

DEPARTING FROM HISTORY: SHARON HAYES, REENACTMENT AND  
ARCHIVAL PRACTICE IN CONTEMPORARY ART

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Departing from History: Sharon Hayes, Reenactment and Archival Practice in Contemporary Art

This thesis addresses reenactment and archival practice in the work of Sharon Hayes: a mid-career multi-media artist renowned for her use of archival documents to pose questions about history, politics, and speech. I do this through analyses of two of Hayes's projects, the series *In the Near Future* (2005-2009) and a series of projects the artist refers to as "love addresses." While these projects appropriate and repeat historical documents, Hayes's work is especially interesting for the way it emphasizes difference over authenticity and explores the ways meaning shifts across temporal, geographic, and social contexts.

In contrast to scholars who argue that Hayes's practice is nostalgic and serves to decontextualize and depoliticize history, my thesis argues that the pedagogical aspects of Hayes's work and her performative engagements with historical material are deeply political and contextual. My thesis demonstrates that Hayes's distinctive contribution is to model historical agency and imagine alternative futures.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Outside of the Democratic National Convention, in 2008, spectators witnessed a colorful yet anachronistic demonstration. Pink and yellow balloons, all marked G A Y in black type, scattered throughout the air. A tribe of queers dressed in flamboyant feather boas, blue hair, Lesbian Avengers, ACT UP t-shirts and the like, gathered on the lawn (fig. 1; see the Appendix for all figures). The assembly repeated in unison:

They say, my love that history moves in waves, from deep troughs to high crests. Sometimes I think you are in one and I am in another. I want to find a place to meet. I want to ride your crest as far as it will go to pull us out of the deep trough we've been stuck in for so long but it takes too much out of me...You are the land that I stand on. You appear and my whole world appears with you. I know you're here. I can feel you in the streets. Out of the closets and onto the streets. I need you. I need you to change. I need another revolution.

The speakers are not protestors but participants in artist Sharon Hayes's project *Revolutionary Love: I am Your Worst Fear, I am Your Best Fantasy*, 2008, Democratic National Convention, Denver, CO and Republican National Convention, St. Paul, MN, (fig. 2-3). They repeat a script that the artist wrote, a script that takes the form of a love letter (fig. 4). The line, "You are the land that I stand on," resonates with a comment Hayes made in reference to her art practice: "I assume feminism as a ground—something that is, was, and will be."<sup>1</sup> In that same conversation, her mentor and a fellow artist, Mary Kelly, recounted a panel discussion in which she participated. At the conclusion of the discussion, someone in the audience posed the question, "Where has feminism gone?"

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie Dick, Sharon Hayes, Mary Kelly and Kerry Tribe, "Something Like A Bridge: Roundtable discussion with Sharon Hayes, Mary Kelly, and Kerry Tribe. A Conversation on the Occasion of *Gloria: Another Look at Feminist Art in the 1970s*." *X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 13. <http://x-traonline.org/article/something-like-a-bridge/> (Accessed July 25, 2015).  
Another Look at Feminist Art in the 1970s." *X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 13. <http://x-traonline.org/article/something-like-a-bridge/> (Accessed July 25, 2015).

implying that feminist movement has failed or lost its way. The participants in *Revolutionary Love* seem to offer a response, “I know you’re here....They say, my love...history moves in waves, from deep troughs to high crests. Sometimes I think you are in one and I am in another. I want to find a place to meet.”

Born in Baltimore, MD in 1970, Hayes’s adult life has been lived in the wake of 2<sup>nd</sup> wave feminism and AIDS activism, a movement which has changed significantly since its earliest manifestation, before people with HIV and AIDS had access to treatment. Hayes describes herself as part of a generation who experienced “feminism” as an established movement, as “something which had happened.”<sup>2</sup> That is, she experienced second-wave feminism not through the events themselves but through its documentation. Her projects, which span the 1990s to the present day, re-examine historical legacies of social movements—such as feminism, gay liberation, and AIDS activism—and speculate on the different directions these historical (and ongoing) movements could have taken. Established yet stifled and incomplete, Hayes’s experienced these movements out-of-sync of their historical chronology. Her projects circulate archival documents and speak across time periods in an attempt to find a place to meet.

Re-speaking is a formal strategy that allows Hayes to reach both forwards and backwards in order to explore the ways two very different moments in time resonate and re-position the present tense. She collapses the past and the present while at the same time maintaining their specificity and historical trajectories to explore what the contemporary appropriation does to the past and vice versa.

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<sup>2</sup> Andrea Geyer and Sharon Hayes, “notes on Cambio de Lugar\_Change of Place\_Ortswechsel,” *LTTR #1: Lesbians to the Rescue*, (online journal, September 2002), last accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www.ltrr.org/journal/1/notes-on-cambio-de-lugarchange-of-placeortswechsel>.

Other artists who appropriate archival documents and repeat them in the present are loosely categorized under the umbrella term of “reenactment”—an emerging practice in contemporary art. Just in the last decade, a growing number of artists, such as Jeremy Deller, Mark Tribe, Diane Borsato, and Elisabeth Subrin, have conducted archival research and used strategies of reenactment to explore historical legacies of social movements, the majority of which look back to artistic and political legacies of the late 1960s-early 1970s.<sup>3</sup> These reenactments take two main forms, both of which take history as their subject with greater or lesser emphasis on authenticity or verisimilitude. Artists either reenact canonical works of performance art, or they appropriate archival documents of historical protests and reenact them in present day contexts.

My thesis addresses questions of time and its relevance to reenactment and archival practices through an extensive analysis of the critical discourse surrounding the work of Sharon Hayes. I interpret practices of reenactment as an embodied archival practice and as an affective means to practice history. It’s important to consider Hayes’s work in relation to reenactment and archival practice to discuss the different ways her projects circulate history and to what effect.

While Hayes’s projects also appropriate and repeat historical documents, her work is especially interesting for the way it emphasizes difference over authenticity and explores the ways meaning shifts across temporal, geographic, and social contexts. Indeed, the majority of Hayes’s artistic production references activist movements who frame their political strategy from a position of difference and opposition. This emphasis on difference productively disrupts traditional understandings of reenactment. In fact,

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<sup>3</sup> For examples, see the following projects: Jeremy Deller, *Battle of Orgreave*, 2001; Mark Tribe, *The Port Huron Project*, 2006-2009; Elisabeth Subrin, *Shulie*, 1997.

Hayes specifically distances herself from the term. I use the term in this thesis in order to locate Hayes's project in relationship to broader discourses and to examine the very different operations Hayes's re-speakings put in play. In contrast to the majority of her peers, Hayes's work is at once citational and transformative. That is, the artist uses the past in what we can call a "performative" manner: rather than attempting to repeat something that belongs exclusively to the past, Hayes uses the past to ask questions about the present. Put differently, Hayes disrupts the timeline of events in order to rewind to different futures. This is significant because Hayes re-speaks archival documents and puts them into proximity with one another in order to lay the groundwork for an experimental historical method that establishes movement and dialogue across time periods.

In order to address reenactment and archival practice, and attend to their various forms and debates in contemporary art practice, my thesis also includes brief discussions of two of Hayes's most relevant works. I explore two series: the series *In the Near Future* (2005-2009) and a series of projects Hayes refers to as "love addresses."<sup>4</sup> While each project uses repetition as a strategy, these works complicate the notion of reenactment in several ways. Not only do they explore the ways meaning shifts across temporal, geographic, and social contexts but they also engage strategies of anachronism to suggest a different relation to the present.

*In the Near Future* is my first case study. As part of the first iteration of *In the Near Future*, Hayes staged nine different actions in New York City over the course of nine days in 2005. Each day, Hayes stood alone on the street with a protest sign,

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<sup>4</sup> The "love addresses" are titled as follows: *Everything Else Has Failed! Don't You Think It's Time for Love?*, 2007; *I March in the Parade of Liberty but as Long as I love You I'm Not Free*, 2008; *Revolutionary Love: I am Your Worst Fear, I am Your Best Fantasy*, 2008.

appearing to address the public, but the sign she held pertained to a different era. This section will discuss *In the Near Future*, its historical references, and the ways her re-speaking echo difference and demonstrate instances in which the past ruptures into the present. These instances show the way historical legacies inform present conditions in addition to generating alternative futures and coalitions.

Throughout my analysis of the pertinent literature and theoretical issues surrounding reenactment and archival practice, I will also discuss three of Hayes's so-called "love addresses" that she performed between 2007-2012: *I March in the Parade of Liberty but as Long as I love You I'm Not Free*, 2008; *Revolutionary Love: I am Your Worst Fear, I am Your Best Fantasy*, 2008; and *Gay Power*, 2007/12. With the exception of the last piece, Hayes addresses the public in all of these works with a series of love letters that she reads in public venues and city streets. The archival documents these scripts quote range from poster placards, gay liberation and AIDS activist slogans, magazine clippings, and love letters from queer publications to photographs and film footage. For Hayes, gay liberation, like feminism, is an "unfulfilled proposition." Among other things, the love addresses attempt to reactivate a "set of relations surrounding love, power, and political agency" and insert them into the present dialogue about queerness and politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

My central claim is this: in distinct contrast to scholars who argue that Hayes's practice is nostalgic and serves to decontextualize and depoliticize history, my thesis instead argues that the pedagogical aspects of Hayes's work and her performative engagement with historical material is instead deeply political and contextual. My thesis



will demonstrate that Hayes's distinctive contribution is to model historical agency and imagine alternative futures.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORIZING ARCHIVAL AND REENACTMENT PRACTICES IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Since the late 1990s, exhibitions such as *Life Once More: Reenactment in Contemporary Art* (Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, 2005), *Ahistorical Occasion: Artists Making History*, (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006), and *Not Quite How I Remember It*, (Power Plant, 2008), have foregrounded reenactment and archival practice. The term “reenactment” is generally used to describe two types of projects. On the one hand, it refers to projects in which artists reenact canonical works of performance art, and on the other hand, it refers to projects that re-stage historical events in present-day contexts. For each, artists use archival documents in their reconstructions, sometimes as a physical component and other times, merely as reference.

Tied to visual culture as much as to ritual and theater, reenactment has a long list of precedents ranging from tableaux vivants, nineteenth-century pageantry parades, “living history” exhibitions in natural history museums, and historical reenactment societies to documentary films or historical fictions. Scholarly disciplines like performance studies, feminist, linguistics, film, and sociology have long argued that all representational practices are composed in repetition. Examples include Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, which argues that bodies become gendered through a “legacy of sedimented acts,”<sup>5</sup> and Richard Schechner’s definition of performance as

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<sup>5</sup> Butler’s theory of gender performativity hinges on a temporal condition—in that, Butler’s presentation of “the gendered body as the legacy of *sedimented acts*,” implies a process of accumulation, a temporal duration. The full passage reads: “My suggestion is that the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and *consolidated through time*. From a feminist point of view, one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of *sedimented acts* rather than a predetermined or

“restored behavior” or “twice-behaved behavior.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, curator Anke Bangma argues that the very act of remembering is a form of reenactment.<sup>7</sup> This line of thought recalls R.G. Collingwood’s influential text, *The Idea of History*, which defines history as “recollection.”<sup>8</sup> In his view, knowledge of the past is recollected from the point of view of the present; from this perspective, not only is history always already a reenactment but it is also recalled in relation to present conditions. Likewise, scholarly discussions by Rebecca Schneider, Sven Lütticken, and Elizabeth Freeman consider reenactment in relation to memory practices, archives, epistemology, and historiography—the ways knowledge is recollected and deployed in relation to the present.

In a recent roundtable discussion on reenactment in contemporary art, the moderator and theater historian, Shannon Jackson, offered a working definition: “an action or process of performing again, acting out a past event.”<sup>9</sup> For artists, sometimes reenactment is just that—the act of performing a past event again in order to instruct, commemorate, or to simply make it visible. Others use it as a historical technique, a deconstructive or revisionist strategy; while others take a genealogical approach and use

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foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic.” Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre History* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 523 (my italics).

<sup>6</sup> See Richard Schechner, “Collective Reflexivity: Restoration of Behavior,” in *A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*, ed. Jay Ruby (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 39-81.

<sup>7</sup> Anke Bangma, “Contested Terrains,” in *Experience, Memory, Re-enactment*, ed. Anke Bangma, Steve Rushton and Florian Wust (Rotterdam: Piet Zwart Institute, 2005), 14.

<sup>8</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Shannon Jackson, et al., “Again, In Another Time and Place: A Conversation on Reconstruction, Restaging, and Reenactment,” The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage video, 1:32:10, moderated by Shannon Jackson, presented at Fringe Arts in Philadelphia, PA on October 5, 2013, [http://www.pcah.us/posts/228\\_again\\_in\\_another\\_time\\_and\\_space](http://www.pcah.us/posts/228_again_in_another_time_and_space)

the past to trace the contours of the present. Artists informed by conceptual art, avant-garde strategies, and theories of representation not only appropriate political texts and other archival documents in order to question political representation but also to re-package them for performative effect. As Steve Rushton insists: the “question is not what reenactment *is* but what reenactment *does*.”<sup>10</sup> That is, artists like Rushton and Hayes explore the performative force of the re-speaking/reenactment—the ways it does something in relation to the present, or the ways the past ruptures into the present, which, in rendering the present moment askew, can shift one’s perspective in productive ways.

To summarize, I argue that artists approach reenactment in one of four ways: (1) for pedagogical or commemorative purposes, (2) to create a counter-document, one that deconstructs or serves to critique the mainstream media’s representation of a particular historical event, (3) as a genealogical investigation—to track the ways past legacies inform the conditions of the contemporary moment, and finally, (4) as a performative strategy that exploits error and anachronism to effect an action. In order to adequately convey the discourse on reenactment in contemporary art, I will speak briefly about the first three of these strategies before discussing Hayes’s artistic production.

## **Pedagogical and Commemorative Approaches to Reenactment**

### *Commemorating the Events of 1968*

To commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1968, in 2008, several exhibitions were mounted that explored the legacy of social movements from the 1960s, many of which

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<sup>10</sup> Steve Rushton, “Tweedledum and Tweedledee Resolved to Have a Battle,” in *Experience, Memory, Re-enactment*, ed. Anke Bangma, Steve Rushton and Florian Wust (Rotterdam: Piet Zwart Institute, 2005), 11.

foregrounded practices of reenactment.<sup>11</sup> This is one explanation for the increasing number of projects that reenact 1960s-70s protest. The art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson argues that artists return to this period for pedagogical purposes. In her discussion of Kirsten Forkert's project *Art Worker's Coalition (Revisited)*, 2006, and Mark Tribe's reenactments of anti-Vietnam era protest speeches, *The Port Huron Project*, 2006-2008, she writes:

The contemporary upsurge in rearticulating this period might stem from the need, in the midst of grotesque distortions, half-truths, and revisionist histories, to set the record straight, or even, for a younger generation, to *hear* the record in the first place.<sup>12</sup>

On a similar note, Patricia Milder argues that reenactment serves both a pedagogical and critical function. She links Hayes's work to other contemporary artists, like Tribe, who use the form of what she refers to as the "lecture-performance as activism through education."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, as a professor at Brown University, Tribe's motivation behind *The Port Huron Project* was at once pedagogical, commemorative, and nostalgic (fig. 5).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The following exhibitions commemorate the political and aesthetic legacies of 1968: *Protest in Paris 1968: Photographs by Serge Hambourg*, University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archives, Berkeley, March 12, 2008–June 1, 2008; *1968: An International Perspective*, curated by Richard Peña, Film Society of Lincoln Center, New York, April 29, 2008–May 14, 2008; *40 Years After: Filming the '68 Revolution*, curated by Charles Coleman, Facets Cinémathèque, Chicago, August 22, 2008–August 28, 2008; *1968: Then & Now*, curated by Deborah Willis, Tisch School of the Arts, Department of Photography & Imaging, New York University, New York, September 2, 2008–November 22, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Sounding the Fury: Kirsten Forkert and Mark Tribe," *Artforum* 46, no. 5 (January 2008): 96.

<sup>13</sup> Patricia Milder, "Teaching as Art: The Contemporary Lecture-Performance," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 33, no. 1 (January 2011): 14.

<sup>14</sup> Originally drafted for a 1962 meeting of the Students for a Democratic Society, Tom Hayden's manifesto, *The Port Huron Project*, became a rallying cry for the New Left. Tribe appropriates this title for his own project. He hired actors to reenact Coretta Scott King's 1968 address to a rally in Central Park which she gave three weeks following the assassination of her husband, Howard Zinn's 1971 address to a rally in Boston, and Paul Potter's anti-Vietnam speech which inaugurated the first anti-war march on Washington in 1965. Creative Time has since commissioned Tribe to reenact speeches by Cesar Chavez, Angela Davis, and Black Panther Party members, Bobby Seale and Stokely Carmichael.

He expressed disappointment over what he perceived to be his students' lack of political involvement in comparison to his own generation. In order to educate his students on the "proper" way to organize a movement, Tribe began to re-stage protest speeches from the '60s and '70s in their original form, creating a historical scene that his students could enter and, in his hope, replicate.

### *Re-performing the History of Performance Art*

In addition to the many exhibitions that re-visited the artistic and cultural events of '68, the historical emergence of reenactment also coincided with the institutionalization of performance art in museological contexts. Indeed, reenactment poses similar challenges to the ones curators face as they consider how to historicize a medium defined through its disappearance. As a reproduction of a past performance, reenactment undermines the defining tenets of performance art—presence and immediacy. Numerous exhibitions have also confronted the particular challenges involved in writing, representing, and re-performing histories of performance-based-work, a paradox considering the medium's antithetical relationship to reproduction is what initially drew artists to the form. In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Peggy Phelan's seminal text on performance theory, she argues that "[p]erformance, 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."<sup>15</sup> Thus, as a reproduction—and a mode of historical documentation

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<sup>15</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 146. Because a performance is incapable of being saved, reproduced, and circulated again; performance subverts the demands of the market, dismantling art's intrinsic relationship to capitalism. Therein lies the political force and utopian promise of performance art, or so the story goes.

itself—reenactment acts as a foil to the ways performance art has been conventionally understood and theorized.<sup>16</sup>

In exhibitions like *A Little Bit of History Repeated* (2001), *A Short History of Performance* (2003), and *After the Act: The (Re)presentation of Performance Art*, (2005), a younger generation of artists explore their relationship to canonical performance work from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. Serving as a pedagogical lesson in performance art, these re-performances, as they are typically referred to in museum contexts, call attention to the significance of documentary materials in the history and reception of performance art as younger artists, many of whom were born after 1970, establish relationships with past generations through the document and not the event itself. The performer does not re-perform the original event but what is left of it—the documentation. In this way, the document of the historical performance binds itself to the performer’s body. It is for these reasons that I consider reenactment to be an embodied archival practice.

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<sup>16</sup> For a more extensive discussion on reenactment in relation to theories of performance art, see Amelia Jones, “‘The Artist is Present’: Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence,” *The Drama Review* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 16-45. Jones argues that reenactment exposes the impossibility of presence and reveals the extent to which performance art is and has always been tied to the marketplace. Jones takes issue with histories of performance art that privilege its live and transformative aspects while denying its reliance on documentation. Her discussion revolves around artistic reenactments of past performances, specifically Marina Abramovic’s 2010 retrospective “The Artist is Present” and *Seven Easy Pieces*, a series of works that she performed over the course of seven nights at the Guggenheim in 2005. In the latter, Abramovic reenacted performances that were important to her development as an artist but performances she had never attended; she only knew them through documentation. While both Abramovic and the curators of “The Artist is Present” insist that the reenactments resurrect the authentic meaning of the original event, they ignore the extent to which the exhibition relied on documentation.

## Generational Specificity of Reenactment Practices

Understood as a memory practice and mode of archiving, reenactment is one way in which artists can not only learn about the past but also step into the space of enactment, step into the image, exploring their own relationship with a specific historical event. Mary Kelly argues that reenactment is specific to Hayes's generation of artists, those born around 1970. Her own students' preoccupation with the "events of '68," served as the catalyst for her work, *WLM Demo Remix* (2005). As the title indicates, this work remixes an archival image of a 1970 Women's Liberation demonstration. Over the course of a 90-second black-and-white film loop, the historical image slowly dissolves into its after image—a contemporary reenactment of the original scene (fig. 6). Neither image fades completely; rather, the two images bleed into one another to the point that one cannot clearly differentiate between the layers. Kelly used her students (Hayes among them) to reenact the archival image; and, what was most uncanny, Kelly remarks, is that "I didn't even have to tell them to wear different clothes—what you see in that image is not just a reenactment of that moment, but an unconscious identification."<sup>17</sup>

Like this anecdote suggests, Kate Eichhorn argues that "archives and archiving hold special significance for feminists born since the late 1960s because their knowledge and cultural production have become—by necessity—deeply entangled in the archive."<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Hayes's practice begins in the archive. For Hayes, "photographs or other

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<sup>17</sup> Ian White, "The Body Politic: An Interview with Mary Kelly," *Frieze* 107 (May 2007): [http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/the\\_body\\_politic/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/the_body_politic/)

<sup>18</sup> Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 3.



documents are the medium, the line of transit between past and present.”<sup>19</sup> She demonstrates this in every one of her projects through the strategy of re-speaking archival documents. In doing so, Hayes stages conversations between different historical moments. For instance, the event announcement for Hayes’s *Revolutionary Love* performance features an individual grasping a megaphone ostensibly calling a collective to action (fig. 7). While the print seems to document a contemporary participant in the project, on closer inspection, the individual pictured is actually cut from an archival image documenting an early gay liberation demonstration.

Similar to Kelly and Eichhorn who argue that reenactment and archival practice is specific to a certain generation, Freeman’s book, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, theorizes “queer transgenerational memory”<sup>20</sup> in the context of a younger generation of queer and feminist artists who look back to the 1960s and 1970s—what she refers to as the “afterlife of the sixties.” According to Freeman, “these artists exist in a moment...in which their history seems to be already written.” In other words, they live in a moment that is demarcated by the prefix “post,” having encountered history through the legacies of the 1960s-70s, the transformation of those political strategies in their participation in 1980s AIDS activist movements (Queer Nation, ACT UP, etc.), and now finally, are witnessing the commodification of these same strategies under neoliberalism. These artists are positioned as the “successors to mass movements whose

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<sup>19</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson, “We Have a Future: An Interview with Sharon Hayes,” *Grey Room* 37 (Fall 2009): 80.

<sup>20</sup> Similar to Freeman’s scholarship on “queer transgenerational memory,” and pertinent to this thesis, Rosalyn Deutsche describes Hayes’s work in similar terms: as a “retroactive transgenerational haunting.” Deutsche uses this term in the following articles: Rosalyn Deutsche et al., “Feminist Time: A Conversation,” *Grey Time* 31 (April 2008): 56. Rosalyn Deutsche, “Not-Forgetting: Mary Kelly’s Love Songs,” *Grey Room* 24 (Summer 2006): 33.

most radical elements were often tamed, crushed, or detoured into individualistic projects as they were disseminated through the mainstream media.”<sup>21</sup>

## **Is Reenactment a Critical or a Nostalgic Practice?**

Due to the way in which these artists have experienced history as Freeman mentions, Eichhorn argues that their turn towards history should be understood as an “attempt to regain political agency” in an era when neoliberal economic and political forces have drastically curtailed possibilities of political agency, democracy, and public voice and has limited non-profit driven attempts to transmit knowledge.<sup>22</sup> In what follows, I construct a dialectical argument. I agree with scholars like Freeman and Eichhorn who insist that artists who return to historical documents of protest do so to circulate knowledge and generate agency in a political climate in which all other possibilities seem foreclosed. On the other side of the debate, scholars like Paige Sarlin denigrate these types of projects because, in her opinion, not only do they perform a disservice to historical inquiry but they also obstruct critical engagements with the contemporary moment. In what follows, I discuss one aspect of Hayes’s *In the Near Future* in order to contextualize both sides of this debate.

While Freeman conceptualizes archival practices as attempts to mine “the present for signs of undetonated energy from past revolutions,”<sup>23</sup> Eichhorn also positions the archive as a central site of resistance. Like Freeman, Eichhorn does not regard the

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<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), xiv.

<sup>22</sup> Eichhorn, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, xvi.

historical turn to second-wave feminism as “pure nostalgia for another revolutionary moment,”<sup>24</sup> rather, the turn towards history “reflects a desire to take control of the present through a reorientation to the past.”<sup>25</sup> She writes: “I propose that examining the archival turn in contemporary feminism is one way to take seriously the political efficacy of failed social transformations and abandoned revolutions.”<sup>26</sup> Both Freeman and Eichhorn suggest that reenactment and archival practice become a way to rewind and reach back, grabbing hold of the stifled possibilities of the past to pave the way for a different future.

As Hayes explains, *In the Near Future* “engages very precise anachronisms to raise a set of questions about the present moment” and, as I argue, provides a critical launching board for the near future.<sup>27</sup> For instance, as part of this project, on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Hayes stood on the corner of Central Park at 59<sup>th</sup> St. and Columbus Circle in mid-town Manhattan, grim faced, with her arms outstretched, holding a sign that read “Who Approved the War—in Vietnam.” The words were hastily scrawled in marker as if to signify the urgency of the sign’s message (fig. 8). But this is absurd. Passersby wonder—What is the urgency? Why hold this sign now?—as they approach Hayes to remind her who approved the war forty some years ago. Surely Hayes knows that Vietnam has already come and gone. But has it?, Hayes seems to ask. The resonance between past and present is heightened because, similar to the Pentagon papers during the Vietnam era, papers had recently been released exposing, once again, the US

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<sup>24</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, xvi.

<sup>25</sup> Eichhorn, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Eichhorn, 32.

<sup>27</sup> Chris Mansour, “Citing History: Chris Mansour in Conversation with Sharon Hayes,” *Petrichor* (personal blog): <http://www.chrismansour.com/citing-history/>

government's deceit and what had really prompted the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The sign she holds replicates one that was originally held in 1962 at the Charter Day Protest, an unauthorized rally that students organized at the University of California to protest atomic bomb testing and the Vietnam War (fig. 9). "To repeat it," Hayes says, "is both to be absurd—intentionally absurd—and also to be dead serious, to a certain extent."<sup>28</sup>

The anachronistic aspects of Hayes's one-woman demonstration pack a campy punch. She uses historical material to not only place the past and present in dialogue but also to critique, and even to parody the contemporary political climate—the fact that history too often repeats itself. Standing on the outskirts of Central Park in the midst of a highly televised marathon, Hayes's re-speaking demands historical foresight; the sight of Hayes holding the sign "Who Approved the War—in Vietnam?" mimes both frustration and opposition to the contemporary wars as much as it questions the relative efficacy of historical models of collective dissent. In fact, one of the reasons Hayes's presence and the anachronistic signs she holds are so very present and pronounced is because they do not address a public directly, as one would typically expect from a protest. While *In the Near Future* references activist movements that pursue direct action (a style of political action in which a group of demonstrators address a public directly with concrete demands), Hayes's strategy is theatrical but indirect, and ironically, more visible, in this case.

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<sup>28</sup> Sharon Hayes, "Performa 2005: Sharon Hayes," interview by Doug Ashford, Clocktower Radio audio file, 28: 12, recorded on November 12, 2005, <http://clocktower.org/show/performa-2005-sharon-hayes>. Recorded in conjunction with the biennial Performa 2005 and the exhibition *After Before*, shown at Art in General, New York City, October 5-December 17, 2005.

As Julia Bryan-Wilson argues, “More than just recovering the past these re-speaking projects use archival speech to ask questions about the current place of stridency and forceful dissent, and the possibilities of effective, galvanizing political discourse.”<sup>29</sup> While Bryan-Wilson, Freeman, and Eichhorn linger on the potential of the archive to be deployed in order to inspire political dissent, other scholars argue that projects that return to documents of historical protest, particularly documents of antiwar activism, speak more towards absence than to political possibility. These scholars dismiss certain reenactment projects as reactionary practices that are neither critical nor concerned with content but are nostalgic, hollow, and devoid of critical engagement and historical inquiry. Far from galvanizing political dissent, for Michael Cohen, the political possibilities Bryan-Wilson mentions seem hopelessly foreclosed; in a nostalgic tone, he writes that Hayes’s “rambling searches for meaning” in documents of protest illustrate “the profound absence in our time of great left narratives.”<sup>30</sup> To simply insert a relic from Vietnam-era activism into contemporary discourse ignores historical specificity of both past and present conditions.

In echo of Cohen, Paige Sarlin argues that reenactment projects that make a blanket comparison between Vietnam era activism, “then” and “now,” or otherwise hold “the events of ‘68” in relation to the present, seem to presuppose the relative absence of contemporary antiwar activism. Though Tribe is her main target, Sarlin lodges a trenchant critique against both Hayes and Tribe. According to Sarlin, they use historical material in such a way that anesthetizes conflict and ignores the present in favor of an

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<sup>29</sup> Bryan-Wilson, “Sounding the Fury,” 96.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Cohen, “Sharon Hayes,” *Contemporary* 89 (2006): 57.

idyllic past. Sarlin compares these artists' practices to Walter Benjamin's concept of Left-Wing Melancholy, which is a term he uses to describe figures that are more attached to past formations and particular political ideals than to seeking change and developing new strategies appropriate to present conditions.<sup>31</sup>

To better contextualize her argument, as a member of the artist-activist collective, 16beaver, Sarlin is highly critical of the art world's relative silence concerning the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to Sarlin, art and cultural institutions such as the journal *October* promote these artists' work as a substitute for—and to feign—actual political engagement.

The cultural left...has embraced the reenactment and the structure of historical analogy to '68 as a form of 'political' engagement or response to the U.S. military and police actions in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>32</sup>

In her view, recent art practices that reference 1960s social movements "fetishize[s] the history of the New Left as a way of avoiding addressing the present."<sup>33</sup> Building on Walter Benjamin's notion of "left-wing melancholy," Sarlin argues that projects like Tribe's *Port Huron Statement* and Hayes's *In the Near Future* represent a form of what

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<sup>31</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Left-Wing Melancholy," in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Volume 2: Part 2, 1931-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Ben Brewster (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999): 423-427.

<sup>32</sup> The full passage reads: "More than simply an update, this new 'left-wing melancholy'—or, as I term it, New Left-wing melancholy—fetishizes the history of the New Left as a way of avoiding addressing the present. [...] Tribe's reenactments are exemplary of how the reproduction of history can substitute for an analysis of specific histories. In the case of Tribe, the reproduction of a form of protest through the staging of speeches erases the politics and labor of organizing and movement building and in doing so points to a particular relation to history, one that is explained by Michel Foucault's concept of the archive. [...] As a result, the reference to the past functions to forestall an examination of the very real challenges to building a contemporary movement, some of which stem from the inheritances of the New Left and its rejection of previous modes of class-based analysis, but many of which derive from the varied developments in the world and on the left in the intervening years since 1968." Paige Sarlin, "New Left Wing Melancholy: Mark Tribe's 'The Port Huron Project' and the Politics of Reenactment," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 50, no. 1/2 (Spring-Fall 2009): 141.

<sup>33</sup> Sarlin, 140-41.

she calls “New Left-wing melancholy.” The “generic references” to protest and radical histories serve not only to obscure the historical specificity of the 1960s but also to “forestall an examination of the very real challenges to building a contemporary movement.”<sup>34</sup> Far from a critical act, this particular orientation towards history limits art’s participation in the public arena. For Benjamin, left-wing melancholy performs a specific relation to history, one that transforms “revolutionary reflexes...into objects of distraction, or amusement,”<sup>35</sup> which are then passively consumed, not actively engaged. The term engages the psychoanalytical inflection of melancholia to describe a structure of attachment to the political past or to a particular mode of analysis or ideal, which obstructs engagement with the political present. Even though radical political histories are chosen as subject matter, Sarlin writes,

It is as if the very lifeblood that made the gesture significant is cut off; the movement or symbol is severed from its context, the political activity and movement that gave it meaning in the first place.<sup>36</sup>

The political theorist Wendy Brown also takes issue with forms of left-wing melancholy, and agrees that maintaining attachments to past formations while ignoring the present is nostalgic, ineffectual and altogether conservative.<sup>37</sup>

My question is: Can re-speaking and reenactment projects serve a critical function or are they always an exercise in nostalgia? Can the past be re-animated in the way Hayes intends, in a way that “does something?” How can looking back galvanize critical discourse and generate agency, or even, resistance?

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<sup>34</sup> Sarlin, 141.

<sup>35</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Left-Wing Melancholy,” 426.

<sup>36</sup> Sarlin, 143.

<sup>37</sup> Wendy Brown, “Resisting Left Melancholy,” *boundary 2*, vol. 26, no. 3 (Autumn, 1999): 22.

Brown offers one answer to these questions. She argues that if one's relationship to the past is fixed—"frozen" as Benjamin writes—then, yes, this "backward looking" glance is negative and indicative of a conservative politics.<sup>38</sup> But not all reenactment practices cause this problem; the key is to focus upon the past with attention to how it resounds differently in the present, a sentiment that Sharon Hayes shares. In order to avoid nostalgia, as Brown points out, what is most significant is the relationship between the reenactment and the history it references. That relationship must not be fixed. Brown seems to suggest that artists must create movement in the past with one eye on its possibilities, or unfulfilled propositions, and another eye to the echoes of the past in present formations.

For these reasons, and to avoid accusations of nostalgia and (New) Left-wing melancholy, artists like Hayes who appropriate historical documents and/or engage in practices of reenactment take an experimental approach rather than attempting historical fidelity. These artists emphasize difference and performativity and have a more nuanced understanding of history and time. As one will see in what follows, many use Foucault's method of genealogy and Benjamin's theories of history in order to investigate the performative force of the past's reoccurrence in contemporary contexts.

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<sup>38</sup> Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy," 22-26. Instead of developing appropriate strategies in the present, Brown argues that the Left mourns the past and blames the loss of a unified, coherent movement on postmodern theory and cultural identity politics. She writes: "the Left has come to represent a politics that seeks to protect a set of freedoms and entitlements [the welfare state and civil liberties], that confronts neither the dominations contained in both nor the limited value of those freedoms and entitlements in contemporary configurations of capitalism."



## Genealogical Approaches to Reenactment

For Hayes, projects such as *The Port Huron Project* are more about style than they are about history. She writes:

I can't just cut out the protest sign and put it on a wall in this present moment, because history for me cannot be accessed that way—it just becomes style. That excision is not actually an investigation; nor does it tease out how history is rupturing in a present moment. Instead, it becomes an anesthetizing of the conflict.<sup>39</sup>

Whereas reenactments that strive for historical fidelity tend to monumentalize, anesthetize, and naturalize history, Hayes argues that history cannot be accessed in this way—“the way it really was.” Rather, history can only be accessed when it ruptures into the present. Hayes looks to Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” to explore the way the past ruptures into the present moment. His theories are useful in describing artists who take a critical approach to history.

In contrast to Tribe’s *The Port Huron Project* and the popular practice of war reenactment that seek historical fidelity, to reconstruct “history as it happened,”<sup>40</sup> Benjamin conceives of a history that is folded into different moments of time. In this approach, the past is not seen from a set position of isolation outside of history; rather, the past can only be accessed in relation to the present and the present can only be understood in relation to the past. Like Benjamin’s angel of history whose “face is turned to the past,” while being blown backward into the future, critical reenactments revisit the past in order to re-contextualize the present. Benjamin writes:

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<sup>39</sup> Bryan-Wilson, “We Have a Future,” 87.

<sup>40</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 177.

to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ [...] It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger [...] Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.<sup>41</sup>

History does not translate to an accumulation of facts that show “the way it really was;”<sup>42</sup> rather, history is an articulation of those facts as they are interpolated by the “force” of the present. Benjamin insists upon locating a “spark of hope in the past” and reconstructing it in order to open up revolutionary possibilities in the present. Significant to Hayes, these “sparks of hope in the past” are ones that did not materialize in their time, but for Benjamin, are redeemable in the present, precisely because they are seized and re-spoken in a “moment of danger.”

As for Hayes, the significance of reenactment for artists such as Pil and Galia Kollektiv lies in its ability to “activate history from within the present.” Taking a genealogical approach to history, Kollektiv argues that “a successful reenactment would therefore simply expose this historical moment to a whole new set of ‘haphazard conflicts,’” which, should not be understood as historical relativism, as Sarlin understands it, but rather an inquiry into the force of its reoccurrence in the present.

## **Performative and Conceptual Approaches to Reenactment**

In contrast to scholars like Sarlin, who criticize the practice for weakening the referential concern and neglecting authorship and historical specificity, some of the more

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<sup>41</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books and Harcourt Bruce Jovanovich, Inc., 1968), 255.

<sup>42</sup> Historicism is an approach to historiography associated with the German historian, Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), who advocated a return to primary source material and proposed a scientific method of historical investigation that reconstructs the past “the way it really was” without the inflection of the present.

interesting analyses emphasize the conceptual, linguistic, and performative dimensions of reenactment. Before moving further, I will first provide the historical and theoretical context for the term “performative.”

The philosopher, J.L. Austin developed speech act theory and introduced the term “performative” in *How to Do Things with Words*, a compilation of his lectures, published posthumously in 1951. Austin's theories are significant to linguistic analyses of how we use language to effect and enact actions, or even to normalize ideologies. The collection analyzes the performative dimension of language, not what a statement says but what it does. "Performative utterances," or “speech acts,” are part of the "doing of the action" and they neither describe nor are they true or false. To use Austin’s example, in the context of a wedding ceremony, the words “I do,” do not describe an action—they perform an action: with these words, I thee wed. According to Austin, in order for an utterance to successfully perform an action, it must adhere to conventional procedures and effects. All conventional acts, acts with the general character of ritual or ceremony—like gender, a wedding, a reenactment—are subject to failure, what Austin calls the “doctrine of *Infelicities*.”<sup>43</sup> An infelicitous speech act “misfires,” failing to meet the conventional protocols appropriate to its particular context.

Antonio Caronia, for instance, considers reenactment a speech act precisely because the practice “weaken[s] the referential concern, the ‘descriptive’ function of the event.” Instead, “what comes to the fore is the act performed in saying something.”<sup>44</sup> Its linguistic and historical dimension are not merely descriptive, or citational, but

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<sup>43</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 14.

<sup>44</sup> *Re:akt!: Reconstruction, Re-enactment, Re-reporting*, ed. Antonio Caronia, Janez Jansa, and Domenico Quaranta (Brescia: fpeditio, 2009), 15.

performative. Caronia argues that reenactments “create something” or “create situations” that “create the conditions to alter the behavior of the spectators” in the moment of their utterance.<sup>45</sup>

Like Caronia, Hayes emphasizes the performative nature of her practice. As I previously stated, Hayes uses performance and the strategy of “re-speaking” to reach both forwards and backwards in time, to explore the ways this temporal mapping creates a new relation to the present. In performance, the body is inseparable from the medium which calls attention to not only the speech act itself but to the speaker and the relative virtuosity of the re-speaking—the degree to which it retains (in)authenticity. She writes:

Performance is one of the only mediums that allows me to take a past event of a speech—a body speaking to a public—and to displace the person, the body, and the public, but keep it in terms of the materiality of the speech act.<sup>46</sup>

Relevant to Hayes’s strategy of displacement and in distinct contrast to Austin, Judith Butler’s text, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, discusses Austin’s “doctrine of infelicities,” which she argues constitute the political potential of the speech act. She provides a helpful summary of Derrida and Bourdieu’s reading of Austin, whose readings attempt to account for the ways in which a speech act derives its illocutionary force—the ways words effect action, the ways they do things beyond merely saying something. According to Derrida, the political dimension of a speech act lie in its “force de rupture,” its break from its prior context, its decontextualization. For Austin, a speech act is only successful to the extent that it conforms to convention, that it is appropriate to the context in which it is uttered. Butler and Derrida flip his script: what Austin calls

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<sup>45</sup> Re:akt!, 15.

<sup>46</sup> Mansour, “Citing History: Chris Mansour in Conversation with Sharon Hayes,” <http://www.chrismansour.com/citing-history/>.

“infelicities” or “parasitic uses of language” are precisely the force of the speech act—the ways that words do something. A speech act acquires its power—its breaking force—because it is subject to “misfires,” failure, and error. For Schneider as well, “it is the labor of the precisely iterated error, the purposeful hole, or the calculated ‘misfire’ that *does things*.”<sup>47</sup> She asks, “What might a parasitical performativity actually achieve? What does it get done in the hollow, or echo, of its articulation?”<sup>48</sup>

For many art historians and curators, elements of fantasy, error, and anachronism are reenactment’s saving grace—its subversive potential. These scholars, such as Rebecca Schneider, Julia Bryan-Wilson, and Sven Lutticken, emphasize the political importance of re-working the past as well as the performative role that desire, error, and anachronism play in the production and circulation of alternative forms of knowledge. Catherine Grant and Giovanna Zapperi argue that similar to Hayes, artists who return to second-wave feminism, use history as a starting point rather than a script to follow. They incorporate fantasy and desire to generate new texts and to create the stories that are missing from the record. Anachronism and montage are aesthetic strategies to explore the relationship between the present and the imagined past.

Though he doesn’t include queer or feminist perspectives, Hal Foster also discusses artists who do not have a fixed relationship to an “authentic” past. Instead of reconstructing history “as it really was,” the artists he analyzes use the past as a way to pose questions about the present moment as well as to propose alternate futures. These

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<sup>47</sup> Schneider, 69.

<sup>48</sup> Schneider 69.

artists pursue “obscure traces” and “unfulfilled beginnings,”<sup>49</sup> using them as points of departure, not fixed destinations, in a “gesture of alternative knowledge or counter-memory.”<sup>50</sup>

Bryan-Wilson argues that Hayes’s work presents an “invitation for exchange,” which she means in two ways; her re-speaking events encourage participation, often scripting audience participation into the event itself, but more pointedly, Hayes exploits error, often exchanging one history for another or displacing one or more of protest’s identifying factors for conceptual and performative effect.<sup>51</sup> Although framing Hayes’s work under the umbrella term of reenactment, Bryan-Wilson distinguishes her practice from other artists who return to historical documents of protest. She emphasizes its performative and speculative dimensions and argues that Hayes is less invested in authenticity than she is in infelicitous speech acts—history’s “uncanny recurrences and unexpected recyclings.”<sup>52</sup> Her projects reference historical documents and past formations but her work, importantly, re-imagines the past, treating history as “scripts to be performed” rather than replicated.<sup>53</sup>

Following scholars such as Bryan-Wilson, Schneider, and Freeman, I argue that Hayes intentionally introduces error and anachronism in the re-speaking—what Austin would call infelicities—in order to reanimate the past and to produce a space of

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<sup>49</sup> Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Openings: On Sharon Hayes,” *Artforum* 44 (May 2006): 279.

<sup>52</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Openings: On Sharon Hayes,” 278.

<sup>53</sup> Bryan-Wilson, “Sounding the Fury,” 96.

possibility in the present. These errors of chronology and identity are the elements that *do* something, that reactivate history. Hauling archival documents and the bodies within around with her, she makes a proposal in tandem with her own embodiment in order to see the present anew. Far from being “stuck” in the past, Hayes’s re-speakings do not fetishize the histories of the New Left—or its models of political revolution and utopia—as Sarlin argues; rather, Hayes’s demonstrations relish in failure and are deliberate in their theatricality. In what follows, I will discuss *In the Near Future* in more detail in order to elaborate the ways Hayes uses the “precisely iterated error” for performative effect.

### *In the Near Future*

As previously mentioned, “Who Approved the War—in Vietnam?” was just one out of a series of actions Hayes staged on the streets of New York City from November 1-9, 2005 as part of her project *In the Near Future*. Over the course of nine days, Hayes staged a one-woman protest, demonstrating at a different location each day with a different sign during times of concentrated pedestrian traffic. But, like “Who Approved the War—in Vietnam?,” the signs she held did not address the present moment. Four of the signs she held, “Ratify the E.R.A. Now!,” “WE ARE INNOCENT,” “Who Approved the War—in Vietnam?,” “I am a MAN,” cited protest placards and signs that Hayes found in archives documenting histories of American social movements from the first-wave feminist movement, the Cold War, antiwar activism, and the civil rights movement. The others, “Nothing Will Be As Before,” “THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT may have to call in the NATIONAL GUARD to put this REVOLT DOWN,” “Strike Today,”

“Actions Speak Louder than Words,” “A STOLEN ELECTION or other intolerable event COULD SPARK millions to the street in A MASS REBELLION,” are hypothetical slogans that Hayes created referring to potentially “impending” events.

While the structure of *In the Near Future* recalls the National Spring AIDS Action of 1988, in which activists staged demonstrations over the course of nine days at different locations in NYC, all focusing on problems surrounding the AIDS crisis, each location where Hayes stood—Union Square, the New York Stock Exchange, Madison Square Garden, Times Square, Central Park, St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Adam Clayton Powell St. Office Building, City Hall, and the Washington Square Park Arch—carries the weight of specific political histories and activist demonstrations. Some bear the imprint of past ACT UP demonstrations, while others were integral sites to the women’s liberation movement, the gay liberation movement, and anti-war and civil rights lobbying throughout the late ‘60s and ‘70s. But the words on the sign, the body holding the sign, the time and the place were out of sync with one another. What, then, is Hayes trying to say?

Neither do these actions have specific goals or desired outcomes nor do they directly address a public. Neither is it protest nor is it a reenactment of a historical protest. But from the position of her own historically-situated, located embodiment, she does, in a way, reenact archival documents, placing specific histories, bodies, and identities in proximity with one another. What interests Hayes is the ways in which past events circulate, resonate, and “rupture” into the present moment.

For instance, on Sunday, November 6, Hayes stood on a sidewalk outside St. Patrick’s Cathedral from 11 am – 12 pm, holding a sign that declared: “I am a MAN”



(fig. 10). Not only is she thirty-seven years late to the 1968 Memphis, TN Sanitation Strikes, an influential civil rights demonstration that was comprised of black male sanitation workers, to which this slogan refers, but she also stands alone without a critical mass, on the wrong site entirely (fig. 11). What is the effect of inserting one time into another time? What is the effect of getting history wrong, mistaking and collapsing one event onto another? How does this impact historical understanding and political agency? Schneider argues that getting history “both right and wrong” creates “affect in the spaces between bodies.” As she argues:

hitting one time in another time, one tempo in another tempo, and getting the (historical) matter almost but not quite right can, much in the style of the jazz riff, get something both right and wrong simultaneously, spiking affect in the spaces between bodies and slide from act to ‘act’ to ‘act’ and back.<sup>54</sup>

On the same note, what does it mean when a queer, white, middle-class, and slightly androgynous woman holds a sign that originally spoke in the name of southern black male sanitation workers? The deliberate play with gender is even more pronounced because Hayes stands outside of St. Patrick’s Cathedral on a Sunday right as mass ends. As Bryan-Wilson points out, this action seems to reference transgender activism more so than the integral civil rights strike spurred by sanitation workers. And indeed, some of the most famous ACT UP demonstrations occurred outside of St. Patrick’s and focused on the Catholic Church’s perpetuation of the AIDS crisis due to the church’s restrictive views on gender and sexuality (fig. 12).

As I argue, *In the Near Future* reactivates memories of cultural events, and questions the ways they perform history and shape the cultural imagination of the present moment. By creating resonances between past and present, Sofía Hernandez Chong Cuy

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<sup>54</sup> Schneider, 66.

argues that *In the Near Future* amplifies the political conditions, public uncertainty, and “structure of feeling,” that emerged following 9/11. The “political dimension,” Cuy writes, “emerge[s] by raising confusion at the live event, and...by presenting a different set of meanings.”<sup>55</sup>

During the Cold War, a group of activists carried the sign “WE ARE INNOCENT” in defense of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg who the US government convicted of espionage (fig. 13). When Sharon Hayes held the same sign in Times Square in 2005, she layers that history atop the contemporary “War on Terror” in order to question the government’s suspension of rights in the name of patriotism (fig. 14-15). In addition to citing specific histories, *In the Near Future* also proposes hypothetical or potentially impending events; for instance, “THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT may have to call in the NATIONAL GUARD to put this REVOLT DOWN” alludes to both a potentially impending revolt as well as to the recent past, three months prior when the president failed to call the National Guard during Hurricane Katrina. “A STOLEN ELECTION or other intolerable event COULD SPARK millions to the street in A MASS REBELLION,” and the location at which she holds the sign, Madison Square Garden, makes reference to two historical events: the 2000 presidential election, and to the ACT UP demonstration and massive rally against George Bush’s public policy and candidacy at the Republican National Convention the year prior to the performance, in 2004 (fig. 16-17). Hayes argues that these legacies and unresolved debates create the conditions of

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<sup>55</sup> Sofia Hernandez Chong Cuy, “Nothing Will Be as Before,” in *After Before: In the Near Future*, ed. Sofia Hernandez Chong Cuy with Miguel Amado (New York: Art in General, 2007), 36. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at Art in General, 2005.

the current moment and impact “the ways in which we still actively stake out positions about personal responsibility, collective action, etc.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Mansour, “Citing History: Chris Mansour in Conversation with Sharon Hayes,” <http://www.chrismansour.com/citing-history/>.

## CHAPTER III

### SHARON HAYES AND THE AFTERLIFE OF EVENTS AND THEIR DOCUMENTS

One of the most pronounced aspects of Hayes's work deals with processes of political subject formation and the ways events and their afterlives mark themselves in the collective imagination. She conceptualizes her practice in relation to activist movements with which she is affiliated and has noted on several occasions how the "unfulfilled promises" of feminism have greatly informed her art practice. Hayes proposes, "that we become political, that we become artists in deep relation to precise locations and precise historical conditions. And that these singularities, these precisions linger with us, they are *carried along in our bodies*."<sup>57</sup>

When you see a photograph of political event, and it has an effect on you, it changes your life. If I am impacted by historical memory, [I] can't see it as a failure. I encountered the event of feminism—everything about my logic system changed.<sup>58</sup>

These statements inform my argument in many ways because not only do they demonstrate the complexities that arise when claiming a relationship to events in which one did not participate, but it also points to the ways that documents do something, the ways documents act, the ways they endure, the ways they are "carried along in our bodies." In this sense, events can be experienced at once inside and outside of their proper chronological moment, which disrupts linear notions of time and the idea that

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<sup>57</sup> *Coming After*, ed. Jon Davies (Toronto, ON: The Power Plant, 2012), 62. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, December 10, 2011-March 4, 2012 (my italics).

<sup>58</sup> "BOMB Live: Sharon Hayes and Lawrence Weiner," *BOMBmagazine*, YouTube video, 37:01, part of the series BOMBLive! In the Open: Art and Architecture in Public Spaces, June 8, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bviC4bfSAQw>.

history progresses forward in a single direction. Hayes's comments, "impacted by that moment which was not mine," serve to illustrate what is most significant about archival practices—their capacity to exert a kind of temporal performativity, an affective charge that, in part, reactivates historical moments.<sup>59</sup>

The idea that a document, something retrieved from the dusty bins of the archive, can be carried along in our bodies—embodied, as it were—is a provocative one. It upends a classic tenet of performance studies that poses an antithetical relationship between documentation and embodiment. Documents are what remain; performance disappears.

## **Performance and Archival Practice**

Performance historians such as Rebecca Schneider and Diana Taylor question the historical and political stakes of aligning performance and embodied practices with disappearance. Their scholarship emphasizes the importance of embodied histories and body-to-body transmission regarding practices of knowledge and memory. While Schneider's book explores the ways performance, as an ephemeral medium, remains differently (in distinction to objects that are more easily assimilated into and stored within an archive), Taylor investigates the effects of power on practices of memory and the formation of archives. She asks: "What is at risk politically in thinking about embodied knowledge and performance as ephemeral as that which disappears?...Whose memories 'disappear' if only archival knowledge is valorized and given permanence?"<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Diane Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University, 2003), 193. Her book explores the effects of colonial and state power on practices of

As primary sources, archival documents are “the first layer of history,” the “evidence” that provide the means to access history and to verify the existence or truth of a historical narrative. But for queer scholars, archives are often riddled with holes and silences. Contemporary queer art and theory challenges traditional notions of the archive, evidence, visibility, and truth. As Mathias Danbolt explains, queer archival practices “not only alter the hierarchies of legitimacy that structure the traditional archive; they also challenge the production of significance in history.”<sup>61</sup> Faced with huge gaps in the historical record, inconsistency, and error, the archive is a pressing topic for queer theory and histories of nonnormative sexual cultures. These scholars have had to confront gaps in the historical record and conventional standards of value and relevance while also challenging the material and conceptual boundaries of the archive. Similar to other performance and post-colonial critiques of the archive, which challenge the archive’s traditional reliance on photographic and text-based documents, Jose Munoz argues that a lack of queer presence in traditional archives relates to the performative and ephemeral quality of queer acts. Munoz’s discussion of archives also expands the notion of

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memory. She questions the imperialist systems of value that position the written word over and above embodied forms of knowledge production. What she calls “repertoire” refers to a “non-archival system of transfer” (xvii) and encompasses forms of embodied memory: “performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing...all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge” (20). Taylor presents the body as a “mnemonic device,” and she argues that “people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there’, being part of the transmission” (20). The archive, understood as the written word, and the repertoire are not opposed to one another, but they generate and transmit knowledge in different ways.

<sup>61</sup> Mathias Danbolt, “Touching History: Archival Relations in Queer Art and Theory,” in *Lost and Found: Queering the Archive*, eds. Mathias Danbolt, Jane Rowley and Louise Wolthers (Copenhagen, DEN: Nikolaj Copenhagen Contemporary Art Center, 2009), 42. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at Nikolaj Copenhagen Contemporary Art Center and Bildmuseet Umea University, 2009-2010.

materiality to account for the “traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things.”<sup>62</sup> Judith Jack Halberstam posits the archive as a “floating signifier implied by the paper remnants of shows, clubs, events, and meetings” and as “a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity.”<sup>63</sup>

## **Reenactment as Embodied Archival Practice**

Against conventional accounts that posit an antithetical relationship between performance and the archive—David Roman considers performance to be a form of “embodied archival knowledge.”<sup>64</sup> With similar intentions, dance historian Andre Lepecki argues that reenactment reflects a particular desire—a “will to archive.”<sup>65</sup> Likewise, Agnew proposes reenactment as a “form of affective history,” or, as in Roman’s formulation, an affective archiving practice.<sup>66</sup> From this lens, and as I argue, reenactment reveals not a nostalgic desire but a desire to bear witness, a desire to create an embodied archive—an unstable, visceral document, one ripe for ruptures, transformation, and tears of time. If performance and history are the elements comprising any given reenactment, not only is the body its own archive but archival

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<sup>62</sup> Jose Esteban Munoz, “Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts,” *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (1996): 10.

<sup>63</sup> Judith Jack Halberstam, “What’s That Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives,” in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, ed. Judith Halberstam (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 169-70.

<sup>64</sup> David Roman, “Archival Drag, or the Afterlife of Performance,” in *Performance in America: Contemporary U.S. Culture and the Performing Arts*, ed. David Roman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 137-78.

<sup>65</sup> Andre Lepecki, “The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances,” *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2, (Winter 2010), 29.

<sup>66</sup> Vanessa Agnew, “History’s Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present,” *Rethinking History* 11, no. 3, (September 2007): 301.

records and embodied memories are enacted and tried out for size, in real-time “onto/into” a performer’s moving body.

The exhibition *A Little Bit of History Repeated* pursues a similar investigation. Rather than juxtaposing photo and film-based documentation with a performance’s contemporary reenactment, the exhibition foregrounds the physical presence of the performer and proposes the body as a “flexible form of archive.”<sup>67</sup> There are no other documents on display—only the ghosts of those canonical stills that inform the history of performance art. As a “flexible form of archive,” these re-performances embody and trace the gestures and choreographed movement of past performances as they have been recorded in their documentation. It is precisely that film memory, which attaches itself to the performer’s body in the re-performance, leaving an afterimage, a historical residue, a stickiness that binds one time and one body to another. In this way, reenactment should be understood as *both* a live performance *and* a form of documentation.

On a similar note, Johanna Burton describes Marina Abramovic’s performances in *Seven Easy Pieces*, as “live images.” A series of reenactments of canonical performances, Burton’s interpretation is telling: she cannot differentiate between the image of the historical performance and Abramovic’s reenactment (fig. 18). “When does a piece begin and end?” she asks. Burton noted that the audience was walking about, casually talking to friends, and “speaking about [the] performance as though it were no more than a picture hung on a wall.” Here, figured as an archive—a collection of “live image[s]”—the body comes to the fore as that which stores and records, a medium

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<sup>67</sup> *A Little Bit of History Repeated*, ed. Jens Hoffmann (Paris: Edition Valerio; Berlin: Kunst-Werke Berlin, 2001), 11. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at Kunst-Werke Berlin, October 16-18, 2001.



capable of transmitting memories and knowledge while at the same time performing temporal dislocations. Building on C.S. Pierce's notion of indexicality, Schneider writes: "The relationship of a 'footprint' ... to bodily memory ... is here a question provoked by historical reenactment [...]." <sup>68</sup> Her book, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, concerns "the attempt to literally touch time through the residue of a gesture or the cross temporality of the pose." <sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Schneider, 11. Pierce's notion of indexicality is a theory of semiotics typically applied to discussions of medium specificity in photographic and film theory wherein the index is a trace or residue left by an object, a "footprint" that can be traced back to that which it signifies—in this case, a foot.

<sup>69</sup> Schneider, 2.

## CHAPTER IV

### ECHOES ACROSS TIME:

#### “TO GIVE YOU A PICTURE OF WHERE I AM”

Experienced at once as a document of a past event and an event happening in real-time, Schneider and Burton echo: when is a reenactment happening? What are its contours? When does it begin and end? Likewise, in reference to Tribe, Schneider asks: When does a call to action take place?

What happens to linear history if nothing is ever fully completed nor discretely begun? When does a call to action, cast into the future fully take place? Only in the moment of the call? Or can a call to action be resonant in the varied and reverberant cross-temporal spaces where an echo might encounter response—even years and years later? Can we call back in time? Across time?<sup>70</sup>

#### *I March in the Parade of Liberty but as Long as I Love You I’m Not Free*

In order to address Schneider’s questions in more detail, I will turn to one of Hayes’s love addresses, *I March in the Parade of Liberty But as Long as I love You I’m Not Free*, (2008), which she performed on the streets of New York City (fig. 19). Between December 1, 2007 and January 12, 2008, Hayes conducted eight marches; each began in front of the New Museum at Bowery and Prince St. in the Lower East Side and each ended at a different site of public address.<sup>71</sup> Over the course of each march, Hayes stopped at various street corners along the way, calling out to a long, lost love. Speaking through a megaphone, Hayes delivered a love letter penned to an absent lover in which

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<sup>70</sup> Schneider, 181.

<sup>71</sup> Many of the endpoints and stops within each marching path have significant ties to histories of queer art and activism, which I cannot address in depth in this thesis but will do so in a forthcoming essay. The following venues marked the end of her marches: Tompkin’s Park Square, St. Mark’s Church, Astor Place, Chatham Square, Judson’s Memorial Church, and Stonewall Place.

she pleads desperately for contact, or at the very least, a sign that her message has been received, however minimal the response.

I need to speak to you, my love. Of your life and of mine, of the past, and of the future, of sweet things that have changed to bitterness and of bitter things that still could be turned to joy. You refuse to answer my messages, my letters and my phone calls but I know that the ears are the only orifices that can't be closed, so I will speak to you from every street corner if I must.

The narrative describes a torn relationship set in the midst of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Communication has been cut off and Hayes searches desperately for a response from her “dear love” while reminiscing about the passion they shared demonstrating on the streets. The more burnt out the activists felt, the more their relationship suffered. More than half of the words in the love letter are appropriated from other sources, from Oscar Wilde’s *De Profundis*, the *Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, the love letters of Radclyffe Hall, Arthur Bell’s 1971 article about the second gay pride march, and various citations of historical protest signs, slogans, and other memorabilia. Hayes provides the chorus and structure of the piece. At each stop, before repeating her love letter, Hayes states her location, action, and the date. She tracks time in relation to World AIDS Day. The megaphone extends her voice into the distance and into the future:

To give you a picture of where I am, I am standing on the corner of Prince St. and Bowery. I am speaking into a megaphone. It’s Saturday, December 1<sup>st</sup>. Today is World AIDS Day.

It is not certain as to whether she intends for her speech to reach the immediate audience of those passing by or whether the words are meant to be passed on to her “dear love” as a recording. Wouldn’t those passing already know the corner on which she is standing? The art historian, Kris Cohen, attended the love addresses and his description of the

audience, or lack thereof, is telling. While a small group of art aficionados followed Hayes from the museum throughout the Bowery, the “audience” seemed as absent as her long lost love. As Kohen describes, while a few people in the street stopped briefly to listen, they stood just “close enough to hear,” but “never too near.”<sup>72</sup> Detached and speaking to no one in particular, without regard to anyone around her, the encounter lacked interaction (fig. 20). Nevertheless, Hayes walked tirelessly for five days during the months of December and January, delivering her love address, each time beginning “To give you a picture of where I am...”. While she invokes a past audience (the original recipients of the love letters—Lord Alfred Douglas, Radclyffe Hall’s lovers, etc.) as well as a hypothetical or future audience, collectivity is not formed across space but across time. Rather than making a direct address to a present audience, Hayes creates ruptures in time and reception. She calls backward and forward in time, addressing texts and people from past times as well as extending her address into the future. As she moves throughout the streets, stopping at seemingly random intersections (fig. 21), she repeats the refrain: “To give you a picture of where I am.”

Many scholars position her love addresses and one-woman protests within narratives of absence, mourning, or longing.<sup>73</sup> Kris Cohen argues that Hayes’s love addresses fail to reach its intended audience, and therefore indicate a “broken” relation within the public sphere.<sup>74</sup> While Cohen argues that Hayes’s “universalized slogans of

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<sup>72</sup> Kris Cohen, “Never Alone, Except for Now: Mediated Collectivity in Networks” (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2010), 187, ProQuest (UMI 3432709).

<sup>73</sup> The following scholars discuss her love addresses in this way: Kris Cohen, Virginia Solomon, Siona Wilson, Michael Cohen, Julia Rubin, and Paige Sarlin.

<sup>74</sup> Against Jurgen Habermas’s claim that citizenship and public life rely on reciprocal relations, ideals of equal exchange, Cohen argues that Hayes’s “broken echo of love,” upset norms of liberal discourse, and instead, her love addresses imagine a mode of collectivity that is not based upon reciprocal exchange.

love” are “simply not inclined in any particular direction, not toward an audience, not towards a lover, and not towards any specific effects or outcomes,”<sup>75</sup> therefore blocking a “participatory, dialogic, or relational aesthetics of encounter,”<sup>76</sup> Virginia Soloman listens to Hayes’s story of unrequited love and weeps. Bemoaning the institutionalized forms of homophobia that keep the lovers apart, Soloman argues that the “disjunction between the audience and the general public,” between those who listened and understood Hayes’s references to queer literature and history and those who walked by uninterested and unaware, (or, like K. Cohen, who listened but completely missed the historical references), “productively reproduced the structure of subcultures, illustrating the gulf between those who live comfortably within the values and hierarchies of dominant culture and those who use those structures against the mainstream.”<sup>77</sup> Siona Wilson makes a similar argument. Not only do Hayes’s love addresses interpolate queer love onto the public, but they also serve to critique the 1960s antiwar movement for its heterosexist insistence that “girls say yes to boys who say no.” Beyond a reference to the political rhetoric of the New Left, Wilson discusses the love addresses in relation to the AIDS crisis, calling them “scene[s] of mourning,”<sup>78</sup> which evoke “a shared feeling of love lost.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Kris Cohen, 193.

<sup>76</sup> Kris Cohen, 194.

<sup>77</sup> Virginia Solomon, “What is Love?: Queer Subcultures and the Political Present,” *e-flux* 44 (April 2013), accessed August 1, 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/what-is-love-queer-subcultures-and-the-political-present/>.

<sup>78</sup> Siona Wilson, “‘Girls Say Yes to Boys Who Say No’: Four Artists Refigure the Sex War on Terror,” *Oxford Art Journal* 32, no. 1 (2009): 140.

<sup>79</sup> Wilson, 140.

Rather than interpreting her love addresses as a nostalgic “scene of mourning,” and a demonstration of longing, I argue that this love address in particular makes a temporal investigation in relation to transgenerational memory and knowledge practices in histories of feminist and queer activism. The quoted sources and the refrain, “To give you a picture of where I am,” are significant formal elements. Not only is Hayes actively archiving her own geographic location within the performance itself, and in this way composing the live address as a forthcoming document, she is also constructing a set of historically and culturally specific subject positions for the two lovers, the speaker and the addressee. The street corners at which she delivers the love address are not random; they refer to specific histories and locations of queer activism and public art performances that took place on or near the intersections in which Hayes stands. Providing a picture of her geographic location and historical and cultural context within this re-speaking, Hayes constructs a dialogue across time periods and between archival documents.

## **Temporal Performativity**

As an “an intense, embodied inquiry into temporal repetition, temporal reoccurrence,” reenactment and its insistence on “performance remains” complicates the idea of presence and linear notions of temporality, clearing the way for a different orientation towards history.<sup>80</sup> In her discussion of temporal performativity and embodied acts, Freeman also emphasizes “the mutually disruptive energy of moments that are not

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<sup>80</sup> Schneider, 2.

yet past and yet are not entirely present either.” Pointing to the political force of citation and its implications for historiography, Freeman asks:

Might some bodies in registering on their very surfaces the co-presence of several historically specific events, movements, and collective pleasures, complicate or displace the centrality of *gender*-transitive drag to queer performativity? Might they articulate instead a kind of temporal transitivity that does not leave feminism, femininity, or other ‘anachronisms’ behind?<sup>81</sup>

Bodies that register “on their very surfaces the co-presence of several historically specific events,” carry a past that is at once past—a historical document—and one that is still moving—a “script” in the process of unfolding. If then, for Sarlin, reenactment’s “New Left-wing melancholy” hinges on an attachment to the past—in this case, the New Left’s vision of radical transformation—that remains, in Benjamin’s words, “thing-like and frozen,” creating movement in the past constructs an orientation towards history that is very different from what is described by left-wing melancholy.

Freeman argues that Hayes’s strategies of historical return are not “merely” nostalgic or citational, but “disruptive.” *In the Near Future* not only “cite[s]” but “incite[s]” and collective action.<sup>82</sup> To elaborate on Freeman’s reference to Judith Butler’s theories of gender performativity, the past, that is at once past and still moving, is positioned in such a way that leaves it open to “the possibility of a different sort of repeating.”<sup>83</sup> In this formulation, practices of reenactment do not naturalize history, leaving it “thing-like and frozen,” but expose the past to the possibility that, in its repetition, any given historical moment could unfold differently. And, indeed, Hayes

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<sup>81</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, “Packing History, Counter(er)ing Generations,” *New Literary History* 31, no. 4, (Autumn 2000): 729. Freeman argues that “temporal replay is not merely citational.”

<sup>82</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, 60.

<sup>83</sup> Butler, 520.

“refuses the idea that there is a naturalized way in which a series of events are meant to unfold in the world.”<sup>84</sup>

Hayes returns to history not to redress the “failures” of memory or to reconnect or to react to a misconstrued or “misplaced past,”<sup>85</sup> as Foster would have it, but to transform it, to activate it in a way that recalls Foucault’s notion of the archive—the archive not as a site or a collection of documents, but as something that acts, a system capable of simultaneously transforming the past, present, and future.<sup>86</sup> Likewise, the philosopher Jan Verwoert argues:

It might well be that the only way to do justice to those who were deprived of their future by the actual course of history is show history not like it was, but like it could have been (for them). . . . So to do justice to history could both mean to research actual and to imagine potential historical realities—to be painfully accurate in relation to the specificity of historical detail and playfully speculative when it comes to re-inventing the future of histories that had none.<sup>87</sup>

Hayes imagines history as it “could have been” and as it will have been. Her re-speaking of archival documents are as playful as they are concerned with historical specificity.

As Hayes admits, “perhaps I have been rewinding to certain moments in time in part to entertain a possibility that things could have unfolded in a different way.”<sup>88</sup> For

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<sup>84</sup> Bryan-Wilson, “We Have a Future,” 83.

<sup>85</sup> Foster, 21.

<sup>86</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

<sup>87</sup> Jan Verwoert, “The Crisis of Time in Times of Crisis: On the Contemporary Conditions of the Emergence of History,” in *Experience, Memory, Re-enactment*, ed. Anke Bangma, Steve Rushton and Florian Wust (Rotterdam: Piet Zwart Institute, 2005), 40.

<sup>88</sup> Andrea Geyer and Sharon Hayes, *History is Ours*, ed. Cynthia Chris (Kehrer Verlag Heidelberg: Kunstmuseum St. Gallen and Goteborgs Konsthall, 2009), 27. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at Kunstmuseum St. Gallen and Goteborgs Konsthall, January-April, 2010.



the installation, *Gay Power*, (2007/2012), Hayes collaborates with the feminist writer and activist Kate Millett (fig. 22-23). They provide audio commentary for a video projection of a 16mm film that documents the second annual 1971 Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade (fig. 24). These four reels of unedited film portray a tenuous moment, one split between two directions, because in 1972, gay liberation took a less radical direction than the Gay Liberation Front initially proposed. Hayes wants to reactivate a historical “model of power and love, *not to return* to that moment,” but to at once suggest a different direction history could have taken (fig. 25) and to insert a more radical notion of liberation into the contemporary conversation about queerness and mainstream politics—to, as Freeman would say, “contest the common sense of the present tense,” which positions “gay liberation” in terms of marriage equality rather than radical social transformation.<sup>89</sup>

Like Hayes, who rummages through archives searching for “sparks of hope in the past” the discarded remnants of unfulfilled social revolutions, and re-deploys them to at once think beyond the status quo of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and to postulate what could have been and what might be, Freeman looks to artists who approach the “cultural debris” of “incomplete, partial, or otherwise failed transformations of the social field,”<sup>90</sup> as extremely malleable force, temporal material, that has the potential to disrupt the present.

Kate Eichhorn’s concept of “archival proximity” refers to the ways knowledge is produced when archival documents are brought into contact with one another. In terms

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<sup>89</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, xv.

<sup>90</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, xiii.

of Hayes's re-speakings, this concept of "archival proximity" is a useful analytical tool because it speaks to ideas of temporal performativity in more explicit, material terms—the ways archival documents (and I would add, bodies) *do* things in relation to one another. Furthermore, Eichhorn advocates for the "archive's potential to be deployed as an apparatus through which one might retroactively *take a position* in the field of cultural production that was hitherto denied."<sup>91</sup> Similarly, from the vantage point of queer theory, Freeman reads Hayes's collapse of different moments as a strategy to make the past available in a new way, creating a "placeholder for possibilities that have yet to be articulated."<sup>92</sup> And, indeed, Hayes states:

I've started to think of myself almost as a placeholder...I'm holding the place of a kind of address that had meaning and resonance and impact at a certain moment in time. And I'm thinking about the possibility that that resonance and impact could be present at a future time.<sup>93</sup>

In this way, her projects generate "productive afterlives for subject-positions"<sup>94</sup> that seemed foreclosed at the time.

Theories of the archive and archiving provide ways to think about time, history, and notions of progress and linear development in distinction to dominant ideologies. Critiques of temporality often question the way cultural producers *position themselves in time* or, as Freeman questions, the ways power situates subjects into particular temporal orders, "ways of belonging and being in time."<sup>95</sup> Significant to what Butler calls the

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<sup>91</sup> Eichhorn, 22.

<sup>92</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, 84.

<sup>93</sup> Morgan Falconer, "Sharon Hayes: The Placeholder for Love and Politics," *db-artmag* 51 (October 2008): [deutsche-bank-kunst.com/dbartmag/en/51](http://deutsche-bank-kunst.com/dbartmag/en/51).

<sup>94</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, 85.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

constitutive acts of subject formation, “nonsequential forms of time,” Freeman argues, “can...fold subjects into structures of belonging and duration,”<sup>96</sup> that are invisible within traditional accounts of history. Derrida writes:

the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. [...] It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, *the question of a response*, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what this will have meant, we will only know in the times to come.<sup>97</sup>

Likewise, Hayes is searching for a response in the future, in the archive, on the streets. She repeats: “To give you a picture of where I am.” For Hayes, photographs and other archival documents are methods of transit between past and present. *I March in the Parade of Liberty but as Long as I Love You I’m Not Free* not only circulates historical documents, but also embodied histories and affective relations, which are not typically part of the archive. Understood as a queer archival practice, Hayes’s re-speakings effectively store, circulate, and reactivate ephemeral, affective, and embodied historical relations that would otherwise be difficult to access through more conventional historiographic methods. Throughout her re-speakings, Hayes creates archival proximity between documents and between the addressee and the quoted documents. Because Hayes interpolates the audience within the circulation of these images and histories, she shortens the distance between her listeners and the historical, cultural, and geographical position in which she is framed—an intersection in the Lower East Side on World AIDS Day. This is significant because, as Hayes mentions,

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<sup>96</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, xi.

<sup>97</sup> Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 27 (my italics).

The experience of the AIDS crisis and the AIDS activist movement are differentially shaped by emotional, geographic, social, and political proximity—how near or far you are or how near or far you choose to be.<sup>98</sup>

Similar to my argument, Lauren Berlant suggests that Hayes uses love and intimacy to create political proximity and “to induce collective potential for belonging.”<sup>99</sup> As I have argued, Hayes’s re-speakings attempt to (re)activate affective sets of relations that are part of activist movements in addition to creating a sense of shared timing and political proximity in order to call a collectivity into being.

## Epilogue

Rebecca Schneider describes the “circulation” of a historical moment or “event”—as in the event of second-wave feminism—as a “durational scene.”<sup>100</sup> Likewise, Hayes is interested in the ways things circulate—the repetition and circulation of the historical record. As I have shown through detailed examination of Sharon Hayes’s work and its discursive context, reenactment is an embodied archival practice; in contradiction to performance theory, which maintains an antithetical relationship between performance and documentation, embodiment and the archive. Whereas Paige Sarlin argues that the work of Hayes is symptomatic of New Left-Wing Melancholy because

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<sup>98</sup> Sharon Hayes, “Keynote Lecture,” *Creative Time Summit: Revolutions in Public Practice* (New York: New York Public Library, 2009), 57-64. Transcribed in *Coming After*, ed. Jon Davies (Toronto, ON: The Power Plant, 2012). Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, December 10, 2011-March 4, 2012.

<sup>99</sup> Sharon Hayes, *There’s So Much I Want to Say to You*, ed. Claire Barliant (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2012), 16. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at Whitney Museum of American Art, June 21-September 9, 2012.

<sup>100</sup> The quote is as follows: “we might think of the *circulation* of event, the procession of event in nonlinear time, as a durational scene of inter(in)animate enactment passed on as much by documents or objects operating as scriptive things as by persons passing them on, by, or around in the affective field of the ghost jump.” Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 178.

she reproduces “hollowed-out forms” and represents history as an “ineffectual loop of repetition and circulation,”<sup>101</sup> I have argued that Hayes re-speaks documents, creating an embodied and performative document—one that moves—in order to initiate a new relation to the present as well as to investigate the ways documents and events circulate in the cultural imagination. By evaluating Hayes’s *In the Near Future* and “love addresses”, I have shown that the artist uses the past in a performative manner to ask questions about the present, to disrupt the timeline of events, and to imagine alternative futures. Rather than a nostalgic inquiry and a longing for a time past, Hayes engages forms of temporal performativity to both reactivate past formations and to think specifically about the histories of social movements and the ways archival documents circulate across bodies and time.

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<sup>101</sup> Sarlin writes, “Tribe’s project, like the work of Hayes, exhibits a particular form of New Left-wing melancholy that makes visible the reproduction of hollowed-out forms. In doing so, they support a kind of political inertia in which history is represented as an ineffectual loop of repetition and circulation.” Sarlin, 144.

## APPENDIX

### FIGURES



Fig. 1. Sharon Hayes, *Revolutionary Love: I am Your Worst Fear, I am Your Best Fantasy*, documentation of performance, Republican National Convention, St. Paul, Minnesota; 2008.

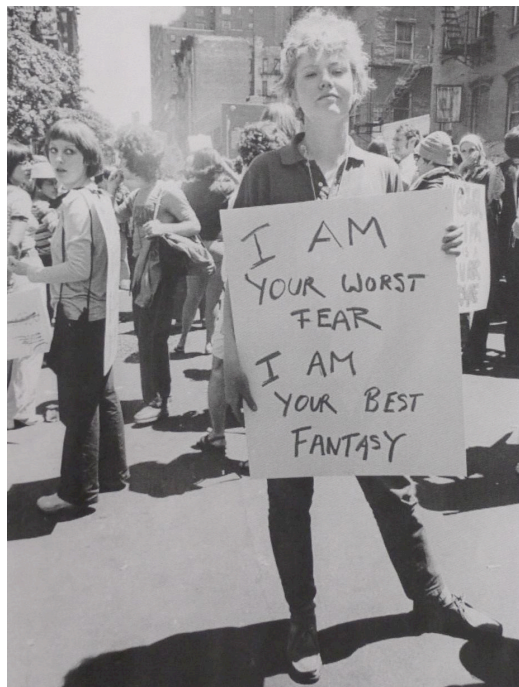
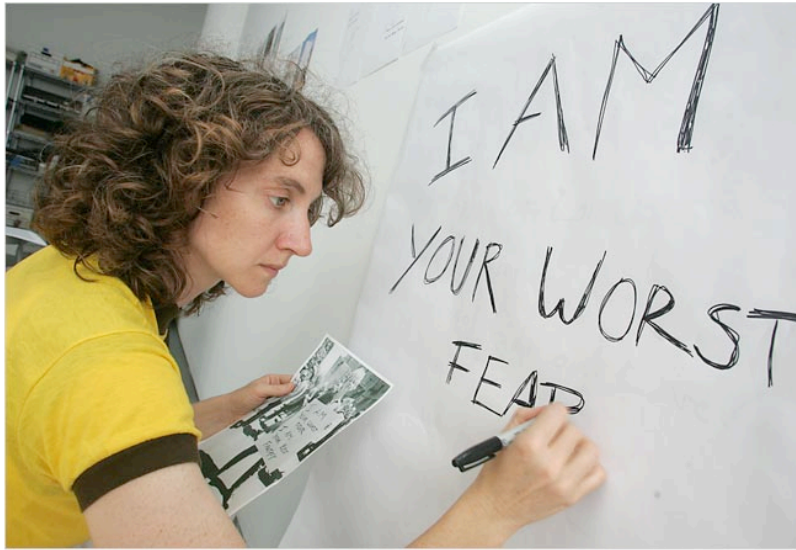


Fig. 2. Diana Davies, Donna Gottschalk holds poster “I am Your Worst Fear I am Your Best Fantasy” at Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day parade, 1970, black and white photograph.



Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times

Fig. 3. Hiroko Masuike, Sharon Hayes in her Studio [preparing for *Revolutionary Love: I am Your Worst Fear, I am Your Best Fantasy*], 2008, color image.



Fig. 4. Sharon Hayes, *Revolutionary Love: I am Your Worst Fear, I am Your Best Fantasy*, documentation of performance, Democratic National Convention, Denver, Colorado; 2008.



Fig. 5. Mark Tribe, *The Port Huron Project (We Are Also Responsible: Cesar Chavez)*, 1971/2008, production still.



Fig. 6. Mary Kelly, *WLM Demo Remix*, 2005, 90 second black and white film loop.





Fig. 7 Sharon Hayes, *Revolutionary Love I: I Am Your Worst Fear*, 2008, poster.



Fig. 8. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future*, 2005, documentation of performance.



Fig. 9. Bob Gill, "Who Approved the War in Vietnam?" 1962 Charter Day protests, 1962, black and white photograph.



Fig. 10. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future*, 2005, documentation of performance.



Fig. 11. Richard Copley. "I AM a Man," *I Am A Man*, 1968, black and white photograph, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://dlxs.lib.wayne.edu/iamaman/items/show/179>



Ellen G. Nejerin (Courtesy Photo)

Fig. 12. ACT UP demonstration, "Stop the Church," St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York City, 1989, black and white photograph.



Fig. 13. A demonstration during the trial of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, New York City, 1953.



Fig. 14. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future*, 2005, documentation of performance.



Fig. 15. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future*, 2005, documentation of performance.

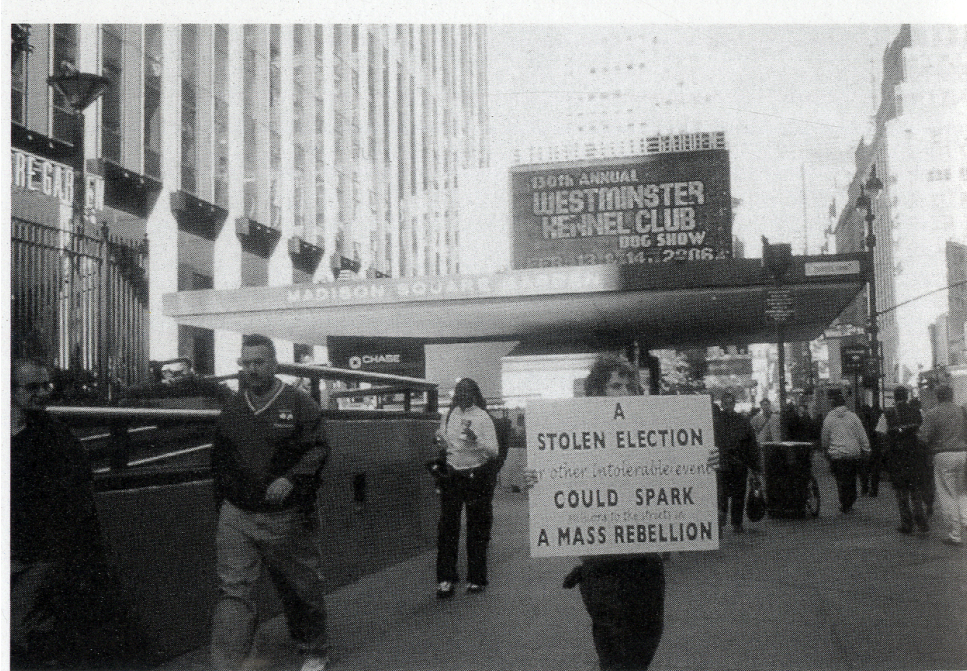


Fig. 16. Sharon Hayes, *In the Near Future*, 2005, documentation of performance.



Fig. 17. ACT UP demonstration outside of the 2004 Republican National Convention at Madison Square Garden in New York, 2004, color photo.



Fig. 18. Marina Abramovic, *Seven Easy Pieces: After Joseph Beuys: How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2005, color photo.



Fig. 19. Sharon Hayes, *I March in the Name of Liberty but as Long as I Love You, I'm Not Free*, 2007, documentation of performance.



Fig. 20. Sharon Hayes, *I March in the Name of Liberty but as Long as I Love You, I'm Not Free*, 2007, documentation of performance.



Fig. 21. Sharon Hayes, *I March in the Name of Liberty but as Long as I Love You, I'm Not Free*, 2007, documentation of performance.





Fig. 22. Sharon Hayes, Kate Millet, and the Women's Liberation Cinema, *Gay Power*, 1971/2007, 16 mm film installation (color, sound, looped), 33 min.



Fig. 23. Sharon Hayes, Kate Millet, and the Women's Liberation Cinema, *Gay Power*, 1971/2007, 16 mm film installation (color, sound, looped), 33 min.



Fig. 24. Sharon Hayes, Kate Millet, and the Women's Liberation Cinema, *Gay Power*, 1971/2007, 16 mm film still (color, sound).



Fig. 25. Sharon Hayes, Kate Millet, and the Women's Liberation Cinema, *Gay Power*, 1971/2007, 16 mm film still (color, sound).

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