X. THE PERFORMING BODY AS SCULPTURAL OBJECT

The performative address of Dada, Fluxus, Happenings, Vienna Actionism, and recent participatory art relies conspicuously on photographic or, more recently, electronic reproduction. If performance of this kind is for the most part experienced live, in the present tense, what documents it, and so ensures its enduring life, is above all photography. Yet photography plays a constitutive role, not merely a documentary one, when performance is staged expressly for the camera. In 1921, Marcel Duchamp shaved the hair on the back of his head into a five-pointed star with an elongated tail, like a comet.[1] Titled *Tonsure* (plate 236), this emblematic self-portrait was consciously constructed with the photographic referent in mind. The chronological proximity of *Tonsure* to Man Ray's pictures of Duchamp in drag as the elusive Rrose Sélavy suggests that in the flux of the artist's expatriation (after the outbreak of World War I, in 1914, he had decided to emigrate to the then neutral United States), he was contemplating a change of identity. Arriving in New York in 1915, he realized to his surprise that he was already a celebrity there. The "star" image of *Tonsure* played out his idea of converting himself into a cult object. With this Dada gesture, Duchamp articulated photography as performance and the body as sculptural material. This kind of representation of the artist's body would manifest in distinct forms of self-portrayal during the 1920s, paving the way toward strategies successfully explored in performances conceived for the camera in the 1960s and '70s.

YVES KLEIN PRÉSENTE :
LE DIMANCHE 27 NOVEMBRE 1960
NUMÉRO UNIQUE
FESTIVAL D'ART D'AVANT-GARDE
La Révolution bleue continue
Dimanche
27 NOVEMBRE
Le journal d'un seul jour
THEATRE DU VIDE
UN HOMME DANS L'ESPACE !
ACTUALITÉ
Le peintre de l'espace se jette dans le vide !
Sensibilité pure

fig. 1. Cover of *Dimanche—Le Journal d'un Seul Jour*, November 27, 1960, showing Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void*, 1960. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York

In the first issue of the American avant-garde magazine *Avalanche*, in 1970, the critic Willoughby Sharp defined a concept of "body work": the "use of the artist's own body as sculptural material."[2] Since then, artists as diverse as Bas Jan Ader, Eleanor Antin, VALIE EXPORT, Gilbert & George, Ana Mendieta, Otto Mühl, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Charles Ray, and Hannah Wilke have engaged in the "rhetoric of pose"—a pose enacted for and mediated through the camera's lens.[3] As has often been said, photography is more than a transparent recording of reality: "It is a mode of representation and, in the visual realm, a cultural dominant."[4] After seeing Duchamp's retrospective at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1963, Bruce Nauman took a series of photographs of himself enacting simple, tasklike exercises in his studio. Collectively the images would come to be known as *Eleven Color Photographs* (1966–1967/1970). Several of these images, including *Feet of Clay*, *Bound to Fail* (which relates to Nauman's sculptural relief *Henry Moore Bound to Fail*, 1967), and *Waxing Hot* (plates 251–53), spoof the classic tradition of sculpture. Yet the signature image of the group—*Self-Portrait as a Fountain* (plate 250), in which a stripped-to-the-waist Nauman spews water from his mouth like a medieval gargoyle—is a deadpan salute to Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917; plate 104). *Eleven Color Photographs* establishes Nauman's lasting engagement with the body as sculptural object. A year later, in 1968, he would expand these ideas to video in *Walk with Contrapposto*, in which he paced back and forth along a narrow corridor, his hands behind his head, his torso twisting off axis from his hips—a pose in the classical sculptural tradition of Praxiteles.

The idea that the artist can in effect stand in for the artwork proved instrumental in broadening the definition of sculptural practice. In 1969, Gilbert & George covered their heads and hands in metallic powders to sing Flanagan and Allen's vaudeville number "Underneath the Arches" in live performance.

Declaring themselves living sculptures, they claimed the status of an artwork (plate 249), a role they used photography to express. Both Ray and Oppenheim, placing a premium on their training as sculptors, articulated the body as a prop that could be picked up, bent, or deployed instead of more traditional materials as a system of weight, mass, and balance. In *Plank Piece I and II* (1973; plate 254), Ray hung limply from a plank wedged diagonally against a wall. And in *Parallel Stress* (1970; plate 255), Oppenheim performed two actions void of drama yet obdurate in their physicality: first, defying the pull of gravity, he stretched his body like a bridge between two parallel brick walls, a position he held for ten minutes; next he lay prostrate inside the large V-shaped concavity between two mounds of earth, his body flexing to conform to the shape of the slopes.

Other artists, including Yves Klein, Claes Oldenburg, and Robert Morris, have also experimented with the body as sculptural material. In 1960 in Paris, dressed in a three-piece suit, Klein jumped from a second-story window to the ground (plate 238). Accounts conflict as to whether he made his leap with or without a net, and the action in fact had no audience; it was staged for a photograph, published in a kind of one-day newspaper, *Dimanche—Le journal d'un seul jour*, on Sunday November 27, 1960 (fig. 1), and sold on newsstands throughout the city.[5] Morris's introduction to the physicality of the body came through his affiliation with the Judson Dance Theater and a group of New York choreographers, including Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer (fig. 2), and Trisha Brown, who opposed the conventions of theatrical dance to investigate the body's ordinary, matter-of-fact movements and positions. Its scale based on the human body, Morris's *I-Box* (1962; plate 239) is a full-length nude photograph of himself set in a Minimalist box with a hinged, I-shaped door. Playing with the pun of "I" and "eye," Morris proposed a mode of meaning for sculpture and performance that corresponded closely to that of the photograph—a mode in which the physical self is at once encoded by the camera and treated as an uninflected sculptural object in space.

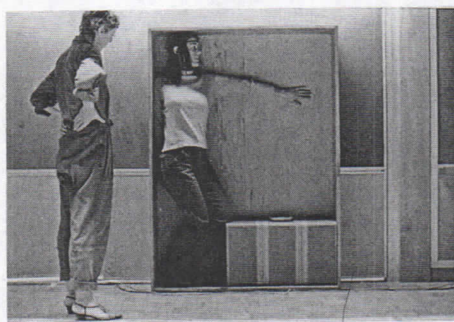

fig. 2. Yvonne Rainer. *Performance*. Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York, 1972. Photograph: Babette Mangolte

In the radicalized climate of the 1970s, when the women's-liberation movement took center stage, artists such as Wilke, Antin, and EXPORT refigured their bodies in the spirit of activism to comment on the power structure of gender difference. To make what she called "performalist self-portraits" such as *S.O.S.—Starification Object Series* (1974–82; plate 235), Wilke hired a commercial photographer to take pictures of her posed like a fashion mannequin in various states of undress, sporting here an Arab headdress, there sunglasses and a cowboy hat, there curlers in her hair. She also "scarred" her naked flesh with a swarm of labia-shaped sculptures made of chewing gum. Wilke's pose as a stigmatized star in *S.O.S.* underscores the key role of photography in the intersection of performance, sculpture, and portraiture.

A self-proclaimed feminist, EXPORT subjected her body to actions designed to defy the conformist post–World War II culture of her native Austria. Working in Vienna alongside the Actionist artists—principally Günter Brus, Otto Mühl, Hermann Nitsch, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler—who emerged there in the 1960s, she, like them, enlisted photography to register the psychological effects of the built and natural environments. In the *Körperkonfigurationen* (Body configurations) series of the early 1970s (plate 256, fig. 3), she used her body as a measuring and pointing device—encircling the curve of a curb, conforming to the angle of a corner, pressing against a wall, or lying down inside a narrow ditch. Most of the pictures are accentuated with red or black lines, either produced in the darkroom or added to the print. The artificial match among the architectural structures, the geometric lines applied to the photographs, and the figure's uneasy gymnastics emphasize the dissension between the individual and the ideological forces that shape social reality.

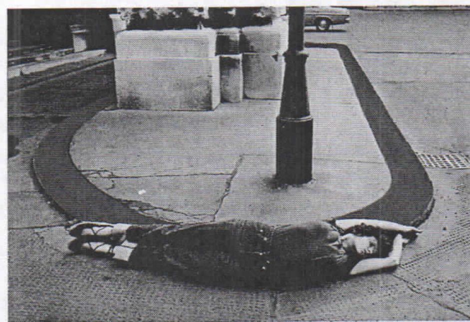

fig. 3. VALIE EXPORT. *Einkreisung* (Encirclement) from the series *Körperkonfigurationen* (Body configurations). 1976. Gelatin silver print with red watercolor drawing, 21 15/16 x 29 1/16" (55.7 x 73.8 cm). Courtesy Charim Galerie, Vienna.

In recent years, artists have continued to use the camera to act out symbolic and concrete gestures of political dissent and to question issues of gender and racial identity. One artist engaged with the incorporation of performance principles into photography is Robin Rhode, who has tapped his familiarity with the rough, segregated neighborhoods of Cape Town and Johannesburg, where he grew up, to address aspects of the troubled South African landscape in the postapartheid age. *Stone Flag* (2004; plate 263) is a sequence of pictures shot from a single, bird's-eye viewpoint in simulated stop-action. They show the artist apparently wielding a flag—actually a sculpture of red-clay bricks, which he seems to bend into the wind in an ode to his nation's newfound democracy. His stark-white boiler suit was initially designed for a dance show, a collaboration with the rap group Black Noise in 2001, in which performers threw handfuls of charcoal dust on the floor, slowly

becoming smeared with dust themselves. Rhode's outfit relates the subcultural codes of urban youth culture to an economy of difference. A meditation on the nature of national representation that extends into questions of personal identity, *Stone Flag* is a work in which photography is a constitutive agent.

Notes

1. This photograph, part of a series, also appears in the literature with the date of 1919. Below one of the variants of the photograph, Marcel Duchamp wrote that it was taken that year, during his first visit to Paris after spending four years in New York and nine months in Argentina. See Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, third rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1997), 2:673–74. But Schwarz has also attributed the picture to Man Ray, and if Duchamp is correct that it was taken in Paris (an easier thing to remember than a photograph's date), it cannot have been made before July 1921, when Man Ray moved there. See Schwarz, *Man Ray: The Rigour of Imagination* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), pp. 243, 289. James W. McManus too attributes the picture to Man Ray, stating that the negative was discovered in Man Ray's archives. See Anne Collins Goodyear and McManus, eds., *Inventing Marcel Duchamp: The Dynamics of Portraiture* (Washington, D.C.: National Portrait Gallery Smithsonian Institution, and Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2009), p. 154. Finally, it has also been suggested that the haircut was administered in 1921 by the Mexican caricaturist Georges de Zayas, during Duchamp's second return to Paris. See Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), pp. 24, 98, and Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art and New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989), p. 18. In their *Marcel Duchamp: Ephemerides in and about Marcel Duchamp and Rrose Sélavy, 1887–1968* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont note that Duchamp enhanced Francis Picabia's *L'Oeil cacodylate* of 1921 with two small cutout photographs of his head, one showing it completely shaved, the other with the comet tonsure, which may reinforce the 1921 dating.
2. Willoughby Sharp, "Body Works," *Avalanche* 1 (Fall 1970):14.
3. See Craig Owens, "The Medusa Effect, or, The Spectacular Ruse," in Scott Bryson et al., eds, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 192.
4. Carrie Lambert, "Moving Still: Mediating Yvonne Rainer's Trio A," in *October* 89 (Summer 1999):92.
5. The photographer with whom Yves Klein worked, Harry Shunk, actually shot not one but two pictures: one was taken with a net beneath the airborne artist, the other a few moments later, from the same angle, but with the net removed to show an empty street. Shunk then montaged the upper half of one picture with the lower half of the other in the darkroom to capture Klein's famous leap into the void. The photographer János (John) Kender, who worked with Shunk from around 1957 to around 1973, appears in the picture on a bicycle. According to Sidra Stich, Shunk "thought the bicyclist would add greatly to the photograph by performing a role similar to that of the people in Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*." See Stich, *Yves Klein* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1994), p. 274, n. 35.