

Performing gestures towards the archive

Queer fragments and other ways of mattering

Ben Cranfield

I am thinking of a fragment. It is a specific fragment, but, for my purposes here, it does not matter what it is. Whilst it certainly matters if this fragment exists as a projection on a screen, a piece of paper that could be easily torn in one's hands, a movement of the body, or as sound waves emanating from a source, it doesn't matter which. What matters is that it is specific, in the sense that it is a particular gathering of data-matter. As what Deleuze might call a virtuality or Whitehead 'pure potentiality' (Massumi 2011, 67–68), this fragment does not yet have any meaning. That is to say, it is not yet interactive – it does not yet participate in any network of human and non-human signification. It is all latency. My primary concern here is, how does this fragment, not yet actualised, come to matter?

Now let me say that this fragment is an archival one. Immediately this item exists in tension. The archive, as a structure of ordering, attempts to contain fragmentation. Through methods of categorisation, encasement and meta-data and, first and foremost, judgement, the items in the archive are made to 'belong' (Mbembe 2002). They no longer float freely but exist structurally. The structural surety of the archive exists as an indexical promise that it speaks to the entity in whose name it has been conjured into being – a person, an institution, a function or an idea (or a combination thereof). As Says Mays has argued, this attempt to 'fit' the archive to the thing that it is supposed to be archiving is an attempt at closure. For Mays, to 'finally wrest the very stuff from all this stuff, without remainder, without more stuff, is to fall into the condition of archive fever' (Mays 2013, 142). The primary function of the archive, to record that something has taken place, relies on its structures of verification that aim to defragment that which it contains. And yet, the indexical claim also means that which is in the archive and the archive itself are partial; they are understood to be necessarily fragmentary, incomplete bits of another time persisting in the present. As potential evidence, the archival item, despite and because of the best attempts of the archive, remains fragmentary – complete in its incompleteness.¹ It is the particular understanding of the archive as a place of legislative potential, of commencement and commandment (Derrida 1996, 1), that helps decide how the archival fragment will come to matter. If the archive gives the fragment its first-level significance, by enshrining it as a document of something or someone, then it is the practices of law and history that make the

archival fragment matter.² It is through these disciplinary exercises that the archival fragment takes up its performative role as evidence within the emplotment of History (White 1987, 44).

I share Hayden White's concern for underscoring the way in which History is a political act of the present and not simply a medium for the transmission of the past (White 1966; White 1987, 58–82). However, my concern here is not for History, per se, but for those archival fragments forced to do History's bidding. I am not suggesting that we foreclose on our desire to understand the present in relation to what has come before, nor am I wishing to give up on the use of historical narrative to render events meaningful, and I am certainly not saying that the value of documents as evidence be refused. Rather, I am interested in other ways in which the matter of the past, that is, after all, also matter of the present, comes to matter; how the fragment becomes radically present in ways that do not explain away its irruptive potential *as* matter in the present. More specifically, I wonder what it is to encounter the archival fragment in its uncertain state as simultaneously document/trace and matter/presence and what work this might do in changing ideas about who and what matters and how. To do this, I will turn to a practice from the field of contemporary performance/art that does not engage with what might be conventionally understood as archival matter (paper documents, photographs and the usual stuff of archival research), but that puts into radically uncertain relationship the material of the past and the material of the present in ways that challenge the neat narrative progression of past-present-future through the use of other types of matter to produce other forms of mattering. The often celebrated quality of performance, that of its presence (Phelan 1993, 146), means that its materiality and its forms of mattering seem to be indissociable from its location in the present. However, performance, even the most improvised and spontaneous sort, relies on the elsewhere of previous performance, whether rehearsals, remembered movements, genealogies of practice or recollections by audiences and performers alike of prior experience – what we might call its archive – that makes the performance legible as such. Indeed, it is the status of that little piece of matter that exists absolutely in the present as performed here and now, but is at once only possible because of what has come before, that I want to suggest offers a way of being otherwise with the matter of the archive. This piece of matter, that I chose to call the 'gesture', is the subject of my discussion below. What I want to explore here is not what the particular matter of the gesture is, but rather how the gesture performs a particular extra-communicative function that offers a paradigm for thinking about the archival fragment as both here and now, and then and there.

Archival bodies

Twenty Looks or Paris Is Burning at the Judson Church is a complex, mutable and expanding suite of performance works by Trajal Harrell. In the M2M (made-to-measure) version of the piece that I saw at the Barbican Art Gallery (the piece also comes in (XS), (S), (M), (Jr.), (L), (made-to-measure) or (M2M) and (XL)

versions) in 2017 (Moore 2014, 8), Harrell performed solo (this is not always the case), carefully and deliberately moving through a range of different ‘looks’. Each look comprised a particular form of dress and a series of movements, although pieces of clothing and types of movement appeared in more than one ‘look’, linking and blurring the specific set-pieces. In fact, as a first-time watcher, it was not clear to me how much was tightly pre-planned and choreographed and how much improvised. Either way, it is a moot point, as what was clear was that each movement, expression, pose, garment, action, look was, at once, exactly part of this particular iteration of the performance in this space and time and recalled from sometime/somewhere else. Each ‘look’ and each movement within each ‘look’ came with an implied genealogy; not a history as such that could be used to explain it away as pure quotation, but, rather, a clear sense that this is not entirely of the now, that these looks were somehow rearranged from a storehouse of looks past.

It might seem strange to explore the mattering of the archival-fragment-as-matter through the fleeting form of contemporary dance. But, I want to propose, it is exactly by looking away from what usually matters *as matter* that another way of approaching the space between past and present, trace and material can emerge. Furthermore, to look away from the archive as a place of documents, to the performing body as site of archival enactment is to reverse an important function of the historical form of the archive: the codification of the body within its structures of informational capture. Allan Sekula’s foundational essay, ‘The Archive and the Body’, made the compelling case that the documentary form of the photograph and the bureaucratic form of the archive were put to mutually supporting use by the desire to render the individual body and the social body knowable and, therefore, controllable (Sekula 1986). This idea of bodies assumed knowable through archival capture and the attendant problem of fixity I will return to below, but for now I want to suggest that Harrell inverts this relationship between the body and the archive. Rather than capturing the body through the archive, he captures, holds and unfolds the archival through the body.

Writing on Harrell’s *Twenty Looks* invariably recalls the question that Harrell has given as the origin point of the work: ‘what would have happened in 1963 if someone from the voguing ball scene in Harlem had come downtown to perform alongside the early postmoderns at Judson Church?’ (quoted in Moore 2014, 9). Whilst I don’t believe that this question explains the work, it does point to a particular temporal relation that initiates the work. Firstly, it recalls two distinct dance traditions (voguing/ball scene and post-modern dance) and spaces (the balls and Judson Church), that are called the specific ‘elsewhere’ of the work. I would call these ‘elsewheres’ archives, in the sense that they offer Harrell not so much traditions in which to work, but a body of traces and ‘a general system of the formation and transformation of statements’ (Foucault 2003, 146), from which to draw. Secondly, the ‘what if’ puts a speculative time into the frame as a way of invoking an imagined past into the present that, through its ‘what if’, also offers a future-orientated potential; how might things be different if this history had occurred or, more importantly, *could* have occurred? Consequently, the work offers a conflation

of archives of past material, with a fictional historical time (the what-if), a projected speculative future time (maybe this), within the present time-space of the work (actually this). For Harrell, this is less an exercise in historical recovery than an act of creating ‘an impossibility that invites us to rethink the possibilities we can have today’ (Harrell quoted in Moore 2014, 3).

To call *Twenty Looks* archival places the work within a recently developed understanding of contemporary performance that renders the body as archive. Andre Lepecki has identified that ‘turning and returning to all those tracks and steps and bodies and gestures and sweat and images and words and sounds performed by past dancers paradoxically becomes one of the most significant marks of contemporary experimental choreography’ (2010, 29). Lepecki calls this the ‘will to archive’, an adaption and reassessment of Hal Foster’s archival impulse, that renders the archival less nostalgic and more generative (ibid.). Working with Deleuze’s concepts of compossibles and impossibles, Lepecki’s will to archive is not about drawing on references for an evidentiary or historical purpose, but, rather, engaging with the never complete process of realising the possibilities contained within that which has already been (ibid, 31).

Crucial in what Lepecki outlines is the function of the body not just as recording medium or repository of the archive of dance’s past movements, but as the realising substrate for that which might have been and, virtually, already is part of what has been. In the examples Lepecki gives, the particular archival nature of the body – its ability to pull from the virtuality of past movements generative moments of newly actualised presence – and dance – as a particular space for the expression of this archival relation – are made explicit through the performed relation between an extant piece of material and its re-actualisation in re-embodiment. The ‘will to archive’ is, then, the wish to render the body performatively referential, but, still, generative; not simply destined to repeat, but wilfully recollecting and recomposing past matter into present reality and future possibility.

Undoubtedly Harrell’s *Twenty Looks* does just this, in that it is a demonstration of the generative nature of recalling and recollecting. But it does so specifically as an act of archival instantiation. Stuart Hall argued that all acts of archival formation are political acts of constitution, not just because they provide the tools for historical work, but because they produce a space of active (re-)collection. Hall called such a process a ‘living archive’ (Hall 2001). Building on this idea, I believe that *Twenty Looks* is a living archive because it attempts at once to contain and expose the fragmentary nature of material traces, as matter that exists both in the here and now and in another time, elsewhere. At the same time, the ‘archival’ nature of the work, like any bureaucratic archive, maintains the possibility of these traces acting as witnesses in the present for a reassessment of the past in order to ‘commence’ a particular future – specifically as moments of reassessment and recollection, as much as original and generative acts of reshaping material, what Hall calls the ‘active, dialogic relation’ in which the archive stands to ‘the questions the present puts to the past’ (ibid, 92). This is the temporal complexity held in Harrell’s question discussed above. What might seem a rather playful and simple question

of 'what if' becomes, as an archival enactment, a calling into being of traces and fragments to witness an imagined potential past that asks questions of the conditions which have led to the circumstances in which the 'what if' has become a provocative, necessary and possible (if unlikely) question to ask. That is to say, by enacting fragments from the two 'archives' of the Judson Church and the ball scene, Harrell instantiates a third archival scene, a no-place where the two are fused and entwined. However, *Twenty Looks* is not just an invocation of an imagined archive composed from the wilful crossing of two extant archives, but the formation of an archival will across the iterations of *Twenty Looks* itself. The seriality of the work makes manifest its own self-reflective historicity that marks another trope of contemporary dance in which an explicit retracing of a piece across time creates a reflection on the archival performance of self, as an unfolding referentiality in and through time; the becoming of self as a constantly referential archival process. Speaking about this phenomenon through the work of Jennifer Monson, Jennifer Lacey and Meredith Monk, Alison Bory reveals that the recovery of the past is an ongoing process of the present and past meeting and changing each other through the dynamic of the archival moment of re-embodiment (whether that be a human body or another sort of embodiment, such as film, exhibition or text) (Bory 2015). This matters because, as Hall implied, to make sure that this politics of the archive is 'alive' requires a reflexivity to be embedded within the archival mechanism itself, something which queer archive theorist and practitioner Jamie Ann Lee has been calling for through the incorporation of Queer Methodology into archival work (Lee 2017). The fictive archive established within both the singular instance of *20 Looks* and in the series *Twenty Looks* not only belies the presumption of fixity in the archive, and the fixity of identity, but also squarely locates the politics of the archival constitution (which is never complete) as a political act in the present.

If, as I have implied, *Twenty Looks* is archival because it structurally enacts a relation of past material in the present with an implied futurity beyond the historiographic, what, then, is the form that allows this to manifest? And, more pertinently to my question posed at the outset, what of the archival fragment itself? Does the very matter that Harrell is working with, all those recollected, recalled, channelled, reworked, remembered and recomposed pieces of movement from a conjured archive of exceptional-everydayness, matter? And if so, how so? I believe the answer to all these questions lies in a form that is attendant to many discussions of performance and certainly to the work of those concerned with the archival turn in performance: gesture. Indeed, gesture is the key to the works Lepecki and Bory discuss and sits right at the core of *Twenty Looks*. Gesture could be said to be both *Twenty Looks*' content and method. Gesture is that which links the movements of *Paris is Burning* to the Judson Church and that which allows Harrell to connect past and present. It is, I contend, that which acts as a conduit between the exceptional and the everyday and the past, present and future.

To start with the 'content' of *Twenty Looks*, it is a *tour de force* of exceptional-everydayness, or everyday exceptionality. This could be said to be the shared territory of the ball scene and the post-modern dance scene. The now famous and

popularised terms of the ball scene (realness, walking, serving) all indicate the need to exceptionally perform the everyday and make the exceptional (the cat walk, high fashion etc.) appear every day (effortless, 'natural'). Whilst, as implied above, all performance (or any meaning-making practice) is intertextual, composed and conditioned by what has been and is, and, in that sense, archivally referential, the ball scene is explicitly so, placing the habituation of observed attitudes, styles, mannerisms (all that Bourdieu would have called *habitus*) at the centre of a successful 'look', it is, in this sense, a distinctly archival practice. As Madison Moore describes it, 'voguing is a style of dance that borrows the language of its iconography and movement from poses seen in high fashion magazines' (2014, 8). But as Moore also says, the 'serving' of the look is more than borrowing or imitating, but 'a battle with yourself, a radical challenge to constantly deliver a compelling performance that upsets everything we think we already knew' (ibid, 5). This is not mere pastiche, but a reclamation of the excess of the everyday, away from the death of repetition – the petrifying space of normativity – by the 'living' of exceptionality within the margins of those spaces to which those of the 'scene' had been denied access. This is not about the fetishisation of marginality, but about the taking-possession of a future-orientated desire for a different way of living in the paucity of the here and now, even if the empowering and subversive possibilities of that taking-possession come with strict limits (Butler 2011, 81–97; Harper 1994, 90–103).

However, as Harrell slowly and purposefully struts down the barely demarcated 'cat-walk' of the gallery space, these ball scene moves have none of the ostentatious glamour of the ball scene but are tempered by a stripped-back, raw intensity. This rawness is present in every detail, from the clothes that are strikingly ordinary (a rubber washing-up glove replaces a long evening glove) draped carefully over the back of functional chairs awaiting Harrell to slowly clothe himself in them, to the looks he casts out to the audience that are as vulnerable as they are fierce. This is the everyday anti-theatricality of the Judson Church that blends and jars with the arch mannerisms of the drag-ball. I am tempted to say here that post-modern dance enacts the transubstantiation of the everyday into exceptionalism in reverse to the ball scene, but this is not quite so straightforwardly an opposite direction of traffic. It is true that post-modern dance came to dethrone dance as the exceptional site of movement through the radical interrogation of everyday movement within the rarified space of dance (Banes & Carroll 2006). However, just like in the ball scene, the use of repeated gestures from a studied everyday rendered the everyday excessive and extra-ordinary in the demanding scene of post-modern movement; in the ball scene, this could be the strut of a cat-walk model, or the puffed chest of the Wall Street trader (Harper 1994, 90–91), whereas in post-modern dance, this could take the form of eating a sandwich or combing one's hair (Banes & Carroll 2006, 61). Indeed, what both practices do is fragment the everyday into a series of gestures that can be not so much re-performed, but re-embodied *as* gesture in the space of performance. As such, the success of a post-modern dance performance, as much as a ball walk, lies not in the communicative success of an expressive

characterisation, but in the performer's fidelity to the recollected fragment. The difference between the two spaces of practice lies in the different relationships the performing bodies within those spaces had to the everyday. In the ball scene, all the gestures are both everyday and exceptional, because the spaces of the everyday being studied are those of privilege – middle-class, white, heterosexual, cisgender (sometimes together, sometimes sequentially) – from which the performers are themselves excluded. Whereas the exceptional everyday of the Judson Church is one that already existed as available for the performers within their everyday experience. The practices are then not so much opposing or complimentary, but parallel. What crosses the parallel lines (or tracks, to put it in more socio-economic terms) is the form of the gesture. Harrell explicitly crosses the beams of these gestural archives to produce something that is entangled. This entanglement also disorientates in a way that queers the relation between performer, gesture and archive. Harrell has spoken about people's assumption that because he registers as Black and queer, he must have been more familiar with the ball scene than that of the Judson Church. In fact, the reverse is true, Harrell having trained in the post-modern tradition and only having been an observer of the voguing tradition (D'Amato 2017). The archives that Harrell draws from are not channelled to secure for Harrell an origin point or a lineage, but, rather, by taking the material of two distinct practices and passing them through the archival process, as Lepecki describes it, of the performing body, a new singularity is created without reductive historicised origin, and with it a new set of gestural possibilities are actualised.

Gestures in time

That the gesture is profoundly prosaic and yet extra-ordinary, in that it exceeds the circumstances of its everyday functionality, becomes evident in Vilem Flusser's series of essays, *Gestures* (2014). Taking acts that might not even register to their performer as performed, Flusser dissects the particular ways in which gestures operate as sites of becoming and technical mediations. Lucia Ruprecht comments that Flusser 'subscribes to a theory of expression that [Giorgio] Agamben in his understanding of gesture actively negates' (2017, 6). And, indeed, Flusser's notion of gesture may seem quite different from Agamben's famous theorisation in 'Notes on Gesture', primarily because for Agamben the gesture is not a piece of expressivity in and of itself, nor is it action in itself, but, rather, an action that communicates simply the capacity for communication (Agamben 2000, 58). René ten Bos argues that Agamben's gesture is not for itself, nor for an end, but a support for a potential community of inclusivity: 'the politics of the gesture refers to a post-sovereign, non-exclusive, and affirmative politics. It is an anti-humanistic politics as it refuses to acknowledge a special status for human beings or for particular human beings' (2005, 42). However, despite the apparent difference, there is something in Flusser's assertion that a theory of gestures would be an 'interface theory' and it would not be a branch of communication theory, but, rather, that communication theory would be a branch of a larger theory of gestures (2014, 116), that calls

to mind Agamben's claim that the gesture is the support for and excess of communication. As Carrie Noland states, 'gesture exceeds dynamically its signifying or operational functions' (2017, 70).

What does this mean in relation to the particular matter of the performed gesture as archival fragment? It is the in-betweenness of the gesture, its suspension between action and communication, between a task to be carried out and an expression of pure information that allows it to operate as a fragment of and in time with particular potential. Because the gesture cannot be reduced to mere information to be received, nor can it be dismissed as a means-to-an-end, its materiality hangs in the air. But if it hangs in the air, it does not hang as an image on a wall, but more as a condensation, a sort of vapour trail, produced by the dynamic interaction of particular materials brought together in a certain movement. Indeed, for Flusser, gesture *is* movement (2014, 163). However, the study of gesture is more than a categorisation of a set of certain movements, say of the hand, rather: 'the facts are these: we are gestures. Through them, we come up against the events of the world in which we are gesticulating, the world that gesticulates through us, and that we "mean"' (ibid, 69). Reading across Flusser and Agamben, I wish to posit that the particular 'expressivity' of the gesture is not as a simple signal to be received, but a complexity that arises from the unavoidable intentionality of being in the world.

Flusser suggests that a theory of gestures would be coterminous with a philosophy of history: 'If a gesture is defined as an expression of a freedom, that is, as an active being-in-the-world, then the sum of gestures (*res gestae*) is history' (2014, 171). If gestures are history, then to propose a theory of the gesture would be the same as proposing a philosophy of history. However, Flusser is quick to challenge this idea and proposes that, alternatively, a theory of gestures could be understood as antithetical to the philosophy of history. Whereas a philosophy of history 'regards the gesture as a "universal phenomenon" in which a "universal human freedom" comes to expression (e.g. Hegelian spirit or Marxist subjectivity)', an alternative theory of gestures

regards the gesture as a 'quantized phenomenon' in which a specific, individual being-in-the-world is expressed in each instance, so that the expression occurs in a space-time specific to the individual, whereby an individual can for his [sic] part, be considered a knot in an intersubjective network.

(ibid, 173)

If a theory of gestures could be considered the antinomy of the philosophy of history, then does this not mean that the world decomposed into gestures could be considered antithetical to history? And, if so detached from historic time, what sort of temporal relation does the gesture then hold?

The gesture as an operation distinct from history shifts focus away from causality to the shape of the movement of the gesture. This means that the linearity of history is replaced with something like a simultaneous implication of past, present and future in the singularity of the gesture. This gives the gesture a technical and

figural quality. So understood, the gesture does not just become a way of being-in-the-world *a la* twentieth century phenomenology, but a primary form of ‘worlding’ as the ‘particular blending of the material and the semiotic that removes the boundaries between subject and environment, or perhaps between persona and topos’ (Palmer & Hunter 2018). Although the gesture is intentional action, its form of action starts to look more like the movement described by Brian Massumi as an arc of an event (2011, 16–17). Although, Massumi’s idea of event takes us beyond Flusser’s gesture as something that can be distinguished from pre-conscious or purely ‘responsive’ movement, it might start to explain the way in which the gesture comes to matter within an ‘intersubjective network’ as inseparable from the conditions of its taking-place. Indeed, Erin Manning, a long-time collaborator of Massumi’s, identifies the gesture (specifically the minor gesture) as a ‘lived variation’ (2016, loc 1587), by which she means a shift from within the vector of an experience. So defined, the gesture, as a micro-part of an event, becomes something that not only moves from past to present into the future, within a traditional frame of causal historical time, but exceeds and disrupts such a linearity in its particular manifestation of a past-present-future figure as a kind of polyp on the surface of the present. Understood in this way, the gesture is a piece of radical materiality operating from within the imminence of an event.

Archival gestures of queer mattering

So what of the gesture that is in some way recorded, archived, preserved, recollected, re-enacted? Extracting the gesture from its original eventful circumstance is to fragment it, to then recall that gesture through the body-as-archive is to both render the gesture archival – that is, situated amongst a scene of gestural traces of something past, connected by its provenance to a space of past significance – and to rematerialise it as a piece of data-matter participating in the event of the present. This is to hold in tension Flusser’s alternative positions on the gesture – seeing it as coterminous with historic action and, at the same time, antithetical to the historical imagination through its intersubjective, technical-mediating eventfulness – and, as such, opens up the gesture to what, in relation to a different context, Massumi calls a double vision (2011, 41–42). Rather than seeing this double vision as a problem, I see it as an opportunity to understand the gesture as speaking simultaneously to causal historic time and radically present materiality, not as opposed to each other, but as part of each other. This viewpoint becomes even more complex if we consider an explicitly re-enacted gesture. The gesture, recalled and re-performed, is at once a congealed piece of pastness persisting in the present, an arc of material becoming that exceeds the conditions of historic causality, *and* a piece of action aiming at the realisation of a particular end. Whilst a referential reading of gesture that would dissolve it into language would prioritise the first understanding, and an eventful, performance-based reading of gesture would privilege the second understanding, the final ‘historical’ reading of gesture would see it only as the ephemeral trace of that which is really important – its causal effect. But must we choose

between these foci of attention, could we not hold these multiple ways in which the gesture as particular fragment of space-time comes to matter usefully in tension? I believe that we can and that the gesture's primary value as *archival* fragment is to locate us between a potential historical, causal meaning of the fragment and the material presence of the fragment replete with co-existent potentiality. This is what the archive as a space of incompleteness, as I have described above, makes possible. Given that the archive holds its materials in-waiting for their use as evidence then, despite the best efforts of the archive to fix that which is held in the name of the entity that sits at the top of the archival tree, it cannot know to what future evidentiary uses it will be put. Furthermore, despite those ordering fonds, meta-data and all the pre-received narratives of value that may attempt to 'know' and 'place' those archival fragments into an archival structure (be it boxed in a formal institutional archive, or be it a notional archive of the New York ball scene, with all of its movements, clothing and phrases held by collective memory in place like so many archival items waiting to be ([re])called), the endless potential of all that material-in-waiting can never quite be kept in its proper place. The very materiality of the archival fragment, however ephemeral, always threatens to exceed its status as witness. Its materiality lives. But its materiality includes its pastness – its particular qualities of being here and now and then and there. If the gesture can be understood as an archival fragment, in that it is recalled from a 'storehouse' of past movements, and, simultaneously, is enacted in the scene of the present, then I want to claim that *all* archival fragments are gestural, in that they have the potential to create an arc in the present through their co-temporality as of the 'now' and of the 'then'. The archival fragment is, like the gesture, always in movement between the possibility of speaking to the past in the present, and the potential of enacting an unrealised past in the present towards yet-to-be realised futures.

Potentiality was queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz's preferred term, borrowed from Agamben, for the utopianism held within certain archival fragments. Whilst all the archival fragments Muñoz animated through his writing were gestural in their utopian capacity to project past futurity into the present and towards other potential futures, the archive of queer gestures Muñoz assembled held for him a particular potential (2009, 1–3). He considered the gesture, in its ephemerality, not as that which has no matter, but as another form of matter that suggests another way of mattering (*ibid*, 81). It is perhaps no coincidence that Muñoz theorised this position from a consideration of queer club performer Kevin Aviance, whose own gestures are deeply influenced by voguing and queer ball practices. For Muñoz, Aviance's performances are marked by rupture; staccato movements that not only cut the space of the club but also produce a temporal punctuation in its conventional rhythms. Aviance uses disjunctive gestures to produce a particular, arresting queer space/time within the busy space/time of the gay club (*ibid*, 75). However, it is Muñoz's (re)collection of Aviance's gestures that fragments Aviance's performance by recalling specific, discrete gestures as momentary forms of worlding in and of themselves – most notably the crack of the performer's ankle as they stomp the stage in gravity defying heels. If Aviance's body is an archive – in Lepecki's

sense of a recording and reordering medium, transforming observed gestures into dynamically generative configurations – then Muñoz sees each of Aviance’s gestures as archival fragments; that is, individual pieces of matter moving in an arc of time connecting past, present and future. Or, rather, mattering-moments that enact a potentiality derived from past-gestures in the present with an implied futurity created by the gap (temporal and spatial) that the gesture opens up within that moment of (re)presentation. For Muñoz, Aviance’s gestures embody a queer futurity, not because they exist outside of the present of their performance, but because they occur as absolutely a part of the present – arising from within the conditions of possibility of that present and yet exceeding the normative limits of that present. It is this temporally suggestive movement that constitutes the gesture as an archival modality, performing the movement not of the archive per se, but of the archival fragment – a piece of matter connected to another place and time, existing in the present, holding the potentiality of a future manifestation. But if Aviance’s body stores an archive of gestures, it is Muñoz’s recollection of those gestures that re-performs them as a scene of archival constitution. Weaving personal stories of his own queer gestures (the way as a child he walked, the way he sat) and the ways in which these gestures ruptured the normative present of his family life (*ibid*, 67–68), with a recollection of Aviance’s hyper-feminised club moves, Muñoz constitutes an archival ‘third’ space where the traces of queer gestures can be given not only archival provenance (a placement of significance based on historical witnessing), but that contrary archival ordering principle of pertinence (the potential material value of recollected eventfulness for and in the present). In this moment of archival instantiation, there is a claim not only for historic visibility for queer moments that have mattered, but for the on-going mattering of an overlooked type of matter. The fact that the gesture is fleeting, not easily captured, claimed or verified, does not make it insignificant, rather:

For queers, the gesture and its aftermath, the ephemeral trace, matter more than many traditional modes of evidencing lives and politics. The hermeneutics of residue on which I have called are calibrated to read Aviance’s gestures and know these moves a vast storehouse of queer history and futurity. We also must understand that after the gesture expires, its materiality has transformed into ephemera that are utterly necessary.

(*ibid*, 81)

On the one hand, the gesture comes to matter as it is understood to document a queer moment of historic significance and, through the archival reverberation of the performer’s gesture back through time, calls forth notional boxes of queer archival fragments linked through provenance to particular scenes of occurrence, or specific performers. On the other, it matters precisely because it defies explicit capture as ‘evidence’ and rather moves affectively through the bodies of the crowd who carry it forward into other archival-gestural futures through a principle of pertinence – how these fragments, because and beyond their significance of origin,

might be kept and shared in new mattering formations. Aviance's gestures, for Muñoz, come to matter as an archival performance that takes a fragment of elsewhere and reanimates it in the present to provide evidence of a different sort of a future recomposed from the matter of the past. The gesture is of course partial, with its arc only suggestive of another type of historical mattering, that cuts the present towards a different future. It completes its arc within the present and falls away. But that is not to say that it doesn't matter. The gesture is performed to be seen and to be shared. As such, its movement is passed on and through the other bodies that witness it, leaving a trace that may just produce another gesture that matters differently in another place and another time. Both of these ways of mattering come together in Muñoz's writing, which in itself produces something like a non-historical narrative of fragmentary recollection – a queer relation between otherwise disconnected queer gestures. I would argue that *Twenty Looks* is both Aviance and Muñoz – both the body as archive and the re-collector as archivist. Yet not the archivist who does their work to allow the historian to come and render the material event of the gesture as a ghost in the footnote of History, but the archival performer who, in Lepecki's words, performs 'difference with repetition, repetition because of difference – both operating under the sign of creation and never of failure, unleashing history and dances toward afterlives' (2010, 46).

Lost in gestures, or, towards a queer archive of supporting matter

Harrell's work holds a space where a series of previously unconnected gestures can come to matter as an archival scene of commencement and commandment of another way of mattering. This radically other form of archive I would call a queer (dis)order, after Muñoz, because it releases the archival fragment from its entrapment as evidentiary footnote in the histories to which its mattering had been reduced and instead understands the fragment as a gesture that bodies forth different embodiments. The gesture allows the gesturers to get 'lost' from fixing and subjugating forms of archival evidence, as much as it allows them to find themselves in the scene of archival embodiment. Harrell's gestural performances occupy a post-archival post-historical-legal space, because, although they are absolutely produced from the availability of a set of previously performed materials from which the performer knowingly and intentionally quotes, the gestures themselves do not melt away into a received narrative about their significance and origins but rather open the space-time of the present as a simultaneously remaking of past-present-future. I believe that this is how the archival fragment can come to matter – as simultaneously a document of a time elsewhere and a material support in the reimagining of the present. In such a way, many types of archival fragment could help support the reshaping of what matters. However, the particular materiality of the gestures in *Twenty Looks*, because they do not supply neat histories, origins or forms of evidence but instead make available the everyday and the exceptional, as necessarily a part of each other, for democratic rendition, explicitly demand a

recalibration of what and who comes to matter through what and how we choose to (re)collect.

Notes

- 1 For a discussion of the fragment as significant in its partiality, see Osborne (2013, 58–62).
- 2 Hayden White, reading Hegel, argues that the legal subject is the precondition of the historical imagination:

If, as Hegel suggests, historicity as a distinct mode of human existence is unthinkable without the presupposition of a system of law in relation to which a specifically legal subject could be constituted, then historical self-consciousness, the kind of consciousness capable of imagining the need to represent reality as history, is conceivable only in terms of its interest in law, legality, and legitimacy, and so on.

(White 1987, 12)

References

- Agamben, G. (2000) *Means without End: Notes on Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.
- Banes, S. and Carroll, N. (2006) ‘Cunningham, Balanchine, and postmodern dance’, *Dance Chronicle*, 29(1), pp. 49–68.
- Bory, A. (2015) ‘Dancing archives of experience: surfacing histories, staging subjectivities’, *Performance Matters*, 1(1–2), pp. 41–61.
- Butler, J. (2011) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London and New York: Routledge.
- D’Amato, A. (2017) ‘Historical realness and the choreographic fragment’, *Extra*, 20(1). www.x-traonline.org/article/historical-realness-and-the-choreographic-fragment [accessed 30/08/2019].
- Derrida, J. (1996) *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. E. Prenowitz. Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Flusser, V. (2014) *Gestures*, trans. N.A. Roth. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.
- Foucault, M. (2003) *Archaeology of Knowledge*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (2001) ‘Constituting an archive’, *Third text*, 15(54), pp. 89–92.
- Harper, P.B. (1994) ‘“The Subversive Edge”: Paris is burning, social critique, and the limits of subjective agency’, *Diacritics*, 24(2/3), pp. 90–103.
- Lee, J.A. (2017) ‘A queer/ed archival methodology: archival bodies as nomadic subjects’, in Caswell, M., R. Punzalan and T. Sangwand (eds), *Critical Archival Studies*, Special issue, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*, no. 2, pp. 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i2.26>
- Lepecki, A. (2010) ‘The body as archive: will to re-enact and the afterlives of dances’, *Dance Research Journal*, 42(2), pp. 28–48.
- Manning, E. (2016) *The Minor Gesture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Massumi, B. (2011) *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: MIT press.
- Mays, S. (2013) ‘Witnessing the Archive: Art, Capitalism and Memory’, in Vaknin, J., K. Stuckey and V. Lane (eds), *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist*. Faringdon, Oxfordshire: Libri Publishing, pp. 141–156.

- Mbembe, A. (2002) 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits', in Hamilton C., V. Harris, J. Taylor, M. Pickover, G. Reid and R. Saleh (eds), *Refiguring the Archive*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 19–27.
- Moore, M. (2014) 'Walk for me: postmodern dance at the house of Harrell', *Theater*, 44(1), pp. 5–23.
- Muñoz, J.E. (2009) *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: NYU Press.
- Noland, C. (2017) 'Ethics, Staged', *Performance Philosophy*, 3(1), pp. 67–91.
- Osborne, P. (2013) *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*. London: Verso.
- Palmer, H. and Hunter, V. (2018) 'Worlding'. <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/worlding.html> [accessed 30/8/2019].
- Phelan, P. (1993) *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge.
- Ruprecht, L. (2017) 'Introduction: towards an ethics of gesture', *Performance Philosophy*, 3(1), pp. 4–22.
- Sekula, A. (1986) 'The body and the archive', *October*, 39, pp. 3–64.
- ten Bos, R. (2005) 'On the possibility of formless life: Agamben's politics of the gesture', *Ephemera*, 5(1), pp. 26–44.
- White, H. (1966) 'The burden of history', *History and Theory*, 5(2), pp. 111–134.
- White, H. (1987) *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press.