

Archives

Performance Remains

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In theatre, as in love, the subject is disappearance.
(Blau 1982: 94)

Performance . . . becomes itself through
disappearance.
(Phelan 1993: 146)

We need a history that does not save in any sense
of the word; we need a history that performs.
(Blocker 1999: 134)

History [...] is never over.
(Le Goff 1992: x)

This essay is about performance and the archive, or the positioning of performance in archival culture, and takes up the long-standing invitation of theorists such as Richard Schechner, Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett and, more recently, Jose Muñoz, to think rigorously about performance as ephemeral.¹ It also accepts a similar invitation from theorists such as Herbert Blau and Peggy Phelan to think rigorously about performance as ‘always at the vanishing point’ (Blau 1982: 28). Taking up these invitations, I’ve set myself the following question: If we consider performance as ‘of’ disappearance, if we think of ephemerality as ‘vanishing’, and if we think of performance as the antithesis of ‘saving’,² do we limit ourselves to an understanding of performance predetermined by a cultural habituation to the patrilineal, West-identified (arguably white-cultural) logic of the Archive?

TROUBLING DISAPPEARANCE

The archive is habitual to western culture. We understand ourselves relative to the remains we accumulate, the tracks we house, mark, and cite, the material traces we acknowledge. Jacques Le Goff

stated this western truism quite simply, noting that history has been composed of documents because ‘the document is what remains’ (Le Goff 1992: xvii; see also Foucault 1971). The ‘we’ of this mode of history as remains (ruin) is not universal, but appropriate to those who align themselves with western societies, or societies which articulate (mythic) descent from Greek Antiquity.³

In the theater the issue of remains as material document becomes complicated – necessarily imbricated, chiasmatically, with the live body. For the theater, to the degree that it is performative, seems to resist remains. And yet, if theater refuses to remain, it is precisely in the repeatedly live theater or installation space that a host of recent artists explore history – the recomposition of remains.⁴ The question at the base of this essay is this: If we consider performance as a process of disappearance, of an ephemerality read as vanishment (versus material remains), are we limiting ourselves to an understanding of performance predetermined by our cultural habituation to the logic of the archive?

According to the logic of the archive, performance is that which does not remain. Radically ‘in

time', performance cannot reside in its material traces, and therefore it 'disappears'.

The expanded quote from Peggy Phelan reads:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. Performance . . . becomes itself through disappearance.

(1993: 146)

The definition of performance as that which disappears, which is continually lost in time, vanishing even as it appears, is a definition that has gathered added steam over the last 40 years. Such a definition is well suited to the concerns of art history, the rise of action and installation art and the pressure to understand performance in the museal context where performance appears to challenge object status and seems to refuse the archive its privileged 'savable' original. In this context, performance appears to offer disappearance – and thus performance suggests a challenge to the 'ocular hegemony' which, to quote Kobena Mercer, 'assumes that the visual world can be rendered knowable before the omnipotent gaze of the eye and the "I" of the western cogito' (Mercer 1996: 165). There is a political promise to this equation: If performance can be understood as disappearing, perhaps performance can rupture the ocular hegemony Mercer cites. And yet, in privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain, do we ignore other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently? The ways, that is, that performance resists a cultural thrall to the ocular – a thrall that would delimit performance as that which cannot remain to be seen.

I am concerned that the predominant art historical attitude toward performance might overlook different ways of accessing history offered by performance. Too often, the equation of performance with disappearance reiterates performance as self-annihilating. Paul Schimmel makes the perspective

clear in 'Leap into the Void', by writing that the orientation toward the act, which he historicizes as a post Second World War preoccupation, is an orientation toward destruction.

Although there are instances of lighthearted irreverence, joy, and laughter in this work, there is always an underlying darkness, informed by the recognition of humanity's seemingly relentless drive toward self-annihilation.

(Schimmel 1998: 17)

In his analysis, performance becomes itself as void. It may be a medium of creation, but a creation subservient to a disappearance understood as loss, 'destruction', and 'darkness'.

If we adopt the equation that performance does not save, does not remain, and apply it to performance generally, to what degree can performance interrogate archival thinking? Is it not precisely the logic of the archive that approaches performance as of disappearance? Put another way, does an equation of performance with impermanence and loss follow rather than disrupt a cultural habituation to the imperialism inherent in archival logic (see Richard Thomas 1993)? A simple example may serve us well: in a panel discussion at a Columbia University conference in 1997 on 'the document', archivists Mary Edsall and Catherine Johnson descried the problems of preserving performance, declaring that the practices of 'body to body transmission', such as dance and gesture, meant that 'you lose a lot of history'. Such statements assume that memory cannot be housed in a body and remain, and thus that oral storytelling, live recitation, repeated gesture, and ritual enactment are not practices of telling or writing history. Such practices disappear. By this logic, being housed always in the live, 'body to body transmission' disappears, is lost, and thus is no transmission at all. Obviously, the language of disappearance here is problematic and hugely culturally myopic. Here, performance is given to be as antithetical to memory as it is to the archive.

Should we not think of the ways in which the archive depends upon performance, indeed ways in which the archive *performs* the equation of performance with disappearance, even as it *performs*

the service of 'saving'? It is in accord with archival logic that performance is given to disappear, and mimesis (always in a tangled and complicated relationship to the performative) is, in line with a long history of anti-theatricalism, debased if not downright feared as destructive of the pristine ideality of all things marked 'original'.⁵

PERFORMING THE ARCHIVE

It is thus in . . . *domiciliation*, in . . . house arrest, that archives take place.

(Derrida 1994: 2)

If the 20th century is famous for, among other things, criticizing the concept of historical facticity, such criticism has not resulted in the end of our thrall to the archive. Rather, we have broadened our range of documents to include that which we might have overlooked; the stockpiling of recorded speech, image, gesture, the establishment of 'oral archives', and the collection of 'ethnotexts'. The important recuperation of 'lost histories' goes on in the name of feminism, minoritarianism, and its compatriots. In light of this, what does it serve to remind ourselves that this privileging of site-able remains in the archive – this ancient habit of mapping for monument – is linked, as is the root of the word archive, to the prerogatives of the Archon, the Head of State (Derrida 1994: 2)? How does the housing of memory in strictly material, quantifiable, domiciliable remains lead both backward and forwards to the principle of the Archon, the patriarch? The Greek root of the word archive refers to the Archon's *house*; by extension, the architecture of a social memory which demands visible or materially traceable remains is the architecture of a particular social power over memory.⁶ Does the logic of the archive rather *demand that performance disappear* in favour of discrete remains – the 'appearance' of material as non-theatrical, as 'authentic', as somehow non-mimetic?

In the archive, flesh is given to be that which slips away. Flesh can house no memory of bone. Only bone speaks memory of flesh. Flesh is blindspot.⁷ Disappearing. Of course, this is a

cultural equation, arguably foreign to those who claim orature, storytelling, visitation, improvisation, or embodied ritual practice as history. It is arguably foreign to practices in popular culture, such as the practices of American Civil War re-enactors who, often motivated by a distrust of documents, consider performance as precisely a way of keeping memory alive – making sure it does not disappear. In such practices – coded primitive, popular, folk, naïve – performance *does* remain, does 'leave residue'.⁸ Indeed the place of residue is arguably *flesh* in a network of body-to-body transmission of enactment – evidence, across generations, of impact.

In scholarly treatments, the question of the performance remains of history, or more specifically history which remains in performance practice (versus written or object remains), generally falls under the rubric of 'memory' versus history, and as such it is often labeled 'mythic'. Oral history also often falls under the rubric of ritual. In turn, 'ritual' generally (or historically) has fallen under the rubric of 'ethnic' – a term which generally means race- or class-marked people but which Le Goff cites as 'primitive' or 'peoples without writing' (1992: 55). Clearly concatenations of primitivism and attendant racisms attach, in turn, to attempts to acknowledge performance as an appropriate means of remaining, of remembering.⁹ Is this perhaps because performance threatens the terms of captive or discrete remains dictated by the archive? Is this in part why the logic of the archive – that utopian 'operational field of projected total knowledge' (Richard Thomas 1993: 11) – scripts performance as disappearing? Because oral history and its performance practices are always decidedly repeated, oral historical practices are always reconstructive, always incomplete, never in thrall to the singular or self-same origin that buttresses *archontic* lineage. In performance *as* memory, the pristine sameness of an 'original', so valued by the archive, is rendered impossible – or, if you will, mythic.¹⁰

Performance practice has been, historically, disavowed as historical practice. Though historiographers such as Pierre Nora claim that this attitude

is shifting in favour of a 'new' history that incorporates collective memory and performative practices, nevertheless that 'new' history is manifested in the constitution of 'radically new kinds of archives, of which the most characteristic are oral archives' (Le Goff 1992: 95–6). The oral is not here approached as *already* an archive, a performative archive. Rather, oral histories are constituted anew, recorded and 'saved' in the name of identity. Though this 'new' archiving is supposedly against loss, does it rather institute more profoundly than anything the loss of a *different approach to saving* that is not invested in identity? Does it undo an understanding of performance as remaining? Does such practice buttress the phallogocentric thrall to the oculo-centric assumption that if it is not visible, or 'houseable' within an archive, it is disappeared?

Let us consider more closely the example of battle re-enactment, and take the particular case of Robert Lee Hodge – an avid Civil War enthusiast who participates in re-enactments. As Marvin Carlson described him in a recent paper on theatre and historical re-enactment, Hodge has attained significant notoriety among re-enactment communities for his 'ability to fall to the ground and contort his body to simulate convincingly a bloated corpse' (Carlson 1999; see also Horwitz 1999: 7–8). The question is obvious: under what imaginable framework could we cite Hodge's actions as a mode of historical knowledge? Is it not rather mimetic representation, and somewhat bogus or indiscreet at that? Is the live bloater not offering a mimetic and perhaps even ludicrous copy of something only vaguely imagined as a bloated corpse? Yet, within the growing movement labeled 'living history', Hodge's bloating body is, for many enthusiasts, evidence of something more authentic, if not something authentic itself. Hodge's bloat is, in the often-ridiculed 'popular' arena of re-enactment, a kind of ruin – itself, in its performative repetition, a queer kind of evidence (Munoz 1996). If the living corpse is a remain of history, it is certainly revisited across a body which cannot pass as the corpse it recalls. If it cannot pass, what kind of claim to authenticity can such a corpse demand?

I am reminded of Charles Ludlam's queer Theater of the Ridiculous in which the replaying of classics or the 'camp' re-enactment of the folk art of vulgar commercial entertainment (such as grade B movies) offers a different though perhaps related kind of 'living history'. Obviously, Ludlam's was not 'historical performance' understood as a seamless master narrative. Rather his parodic evenings offered a fractured re-entry of remainders – a history of identifications, of role-playing and its discontents. In Ludlam's theater, as Stephan Brecht described it in 1968, 'Removal of cadavers, necessitated by the high onstage death-rate, is done with exaggerated clumsiness, the corpse does not cooperate – but mostly the dead just sit up after a while, walk off, reparticipate in the action' (Brecht 1968: 120).

When we approach performance not as that which disappears (as the archive expects), but as both the *act* of remaining and a means of reappearance (though not a metaphysics of presence) we almost immediately are forced to admit that remains do not have to be isolated to the document, to the object, to bone versus flesh. Here the body – even Hodge's bloating one – becomes a kind of archive and host to a collective memory we might situate, with Freud, as symptomatic, with Cathy Caruth after Freud as the compulsory repetitions of a collective trauma, or with Foucault after Nietzsche as 'counter-memory' – the bodily, read through genealogies of impact as arguably always performative. This body, given to performance, is arguably engaged with disappearance chiasmatically – not only disappearing but resiliently eruptive, remaining through performance like so many ghosts at the door marked 'disappeared'. In this sense performance becomes itself through messy and eruptive reappearance, challenging, via the performative trace, any neat antinomy between appearance and disappearance, or presence and absence – the ritual repetitions that mark performance as simultaneously indiscreet, non-original, relentlessly citational, and remaining.

Indeed performance in this light can be figured as both the act of remaining and a means of appearance. But we must be careful to avoid the habit of

approaching performative remains as a metaphysic of presence that privileges an original or singular authenticity. Indeed it has been the significant contributions of performance theorists such as Blau and Phelan that have enabled us to interrupt this habit. As theories of trauma and repetition might also instruct us, it is not *presence* that appears in performance but precisely the missed encounter – the reverberations of the overlooked, the missed, the repressed, the seemingly forgotten. Taken from this perspective, performance does not disappear though its remains are immaterial – the set of acts and spectral meanings which haunt material in constant collective interaction, in constellation. As mentioned above, performances-*as*-remains are suited to psychoanalytic analyses of traumatic repetition, to Althusserian analyses of the ritual tracks of ideology, and to Austinian analyses of enunciation, or citationality: repetitive *act*.

DEATH AND LIVING REMAINS

Given the importance of poststructuralism, let us not too rapidly dispose of the issue of disappearance, for surely if the field of inquiry is not already mined, it should be mined further. If Blau, Phelan, and Blocker are correct and performance is given to become itself through disappearance, to resist document and record, to deny remains, we find ourselves in a bit of an awkward bind regarding the argument so far. For upon any second look, disappearance is not antithetical to remains. Indeed, it is one of the primary insights of poststructuralism that disappearance is that which marks all documents, records, material remains. Indeed, remains become themselves through disappearance as well.¹²

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

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

As Derrida notes, the archive is built on the domiciliation of this flesh with its feminine capacity to reproduce. The archive is built on ‘house arrest’ – the solidification of value in ontology as retroactively secured in document, object, record. This retroaction is nevertheless a valorization of regular, necessary loss on (performative) display – with the document, the object, and the record being situated as survivor of time. Thus we have become increasingly comfortable in saying that the archivable object also becomes itself through disappearance – as it becomes the trace of that which remains when performance (the artist’s action) disappears. This is trace-logic emphasizing loss – a loss the archive can regulate, maintain, institutionalize – forgetting that it is a loss the archive *produces*. Here in the archive that which ‘disappears’ (or that which is actively disavowed) is the resistance of flesh to an imprint, the way flesh pushes back when touched – again and again – the body in all its detailed repetitions (see Foucault 1977). Here in the archive, bones are given to speak the disappearance of flesh, and to script that flesh as disappearing.

That loss as institution should make an equation that spells the failure of the bodily, the failure of mimesis, to remain, is rife with a ‘patriarchal principle’. No-one, Derrida notes, has shown more ably than Freud how the archival drive, which he labels a ‘paternal and patriarchic principle’, is both patriarchal and parricidal. The archival drive

posited itself to repeat itself and returned to reposit itself only in parricide. It amounts to repressed or suppressed parricide, in the name of the father as dead father. The archontic is at best the takeover of the archive by the brothers. The equality and liberty of brothers. A certain, still vivacious idea of democracy.

(Derrida 1996: 95)

Ann Pellegrini has stated this Freudian schema succinctly: 'son fathers parent(s); pre- is heir to post-; and "proper" gender identification and "appropriate" object choices are secured backward' – a 'retroaction of objects lost and subjects founded' (Pellegrini 1997: 69).

Elsewhere I have discussed this parricidal impulse as productive of death in order to insure remains. I have suggested that the increasing domain of remains in the West, the increased technologies of archiving, may be why the late 20th century has been both so enamored of performance and so replete with deaths: death of author, death of science, death of history, death of literature, death of character, death of the avant-garde, death of modernism, and even, in American playwright Suzan-Lori Parks's brilliant and ironic rendition, *Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* (Parks 1995). Within a culture which privileges object remains as indices of and survivors of death, to produce such a panoply of deaths may be the only way to insure Remains in the wake of modernity's crises of authority, identity and object. Killing the author, or sacrificing his station, may be, ironically, the means of insuring that he remains (see Schneider 2001).

Unfortunately, I do not have time to develop that side of the argument here. For the moment let me simply suggest that when we read this 'securing backward' Pellegrini discusses, this 'retroaction' of objects as action and drive, we are reading the archive as *act* – as an architecture housing *ritual*, rituals of 'domiciliation' or 'house arrest' – continually, as ritual, performed. The archive itself becomes a social *performance* of retroaction. The archive performs the institution of disappearance, with object remains as indices of disappearance and with performance as given to disappear. If, in Derrida's formulation, it is in domiciliation, in 'house arrest', that 'archives take place' we are invited to think of this 'taking place' as continual, of house arrest as performative.

To read 'history' as a set of sedimented acts which are not the historical acts themselves but the act of securing any incident backward – the

repeated act of securing memory – is to rethink the site of history in ritual repetition. This is not to say that we have reached the 'end of history', neither is it to say that history didn't happen, or that to access it is impossible. It is rather to resituate the site of *any knowing* as body-to-body transmission. Whether that ritual repetition is the attendance to documents in the library (the acts of acquisition, the acts of reading, writing, education) or the family oral tales of lineage (think of the African American descendents of Thomas Jefferson), or the myriad traumatic re-enactments engaged in both consciously and unconsciously, we refigure 'history' onto body-to-body transmission. In line with this configuration performance does not disappear, but remains as ritual act – ritual acts which, by occlusion and inclusion, *script* disappearance. We are reading, then, our performative relations to documents and to documents' ritual status as performatives within a culture that privileges object remains. We are reading, then, the document as performative act, and as site of performance.

REMAINING ON THE STAGE

As mentioned above, recent artists such as Parks and Piper attempt to unpack a way in which performance, or actions, or acts remain – but remains *differently* (the sense, perhaps, in which history is not only the imperial domain of the document, or in which history is not 'lost' through body-to-body transmission). Is this less a thrall to disappearance than an interest in the politics of (dis)location and (re)location? Is this a resituating of memory beyond the habituations of ocular hegemony – an ocularity that the phrase 'disappearance' privileges by virtue of antimony? That flesh memory might remain challenges conventional notions of the archive. By this reading, the scandal of performance relative to the archive is not that it disappears (this is what the archive expects) but that it *both* 'becomes itself through disappearance' (as Phelan writes) *and* that it remains – though its remains resist 'house arrest' and Derrida's noted domiciliation.

To the degree that it remains, but remains

differently or *in difference*, the past performed and made explicit as performance can function as the kind of bodily transmission conventional archivists dread, a counter-memory – almost in the sense of an echo (as Parks’s character Lucy in *The America Play* might call it). If echoes, or in the performance troupe Spiderwoman’s words ‘reverberations’, resound off of lived experience, such as performance, then we are challenged to think beyond the ways in which performance seems, according to our habituation to the archive, to disappear. We are also and simultaneously encouraged to articulate the ways in which performance, less bound to the ocular, ‘enters’ or begins again and again, as Gertrude Stein would write, differently, via itself as repetition – like a copy or perhaps more like a ritual – as an echo in the ears of a confidante, an audience member, a *witness*.

Arguably, this sense of performance is imbricated in Phelan’s phrasing – that performance ‘*becomes itself through disappearance*’. This phrasing, importantly different from an ontological claim of being, invites us to think performance as a medium in which disappearance negotiates, perhaps becomes, materiality. Works in which the political manipulations of ‘disappearance’ demand a material criticism – works such as Diana Taylor’s *Disappearing Acts* (1997) or Jose Muñoz’s ‘Ephemera as Evidence’ (1996) – thus create a productive tension within performance studies orientations to (and sometime celebrations of) ephemerality. It is in the midst of this tension (or this ‘pickle’ as Parks might put it) that the notion of performance as disappearance crosses chiasmatically with ritual – ritual in which, through performance, we are asked, again, to (re)found ourselves in repetition.

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

(Parks 1995: 13)

NOTES

1 The approach to performance as an ‘ephemeral event’ has been a cornerstone of Performance Studies, and has been evident as basic to performance theory since the 1960s (Schechner 2001). Interestingly, ephemerality remains. Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, another long-standing member of and influential thinker in the field, employed the term ‘ephemeral’ in 1998 claiming that: ‘The ephemeral encompasses all forms of behavior – everyday activities, storytelling, ritual, dance, speech, performance of all kinds’ (1998: 30). In an excellent 1996 essay, ‘Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts’, Jose Esteban Muñoz turns the tables on ephemerality to suggest that ephemera do not disappear, but are distinctly material. Muñoz relies on Raymond Williams’s ‘structures of feeling’ and argues that ephemera – ‘traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things’ – are a ‘mode’ of ‘proofing’ employed by necessity (and sometimes preference) by minoritarian culture and criticism makers (1996: 10).

2 Building explicitly on Phelan’s work, Jane Blocker recently employed the equation of performance with disappearance to suggest that performance is the antithesis of ‘saving’ (1999: 134).

3 Of course, the articulation of Greek Antiquity as foundational to history is itself is a powerful myth of primary origin, with Herodotus most often articulated as founding father. As many have argued, the ‘foundation’ of historical science goes much further back to the empires of Africa and the Near, Middle, and Far East – a lineage ‘disremembered’ in the interests of white racial agendas (see Le Goff 1992; Bernal 1989; on this issue in theater history see Bowman 1996).

4 See, for example, Keith Piper’s installation *Relocating the Remains* (1997). The work of Suzan-Lori Parks is also exemplary (1995). See Hal Foster’s (1996) essay ‘The Return of the Real’ on contemporary arts concerned with the ‘returns’ of trauma.

5 See Jonas Barish on the Platonic bases of a general cultural distrust of (or anxiety about) mimesis. That this distrust should develop contemporaneously with the development of archives deserves greater analysis, especially given the ironic fact that the first archives did not house originals. In ancient Greece, the first archives were used to store legal documents which served as official *copies* of stone monuments placed around the city (see Rosalind Thomas 1992). The notion of the archive was, then, linked quite profoundly to the safeguarding or strongholding of a more performance-oriented memory organized via *spatial* reminders in the form of monuments, art, and architecture. On the classical art of memory as performance oriented in the ancient world, see Yates (1966: 1–49).

6 Jacques Derrida unpacks the meaning of the word archive thus: ‘The meaning of “archive”, its only

meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house (private house, family house, or employees' house), that official documents are filed' (Derrida 1994: 2). While Derrida is correct about the root of the word and its meaning, the history of archives in the actual ancient world (versus in the traces left to us in name) is exceedingly more complicated than Derrida lets on, and beyond the scope of this essay. Though the modern world came to employ the word archive, a word certainly ghosted by the prerogatives of the *law* Derrida cites, in ancient Greece the word archive was not used to refer to the housing of documents (Sickingler 1999: 6). I have alluded to this briefly in note 5 (above), but to complicate matters, the first official state storeroom for documents in Ancient Greece was called the Metroon – the sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods. The Metroon was established in part to bring some order to official documents which had been scattered at offices of the magistrates.

7 Psychoanalysis has been keen to give us flesh as archive, but the archive of flesh supplied by psychoanalysis sheds interesting light on the drive to archivalism generally. The flesh archive, unlike official sites of memory, troubles or doubles or disguises all presumptions of origin – origins and 'first times' are, in the flesh house, quite clearly read as dissimulating doubles. And yet, there are ways in which the psychoanalytic flesh-archive accepts certain tenets of archontic domiciliation. Body-knowledge, or symptomatology, in the flesh-archive is fundamentally given to be blind to itself, even 'unknowing' (see Butler 1997: 10; see also Felman 1972). In this sense, the notion of flesh as blindspot (not remaining to be seen) is not necessarily antithetical to archival logic, even though feminists such as Shoshana Felman and Judith Butler redeploy the body as unknowing in an effort to undo patriarchal efforts to fix (read domiciliate) the body. Does the repetitive reinscription of bodies as 'unknowing' and 'unknowable' buttress or dissolve a certain archive-centric (oculocentric) foundation? For more on this question see Schneider (2000).

8 In his influential book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Walter Ong (1998) makes the claim that because they are performance-based, oral traditions do not leave residue, do not remain. Strangely, this claim is later debunked in his own book when he argues that many habits from oral culture persist.

9 Le Goff exemplifies this troubling leap from oral history to ritual to ethnicity and from ethnicity to 'peoples without writing' very neatly in his chapter on 'Memory' in *History and Memory* (1992).

10 I am grateful to Erika Fischer-Lichte for raising the question of 'mythic' history versus objective history at the 1999 *Kulturen des Performativen* colloquium 'Memory and The Performative' at Freie Universität in Berlin, November 1999.

11 Cultural historians now routinely accept popular and 'high art' representation as social modes of historicization, often under the rubric 'collective memory', a term culled from Maurice Halbwachs. Still, the process of reading aesthetic production as 'history' often involves careful (and debated) delineation between 'myth', 'tradition', and history proper (see, for example, Michael Kammen 1993: 25–32).

12 If remains become themselves through disappearance, another way to frame the central question of this essay is to ask what is at stake in the assertion that performance is *especially* given to vanishment?

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