

the “stuff” of performance 4

I think twenty-first century should be art without objects.

—MARINA ABRAMOVIC, TV interview

Oh my body, make of me always a man who questions!

—FRANTZ FANON, *Black Skin, White Masks*

The following scene is from *The New Disciples*, a novel I wrote a few years ago:

[Marina] Abramovic and [Kira] O'Reilly explore the ways in which pain and manipulation of the body allow interrogation of the limits of the body. These artists we saw that afternoon did that through cutting themselves with a series of knives and having it recorded. One of the artists was on a stage surrounded by the audience and the other was below the floorboards with a similar set of knives, and he mirrored the artist on stage by cutting himself on the opposite arm for example, or leg. According to the posted information, the purpose was to demonstrate the links between the visible body and the unconscious represented by the artist below the stage. The idea . . . is to test the limits of the body, to unpack and expose the way the manipulation of the body is felt and perceived. The fact that both artists were standing in what seemed awkward and perhaps painful positions was meant to increase the viewer's awareness of the ways in

which pain is communicated and how it informs our thought and behavior. The body becomes both the means for understanding sensation and also the product of sensation. The body becomes fully aware of itself and known by others.¹

In this section of the story a professor provides context for questionable activity: She had used the manipulation (i.e., cutting) of bodies to fuel the creativity necessary to finish the book that would gain her tenure. In the quotation above, she is discussing with a priest, Father Ford, what first triggered her turn to the physical penetration of the bodied naming-thing. She comes to realize a deep connection between herself as a naming-thing and her circumstances. In her case, the cutting of other naming-things, and eventually herself, produced states of mind and being that entailed a reimagining of relationships: naming-thing—thing-thing—naming-thing—thing-thing, and so on. The knife (thing-thing) and the body (naming-thing) cut by the knife gave her sensations that made possible the production of her manuscript (thing-thing).

Performance

My limited encounter with Marina Abramovic inspired for me possibilities concerning the ways in which manipulation of bodied naming-things vis-à-vis exchange with other naming-things in relationship to thing-things might add perspective to my presentation of religion as a technology.² The vibrant encounter between time, space, naming-things, and other things all entwined captures, reads, and thinks that mapping of interplay. Performance art, then, is always and already a matter of interconnections to and between various cultural codes and social programs.³ By extension, there is, I argue, a symbiotic relationship between art—in this case performance art—and religion as a technology in that they enact the same consideration on what Amelia Jones in another context calls “a different register.”⁴ I would add that this alternate “register” includes a grammar and vocabulary that capture what religion as a technology exposes, and articulates it mindful of its inherent fluidity. While still entailing a mediated modality of expression, its permissive and provocative nature gives performance art a receptive quality that makes it ideal for exposing and naming openness and interplay.⁵ Performance art, as it is, implodes traditional arrangements of religious practices and teachings in the form of traditions such as Roman Catholicism and Protestant Pentecostalism, but it is just the type of structuring of experience that can

enliven religion as I have sought to define and present it—a theorization of religion that assumes no intentional forms, privileges no particular intent, and challenges the very nature of religion as a “something” as opposed to a method of seeing.⁶ This mode of artistic activity “embodies” the inclinations advanced by this technology regarding the openness of things in that it “has been a medium that challenges and violates borders between disciplines and genders, between private and public, and between everyday life and art, and that follows no rules.”⁷ The resulting and central questions are as follows: What are the limits of the naming-thing, and what are the limits of the naming-thing’s ability to “speak” through the manipulation of itself as thing-thing? What are the necessary (if any distinctions) between bodied naming-thing and thing-thing?

What I intend to portray in the following pages will become clear. But for now, I simply point to an observation made by Allan Kaprow regarding the nature and function of art. He refuses to make a distinction between life and art, instead referencing “lifelike art” over against “artlike art.”⁸ The latter assumes art is a distinct modality of expression that is disconnected from mundane experience in any significant way. However, the former reflects art as already and always connected to life. It is, in his words, “art in the service of life.” It is this posture or function of “service” that is significant here. But rather than life in more general terms, I posit the benefit of understanding (and interrogating) art as the presentation of the openness of things. This is more than religious art, and more fundamentally lodged in the structuring of thing-things and naming-things than that. Or, as Kaprow notes regarding “lifelike art,” “It is not a ‘thing’ like a piece of music or a sculpture that is put into a special art container or setting. It is inseparable from real life.”¹⁰

On the Art of Performance

The development of performance art is tied to sociopolitical shifts and changes in cultural sensibilities (toward collective life) during tumultuous years of the mid-twentieth century. Old artistic postures and assumptions failed to capture the times. Hence, “work,” writes Lynn MacRitchie, “which came to be called live or performance art emerged most powerfully in Europe and the United States at moments of artistic or social crisis, when formal aesthetic or social structures were perceived to be inadequate or had actually collapsed.”¹¹ Marked by World War II and followed by the Vietnam War, the trauma of violence on an international level, in all its existential madness, could not be soothed or even explored using artistic practices that

maintained as stable the naming-things that were in fact the fuel for world conditions. Performance art entailed confrontation so as to urge reconsideration of naming-things by, in a deep and significant way, linking what they do to what they are.

Hence, using performance art, I make a turn and consider how one might think about bodied naming-things manipulating themselves as thing-things and thereby blurring if not destroying distinction.¹² This turn further shifts dynamics and creates awareness that neither naming-things nor thing-things have fixed meaning or function. Both are defined in a significant manner through their “li-ness”: naming-thingliness and thing-thingliness. Here “li-ness” is meant to suggest a particular vibrancy that calls attention to the “qualities” of the naming-thing and thing-thing and in the process draws viewers and artists into circumstances otherwise invisible.¹³ The conflation of naming-thing and thing-thing fosters this move because, again, it rejects the assumption of sustainable distinction.¹⁴ A clear example of this is Jim Dine’s *The Smiling Workman* (1960) in which, “dressed in a red smock, with hands and head painted red, and a large black mouth, he drank from jars of paint while painting ‘I love what I’m . . .’ on a large canvas, before pouring the remaining paint over his head and leaping through the canvas.”¹⁵

To the extent it concerns itself with the portrayal of life in its ordinary arrangements and activities, performance art often requires a “space” of exchange beyond the restrictions of the formal gallery. Artistic movements such as Pop Art, Neo-Expressionism, and so on raised questions concerning the proper form and content of art, yet the questions raised by performance art push through a refusal to allow firm boundaries between artist and viewer. It raises issues regarding the nature of art but pushes the boundary by not simply challenging the nature of a thing-thing as art (i.e., Pop Art) or the naming-thing as the proper story and source of art, but instead it blurs the line between naming-thing and thing-thing.¹⁶ I say this mindful of the manner in which performance art’s “in the moment” quality supports my assertions but also poses a challenge noted by numerous scholars and artists: few are able to experience this mode of art “in real time” but rather come to know it through books, films, photographs, and so forth that reify it somewhat and move it at least a degree or two away from the initial expression of interplay. This work is of a limited duration. “Live” performance destabilizes by removing the opportunity to fix and reflect. The “work” of art takes place in “real” time and demands attention without the ability to hold and process at a later moment. It’s gone, done, and there are memory and representations to provide a cartography of engagement and response. As Laurie

Anderson says when reflecting on developments during the late twentieth century, “Live art is especially ephemeral. Once performed, it tends to become myth and a few photos and tapes.” It is, in a word, “an art form that resists documentation.”¹⁷ Still, this qualification notwithstanding, it offers a useful framework. There is support for my argument regarding the limited impact of this qualification in a thought offered by Laurie Carlos: “It is the element of duration, of time, that is at the heart of a performance. But there is a time of experiencing and a time of memory, of reliving in the imagination, and there is no essential contradiction between the two.”¹⁸ Nonetheless, the “live” quality also demands the involvement of other naming-things; demands can be made of the viewer that cannot be made when the viewer leaves the space and enters back into familiar restraint. To directly encounter performance art in the moment is to be pulled and pushed, to have naming-things engaged and challenged.¹⁹ There are more pointed examples of this, such as “do-it-yourself artworks” in connection to which the viewer might be given a series of instructions or invitations that involve her doing the art by following the prompts provided.²⁰

The ability to buy performance art would entail a falling back into distinction between naming-things and thing-things that this modality of art intends to disrupt. It is not knowledge for purchase; instead, it is to be experienced. Nonetheless, this statement is accurate only if “ownership” is understood in particular ways. When performance artists such as Yves Klein “sold” art, the transaction was simply symbolic and pointed to the inability to actually own the art with which he concerned himself. In other words,

Klein sought a way to evaluate his “immaterial pictorial sensitivity” and decided that pure gold would be a fair exchange. He offered to sell it to any person willing to purchase such an extraordinary, if intangible, commodity, in exchange for gold leaf. . . . Gold leaf and a receipt changed hands between the artist and the purchaser. But since “immaterial sensitivity” could be nothing but a spiritual quality, Klein insisted that all remains of the transaction be destroyed: he threw the gold leaf into the river [Seine, February 10, 1962] and requested that the purchaser burn the receipt.²¹

Still, one should measure this act of commercialism against reflection on performance art by others like Clifford Owens, who says the following when thinking about more recent developments: “After all, dealers don’t profit from performance art unless they inflate the value of documentary photographs of performances; hustle performance-based videos on DVD a practice I find criminal and exploitative; or sell dumb performance objects as

sculpture. And museums and institutions generally don't fund performance art events because they are not willing to jeopardize federal funding or take curatorial risk."²² The questionable ability to directly buy performance art as noted here does not mean it is beyond containment, cannot be captured so to speak, or that it cannot be made a moment in the historical record. Books, catalogues, interviews, articles, and so forth capture not the moment of performance—its quality of movement—but rather they allow an “artist's print” or a shadow or still shot of the event. I say this merely to provide a bit of balance by acknowledging the temporality of performance art—its resistance to confinement—while also noting the manner in which it is unable to fully and finally escape re-presentation or repetition.²³ On this point, keep in mind the words of Clifford Owens: “Copyrighting has never really been about art. Copyrighting is about commerce, commodities. One reason I've always been interested in performance art is that it isn't easily commodifiable. Some people are making a living at it. I've been fortunate enough to sell some work, but this practice was never intended as a moneymaker. In fact, it's costing a fortune (laughter).”²⁴

Drawing inspiration directly or indirectly from figures such as Dada artist Duchamp and housed most firmly in Northern California and New York City, some body artists or performance artists, as they were called as of the 1970s, understood the naming-thing as a material by means of and through which art was produced. That is to say, through Duchamp's ready-mades or manipulations of the physical body, an artistic move developed that refused to distinguish the body over against other materials. Distinction between the naming-thing and thing-things—found or created—had little significance because product no longer was an important dimension of art. To the extent the clothed naming-thing was often viewed at least aesthetically as a distinct thing, particular modalities of performance art often involved the naming-thing without such covering, but instead the naked body became similar to any other uncovered thing present and open to manipulation and use—but also holding a certain integrity of form.²⁵

Dada (and the early twentieth-century German school of “total” art called Bauhaus, for that matter) manipulated the body and called for more attention to process, as opposed to a finished and fixed “piece” that could be called art, but performance art—particularly in its more aggressive forms—interrogates the very distinction between naming-things and thing-things. Furthermore, it involves viewers in this questioning in new and at times disturbing ways.²⁶ The 1959 *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* by Allan Kaprow at the Reuben Gallery in New York City—with its slides, music, readings, and so forth, all conducted

in three rooms—“changed the game,” so to speak, and marked a major shift in performance art toward the practices with which we are most familiar.²⁷ Still, the meaning of performance art—that is, what is captured (and excluded) by that concept—remained somewhat illusive. “Performance is dead! Long live performance! This [so it goes] declaration reflects the paradoxical situation in which we find ourselves when we consider a contemporary understanding of performance within the sphere of visual art.”²⁸ Despite tensions between differing ideas of performance art’s content and meaning, there seems at least one common factor: naming-thing, as fixed, stable, and distinct, is troubled often in graphic and aggressive ways.²⁹ “Performance art,” writes Dominic Johnson, “emerges as a means of testing how to live—to live more fully, more atypically, more perversely or more effectively than one might do without the sustaining practice of performance.”³⁰ Any effort to sanitize art, to render it devoid of material consequence, to give it a purpose beyond the connotations of material life, was rejected as naming-things were pushed to the point of breaking and were exposed to pain and suffering. Thing-things and naming-things were brought into a felt interrelationality.

The naming-thing is put on display in certain instances, and in this process it is connected to thing-things in such a way as to reconfigure both—thereby becoming a way of filtering historical experience by absorbing particular dimensions of it and dismissing others. Lynn MacRitchie, in reflecting on the function of performance art in the late twentieth century, says, “The real and terrible destruction wrought by two world wars had made a mockery of any idealization of violent social change, however, and the development of live work post 1945 followed a dual path. While continuing to expand and explore its original premise of the critique of the position and purpose of the art object and the academic institutions, artists’ own bodies, their physical being, came to be considered as a site of knowledge and a vehicle for affecting healing and transformation.”³¹ Conscious occupation of time and space took on a new significance with performance art.

Performing Art

In some performance art the porous nature of the bodied naming-thing is highlighted through manipulation—exposing it naked and hypervisible. With regard to violence inflicted, performance art chronicles the manner in which penetration speaks to levels of clarity and lucidity that are valueless otherwise.³² A process of mutilation and ritualized pain renders the naming-thing somehow more than itself. Outside such ritualized infliction known within

traditional modalities of religious systems, performance art in general and body art or live art in particular seek to make felt (through the testing of strength and endurance of interplay) the manner in which thingliness is vibrant. Going back to Camus's analysis of Sisyphus, this heightened awareness, one would think, has something to do with the stress and strain—physicality as ritualized discomfort:³³

As for the myth, one sees merely the whole effort of a body straining to raise the huge stone, to roll it and push it up a slope a hundred times over; one sees A face screwed up, the cheek tight against the stone, the shoulder bracing the Clay-covered mass, the foot wedging it, the fresh start with arms outstretched, the wholly human security of two earth-clotted hands. . . . It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. . . . That hour like a breathing-space which Returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness.³⁴

Think of Camus's depiction of Sisyphus's pain. This is not a theodical description in that it flies in the face of the gods as opposed to marking out an effort to justify them. Instead, it speaks to Sisyphus's performance (art) as a means of framing a process of exploration that urges a rethinking. Now compare Camus's depiction of Sisyphus and his stone to the description of the self-mutilation or living art of Ron Athey. There are clear distinctions, but a shared perception of naming-thing in pain as source of lucidity—without a theodical twist. "In Athey's work," remarks Dominic Johnson, "the triumphant conversion of disaster into a type of agency perhaps relies on his appropriation of body modification, as a troubled yet potent means of claiming agency over one's own body."³⁵ Sisyphus and his stone pushed, and Athey and his body pierced, point to the working of the naming-thing as/with thing-things. Sisyphus, monitored by the will of the gods, and Athey, always aware of the types of confinement that sociocultural codes of conduct mean within the West, offer body performance as response to authoritative demands for unity. In both instances, movement as performance of ritualized pain entails an artistic tackling of experience without much regard for traditional entertainment quality.³⁶ In a belligerent twist, both Sisyphus and Athey defy notions of the divine as distinct—Sisyphus through his defiance and Athey through his re-presentation of Christian mythology (e.g., martyrdom of saints reenacted). Performance art emphasizes the manner in which the naming-thing and thing-thing do not simply connect but instead become indistinguishable over against traditional markers of difference or relationship; the affective language of this is "pain" and "ecstasy."

Performance art amplifies activity over against the consequences of that activity (e.g., static work of art that exists after the “happening”). By so doing, it undercuts the ability to single out the naming-thing as that which produces thing-things—with the distinction lodged in the reified form of the thing-thing over against the active naming-thing. Still, the consequence remains somewhat consistent: performance art urges interrogation of things for what they tell us about circumstances and relationships to those circumstances. In its most graphic forms, performance art uses extreme manipulations of the naming-thing to bring to the fore a fluidity of form that in turn opens to increased awareness. For example, Metoyer’s exhibits bring viewers into play as they move around the works and are drawn into the conversations urged by the configuration of new and found thing-things, and in this way they are brought into a framework of questioning themselves as naming-things. Yet this is not the same as the manner in which performance art brings the viewer into the project as part of the process of artistic expression. What is Abramovic’s *Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present* without viewers sitting across from her, looking back into her as she sits motionless looking into them?³⁷

Time and space remain the location, so to speak, for art, but neither is confined or cataloged in the same manner as when the traditional matrix of presence is used. That is to say, what “gallery” means alters through use.³⁸ Performance art—with its emphasis on process rather than product—configures time and space without concern with traditional thinking on artistic locations (in that the naming-thing and thing-things are the mobile location), but it is not ahistorical—for example, Ron Athey’s work reflects on church history and does so as theater. Referencing the shift to performance art, Henry Sayre says the following: “Art is no longer that thing in which full-fledged aesthetic experience is held perpetually present; art no longer transcends history; instead, it admits its historicity, its implication in time.”³⁹ The activity or process is hidden within other modalities of expression discussed in this volume. Only documentaries about the artists or their films, in the case of Metoyer, offer a glimpse into process, but this is an aside easily distinguished from the product, which is the primary focus for the artist. With performance art, the name—although its descriptive quality will ebb and flow—says so much about its focus: performance/process. Perhaps there is something about this arrangement, this commitment to process over against old standards of product, that lingers in the words of Abramovic. “The hardest thing,” she reflects, “is to do something which is close to nothing.”⁴⁰

Thing-things used by a naming-thing are typically covered or transformed in such a way as to hide their initial design and utility. For example, pieces of paper no longer serve to present a complete image put in place by a naming-thing, and a refrigerator is no longer used to store foodstuffs. With performance art, thing-things and their initial function (e.g., knives are made to cut things) are not hidden but highlighted, and what is changed or made less visible are assumptions regarding the anthropology of the bodied naming-thing and its defined integrity. This is not the context of the surgery room, where naming-things use thing-things to maintain the distinct integrity of the naming-thing over against the tool used in the process. Still, even a medical space can serve as the location for body art, or performance art. One need only keep in mind the performance of body pain used to speak the porous and troubling nature of the naming-thing as represented by French artist Orlan, who used plastic surgery as a method of “bio-art” by means of which public surgeries serve to, in the words of Amelia Jones, test “the integrity of the embodied self by literally slicing through its boundaries.”⁴¹ It is true that technological advances through artificial limbs and so on become means by which thing-things alter naming-things, but not in ways that speak to the same public display of a porous or penetrable quality that remains visible rather than hidden. That is to say, the artificial limb is intended to be hidden; bio-art, as done by Orlan, is meant to keep visible and in tension foreignness and sameness. With technological change, the idea is to hide the penetration of the thing-thing so as to enhance the naming-thing as unified.⁴² But this is not so with performance art.

Bringing Something to Things

While the social coding layered on naming-things is discussed more fully in the final section of the book, it is important to say at this point that some performance art—for example, as produced by women and racial minorities—constantly reminds viewers that the sign of cultural penetrations marks these naming-things even before the artist “marks” them. Issues related to the cultural constructions of race, gender, and sexuality were often explored using performance art, and there is much to think about in such attacks on the confinements of cultural constructions.⁴³ As Valerie Cassel Oliver reflects,

For black artists, the emphasis on “body as material” does not come without its own historical tethers. The black body carries within it signifiers and markers that are deeply rooted in historical narratives. They embody

the evolution, transcendence, and complexities of that same body long ago unshackled, affirmed, self-determined, and now immersed in myriad discourses that encompass multiethnic heritages, gender, and queer and transgender identity, as well as uncharted otherness. The performing self is at times the embodiment of the collective, and at other times it is simply the liberated individual exploring the conundrum of his or her own multifaceted being.⁴⁴

A graphic example that binds together race, gender, and sexuality is *Sally's Rape* by Robbie McCauley and Jeannie Hutchins. It involves McCauley, an African American, on an auction block with members of the audience being directed by Hutchins, a white woman, to bid on McCauley.⁴⁵ One can add Spider Woman Theater, Bill T. Jones, and Arnie Zane Company, who explore issues of cultural configurations of race and gender.⁴⁶ Or there is something of what I am suggesting in the words of Lea Vergine when reflecting on body art turns in the 1990s:

The use of the body as a language has returned to the scene of the world around us in new and different forms, and it speaks through altered declinations. The body as triumphant, immolated, diffused, propagated, dramatic, and tragic. The political, social, and mystic body. The body as the site of the extreme. . . . By way of tattoos, piercings, and citations of tribalism. Through manipulations of its organs. The instrument that speaks and communicates without the word, or sounds, or drawing. The body as a vehicle, once again, for declaring opposition to the dominant culture, but also of desperate conformism.⁴⁷

Performance art by African Americans, like its counterparts (i.e., performance art by non-African Americans), pushes the naming-thing/thing-thing dynamic and does so within the context of a public. The encounter happens in a way that is reminiscent of what takes place within the context of white artists. The bodied naming-thing in both contexts—white artists and black artists—is supple, flexible, porous, penetrated, shifted, marked, and changed as it flows between what we have typically regarded as fixed categories of meaning: subject and object. Yet there is another dimension to performance art by African Americans that is inherent. In a word, there are other cultural codes (e.g., blackness, blackness and gender, blackness and gender and class) assigned to those naming-things, other ways in which the blending of naming-thing/thing-thing is challenged, but in this case not for the benefit of African Americans. The challenges of being and doing that have

shaped the racial, sexual, and class (and, for black women, gender) dynamics defining the discourse on bodies in the United States is not bracketed off by performance art. Yes, performance art provides a way of interrogating, but it does so from within epistemological frameworks and strategies that speak to and about naming-things even as artists challenge these frameworks. This amplifies questions of what these naming-things are doing and what distinguishes them from other things—both having been understood historically as valuable for their utility—“blackened” naming-things as tools of labor and gratification and as references for white privilege. Perhaps this is one reason discussion of performance art from the 1970s to the present has privileged culturally white bodies in performance. Yet this discursive shadowing, if not silencing in certain ways, does not speak an unquestionable truth. To the contrary, African American performance artists have used this genre of artistic expression to raise and wrestle with questions of fundamental importance. As Cassel Oliver remarks, black performance art “occupies the liminal space between black eccentricity and bodacious behavior, between political protest and social criticism.”⁴⁸ With a particular focus on black women performance artists, Uri McMillan speaks of “performing objecthood” as a way of expressing the manner in which black women manipulate their bodies to constitute thing-things. Or for McMillan, “avatars” challenge common perceptions and assumptions concerning black women as bodied naming-things and how they rightly occupy time and space. The development of alternate personalities and performing these personalities opened for artists such as Lorraine O’Grady ways to both represent and critique sociocultural codes.

In part, the impact of this method of expression involves the manner in which it challenges both traditional and more “progressive” depictions of the dichotomy of naming-thing/thing-thing by denying any totalizing properties for either. The legacy of slavery and ongoing discrimination notwithstanding, the latter half of that metaphysical equation can be presented—rather, performed—without having it reify a particular understanding.⁴⁹ This, for McMillan, has been the art of body performance utilized by black women for centuries. In a word, naming-thing/thing-thing relationships can in fact interrogate and expose restrictive and reifying sociocultural codes; it is not a necessary consequence that such performance can only reinforce the political status quo by means of art. Take, for example, Adrian Piper as discussed by McMillan as a key and deeply influential conceptual and performance artist. The manipulation of her body (in *Mythic Being: Cruising White Women* from 1973) involves shifting markers of identity and hence of social meaning, as she dons a new “uniform”—an Afro wig, clothing, glasses, and other markers

of the 1970s—and performs a version of masculinity that signifies cultural codes of gender and consequently of agency.⁵⁰ Thing-things in this case—glasses, a wig, facial hair, and so forth—gain the type of agency noted by Bill Brown and other advocates of thing theory. Thing-things penetrate cultural identity, and shift and change it like the power of a talisman. Yet in this case they promote the transformation of gender, blurring thereby lines between the coding of masculinity and femininity. In addition, the Afro wig with its ties to black culture during the 1970s speaks a word regarding the embodiment of racial categorizations and discourse that have something to do with the metaphysical quality of cultural engagement. Still, this time, the tone and texture of that discourse and those categorizations are signified through performance: female to male and thing-thing to naming-thing. Is this artist the black male as threat that one fears, or an exaggerated being that one mocks? Or might it be the exotic beauty one desires? Is “it” the despised mixed race being betwixt and between cultural worlds? In what ways can the difference be discerned if it is not fixed? Upon what bases is authenticity determined and judged within a context of shifting things? The transformed naming-thing glares at the passersby and in that gaze turns them (through recognition) into naming-things. In an essay related to *Mythic Being*, Piper says the following, which speaks in significant ways to what we typically understand as totalizing properties and positionality of naming-things and thing-things: “I was trying to develop my arena by becoming an object in it. I now want to become the arena itself; I want to be, for a while, a consciousness within which I view myself and other objects. I’m thinking of the ghostly spectator, eternally viewing, taking in everything, recording and reflecting on everything, but not being an object of refraction him-herself because invisible.”⁵¹

For Piper, the sociopolitical and cultural upheaval that marked the late twentieth century could not be ignored, and artistic production, particularly that which encompassed the primacy of the naming-thing, was a strong instrument for making statements regarding the racial, gender, and militarized destruction of personhood and agency. For her, like Metoyer to some extent, this meant emphasizing the transient nature of the naming-thing as well as the ability of the artist who emphasizes the bodied naming-thing to think of artistic space beyond the confines established by the formal and formalistic art world. She, in a literal sense, would take her art to the streets and perform it in front of nontraditional audiences, but it was not simply the wearing of a different identity. No, something about the performance also entailed her recognizing and tapping into the complexity of her own

identity—the maleness of herself.⁵² This “mythic being” points to a meta-symbol of cultural and social anxiety projected onto certain naming-things through discursive pronouncements housed within a process of interrogation and spectacle. Something “unifying” about this perception of the raced naming-thing gives it a type of narrative strength and reach that could not be captured by simply calling it the “black” being, or the “cultural” being, or even the “raced” being.⁵³ This conceptual strength allows the identity of the mythic being to penetrate, to impinge upon the artist in such a way as to blur lines of authority and agency. Put differently, as John Bowles recognizes, “Piper alienates herself from her self-image and from her artwork. In the first case, she renders herself available for self-reflection. In the second, the *Mythic Being* embodies a stereotype drawn from the popular imagination. Piper’s earliest statements about the Mythic Being present him as someone whom she imagines is performing her.”⁵⁴ Naming-things, when performed, blend into each other, fostering in the process new structuring(s) of cultural linkage with the capacity to short circuit social codes. Naming-things and thing-things are rendered fluid, and the social codes (e.g., masculinity and femininity) supporting structures of time and space are exposed and, through performance, questioned.

Such art, as represented by Piper and Clifford Owens among many others, arranges and confronts bodied naming-things/thing-things in such a way as to problematize social assumptions and predictable patterns of cultural engagement. It is real-time encounter that, unlike with “flat” works of art such as paintings, cannot be held off and processed later in the safety and comfort of one’s inherited epistemology of life devoid of confrontation and conflict. Performance art, one might say, removes the cushion of distance and makes the encounter with naming-things/thing-things sustained, somewhat unpredictable, and marked by an arrangement of time outside the control of the audience. Inherent in performance art, for both the artist and the viewer-participant, is vulnerability. Unlike looking at a painting hung meticulously on a wall, performance art’s shaping and running of time is more unfixed and warped. Perhaps this is one reason Piper’s thought-provoking and transformative work has been called such things as “off-putting” and marked by an artist with a “morally bullying tone”—which is precisely the point.⁵⁵ Confrontation with bias and symbols of racial-gender injustice cannot be comfortable and simply insinuated with cultural decorum if it is to have even the hope of being useful. Piper produces an altered presentation of naming-things, complete with them covered in a variety of cultural signifiers. In a word, she assumes “different personae (she’s a skilled and witty performer)

and changing her looks as if she were herself a kind of malleable conceptual object.”⁵⁶ And in this way, she forces viewers to recognize the characterizations of race, gender, sexuality, and class that promote their legacy. By playing these significations out, she offers an opportunity to dismantle them.

Discomfort is a tool used to disrupt thinking and the “doings” of naming-things. Piper disrupts social and cultural codes regarding gender play—for example, expression of desire—by shifting the appearance of her naming-thing through costume and custom (i.e., who gets to actively observe and perhaps pursue partners). The fluidity of identity that marks the naming-thing in relationship to thing-things grants opportunity to manipulate gender symbols and practices so as to short-circuit their internal logic and status. In that the costume is clearly a costume, observers on the street are unsettled epistemologically by the individual performance that mocks social performance.

It is interesting to note that Clifford Owens intends a similar type of work. Both Piper and Owens indicate social awareness and commitment through performance.⁵⁷ The script, so to speak, can be generated internally—coming from the artist and projected out. This is how Owens typically works. “I make art in my head,” he reflects, “from my heart, and *through my body*.” This is all to note the manner in which the naming-thing/thing-thing engagement and interplay for such artists moves from the naming-thing as artist to thing-things and naming-things as viewers and/or participants.⁵⁸ However, for his 2011 *Anthology* work for MoMA, Owens moved in another direction through an alternate highlighting of the naming-thing/thing-thing dynamic. He invited other artists to provide a total of twenty-six scripts—arranged activities and performances—that he would then undertake as his work of art. For instance, artist Kara Walker provided the following: “French kiss an audience member. Force them against a wall and demand sex. The audience/viewer should be an adult. If they are willing to participate in the forced sex act abruptly turn the tables and you assume the role of victim. Accuse your attacker. Seek help from others describe your ordeal. Repeat.”⁵⁹ Using photographs and other thing-things (e.g., food and urine), along with particular arrangements of time and space, with *Anthology* Owens performed instructed movements in ways that reflect past activities by various artists (a process akin to what he has called “response” to “artists practices” over against reperforming).⁶⁰ He interpreted their work in line with his own sensibilities by having his naming-thing manipulated per the instructions given—such as kissing an audience member and so on. In this way, his naming-thing/thing-thing dynamic was highlighted by the shadow of other naming-things arranging and determining the flow of presence and practice.

The experience tugged at this naming-thing and in the process used other naming-things as “tools” impacting and penetrating him. The sensations and discomfort produced said something about sociocultural codes of conduct as well as the markers of time and space framed by relationship between naming-thing and thing-thing. A full range of emotional and psychological processes was enacted as part of this performance: Owens as naming-thing encountered the agency of other naming-things. Notions of community, of relationship, of the integrity and agency of the human as a matter of theological and cultural anthropology were tested. In his words, “Audience members kissed me, kicked me, slapped me, embraced me, dragged me, hoisted me, humiliated me, humbled me, befriended me, loved me, hated me, harmed me, hurt me, moved me, touched me, abandoned me, rescued me, stalked me, harassed me, intimidated me, frightened me, abused me, used me, exploited me, repulsed me, and some would later fuck me.”⁶¹

The collaborative quality of performance art is made graphic vis-à-vis this process, but also exposed is risk entailed through an ethics of mutuality that leaves participants exposed (often literally) and open to what the human mind can imagine as the business of naming-things/thing-things/naming-things colliding both literally and figuratively. Within the space of the MoMA and expressed as interactive performance, Owens mapped out the movements and encounters that have shaped the sociocultural context of life in the United States for centuries. And he did so in a way that highlighted what we have already known on some level to be central. More to the point, for Owens, blackened naming-things matter, and through their work black performance artists enact the merit of this statement. There is in this multi-layered movement (that depends on numerous naming-things in coordinated flow) a blurring effect in that the end product holds only hints of this orchestration. The thing-things’ bare codes are transformed into ritualized actions.

One can interpret the work of Piper and Owens through explicit attention to traditional religious-theological vocabulary and symbol systems. For instance, Piper’s turn to costume might suggest something of the effort of religious figures such as Joan of Arc to morph identity through gender identification as a soldier. Or consider some devotees of Krishna who dress as women in order to portray Radha, who is significant for Krishna, or devotees of African-based traditions such as Candomblé who, when possessed, are changed into attire consistent with that particular divinity, which can involve men dressing as women and performing (dancing) in ways that reflect social codes of femininity. While Piper’s morphing highlights shifts in active sexual desire performed, for Joan of Arc this shift of the naming-thing

highlights the rituals of aggression typically associated with males. Although different in significant ways, what both entail, or can be read as suggesting, is the manner in which signifying presentation of the naming-thing has significant connotations that impact relationality to social ideals. Furthermore, at least one commentator has noted the manner in which the movement of Owens as bodied naming-thing by audience members around the performance space resembles the manipulation and transportation of the body of Christ in so many religious paintings.⁶²

Such observations are intriguing, yet they map performance art on traditionally understood framings of the religious, while I want to point to a different perception of the religious. Mindful of this, I note that without words but through presentation and play, Piper and Owens raise fundamental challenges to assumptions of closed and fixed “things.” True, the performance is focused on disruption of particular codes of conduct; still, the dissonance created allows for much more expansive consideration. Owens reinforces social codes and body practices, but even in this he causes disruption to the extent that the naming-thing is marked “black” and hence is already out of place and beyond the scope of its social freedoms. For instance, the script given him by Walker plays off centuries-old cultural assumptions regarding black men as sexual predators, but the performance seeks to disrupt agency and in the process points out the complex nature of American sexual terrorism: “You,” as Walker instructs, “assume the role of victim.” Hence, the naming-thing both penetrates other naming-things and is penetrated by them, and through this complexity performed in alternate space and as public act, the coding of sexual relations in the United States is exposed and highlighted. The interrelated nature of naming-thing to naming-thing is highlighted through the interactive quality of the series of performances while also pointing out the manner in which some influences, some actors so to speak, are not visible yet are still present (i.e., those providing the scripts). Put simply, writes Christopher Lew, “audience members are invited to talk back, to step to the fore and interact with the artist or each other; food and objects are thrown about; articles of clothing are removed or exchanged; physical violence is implied; rape and autocastration threatened.”⁶³ Attentiveness to naming-things in action poses important questions concerning care, empathy, sympathy, agency, identity, freedom, and other qualities of engagement and positioning that matter. Piper and Owen offer what was at an earlier point in this chapter a particular “register” of human engagement with circumstances.

This work, performance art by African Americans as well as other so-called racial minorities, is important in that it says something about the sociocultural

coding that informs what we say and “know” about naming-things. However, while it is important, here I am not concerned with the psychological work of performance art; my focus is not on the nature and meaning of subjectivity as articulated through performance art. Instead, my interest rests in this genre of art’s ability to speak what the naming-thing is (and is not) in light of deep connection to thing-things—and it does so without full restriction of the spoken or written language. “Live work by artists,” Laurie Carlos makes clear, “unites the psychological with the perceptual, the conceptual with the practical, thought with action.”⁶⁴ So conceived, one can easily recognize the manner in which persistent attention to naming-things within performance art presents the bodied naming-thing, at least in part, as an alternate and dynamic language employable for the articulation of a particular range of considerations.

Are They Beautiful or Ugly Things?

As stated earlier, my concern is not aesthetics—certainly not as understood prior to the shift in artistic thinking and production marked by the mid-twentieth century. Yet I am intrigued: Does performance art as discussed throughout this chapter further damage the reifying effects of beauty or theories of wholeness by entangling naming-things/thing-things in a web of what is typically referenced as ugly? Ugly behavior? Ugly appearance? Ugly surroundings?⁶⁵ And finally, are there ways in which discussion of race, gender, sexuality, and class are interrogated in performance art not always as they relate to sociopolitical justice, as is typically the approach, but rather through play with naming-thing/thing-thing in the domain of beauty/ugliness and pain/pleasure assumptions that undergird and to some degree guide the more commonly addressed structures of sociopolitical justice?

I offer just a few thoughts related to these questions before moving back into the general discussion of naming-thing/thing-thing implosion. And I begin with this statement from RoseLee Goldberg concerning troubling behavior as art:

Public display of sex and death and other private concerns was a statement of artistic solidarity against the conservative backlash of the 1990s. The material was unquestionably shocking to even the most emancipated of audience. Bob Flanagan, suffering from cystic fibrosis, endured hours of excruciating physical therapy in a hospital bed in *Visiting Hours*, an installation at the Santa Monica Museum of Art in California (1992).

Male strippers, drag queens and drug-abusers participated in Ron Athey's *Martyrs and Saints* (1993), an hour-long work which included self-inflicted wounds so gruesome that several members of the audience passed out.⁶⁶

As the naming of his performances more than suggests, an intriguing element of Athey's work involves the interrogation of traditional religious rituals and practices that are meant to discipline and control bodied naming-things.⁶⁷ However, mindful of his early years in a deeply religious household that claimed ministry as part of his future, he amplifies the discipline and punishment of the body, tying it to pleasure and in this way exploding categories of religious repentance and purification. The fact that ritualization of naming-things in/as pain is conducted by a white male (at times over against a black naming-thing assistant) raises questions concerning the relationship between whiteness and the exercise of control vis-à-vis pain and discipline of naming-things as well as modalities of "confession" of whiteness that both makes visible and renders undetected the pleasure of white privilege performed. These are important considerations, but they are beyond the purpose of this chapter in particular and this book in general.⁶⁸ Instead, I want to resist my intellectual-political inclination to more fully interrogate race dynamics and the cultural power being performed, and instead consider implications in a general sense as they relate to what has been a traditional religiously motivated activity on/with naming-things.

What the graphic depiction of ritualized aggression, the blood, and the penetration and marking of the bodied naming-thing points out is the degree to which traditional modalities of religiously understood practices within spaces perceived "sacred" really avoid the intended target—that is, the naming-thing. They symbolize attention to the body, but Athey creates a disturbing ritual space in which there is unflinching attention to the naming-thing marked out by thing-things and other naming-things. In so doing, with all the discomfort and anxiety produced, ritualized aggression raises questions: What happens (and how does it happen) when the naming-thing is actually disciplined and penetrated as ritual practice? What is the *look* and *texture* of a naming-thing postritual, in the company of other things? And what does such practice communicate to other naming-things?⁶⁹

There are ways performance artists—white artists—push against false categories of importance, but this is never done and cannot be done in a way that fully negates their whiteness. The privileges associated with whiteness, in certain ways, make possible and important their manipulations of the naming-thing. But these naming-things challenged, twisted, and altered

remain whitened with all whiteness entails. Such naming-things—even against the desire of these artists—resist ugliness as a permanent, sociocultural condition in that ugliness remains trumped by the salve of whiteness always applied to the ritualized wounds. Maleness has a similar effect as it is layered on the naming-thing performed and performing.

Performance art challenges but does not escape cultural codes that guide the structuring and speaking of life. This art is not the solution to issues of social justice, although through its history it has often been used as an alternate language and performance of political issues. What it does is destabilize socially desired conditioning of the naming-thing, while also challenging the assumed distinction of the naming-thing and its relationship to thing-things premised on their utility. And all this has something to do with the embodied grammar of ugliness. In a general sense, there is something about ugliness that “speaks” to unintended interaction—features as running contrary to the preferred symmetry—or the use of bodied naming-things that runs contrary to desired perfection, and so on. Ugliness may not be the opposite of beautifulness in that they are both dimensions of the same intention—the same attachment to manipulated naming-things. Artists force encounter with the naming-thing, and the takeaway from that encounter is contextual and therefore not fixed.

Sally's Rape depicts extreme circumstances that highlight and exaggerate. To be clear, I *do not* mean to overplay the tragic but rather to force a longer look into the tragic picking apart of naming-things. Compare *Sally's Rape* to Orlan's public plastic surgery that is meant to bring her visually in line with beauty as outlined in various works of art. Both elicit strong reactions that mark encounter with the unintended.⁷⁰ One, the former, does so through depiction of the ugly nature of the United States' relationship to black women as the “other” and the surgeries mark a radical transformation meant to shift the naming-thing toward aesthetic “perfection.” Still, both entail violent encounter, both call for a strong response that blurs the line between beauty and ugliness, and in this way both point out the conflation of the two made possible through certain genres of performance art. Both push against symmetry of form or static appeal to comfort by shifting the dynamics of the naming-things and rendering their relationship to markers of meaning unstable. Both, in distinct ways, aim to destroy beauty/ugliness as representative of anything substantive in relationship to naming-things/thing-things.

Graphically presented by Orlan and Athey, performance art blurs beauty/ugliness as it plays out manipulations of the bodied naming-thing that stretch its form and content and, in the process, render naming-thing/thing-thing

exposed and laid out. Kristine Stiles describes the situation with Orlan as such: “Among the most dramatic and troubling performances in the 1990s were Orlan’s numerous cosmetic surgeries. These operations, which increasingly threatened the artist’s health and well-being, initially were attempts to reconstruct and transform her face and body into a composite of the ideal Western art-historical notions of beauty, and later became pure physical disfigurements.”⁷¹ Not beautiful, nor ugly—instead unsettling, an attack on Christian theological assumptions of wholeness and perfection. The distinction between the frames of beauty and ugliness, to put it another way, is insignificant because both point to the function of performance art to conflate naming-things/thing-things in such a way as to nudge us in the direction of greater awareness of the “constructed” nature of meaning frameworks as fixed and bounded standards. One gets a sense of what I intend to highlight when considering Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s description of the work of the performance artist. “Our job,” he says, “may be to open up a temporary utopian/dystopian space, a de-militarised zone in which meaningful ‘radical’ behaviour and progressive thought are hopefully allowed to take place, even if only for the duration of the piece. . . . In this border zone, the distance between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ self and other, art and life, becomes blurry and non-specific.” And here is the most telling statement: “We do not look for answers; we merely raise impertinent questions.”⁷² Continuing this idea, one might say with Athey that there is a conceptual shift away from beauty or ugliness to “realness” and “atrociousness,” for instance. “In my performance material,” Athey reflects, “I am guilty of enhancing my history, situation and surroundings into a perfectly depicted apocalypse, or at least a more visual atrocity.”⁷³ He cuts; he penetrates. Blood flows covering him and other things, pointing out as it oozes on stage the reality of naming-things as exposed, open, or—as Bakhtin notes—degraded.

What Athey offers is far more graphic and penetrating than what, for instance, video artist Bill Viola provides in *Inverted Birth*—a large video screen within an otherwise empty, dark room.⁷⁴ There is no furniture, nothing upon which to sit other than the floor. Those who enter hear the sound of liquid flowing. It is a dark liquid—which could be blood. Viola, the large image of the artist in only a pair of pants, stands staring at those present. He is covered with this liquid; it hits him, affecting his breathing, altering his posture as it pounds him, and limiting his vision as it enters his eyes. The vulnerability of the naming-thing—the manner in which this dark liquid impinges and alters the position, breathing, seeing, and so forth, of the naming-thing—is profound. Yet it is inverted birth in that the final stage is not the naming-thing emerging

into the world covered with a substance both associated with and foreign to the new naming-thing. With time, for viewers who are patient enough to wait, the dark liquid is replaced by a white liquid that does not obscure to the same extent. It moves from darkness to light, and in this way from death to birth. In other words, “the fluids represent the essence of human life: earth, blood, milk, water, air, and the life cycle from birth to death, here inverted into a transformation from darkness to light.”⁷⁵ After the shift from dark to light, the liquid flows up and away from Viola, eventually leaving him clean—shirtless, light paints unstained, and more closed off than at the beginning. Offered here is the naming-thing affected and influenced by other things (in this case liquids) that impinge and modify positioning in the world. There is an affective component as the figure’s composure and comportment alter as the liquid changes from dark to light. This thing—liquid—modifies the naming-thing by altering its perception of itself in relationship to other things—as well as its ability to maintain its posture and stamina as the liquid pounds him. While done within the context of an individual thing encountering another thing, Viola’s *The Raft* (2004), extends the model of interplay by bringing multiple naming-things together. The piece involves the coming together of a diverse range of bodied naming-things. They arrange themselves—suggesting a particular type of interaction. And after finding their places, they are bombarded by water at a high pressure. It penetrates their grouping—pushing against and into them, moving them and rearranging them as they brace themselves with and against each other in order to withstand the water pounding them.⁷⁶ The porous, somewhat unbounded nature of the bodied naming-thing is further explored by Viola in his Royal Academy of Arts exhibit titled *Life, Death, Rebirth*. In it, Viola’s work is juxtaposed to that of Michelangelo, and in this way, it wrestles with the spiritual dimensions of mortality and transcendence across time—all marked out through the presentation and exploration of the body. One piece, *The Messenger* (1996), in particular demands recognition of the open nature of the body, as the body of a man is viewed over time and over against water (representing for Viola both life and death) in which he is submerged. As one stands in front and waits, the viewer sees the body as it seems to blend into the water, becoming little more than the colored wave and movement of the liquid without boundaries secure and certain. This says something about the nature of the human in relationship to other “things”—a relationship that dismisses the utility of rigid distinction and thereby forces a rethinking of what we name with language and what that language falsely establishes as certitude of expression.⁷⁷

From the flow of liquid over the naming-thing and water pounding naming-things, we move to the amplification of the bodied naming-thing as thing-thing in relationship to the work of Yves Klein, who abandoned the traditional tools of the painter. Klein's practice, extending beyond that of Jackson Pollock, removes the brush from the canvas, rethinks what constitutes the brush, and allows the body to hover above the canvas as something more akin to the unconscious guiding the work.⁷⁸ Klein took the naming-thing as tool as he had naked bodies roll on canvas and in that way spread the blue paint. "They became living brushes," he remarked. "At my direction the flesh itself applied the colour to the surface and with perfect exactness."⁷⁹

In addition, some performance artists use their work as a way to explore and critique dominant social sensibilities meant to close off naming-things, and they do so by highlighting segments of the population and their behaviors typically critiqued and hidden from public view. Stuart Brisley, for instance, brought into performance art stigmatized addictions such as alcoholism and mental illness. In this way, he challenged societal assumptions concerning normativity of appearance, behavior, and conduct in ways that play off and challenge the grammar of ugliness and beauty. This time it was done through the performance of despised or feared personalities akin to becoming that which is despised in the manner of Orlan and Athey: What is this I am seeing, participating in? This becomes a central question that prompts interrogations both internal and in relationship to other things.

Discomfort with Things

Artists discussed thus far work with a level of anger, disappointment, and perhaps angst, and they express these affective dimensions in their work. In more graphic and aggressive modes of performance art, bodied naming-things are violently encountered as thing-things open to manipulation and penetration (literally). Anger, disappointment, and angst are presented in a three-dimensional and vibrant manner. The audience, then, is pulled in as both a part of and a party to the emotional twists and turns of the performed naming-thing. One gets a sense of this interplay with the audience when considering performance artist Chris Burden, whose art has included crucifixion not on a cross but on the hood of a car and crawling through broken glass—naked.⁸⁰ His work is illuminating as it sheds further light (think in terms of Owens) on the false distinction between the active naming-thing of the artist and the assumed passively observing naming-things of the viewers. While to some extent the interplay depicted by others in this chapter points

in the direction of active engagement, I find something particularly compelling about Burden. As Cynthia Carr writes, “He denies any interest in either pain or transcendence. As he explained in 1975, ‘when I use pain or fear in a work, it seems to energize the situation.’ That ‘situation’ was the relationship between him and the audience. It was their fear and distress as much as his that ‘energized the situation.’ Burden’s work examines physical phenomena in their natural context, the land of human error.”⁸¹ There is interaction, a merging of sorts involving various naming-things connected in tense ways and without full knowledge of this encounter. Turning to Burden again, Carr said the following concerning his 1972 piece titled *Jaizu*:

Burden sat facing a gallery door, wearing sunglasses painted black on the inside, so he couldn’t see. Spectators were unaware of this. They assumed, then, that he was watching, as they entered one at a time and faced him alone. Just inside the door were two cushions and some marijuana cigarettes. As Burden described it, “many people tried to talk to me, one assaulted me, and one left sobbing hysterically.” The artist remained passive, immobile and speechless—the blank slate to whom each visitor gave an identity: judge? shaman? entertainer?⁸²

The action was not always so physically intense and challenging. For instance, Piero Manzoni’s *Living Sculpture* in Rome in 1961 involved naming-things he signed—in this way blurring the distinction between the naming-thing as producer of art and naming-thing as artistic thing-thing.⁸³ “Manzoni’s *Sculpture Viventi*,” it was noted, “was completed by a declaration of authenticity. A red stamp certified that the subject was a whole work of art for life. A yellow stamp limited the artistic status to a body part, while a green one meant that the individual signed was a work of art under certain circumstances (i.e. only while sleeping or running). Finally, a purple stamp stuck on the receipt of authenticity meant that the service was paid for.”⁸⁴ In either Manzoni’s *Sculpture Viventi* or Kaprow’s *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, performance as an art movement marked a new pulling at the naming-thing so as to highlight its instability as a distinct “something” in relationship with thing-things, but still the slightest bit distinct. The audience did not simply observe this statement. “Kaprow,” observes RoseLee Goldberg, “issued invitations that included the statement ‘you will become a part of the happenings; you will simultaneously experience them.’ Shortly after this first announcement, some of the same people who had been invited received mysterious plastic envelopes containing bits of paper, photographs, wood, painted fragments and cut-out figures. They were also given a vague idea of what to expect:

‘there are three rooms for this work, each different in size and feeling. . . . Some guests will also act.’⁸⁵ Something about the very contested nature of the concept “performance” supports the effort of art to trouble the familiar and the distant—to demand attention to what is assumed regarding boundaries between naming-things and thing-things.⁸⁶ This is an alternate way of communicating a concern with awareness of circumstances and the impingement of circumstances. Its bodied language is coded by a particular sense of muscle memory, so to speak.

Performance art as discussed here is understood as seeking a blurring of difference between the naming-thing and the thing-thing, between the naming-thing doing and the thing-thing to which it is done: Thing-things shift and change naming-things. The ability to distinguish between the two is challenged, if not removed altogether. This is more than to say, “Humans and things are stuck to each other,” and dependency does not capture sufficiently the nature of togetherness that marks the naming-thing/thing-thing in certain practices of performance art.⁸⁷ The assumed integrity of the naming-thing is challenged as soon as the viewer is forced to wrestle with an emotive question: Who does that to the bodied naming-thing, and why would anyone do that?

By becoming much more visible, the bodied naming-thing is blurred, and its porous condition is “named.” This mode of art pushes for a different relationship between viewer and artist, one that places the question of art in the reaction of the viewer in that “the reception is as crucial as the creation of art.”⁸⁸ Even when one thinks about thing-things as not inert but active within a range of circumstances (i.e., world), there is still a relationship between naming-things and thing-things marked by even the smallest distinction between types. But there are modalities of performance art that seek to challenge even this slight difference by making art what the bodied naming-thing is and what it does. Naming-things and thing-things and their relationship are given a particular charge through graphic, public acting. The porous nature of their borders is highlighted, and it is the blurred space in between to which performance art pushes viewers-participants.