the repetitive properties of the multiple orgasm as well as an epidemic/pandemic/spread of disease, specifically sexually transmitted, I question: How do we move past these assholes to the numerous others? Towards a more queer and inclusive *assholeography* (Athey's language)?

Gaping Holes. Amelia Jones takes a more queer approach to holes in her 2006 essay "Holy Body: Erotic Ethics in Ron Athey and Juliana Snapper's Judas Cradle." Jones

watches. The audience tentatively follows Laris Cohen and the wall, leaving Tom in his corner. Talking amongst themselves in a recording of *al Coda*, audience members speculate: "Can we look?" "I don't know."⁸⁹ Some audience members lose visibility of Laris Cohen and the wall as they move deeper into the construction site. Hearing light clapping, those in the back speculate, "I think he got it on the elevator."



Figure 15. (still from) *al Coda*, from *D.S.*, 2014. Performance, Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial, new Whitney building construction site, New York, NY. March 28, 20.

⁶⁴ Leo Bersani writes: "the similarities between representations of female prostitutes and male homosexuals should help us to specify the exact form of sexual behavior being targeted, in representations of AIDS, as the criminal, fatal, and irresistibly repeated act. This is of course anal sex (with the potential for multiple orgasms having spread from the insertee to the insertor, who, in any case, may always switch roles and be the insertee for ten or fifteen of those thirty nightly encounters), and we must of course take into account the widespread confusion in heterosexual and homosexual men between fantasies of anal and vaginal sex" (Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" 211).

⁸⁹ Laris Cohen, "Yve Laris Cohen: *al Coda*."

acknowledges “I am a body of holes. Dripping, mucousy, bloody,” with pores and orifices, a nose, eyes, mouth, ears, vagina, asshole, nipples, (piercings?), etc... Notably in this essay, Jones canonizes Athey’s asshole, stating, “Ron Athey’s asshole has its own place in the history of contemporary performance art.”⁶⁵ In terms of Jones’ canonization of Athey’s asshole, why don’t more female, lesbian, or trans assholes have their own place in the canon? In the case of Tolentino, is it because we do not visibly see or gaze on their asshole as often in their performance work? However, if Tolentino’s asshole were to be canonized would it be (an act of violence) no longer queer and enter into an economy of reproduction (and no longer non-reproductive)?

As much as Athey’s work has queered and turned out, prolapsed and Crisco-fisted the sphincter that is the performance art canon I want to expand upon the greater politics of the



Figure 16. (still from) *al Coda*, from *D.S.*, 2014. Performance, Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial, new Whitney building construction site, New York, NY. March 28, 20.

Men in yellow vests and hardhats, assumed to be workers employed by the Turner Construction Company and contracted by the Whitney Museum, also watch and follow Laris Cohen. Although Laris Cohen performs the labor of moving the wall through the site himself, here we see a difference in trade and training similar to operating the heaters. Laris Cohen is a guest here, contracted through the Whitney Museum in a different department. In this case, are the construction workers non-performative as

⁶⁵ Jones, “Holy Body,” 163.

asshole, and excrementality of citing supervising representatives of not only the Tolentino in written works on Athey (well Whitney but also Turner Construction aware I am currently doing this myself). Company? Do they uphold the institutional Jennifer Doyle in *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (2013) writes on Athey and his relationships with queer women. Where Athey is famously HIV positive (with his “AIDS blood” centered in 1994 culture war arguments by Jesse Helms, who showed the US Senate a image of Athey from the performance *Four Scenes of a Harsh Life*), Doyle notes that “seeing women look after Athey” in his performances “was not only a reiteration of the feminization of nursing and care but a reminder of the numbers of women impacted by AIDS, as the pandemic turned women in queer circles into caretakers and AIDS activists.”⁶⁶ Tolentino reflects on this subject during their time running Clit Club— closing the club in the early morning and going to a friend’s

what the institute (museum and construction company) are unwilling to bring about? Perhaps the construction workers here are the real wall, iconographic of the non-performative in being “an institutional ‘no’” without saying “no.”⁹⁰ In this way again we see the embodied labor of a wall within the Turner Construction Company workers similar to the brick wall representing a non-performative institutional standing embodied in the labor of practitioners beating their heads against the wall.

Exiting to the south of the museum on the Hudson river side, Laris Cohen pushes the wall down a wooden ramp. Then speaking towards the audience, he

⁶⁶ Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*, (London: Duke University Press Books, 2013), 65.

⁹⁰ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 129.

caretaker shift. “The relationships, meeting points, and links between the Clit Club and caregiving and support systems for friends with HIV and AIDS might be understood as webs of care...”⁶⁷ In this caretaker role, Doyle addresses how queer women often took care of administrative and production needs for Athey’s performance works, continuing to write:

Athey has worked with a small army of attentive butches, queer women, and transgendered people since the early 1990s (such as Stosh Fila [Pigpen], who appeared in the Minneapolis performance, and Julie Tolentino, who produced it). Even solo works like *Self Obliteration Solo* or *Dissociative Sparkle* often include supportive labor. Queer women sweep in, just below the focus of attention, to take care of things...⁶⁸

Doyle highlights the supportive and administrative labors of queer women which

asks “A Turner person? Or Mamie?” for permission to back-in a U-Haul \$19.99 rent-a-van.⁹¹ With some assistance, Laris Cohen tries to fit the wall into the van’s trunk in order to bring it back to the Whitney Biennial on Madison. He calls out for more help, from “Jay!” “Cole?” A woman in heels runs to support a side of the wall as they try different angles. People watching debate if the wall will actually fit, and in the end, it does not. Laris Cohen drives away in the U-Haul leaving the wall on the sidewalk, and the audience “left wanting.”⁹² In Velasco’s account of *al Coda* for Artforum, he describes the audience assuming Laris Cohen will come back with a larger vehicle while they loiter and eventually disperse.⁹³ “I don’t remember any applause, but in any case... I don’t see how it would have made any

⁶⁷ Tolentino, “The Sum of All Questions,” 472.

⁶⁸ Doyle, *Hold It Against Me*, 65-66.

⁹¹ Laris Cohen, “Yve Laris Cohen: *al Coda*.”

⁹² Velasco, “Yve Laris Cohen,” 304-307.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

often do not receive attention, citation, or reference (and therefore excluded from a canonicalization of Athey's asshole). I see Athey address this, speaking on Tolentino as a mentor in his 2008 interview with Dominic Johnson: "Tolentino was a member of David Rousseve's dance company REALITY, and she booked me into New York Clubs. She was also behind pivotal early 1990s gigs..."⁶⁹ Jones also makes an effort to cite Tolentino as a collaborator in *In Between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (2020). First establishing Athey's "dyke sensibility"⁷⁰ and queerness beyond a male homosexuality because his "performance troupe in the 1990s," included and were dominated "by collaborating queer women such as Julie Tolentino and Cathy Opie."⁷¹ Second in interrogating how his wounded

difference."⁹⁴ The Whitney Museum ultimately cancels the following performances of *al Coda* citing construction delays.⁹⁵



Figure 17. (still from) *al Coda*, from *D.S.*, 2014. Performance, Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial, new Whitney building construction site, New York, NY. March 28, 20.

Here, in the performance's non-ending, the audience "left wanting," and the wall abandoned by Laris Cohen on the sidewalk— it is important to remember that these non-performative qualities are not failed performatives. Similar to the

⁶⁹ Johnson, "Perverse Martyrologies."

⁷⁰ Amelia Jones, *In Between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 234.

⁷¹ Jones, *In Between Subjects*, 234.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

body “trashes, disperses, and interrelates”⁷² his whiteness:

... with the long-standing companions and collaborators-of-color such as Divinity Fudge (Darryl Carlton), Julie Tolentino, [and] Lisa Teasley. He makes a community of his body, offering it for group ‘salvation.’⁷³

Here I see Jones trying to move towards a more non-binary approach to queerness in warning against the “binarism of ‘cis’” and “the whiteness of queer.”⁷⁴ Jones asks: “How can we move towards “Other” and “Trans” with this reiteration of white masculinity as queer performance’s exemplar?”⁷⁵ I understand Jones as trying to obscure witness and masculinity through reiteration (repetition with a difference, similar to Yve Laris Cohen’s obscured subject/object hierarchies of his transsexual wall label, that I expand on in the parallel

construction workers supervising Laris Cohen’s performance, the wall’s inability to fit into the Uhaul is a non-performative by being a “no” that also “doesn’t need to become the subject of an utterance.”⁹⁶ In this way the non-performative, and the wall’s failure to fit into the Uhaul, is not a failure of performance or failed performative utterance. Rather than a failed performative, Laris Cohen’s attempts to cross administrative limits— in a transsexual wall label, heaters, a man named Tom, and a \$19.99 Uhaul— brings to attention what the performance is actually doing (and unwilling to bring about).

⁷² Jones, *In Between Subjects*, 235.

⁷³ Jones, *In Between Subjects*, 235.

⁷⁴ Jones, *In Between Subjects*, 236-237.

⁷⁵ Jones, *In Between Subjects*, 236.

⁹⁶ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 129.

chapter). However in Jones questions I still see her centering someone who has historically identified as a white gay cis-male body at the center of conversation on queerness in reference to non-white women, lesbian, and trans bodies. (I also note my own hypocrisy spending so much time writing about Athey in my chapter on Tolentino). Again, I see this as a starting point to how I want to talk about Tolentino in the future and restructure my conversations on re-performance moving forward.

Conclusion. Smells like Queer Capitalism. What happens if we canonicalize Tolentino's colon? Such as in a colonoscopy, what are the consequences of documenting and gazing on something unseen? A colonoscopy requires the medical imaging of internal organs by way of endoscopy and using a colonoscope, a camera attached to the end of a long, flexible tube inserted into the mouth and/or rectum. Another method could

involve a capsule endoscopy where patients swallow a small pill-sized camera. These methods can strain the body—the body is starved, liquidated, penetrated, and exposed—however, in the promise of a future bill of health. Choosing not to have a colonoscopy, to refuse medical imaging and documentation, could lead to internal pain.

What does this mean for the archiving of subculture communities and spaces that resist documentation? The Clit Club notoriously prohibited photography.

This refusal of photography also resisted the rhetoric of identity-based visibility politics that embraced legibility and commodification. Lesbian identity flourished at the Clit Club because attention was directed inward, towards the communities it served.⁷⁶

While creating a space for lesbian communities to flourish without fear of entering into a commodified economy of reproduction, I am concerned how these

⁷⁶ Tolentino, “The Sum of All Questions,” 486.

important histories will continue to live and be learned. How do we locate internal pain without a colonoscopy? Tolentino speaks on how “the club” doesn’t always materialize a place, rather the club is in the body. Paraphrasing thoughts from Anne Garréta’s guest lecture at the California Institute of Arts for a Dance course in the fall semester of 2020, they raise questions about the erotics of space. Garréta describes “erotics” as what gets inscribed in memory and what is “lived” most intensely, such as a libidinal gathering of bodies, a record of our sex. Going back to a club, a church, a body, again and again. Through this re-performance scent becomes a leaky bodily archive—the smell of something you cannot see that connects you to a past event, triggers the re-living of a memory or experience (imagine the smell of your ex-partner’s cologne/perfume/shampoo).

Here I see the importance of the first part of the contract in *THE SKY*. Tolentino describes how works are shared “in detail in

words, video, images, transferred via short-hand samples of mimic-able movements... there is a lot of laughter accompanying the camaraderie... anecdotes, gossip, secrets, slippages...”⁷⁷ These moments are unseen to an audience, and perhaps will never be shared based on the second part of *THE SKY* where artists decide if their performance will “be merely ‘retained’” by Tolentino or take “another form.”⁷⁸ However, if retained only in an embodied archive into/onto Tolentino, I am left with the question: what happens when Tolentino dies? In the few hours after death, muscles in the body will relax and release fluids: stool, urine, saliva, etc... When Tolentino dies, will their gut die too? Or is Tolento an organ donor?

(When) does repetition end? When the Whitney Museum tells us to stop the performance? If the Whitney Museum cancels the performance, then how do we move towards a “new” Whitney? Or can we take a hint from Laris Cohen’s non-performatives and realize we’ll never get there? How do we stop? When Tolentino dies? When the colon shits?

⁷⁷ Tolentino, “An Unruly Archive,” 276.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

If Tolentino's *THE SKY* is not re-performance, and if Tolentino is not re-performing (a question I still do not want to answer): does the colon enter a queer economy of reproduction more concerned with bio-matter rather than the materiality of photographs/videos/ephemera which usually terrorizes an ontology of live body art and re-performance discourse? In this queer rejection of an economy of reproduction: how do we revisit the ephemera of something potentially lost such as in the case of Tolentino's death? Or when you take a shit? Do you look at it before you flush? Do you smell it? Do you cite it? Do you remember how your last bowel movement smelled? How has the smell changed over time? To quote the 2003 song "Roses" by OutKast:

*I know you'd like to think your shit don't stank, but
Lean a little bit closer, see
Roses really smell like poo-poo-oooh*

CONCLUSION LOS ANGELES GOES ONLINE

The music video for Kendrick Lamar’s song “These Walls” opens with a title reading “Behind these Walls: A Black Comedy,” then cuts to men in a prison cell. These walls Lamar refers to materially are vaginal walls, prison walls, and the walls at Lamar’s house party. A woman grinds and twerks on Lamar against a wall in the music video to the point that the wall breaks. These movements are reminiscent of Laris Cohen’s while shoving the wall through the Whitney Museum space— thrusting his hips against the wall’s surface, jerking quick movements which make him seem to purposefully struggle with moving the wall. What if we take a hint from Lamar and Laris Cohen and dance on the wall or line dance with the wall? Line dance may help us move towards something new (and back again). Listening to D.J. Casper, he states: “This is something new, the Casper Slide part two.”

Before expanding on line dance, I look at un-walling as a way of moving towards this “something new.” I am interested here in an Israeli Defence Force (IDF) tactic written on by Eyal Weizman. He writes on how the IDF punches and moves through holes in domestic walls during an attack on the West Bank city of Nablus in April 2002. Looking to Weizman, we could continue to argue for the engagement of institutions rather than withdrawal in trying to dismantle the wall, such as in Laris Cohen’s possible relationship with the Whitney Museum:

Although the concept of ‘walking through walls’, ‘swarming’ and other terms referring to military non-linearity may indeed imply some structural changes in military organization, claims that these developments constitute radical transformation are largely overstated. This, in itself, should bring into question the real place of theory as a generative source for the actual transformations of military practice.⁹⁷

Weizman argues that the structural changes in non-linear movement or un-walling does not require a large transformation in practice. Considering the military practice of un-walling as

⁹⁷ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation*, (New York: Verso, 2017), 211.

the practice of un-walling institutional standings: let's revisit Ahmed's reading of attempts to transform or institutionally un-wall through the metaphorical practice of "beating your head against a wall." Rather than beating your head, are we able to engage in non-linear movements such as: rubbing your face against the wall, or kicking the wall, or hugging the wall, or twerking on the wall? Perhaps, in this way, we can access an institutional un-walling in a non-radical transformation of practice.

Orientations of the Wall. Ahmed may help us to re-think these dualisms or binaries the wall is iconographic of within her chapter on "Sexual Orientation" in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. She writes: "A queer phenomenology might offer an approach to sexual orientation by rethinking how the bodily direction 'toward' objects shapes the surfaces of bodily and social space."⁹⁸ In this relationship between bodies and objects, Ahmed turns to Edmund Husserl's work on the table— not only written work but physical orientations towards the table. She expands upon Husserl's concept of "'twofold directedness' (1969: 122)" where "first, I am directed toward an object (I face it), and then I take a direction toward it (for instance I might not admire it)."⁹⁹ I draw a connection between orientations and physical/philosophical turns towards objects and line dance— recalling how walls in line dance represent the direction or orientation a dancer faces at any given time in a choreographies sequence. When Ahmed asks, "which way does Husserl turn?" (ultimately criticizing him for having his back turned to the kitchen and therefore domestic labors which may differently direct him towards the table— however, I write this with my back turned to my kitchen and dirty dishes) I am interested in how four-walled line dance choreography may reorient Husserl in physically turning which direction

⁹⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 68.

⁹⁹ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 28.

he faces.¹⁰⁰ Ahmed writes: “What gets our attention depends too on which direction we are facing.”¹⁰¹ In this way line dance could possibly reorient our attention by changing the direction we face.

Continuing to question the orientational relationship of bodies and objects, specifically walls, I return to Ahmed’s brick wall. When practitioners metaphorically bang their head against the wall, the wall does not perform but practitioners physically embody this performance (e.g. RSI). Continuing to question how walls do not perform themselves but in the movement of bodies surrounding them I turn to political theorist Wendy Brown’s *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*.^{102 103} Brown notes the movement of bodies in looking at how walls are “detering, as opposed to rerouting, the flow of illegal immigration.”¹⁰⁴ However, in simply “detering” rather than “rerouting” the movement of bodies, do walls fail to perform? Brown continues:

Walls may be effective in producing psychic containment even as they fail to block or repel the transnational and clandestine flows of people, good, and terror both that signal and contribute to the undermining of political sovereignty.¹⁰⁵

This “psychic containment” may point to non-performative political properties of the physical border wall that actually serves as iconographic of an illusion of sovereignty. This containment could be comparable to kettle lines and “kettling,” a crowd-control tactic used by police to corral groups of people into a limited space (to be contrasted with dispersal techniques like tear gas or rubber bullets). In a kettle, a group of people are surrounded and held in an effort to shift the crowd’s libidinal energy – to de-escalate, demoralize, or simply wear them down in a type of “psychic containment.” A kettle’s four walls are usually pre-constituted by the built

¹⁰⁰ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 28-29.

¹⁰¹ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 29.

¹⁰² Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, (Cambridge, Mass: Zone Books, 2010), 37.

¹⁰³ So does Weizman: “It was not the given order of space that governed patterns of movement, but movement itself that produced the space around it.” (Weizman, “Urban Warfare,” 186.)

¹⁰⁴ Brown, *Walled States*, 49.

¹⁰⁵ Brown, *Walled States*, 121.

environment. Grid streets, tunnels and bridges are particularly vulnerable. For example, members of the New York Police Department blocked protesters from exiting either side of the Manhattan Bridge during a march in support of Black Lives Matter on June 2nd, 2020. In this case we see how the march is physically trapped on all sides— forced to move linearly between Brooklyn or Manhattan, east or west, or off the side of a bridge. Here, how do protesters access non-linear movement? Could the Cha Cha Slide be useful at this moment? Reiterating questions from my first chapter: How does line dance disrupt the linearity of protest tactics? For instance, does line dance re-orient a march moving down a street in one direction, or disperse the constricting lines of a kettle?

D.J. Casper speaks about the accessible and egalitarian effects of his lyrics in the Cha Cha Slide containing dance instructions. D.J. Casper describes, “All you have to do is listen and I will tell you how to do the dance.”¹⁰⁶ This instructional character of Casper’s lyrics (*Let’s go to work, To the left, Take it back now y’all; Freeze, everybody clap your hands; Hands on your knees, hands on your knees; Reverse, reverse; Etc...*) mirrors the call-and-response format of protest chants during BLM demonstrations that instruct a physical action. For instance, a common chant “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot” is accompanied by raising hands in the air; or the chant “Take a knee! Take a knee!” signals for everyone to kneel. This instructional quality allows for an accessible collective action, however also a possible appropriation. When the police kneels or a white protester chants “I can’t breathe,” the political ontology changes— these words/actions take new meaning depending on both their genealogies and who enacts them. How do social orientations of bodies affect how the bodies arrive at the wall? For example, what circumstances orient the national guard to form a kettle line versus protesters to form a line dance?

¹⁰⁶ Brittany Luse and Eric Eddings, “Cha Cha Now Y’all,” 22:56, *The Nod*, published October 14, 2019.

The *IIAlive* report, “National Guard troops dance in the streets with protesters,” recorded National Guard troops dancing with protesters to the Cha Cha Slide. Watching the video, the instructional and directional character of line dance’s 4-wall choreography appears to reorient who is at the “front” or leading the gathered crowd. To join the line dance, the troops disassembled their military line, giving up a hierarchical positioning of being at the “front” of the line to join a more public line. The reporter narrating the scene, Hope Ford, describes the troops “not getting the dance yet, but they’re trying.” The troops here seem to forfeit some sort of power by allowing themselves to be led by protesters and D.J. Casper’s instructions.

In a Fox 5 Atlanta aerial-view video posted on Twitter of troops dancing the Macarena alongside a few protesters, a visible third third line emerges outside of the march or the kettle—a space of dance. In this space, an obvious new linearity forms in a collective line of dance that at the same time divides protesters from troops. The perpetuation of a binary in the creation of this third space maintains a linearity and therefore a political ontology. Here, we see how repetition in line dance perpetuates a gap in political ontology between the protesters and troops. When the National Guard Cha Cha Slides with protesters, they engage with a dance with genealogies in blackness while still remaining anti-black. A dancing soldier may point to individual sentiments when engaging in a dance rooted in blackness, however the action does not shift their structural position in the military, and does not institute legal change. In this example, the line dancing troops ultimately serve as a anti-black de-escalation tactic through an appropriation of black dance and blackness. When the Cha Cha Slide Part II finishes at the end of the *IIAlive* video news report, the protesters ultimately disperse at the time of the citywide curfew.

In conclusion. Returning to the issue of line dance as protest in southern California, I recall how Phelan specifically points to a generational response to re-enacted genealogical and intergenerational trauma in the relationship between Los Angeles and violence. Phelan uses the language “anew the same rupture” to bring attention to specific histories of re-performance understood as iteration. Derrida notably writes on iteration in “Signature Event Context” (1972), describing iteration using the terms “riven [*crever*]” and “*force de rupture*.”¹⁰⁷ These word choices by Derrida seem like violent verbs to describe iteration. *Crever* translates from French meaning “to die,” and riven is defined as “to split or tear apart violently.” Phelan also uses the language “rupture” in the title of her essay continuing to directly link “Violence and Rupture” together in the context of re-enactment of live body works. Phelan continues to speak on the “re” within the context of the arts institution: “What I would like to suggest here is that the recent museological practice of ‘re-enacting’ and ‘re-performing’ live art may open onto a more radical approach to long-standing questions about the function and purpose of museums in general.”¹⁰⁸ Here, I want to express a similar intent when I began writing, that through a re-considered ontological practice of re-performance, we may access institutional unwalling or queering of the binary. However, even queered, I question if it is possible to access non-violence in re-performance.

¹⁰⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 9.

¹⁰⁸ Phelan, “Violence and Rupture,” 13.

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