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**Absence and the Archive:  
Cheryl Dunye, Zoe Leonard, and the Parafictional Representation of Fae Richards**

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## Abstract

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Fae Richards was the fictionalized muse of filmmaker Cheryl Dunye and artist Zoe Leonard in the early 1990s. Her story was constructed from photographs and a few short film fragments, which were translated by the two artists into three mediums: Cheryl Dunye's feature film, *The Watermelon Woman*; a set of hand-developed photographs by Zoe Leonard titled *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*; and a collaborative photo-book of seventy-three photographs with descriptions. This paper focuses on the communal force buttressing "Fae Richards," and views her fictional ghost as a repository for an emotional force that links a community laterally in a contemporaneous present and vertically across a continuum of time. It treats the archive as a resource of fiction no matter its claims to objectivity, asserting that the interpretation of "fact" is always in flux. Instead, it shows the archive can serve as a mirror — a means to express one's identity. It is also an imperative of absence from institutional archives — when one cannot find one's history, one must create one's history.

## Table of Contents

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Absence and the Archive:  
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Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Historical Context.....	6
Chapter 2: The Fictionalized Archive.....	18
Chapter 3: Trauma, Community, and Empowering the Present.....	32
Conclusion.....	44
Bibliography.....	45
List of Illustrations.....	48
Illustrations.....	51

The first photographs of Faith Richardson are family photos. Dated between 1924 and 1925, the seemingly well-worn images show Faith and her sister, Reba, smiling and posing with friends and a pet dog, a liting script recording names below (Fig 1). The final photographs from *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*, a collection of seventy-three images that depict one woman's existence, are also family photos. But before a viewer reaches this point, they must wade through representations of a life with many turns. The protagonist's name is shortened to Fae Richards, and later reduced to "The Watermelon Woman." Typewritten captions explain Fae was working as a maid for a wealthy white family in Philadelphia when she was "discovered" by the family's film director daughter, Martha Page, and began an acting career in Hollywood. Her roles included maids, slaves, and dancers, and her name was consistently left out of the credits. It also appears she had a relationship with Martha Page, laughing and sharing picnics in snapshots, though other photographs of the couple off-screen seem to indicate trouble (Fig 2, 3). When the limited roles proved unsatisfying, Fae left Martha and Hollywood, joining a black film studio called "Liberty Productions" and becoming involved in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. While her starring roles were newly ambitious, the production company folded and Richards became a club singer, where she met her new partner, a black woman named June Walker. June Walker was Fae's final family; the duo lived in New York City until Richards' death in the 1970s (Fig 4).

Fae Richards was the muse of filmmaker Cheryl Dunye and artist Zoe Leonard in the early 1990s. Her story was constructed from photographs and a few

short film fragments, which were translated by the two artists into three mediums: Cheryl Dunye's feature film, *The Watermelon Woman*;<sup>1</sup> a set of eighty-two hand-developed photographs by Zoe Leonard titled *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*;<sup>2</sup> and a collaborative photo-book of seventy-three photographs with descriptions.<sup>3</sup> Fae's life was painstakingly recreated with extraordinary attention to detail. There is a complication, however: Fae Richards was fictional.

Dunye conceived of Fae "The Watermelon Woman" Richards in the early 1990s and approached Leonard with a "raw, just formed" sketch of her biography.<sup>4</sup> Leonard spent 1993 to 1996 directing, shooting, and producing hundreds of photographs meant to comprise Fae's life, using a collection of actors on sites in New York and Philadelphia. Shot with a Nikon FM camera furnished with a 50mm lens on 35mm TriX film, the film was aged in a darkroom by eight different people with a goal of evoking the multiple treatments necessary for photographs taken over a fifty-year span.<sup>5</sup> Leonard also filmed several short clips intended to comprise part of Fae's filmography. Following Leonard's creation of evidentiary material,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Watermelon Woman* was released in 1996 and is written by, directed by, and stars Cheryl Dunye. It premiered in February of 1996 at the Berlin International Film Festival and then screened at largely gay and lesbian film festivals in the United States during 1996 and 1997. It continues to be screened into the present.

<sup>2</sup> The photographs are in an edition of 3 + 2 APs. They are in the collections of: the Art Institute of Chicago; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; cast and crew of *The Fae Richards Project*; Private Collection, Europe; and Eileen Harris Norton, Los Angeles/New York.

<sup>3</sup> The book is published and distributed by Artspace Books, San Francisco.

<sup>4</sup> Zoe Leonard and Anna Blume, "Zoe Leonard Interviewed By Anna Blume," 1997, <http://www.anthonymeierfinearts.com/attachment/en/555f2a8acfaf3429568b4568/Press/555f2b29cfaf3429568b5c35>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Dunye wrote, directed, and starred in *The Watermelon Woman*, releasing the film in 1996.<sup>6</sup>

The film follows a character named Cheryl as she attempts to track down the story of “The Watermelon Woman.” She is taken with the actress after seeing her in a film — her character reflecting, “Something in her face, something in the way she looks and moves, is serious, is interesting.” While the archives continuously fail her, she finds redemption in the oral testimony of Fae’s peers as well as through self-reflection.<sup>7</sup>

Like Dunye and Leonard’s project, this dissertation centers on Fae Richards herself. While many scholars have deconstructed aspects of the film with attention to film theory, this study will focus exclusively on what is accomplished by Dunye’s cross-generational performative exchange.<sup>8</sup> Others have conducted close readings of Leonard’s photographic construction of the archive. This paper picks up on the predominant interpretation — that the photographs are deceptively realistic, with clues that point to fiction in order to remind the viewer of those who are unrepresented in historical documentation — and situates it in regard to trauma theory and self- and community-affirmation.<sup>9</sup> By focusing on the communal force

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<sup>6</sup> From this point on, the film, photographs, and project in entirety will be demarcated in their titles: the film is *The Watermelon Woman*, the photographs are *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*, and when referring to the project in entirety it is *The Fae Richards Project*.

<sup>7</sup> In order to avoid confusing Cheryl Dunye with *The Watermelon Woman*’s character, Cheryl, this paper will use the last name “Dunye” when referring to the director and “Cheryl” alone when referring to the character. Characters from the film, inclusive of Fae Richards, will be referred to colloquially by their first names, replicating how they are presented in *The Fae Richards Project*.

<sup>8</sup> Further reading on the film can be found in Laura L. Sullivan’s, “‘The Watermelon Woman’ and Black Lesbian Possibility”, *Callaloo* no. 1 (23: 2000): 448-460, and in Alex Juhasz and Jesse Lerner’s *F is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth’s Undoing*, (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Further reading on these interpretations of the photographs, both in book and installation form, can be found in Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “On Ghost Writing: The Fae Richards Archive,” *artUS* 1

buttressing “Fae Richards,” it will view her fictional ghost as a repository for an emotional force that links a marginalized community laterally in a contemporaneous present and vertically across a continuum of time. It will recall some details of the film and photographs in order to situate the work’s position, but will focus largely on how *The Fae Richards Project* in its entirety is mediated culturally.

This paper will treat the archive as a resource of fiction no matter its claims to objectivity, asserting that the interpretation of “fact” is always in flux. Instead, it will show that the archive can serve as a mirror — a means to express one’s identity without temporally induced constraints. It is also an imperative of absence from institutional archives — when one cannot find one’s history, one must create one’s history. It will primarily invoke queer theory, but will pay close attention to black, feminist, and trauma scholarship, focusing on points of overlap between the disciplines, while situating the overall project within 1990s cultural politics and prominent post-structural scholarship.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the paper will insist that *The Fae Richards Project* is an active work: one that seeks to change how a community can engage with its past and present.

The first chapter discusses how the cultural climate of the 1990s ushered in a period where marginalized populations felt “the urgency of now,” and how this

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(February 2004): 26–33. and in Rebecca Schlossberg’s Master’s Thesis, “(Re)mediation of Media in ‘the Fae Richards Photo Archive’” (School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> I think it is important to state that as a queer woman, I feel more comfortable trusting my insight on the queer work performed by the *The Fae Richards Project*. It is also a tremendous commentary on racial politics, and I direct the reader to Laura L. Sullivan’s previously mentioned piece and Robert Reid-Pharr’s essay in *F is for Phony*, titled: “Makes Me Feel Mighty Real: The Watermelon Woman and the Critique of Black Visuality,” for a closer look at the film’s powerful examination of African American identity.

effected the production and reception of *The Fae Richards Project*. The second chapter delves into the thesis embedded in the project, examining its representation of the archives as a means to critique invisibilized power structures, asserting the value of self-examination and alternative forms of memory-maintenance in its place. The third and final chapter examines the production and (re)production of history as a ritual that creates communities across time through shared traumas. It also positions the vehicles of dissemination of *The Fae Richards Project* as ones that intervene in the museum system through emotional charge.



*The only way for us to get through some of the muck of living in America today — the racism and sexism and classism — is for us to understand each other's stories.*

Cheryl Dunye<sup>11</sup>

*I remember one time having lunch with David Wojnarowicz, and I had these small work prints of clouds with me. And I was showing them to him and I was almost crying. I was like, 'David, what the fuck am I doing?' [...] And he said — I'm paraphrasing — 'Don't ever give up beauty. We're fighting so that we can have things like this, so that we can have beauty again.' You know, we were all just too busy for beauty. We were too angry for beauty. We were too heartbroken for beauty.*

Zoe Leonard<sup>12</sup>

Interpretations of history are unstable, and temporal vantage points are a factor in how the past is read. The 1990s marked a period when certain populations sought to reimagine their historical trajectories. Faced with the trauma of erasure in both the past and present, communities came together to assert their selfhood. Figures that did not comfortably meld into prior social designations fought for the visibility of hybridity and intersectionality, often invoking historical narratives as evidence of their significance. This gave rise to artistic positions that stressed the value of making underrepresented communities visible, a key objective of *The Fae Richards Project*.

“History is always in transit” writes historian Dominick LaCapra.<sup>13</sup> It can be deconstructed and rebuilt into different interpretations dependent on subject position, inclusive of temporal standpoints and individual interests. A group of people can understand the past with kaleidoscopic multiplicity, and it, in turn, can

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<sup>11</sup> Cheryl Dunye, “Above the Line,” ed. Matt Brim and Cynthia Chris, *Women's Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 3 & 4 (Fall/Winter 2015): 277–80.

<sup>12</sup> Leonard and Blume, “Leonard Interviewed by Blume.”

<sup>13</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1.

affect an individual with as much variation. Identity formation is ongoing: with “self-definitions and borders never achieving fixity or uncontested identity.”<sup>14</sup> Sometimes people make a choice about what is integrated into their selfhood; other times it is imposed. The twentieth century, LaCapra argues, ushered in a period where the notion of “experience” became important — how one’s encounters in the past shaped their present — with emphasis on the “awareness of the importance of ‘traumatic’ history” in identity formation. This prompted attempts to re-interpret the archive, with attention to its organization and subsequent exclusions, in order to find traces of those who are forgotten or ignored.<sup>15</sup>

In order to fully grasp the intentions of *The Fae Richards Project*, it is crucial to look closely at the social movements of the 1990s specifically related to gender, race, and sexuality, in order to see the shifting boundaries of identity. This chapter will chart the progression of self-definition with specific attention to black and queer American women by looking closely at fractures in the 1970s and 1980s feminist movement. It will then discuss how these identities collided with collective traumas in the 1990s.

Race was understood as a point of failure in first and second wave feminism. Many African American women felt feminism had been co-opted as a white movement that framed the white voice as universal, and this became a point of debate in the 1970s, particularly for art communities.<sup>16</sup> In 1972 to 1974, following the feminist art exhibition, *Womanspace*, Betye Saar commented: “It was as if we

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>16</sup> Lisa E. Farrington, *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 148.

were invisible again. The white women did not support [us.]”<sup>17</sup> Many black women chose instead to ally with co-ed black liberation groups, though these tended to be embedded in patriarchal systems.<sup>18</sup> In cases where no group could offer adequate support, many black women filled the gap through their own actions: “When there is a group for blacks and a group for women, where do I go?” inquired Faith Ringgold.<sup>19</sup> She answered this question by founding *Where We At: Black Women Artists* in 1971, creating a space for black women to exhibit work on their own terms.<sup>20</sup>

Essentialist feminism also mishandled the representation of sexual difference.<sup>21</sup> This can be observed in the treatment of one significant artist group, the Lesbian Art Project, which hosted a series of performances titled *An Oral Herstory of Lesbianism* in 1979. It was radical in its standpoint; its performative individual testimonies of everyday lesbian life carved out a form of queer expression that was distinct from gay male identity and heterosexual womanhood.<sup>22</sup> But the group faced backlash from the larger feminist movement. Feminist scholars criticized their project as “a separatist position” of “self-validation,” guilty of exploiting women by imposing a sexualizing (and therefore exploitative) gaze on

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<sup>17</sup> Betye Saar quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Faith Ringgold quoted in *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>20</sup> This was also a reaction toward exhibition practices that were seen as exploitative of black identity, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s show *Harlem on my Mind* (1969) and the Whitney Museum of Art’s show *Contemporary Black Artists in America* (1979). Both were seen as exhibitions put together by white curators with a white perspective that exploited and exoticized black identity. Shows such as *Where We At* put the perspective into the hands of black women, allowing them to form the message they wanted to disseminate.

*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer, *Art & Queer Culture* (London, UK: Phaidon Press, 2013), 40.

<sup>22</sup> Jennie Klein, “The Lesbian Art Project,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, no. 14 (2010): 241.

their bodies.<sup>23</sup> As they could not adhere to perceived feminist principles, they were consequently characterized as replicating the patriarchy.

While *An Oral Herstory* offered a more complex view of sexuality within the 1970s feminist movement, it still faced missteps, including its lack of racial diversity. The show hosted exclusively white women with one exception: Christine Wong, whose contribution accordingly centered on her feelings of mismatch as an Asian woman in a sea of whiteness.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, the group was found wanting by both the larger feminist movement and by women of color, though on different grounds.

The 1990s brought forth the dawn of multiplicity, which pushed the notion that no one label had to stand for all. “After twenty years, feminist art is a braid of multiple positions,” wrote Lucy Lippard in 1989. “But in fact, it’s not multiple enough.”<sup>25</sup> “Sisterhood is still important,” pressed bell hooks at the end of the decade. But for her, solidarity meant learning to understand other perspectives: “in being able to learn everyone’s codes and to ‘code switch,’ as well as to try on other codes.”<sup>26</sup> Perceived failures in the history of the movement came to the forefront. “Feminism in the United States did not emerge from the women who were most victimized — the invisible, the most hurt, the powerless,” wrote bell hooks.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman, “Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art Making,” in *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women’s Movement 1970-1985* (London, UK: Pandora, 1987), 317.

<sup>24</sup> An excerpt from Wong’s piece, “Yellow Queer,” reads: “It’s fun being a Yellow Queer./ I can play White/ And everyone pretends that I am./ It’s a thin line/ Where one half is playing White/ And the other half is who I really am.”

Terry Wolverton and Christine Wong, “An Oral Herstory of Lesbianism,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1979): 52–53.

<sup>25</sup> Lucy Lippard, “Both Sides Now: A Reprise,” in *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: The New Press, 1989), 266.

<sup>26</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, Second Edition (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 58.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

Attention was given to fashioning a feminism that spoke for all women, despite class, race, and sexual difference.

These philosophies flowed into the art world. “Artists in the nineties have begun to fully deconstruct the marginality-centrality paradigm,” wrote Thelma Golden in her survey of art for the 1993 Whitney Biennial, asserting that the margins were becoming the center while the center was moving to the margins.<sup>28</sup> Positions that were previously relegated toward otherness were now in a place of demanding their worth. These interests manifested in an examination of intersectionality and hybridity, which paid particular notice to respecting individual vantage points. Theorists like Homi Bhabha celebrated the insights of intersectional studies, exploring “‘in-between’ spaces” as places of exchange and revolution.<sup>29</sup> To examine sites of interchange between groups was seen as a way to actively restructure cultural conversations.

LaCapra notes that historical transformations of identity come into conflict with governmental forces, such as law and systems of standardization, as identity transformation necessarily prioritizes change over fixity.<sup>30</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, this mismatch came to be seen as a conflict between morality and chaos. Identity was being categorized anew, and nondominant identities clashed with dominant culture in the United States. This ultimately came to be understood as “identity

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<sup>28</sup> Thelma Golden, “What’s White...?,” in *1993 Biennial Exhibition* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 35.

<sup>29</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Beyond the Pale: Art in the Age of Multicultural Translation,” in *1993 Biennial Exhibition* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 62–63.

<sup>30</sup> LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, 6.

politics.” The resulting incongruities launched a political battle waged in the media, often referred to as the “culture wars.”

This had a concrete impact on the art world. Conservative government proselytized against art they deemed anti-moralistic, an attack often leveled at work depicting queer themes. In 1989, Washington DC’s Corcoran Gallery of Art canceled an exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe’s work following criticism from Congress and conservative lobbyists, who regarded his photographic depictions of (often black) male homosexuality (described by the New York Times as “homoerotic and violent”) as obscene to the point of illegality.<sup>31, 32</sup>

*The Watermelon Woman* faced similar controversy in 1996, with conservative politicians railing against its National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding. In Congress, Rep. Peter Hoekstra of Michigan accused the government of funding lesbian pornography due to the film’s inclusion of a sex scene.<sup>33</sup> The Times characterized Hoekstra’s condemnation as a witch hunt, publishing “of some 9,000 recent NEA grants, the Congressman is focusing on a few dozen, most of which went to gay, minority, or female recipients.”<sup>34</sup> The controversy resulted in a change to

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<sup>31</sup> Since this point, scholars have unpacked the fetishization of the black male body by the white male gaze, revealing more nuance about this topic than I would be able to cover within the bounds of this paper. I direct the reader to Kobena Mercer’s essay, “Reading Racial Fetishism: The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe” for more information.

Emily S Apter and William Pietz, eds., “Reading Racial Fetishism: The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe,” in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, by Kobena Mercer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Gamarekian “Corcoran, to Foil Dispute, Drops Mapplethorpe Show,” *The New York Times*, June 14, 1989, sec. Arts, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/14/arts/corcoran-to-foil-dispute-drops-mapplethorpe-show.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Frank Rich, “Lesbian Lookout,” *The New York Times*, March 13, 1997, sec. Opinion, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/03/13/opinion/lesbian-lookout.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

NEA policy, allowing Congress to review the content of art before issuing grant money — a victory for conservatives.<sup>35</sup>

As art became a focus of governmental attack, the definition of what constituted a valuable image came into question. In 1991, the Los Angeles Police Department brutally assaulted a black man, Rodney King, on the side of a highway. When spectator-recorded footage of the beating was released, it was broadcast across the United States and had near-immediate viral reach, fueling revolts in major cities.<sup>36</sup> Two years later, it was included in the 1993 Whitney Biennial in the main galleries, with curator John G. Hanhardt reporting: “The video of the Rodney King incident... is paradigmatic of the new relationship media has to its community, and to television itself.”<sup>37</sup> Images were valued for their impact on public discourse, and the manner in which they served as a battlefield for communities’ struggles. The Whitney’s display also demonstrated the increasing interest in the ways video could “address issues of identity, desire, and personal realities that the mainstream media fails to substantively address.”<sup>38</sup> It highlighted the significance of reality. Personal experience could ignite change when, facilitated by the media, its meaning resonated with larger communities.

At the same time, gay and lesbian Americans began to use personal images to battle a war of visibility in the media. The AIDS crisis emerged in the early 1980s,

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<sup>35</sup> Laura L. Sullivan, “‘The Watermelon Woman’ and Black Lesbian Possibility,” *Callaloo* 23, no. 1 (2000): 451.

<sup>36</sup> The power of the footage resonates with people to this day. For contemporary insight, a reader might be interested in Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (London: Penguin Books, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> John G. Hanhardt, “Media Art Worlds: New Expressions in Film and Video, 1991-93,” in *1993 Biennial Exhibition* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 38.

<sup>38</sup> Margot Norton, “Public Access: Taking Ownership of the Moving Image in 1993,” in *1993: Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star* (New York: New Museum, 2013), 48.

continuing well into the 1990s before there was manageable treatment. Three hundred thousand Americans died between 1987 and 1997.<sup>39</sup> Censured as a gay disease, President Ronald Reagan refused to address the issue until almost the end of his presidency.<sup>40</sup> Queer populations, gay men and lesbians alike, were left to fight for positive exposure. “The press sought to photograph [gay] people with AIDS — the more visibly ill the better — to scapegoat the supposed culprits,” document Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer.<sup>41</sup> To counteract media panic, activists battled against the depersonalization of horror. “Counter images were at first circulated in queer communities,” continue the historians, “family albums, for example, home movies and the snapshots used in the obituary columns of the gay press.”<sup>42</sup> The personal image became a tool to evoke empathy and ignite activism.

Art became a means of both expression and activism, and depictions of the human body were of central significance. Media coverage was generated when the gay body forced itself to be noticed, and funerals were frequently staged on the White House lawn, directly indicting President Reagan and Clinton in AIDS deaths.<sup>43</sup> David Wojnarowicz’s ashes were famously scattered in front of the White House when he died from the disease.<sup>44</sup> Collectives including Gran Fury and ACT UP created work intended to educate the public, funneling their rage and weariness

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<sup>39</sup> “Mortality Slide Series” (Center for Disease Control, 2016), [http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/statistics\\_surveillance\\_hiv\\_mortality.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/statistics_surveillance_hiv_mortality.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Lord and Meyer, *Art & Queer Culture*, 32.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson and Barbara Hunt, eds., *Bodies of Resistance* (New York: Visual AIDS, 2000), 9.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*



into an activist practice.<sup>45</sup> Art and performance became a means of breaking through oppression and calling attention to a dominant culture that ignored trauma.

LaCapra indicates that these types of traumatic clashes prompt groups to come together in order to “work through” its emotional impact, often resulting in a higher degree of communication with people who are also recognized as “other.”<sup>46</sup> Such was the case for populations living through the trauma of marginalization in the 1990s. Producer and collaborator in *The Watermelon Woman*, Alex Juhasz, stressed this as a contribution to the production of *The Fae Richards Project*: “People [were] suggesting that organizing only around being black or organizing only around AIDS or organizing only around being [a] lesbian is limiting conversations that are important politically.”<sup>47</sup> Multiple communities came together to support the visibility of queer, black identity in *The Fae Richards Project*.

These issues were of particular concern for its two artists: Cheryl Dunye and Zoe Leonard. Leonard was embedded within the queer community, living and working in New York in the 1980s and 1990s. She was a member of ACT UP, as well as the largely female collectives Gang and Fierce Pussy.<sup>48</sup> Her AIDS and feminist activism had great effect on her methodology as a whole. In an interview she describes coming out of the 1980s and finding the “very tangible horror in my own life because of AIDS... I just could not keep doing these ambiguous, beautiful, pictures anymore. I needed to do something that had the same kind of vitality I had in my personal and activist life... we were losing our bodies, losing control of our

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<sup>45</sup> Lord and Meyer, *Art & Queer Culture*, 32.

<sup>46</sup> LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, 5, 56.

<sup>47</sup> Alex Juhasz and Suzie Oppenheimer, Interview, Skype, June 3, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Leonard and Blume, “Leonard Interviewed by Blume.”

speech, and the government was coming closer and closer inside our homes.”<sup>49</sup> Her experience with AIDS reverberated into a practice that fueled her perspective as a feminist and a lesbian. In 1992, she worked with Gang to design a poster that was “a portrait of a vagina that read, ‘Read my lips before they are sealed,’” which was plastered throughout New York City. Leonard reflects, “It was a way to channel, I think, our talents as artists through our anger as activists... Something that would unite art and our need to create change in the world.”<sup>50</sup>

Cheryl Dunye, too, found herself immensely affected by the disease. “This was a time [of] AIDS activism, ACT UP,” reflected Dunye in a recent interview. “There was a lot of visibility and activism around making images... the 1990s were a conscious and vital time... we were seeing the first films of every sort of community, so the 1990s was filled with this variety of ‘first images.’”<sup>51</sup> This setting gave primacy to representations of those who were missing from public consciousness, linking activism with the expression of self-identity.

Dunye also turned her gaze toward the past, using her work to explore her problems with the legacy of feminism. Much of her writing points to overall dissatisfaction with a lack of recorded cultural inheritance. Reflecting on her personal position, she has stated:

I don’t necessarily see myself as a feminist per se. I must say that I’ve been empowered by African American issues, and by other political battles, anarchist movement issues... A whole bunch of those things became who I am. But there is no word for the -ism that I live from... I am a feminist as much as I am black as much as I am a tennis player as

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> *Teddy Award Winner Cheryl Dunye on Queer-Feminist Afro-American Filmmaking*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysdbI5RAmk4>.

much as I am a dog owner.... When I was exploring feminism it was a bunch of *books* that made you a feminist. There was no movement I, as a young black woman, could run into. It was a lot of reading and feeling uncomfortable and standing around people I didn't like who said they were feminists.<sup>52</sup>

Dunye's artistic motivations were sampled from many movements, but she ultimately concluded that self-reflection was the most reliable -ism in which she could take part. A telling moment occurred in 1990 when she was an MFA student at Rutgers University in New Jersey. "I was going to do a documentary and ask the question, 'Why are there so few African American women artists?'" she explains. She taped images of African American women on her wall, only to tear them down. Rather than document past injustice, she chose to reflect on her personal history, challenging herself to "put my own pictures on the wall." This developed into *Janine*, a film exploring the memories of her infatuation with a white, upper-class woman in her Catholic high school. Talking about selfhood in her work was a way of both "empowering" herself and making herself "real."<sup>53</sup>

The 1990s ushered in a time when the margins were pushing their way into the center, primarily through modes of activism, disseminated through imagistic vehicles. The clashes between governmental censorship and expanding definitions of selfhood urged art communities toward modes of activist expression: if one did not put their identity on paper, it risked real-time erasure. Ultimately, the creation of Fae Richards married the visions of Cheryl Dunye and Zoe Leonard during a

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<sup>52</sup> Cheryl Dunye and Alexandra Juhasz, "Cheryl Dunye," in *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video*, vol. Volume 9, Visible Evidence (Minneapolis/ London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 298-299.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

period where exerting the visibility of marginalized identity was a form of political action.

*“The Watermelon Woman?” I don’t know where you got that mess from. Probably from when she was making those movies. But her name was Fae Richards.*

*When she sang for us she used her real name.*

Miss Shirley to Cheryl, *The Watermelon Woman*

*The Fae Richards Project* questions the reliability of the “objective” archive, only to dismiss it in favor of self-representation. Cheryl Dunye’s film demonstrates how organizations that claim authority replicate historical exclusions, invisibilizing marginal populations. The project indicates that any object is the product of its fixed historical point. In contrast, both hierarchical systems of exclusion and the emotions the project elicits are indicated as atemporal, insinuating that connections can be drawn across time. The project further demonstrates the significance of emotional connectivity through oral testimony and personal identification. By addressing a problem that is based in the “real,” then moving it to a fictionalized, impossible result, the artists are able to open a space of imaginative potential.

Archives are designed as a repository for the past, and their systems of organization betray what is deemed by a society to be universal order. Referred to by Michel Foucault as a historical *a priori*, archives before post-structuralist revision had been understood as a collection of objective statements that could be called up in the present by whomever needs them and deployed to whatever effect is required.<sup>54</sup> Later theorists, Foucault among them, have explicated that archives are far from objective: they betray the discursive biases of the dominant power, excluding viewpoints that do not comfortably fit within how a power system would

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<sup>54</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 126.

prefer a society be remembered.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the past is interpreted according to the needs of present prejudices; it can never truly be understood according to the perspective of its time.<sup>56</sup> This critique of finding an all-encompassing truth was a significant part of 1990s discourse, and, in LaCapra's view, led to an emphasis on studying "experience."<sup>57</sup> This meant that that an individual's subjective background, most often delivered through oral histories and testimonies, could better describe the moving borderlines of identity over time. Extrapolating from this, it was deemed that by getting in the minds of those who were responsible for historical documents one could more suitably understand what version of "truth" was being described.<sup>58</sup>

Photographic archives were of particular interest, as the meaning of "truth" in a photograph took on new forms of criticism in the 1990s. In the decades prior, Roland Barthes had declared photographs possessed an "evidential force" — depicting reality, even if it is a "reality one can no longer touch."<sup>59</sup> This understanding of the photographic archive shifted along the same lines as general archival theory. Theorists, such as John Tagg, pushed against Barthes' contention, asserting that photographs reveal less about an objective reality and more about the social and political framework from whence they came — essentially, the photograph's "experience."<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, one could learn a great deal from analyzing how a historical object was treated in the present. "It is to the reality not

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<sup>55</sup> Further reading and insight into Foucault's post-structuralist philosophies of the archive can be found in Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (University of Chicago Press, 1998).  
Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*.

<sup>57</sup> LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Roland Barthes quoted in John Tagg, *Burden of Representation* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 3.

of the past,” writes Tagg, “but of present meanings and of changing discursive systems that we must turn our attention.”<sup>61</sup> This uncovered a history of the power dynamic surrounding photographs, and the ways in which they are not passive objects, but instead systematically serve the needs of an authority. Okwui Enwezor points out, as an example, that archival photographs have been invoked as a justification for imperialism. In the Victorian era, Enlightenment principles converted photographs of the monarchy’s colonies into sources of data, aggregating the material into systems of codes that judged and regulated their subjects according to what was deemed universal. Omnitude became a force of control. Under the guise of “Enlightenment science,” Britain sent spies dressed as Buddhist monks to map areas banned from the Western gaze, surveying protected holy areas of Tibet.<sup>62</sup> Espionage was committed under the auspice of knowledge.

These half-truths fall under the category of “parafiction,” a term coined by Carrie Lambert-Beatty to describe actions that appear “real” but are actually fictionalized parodies meant to convince a viewer of their authenticity in order to serve an ulterior purpose.<sup>63</sup> For Lambert-Beatty, parafictions are often invoked by sources of power — in recent times, examples include false claims of weapons of mass destruction that start wars, and embedded journalists documenting warfare “objectively” dressed as and from the viewpoint of soldiers.<sup>64</sup> But the notion of

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>62</sup> Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (Germany: Steidl, 2008), 19-20.

<sup>63</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, “Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility,” *October* 129 (Summer 2009): 52.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 56.

parafiction has been repurposed in the visual arts not as a tool of authority, but a form of power subversion.

Cheryl Dunye and Zoe Leonard's construction of Fae Richards is one such version of artistic parafiction, specifically targeted on the failures of the archive. By keeping one foot in the door of the real through a successful mimicry of an actual archive, as well as the experience of searching for archival documents, Dunye and Leonard offer a realistic interpretation of what it means to search for a past that is irretrievable. But by reinterpreting this archival instance on their own terms, they indicate self-fashioning is a way to reclaim history.

Dunye and Leonard's project is sourced from personal struggles. Each artist spent time in institutional archives, and the final outcome of Richards is pieced together through fragments of other women, with the intention of making her "fictional but historically possible."<sup>65</sup> Dunye reported that she conducted research in the Lesbian Herstory Archive in Brooklyn, New York and the Library of Congress archives in Washington, D.C. She found that while each archive contained a portion of the character she was trying to build, each was incomplete and information was disparate — for example, the Lesbian Herstory Archive had no material on African American women in Hollywood, though it did include black lesbians. Conversely, the Library of Congress had information on black women in Hollywood, but none specifically regarding lesbians.<sup>66</sup> Leonard researched photographic history and the accounts of Hollywood "race films," particularly in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (part of the New York Public Library), the Library for the

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<sup>65</sup> Leonard and Blume, "Leonard Interviewed by Blume."

<sup>66</sup> "Imaginary Archives: A Dialogue," *Art Journal* 72, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 83.



Performing Arts in Lincoln Center, New York, as well as the Lesbian Herstory Archives.<sup>67</sup> The final products drew from these sources to harken to something that *could* have taken place but was not recorded by the archives. Leonard explains that “every part of her biography is possible within the historical framework on every level — the roles available for black actresses in Hollywood in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, the black Hollywood industry, the Civil Rights movement, the queer/lesbian underground scene, etc.”<sup>68</sup> In the artist’s perspective, every choice Richards made throughout her fictional journey was one within the realm of possibility.

This process was recreated in *The Watermelon Woman*. Cheryl encounters institutional archives at three turns: a home-based archive run by an amateur race film scholar, a public library with a white male librarian, and a non-profit archive of lesbian material run by a collective. She inquires in all three whether or not they have information on “The Watermelon Woman” to various results.

The race film scholar, a black gay man named Lee Edwards, lives in a house filled to the brim with posters, ephemera, and books. His own interests guide his collection: he reports to Cheryl that he has never heard of “The Watermelon Woman,” likely because she is a woman, and “women are not my specialty” (Fig 5). He also reveals his distaste toward the idea that black consumers from the 1920s to 1950s sought out Hollywood films, stating that despite the fact that “black folks wanted to see the Hollywood stuff with the stars and the costumes, all that junk,” he refused to have information on films that he deems white products. Therefore Fae

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<sup>67</sup> Leonard and Blume, “Leonard Interviewed by Blume.”

<sup>68</sup> Zoe Leonard to Suzie Oppenheimer, “Master’s Dissertation: Interview,” May 13, 2016.

Richards as “The Watermelon Woman” is unsearchable. His very specific interests represent a system that prioritizes one type of marginalization over another.

Cheryl encounters an unfriendly and reluctant gatekeeper in the white, male librarian when she continues her quest at the public library. When she asks where she can find information on black actresses in the 1930s, he tells her to check “the black section” (Fig 6). She presses on, only for him to find results in his computer with texts on Fae’s white lover, Martha Page, in titles related to “women in film,” and nothing related to Fae Richards. At the public library, the only way to find information on Fae Richards is through her association with white women.

Cheryl finally finds success in locating material on Fae Richards in the final official archive, C.L.I.T. (Center for Lesbian Information and Technology, a humorous parody of the Lesbian Herstory Archive), but encounters hostility from the Center’s staff. The archivist explains that “someday there will be a great system,” but for now the material is in boxes — which she aggressively pours out onto the table, indifferent to their fragility. When Cheryl asks about material on black lesbians specifically, the archivist responds: “The black lesbian collection is very separate. We received a very generous gift from the Hysteria Foundation, but they wanted it to be used exclusively for African American lesbians, so if we have any photographs that have white people in [sic], we just cross them out.” Cheryl then must block the archivist from pouring the material out haphazardly a second time — taking it gently into her own hands. In the boxes are publicity photographs of Richards from her film and singing career and a major clue for Cheryl: a written dedication from Fae to “June Walker, a special friend.” However, her attempts to take photographs of

the material are thwarted by the archivist, who exclaims “it’s confidential — a safe space,” and that she cannot record without the unanimous permission of the collective, which meets every other month (Fig 7). Dunye draws attention to the limitations of feminist and queer enterprises; a collective can fail an individual in its need for consensus, counteracting its protective mission. The collective’s dedication to inclusivity failed at that very point: first, it is inability to preserve Fae Richards’ story in its entirety, and second, in its reluctance to allow the story seamless entry into the present. Only by overruling the collective and illicitly taping the material is Cheryl able to keep, and thereby use, the records.

Through this progression, Dunye quotes her lived reality in order to deposit the experience firmly in the “real.” Moreover, the depicted struggle is representative of Foucault’s conception of the archive: it is a hierarchical system that prioritizes some histories over others, and betrays discursive biases through its systems of organization.<sup>69</sup> Departing from Dunye’s reality, however, is the moment Cheryl discovers Fae’s story. This is clear when looking at how the characters were created. Mimicking the ease in finding information on Martha Page, the fictional white lesbian director’s character is based predominantly on just one woman, a filmmaker named Dorothy Arzner. Fae Richards, however, is unavoidably constructed from many: black Hollywood actresses such as Butterfly McQueen, Louise Beavers, Dorothy Dandridge, and Lena Horne; performers such as Josephine Baker; and singers such as Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey.<sup>70</sup> While historically possible, there was no way for the artists to find a single identity to stand in for Fae Richards — she is

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<sup>69</sup> Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 3.

<sup>70</sup> Zoe Leonard to Suzie Oppenheimer, “Master’s Dissertation: Interview,” May 13, 2016.

necessarily an amalgamation accessed through the stories the archive has allowed to remain. It is an institutional impossibility to uncover a stand-in for Fae Richards.

But, as previously stated, *The Fae Richards Project* overcomes this dead end: rather than accept that Fae Richards cannot be represented, the artists assume her existence and create a fictionalized placeholder. Invoking parafictional technique, they bring reality into a believable yet falsified location. In doing so, the artists make the claim that their expectation that Fae Richards would have existed is a reliable way to fill in the absence of information — and, for Cheryl Dunye, who among many things is a queer black lesbian actress, looking into an archive and seeing yourself is a way to combat absence in the actual documentation.

Ann Cvetkovich clarifies this impulse in her meticulous study of queer archival practice.<sup>71</sup> She writes that archives can transcend temporal constraints through emotional connectivity linked by responses to shared traumas. “An archive of feelings,” as she refers to it, can be found in cultural texts that encode specific sentiments within it that are legible to those with shared experiences across time, who then activate those emotions through the practices that surround the document’s reception.<sup>72</sup> For Cvetkovich, emotion is atemporal, and even if archival material’s meaning changes, inscribed feelings can be summoned anew by those who identify with what they see in the archive.<sup>73</sup> Fae Richards’ representation is a ping-pong match between two members of a shared community at a shared point in

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<sup>71</sup> Cvetkovich’s version of “queer” echoes Juhasz’s notion of a coming-together of “others.” The theorist treats “queer” as both a moniker for gay populations and for populations outside, and marginalized by, dominant powers.

Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

time: the photographs as archive serve the needs required in the filmic investigation, and the film validates the existence of the photographic material. In light of the assumption that an object can only be read according to the discursive systems in which it is suspended, inventing antiquity is futile.<sup>74</sup> But through Cvetkovich's principles, emotional power *can* be exchanged and assumed across communities in a past/present dyad. This viewpoint offers insight into the film's creation of a historical figure that resounds in the present.<sup>75</sup> The trauma of erasure can reverberate through the traumas of the artists' lived experiences because all are bonded by the oppressive insistence by a dominant narrative that one's lived experience is insignificant: something that had gone unchanged for black and queer populations in the twentieth century.

Cvetkovich asserts that oral testimonies and personal memories, which rely on LaCapra's interpretation of the experiential, are strong conduits for emotional connectivity. "In the absence of institutionalized documentation or in opposition to official histories," she writes, "memory becomes a valuable historical resource."<sup>76</sup> It also allows the transmission to take place outside of the official narrative. For example, low-budget, self-produced films (such as *The Watermelon Woman*) can act as alternatives to big-budget movies and popular culture because they do not make the same demands on capitalist, and therefore power-dependent, sources.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> This pushes against Foucault's commentary in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that any statement made is enunciated by specific discursive background of a moment. For Foucault, if a statement is repeated in a different time or with a different purpose, it is not the same statement.

<sup>76</sup> Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, 8.

<sup>77</sup> This viewpoint is repeated by LaCapra, who understands this turn toward oral testimony as a way for groups made subordinate in the archive to reclaim a history that "has not left sufficient traces" in institutional records. LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, 3.

Indeed, this is also reproduced in *The Watermelon Woman's* script. Cheryl is pointed in the right direction through the oral testimony of a line of women — first her mother, then her mother's friend, Miss Shirley, and then Fae Richards' lover, June Walker. They are able to lead Cheryl to information on Fae's life off-screen. Her mother recognizes Fae from her club career, grousing that "weird people were there," which guides Cheryl to Miss Shirley (Fig 8). Miss Shirley is described by Cheryl as "in the family," but in this case she means a queer one rather than blood, as Miss Shirley is a lesbian as well (Fig 9). "She used to sing for all of us at Butches," professes Miss Shirley, showing Cheryl worn photographs that had previously been tucked into her mirror. These images are dog-eared, with folds in various places: they were actually used, and are not relegated to a solely historical function. The final memory from June Walker is treated as the most significant. June, who only speaks with Cheryl after affirming that she is "a sister," asserts Fae's importance to Cheryl via a letter. June writes, "She paved the way for kids like you to run around making movies about the past and how we lived then." She is furious about the mention of Martha Page in the narrative, stating, "Why do you even want to include a white woman in a movie about Fae's life? Don't you know she has nothing to do with how people should remember Fae? [...] I wanted to remember [that] for you now so that the next time I see you, you can make it right." In these testimonies, Dunye indicates that the emotive power elicited by Fae Richards connects the three women. The reiteration of family titles is significant — the women are characterized as mothers, sisters, and family — demonstrating genealogy can be based on more than blood.

The crux of the film lies in Cheryl's last sentence before introducing the full story of Fae Richards. Cheryl directs it to June Walker in response to her demand that she edit Fae's story, stating:

I know she meant the world to you, but she also meant the world to me and those worlds are different. [...] what she means to me, as a twenty-five year old black woman means something else. It means hope, it means inspiration, and it means possibility. It means history. And most importantly, what I understand, is that *I'm* going to be the one who says, 'I *am* a black lesbian filmmaker who's just beginning' (Fig 10).

Cheryl accepts that Fae Richards means different things to different people, while asserting that what one draws personally from history is of primary significance in looking into the past. A fixed point — in this case Fae Richards — can unite a group even if their interpretations are multiple.

These moments act as a joyful reclamation of Foucault's position, later built on by Jacques Derrida, that when one looks into the past one sees one's self.<sup>78</sup> While the event is not preserved, its subjective effects, or, as Derrida puts it, "erotic simulacrum," remains as an object of influence.<sup>79</sup> But rather than representing this as rendering the archive irrelevant, Dunye's treatment indicates that an imagined past is a way to reify the present. The last slide of the film reads: "Sometimes you have to create your own history. *The Watermelon Woman* is fiction. – Cheryl Dunye, 1996" (Fig 11). Imagining one's history is a way to empower the present.

Some scholars have drawn on Derrida's logic to assert that art that dwells in the archive is forcing relationships between two, unrelated points — a reflection of personal compulsion. Hal Foster, one of the foremost scholars of the subject, posits

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<sup>78</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 62.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

that archival practice is a paranoid gesture. Drawing on a work contemporaneous to *The Fae Richards Project*, Tacita Dean's *Girl Stowaway* (1994), Foster points to the practice's yearning to fill unknowable gaps as "tendentious, almost preposterous."<sup>80</sup> In *Girl Stowaway*, Dean, like Dunye and Leonard, claims that past figures can have a haunting pull on the present (in Dean's case, her muse is a young woman from 1928 who was a stowaway on a wrecked ship). The work is an eight-minute 16mm film birthed from a found photograph, with the artist documenting the ways traces of the stowaway emerge in her present life (Fig 12). For Foster, to focus on the absence of information is to insist that the present can tie loose ends and is, therefore, utopian.<sup>81</sup> While Foster is wise to point out that archival practice indicates a failure in cultural memory, his claim that absences are "enigmas without... rescue" fails to account for the active role the past can play in the present.<sup>82</sup> Both *Girl Stowaway* and *The Fae Richards Project* do not attempt to resolve the lack of information about a past to make demands for a utopian future — instead, the artists connect with it, empowering their present by communing with history. An intimacy can be formed around a shared sense of being lost and being found, denying that the absence of information demands rescue. In response to "pathologizing" these things as problems that need to be fixed, queer culture has found ways to "seize control" and self-define how they want to handle absence in the archive, writes Cvetkovich: and

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<sup>80</sup> Hal Foster, "Archival Impulse," in *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* (London, UK: Verso, 2015), 60.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 47.



this includes leaving ends unbound.<sup>83</sup> The artists do not use the archive to conjure solutions; they use it to inform the now.

Its import can be observed when circling back to the notion of parafiction. Audiences believed the story, even approaching Dunye after screenings to direct her toward relatives and sources who they believed ran in the same circles as Richards.<sup>84</sup> Producer of the film Alex Juhasz interviews that this was a crucial part of the film's accomplishment of "starting fake and ending real."<sup>85</sup> Other artists have too convinced publics of something other than fact through parafictional practice. In *Tribute to Safiye Behar* (2005), Michael Blum mounted a made-up archive documenting a Turkish Jew named Safiye Behar who advised (and maybe romanced) founder of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, which "served as a critical intervention in the official hagiography of the leader."<sup>86</sup> In 2002, a representative from the Yes Men collective pretended to be a WTO representative named Kinnithrug Sprat, and spent an hour addressing the Certified Practicing Accountants Association of Australia, declaring the WTO wanted to resolve its problematic hand in promoting cash-crops that caused famish and drought. The speech was met with "marked enthusiasm, with accountants approaching Mr. Sprat after this talk, full of ideas for helping the 'TRO' serve the people of the global South."<sup>87</sup> These instances exemplify the idea that fact can be followed to an eventual end, only to reveal a fiction, empowering parafiction to unveil failures in the system as a whole. Citing

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<sup>83</sup> Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Alexandra Juhasz and Jesse Lerner, "Introduction: Phony Definitions and Troubling Taxonomies of the Fake Documentary," in *F Is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 15.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>86</sup> Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility", 52.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

Ranci re’s theories of sensibility, Lambert-Beatty states such radical parody can have an active function, intervening in the system of inclusions and exclusions governing what is deemed the collective “common sense,” with a successful act expanding the bookends of this sensibility.<sup>88</sup> When Dunye, Leonard, Blum, and the Yes Men show a public that there are options other than the “given,” audiences are able assess other directions in discursive systems.

Dunye and Leonard deploy parafictional technique in order to subvert power systems and indicate that an emotional connection exists across temporal bounds. By creating a past modeled after an “archive of emotion,” rather than objectivity, they reify their present and create a relationship to history. In order to better understand the purpose of archival critique and the collapse of temporal reliance, it is worthwhile to investigate what types of communions are formed in the past throughout *The Fae Richards Project*.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 64–66.

*But the realness of that community being able to magically come together and produce something with so much value — I don't just mean monetary value, I mean social and cultural value — that's real.*

Alex Juhasz<sup>89</sup>

To look into the archive and find it lacking is symbolic of a larger force of exclusion. But by forming connections — symbolically yoking traumas — a community is formed that unites to defend its right to exist across time. This chapter focuses on the process of (re)performing traumas, and how these serve as a means to reclaim joy, pride, and agency on individual and community levels. By embracing queer desire, which in its definition is claimed to be “perverse,” the artists show the value of personal archives to individuals and to communities. Finally, it will discuss how this exchange between art and activism was an integral part of image culture in the 1990s.

*The Watermelon Woman* collapses history and present into one ahistorical figure. In her performance, Cheryl Dunye links three temporal points — Cheryl Dunye's reality, Cheryl's movie-time, and Fae Richards' fictional historical period. This trio of identities blend into each other and are connected by their shared desires. It is no coincidence that the actress and her role have the same name, which is established from the film's inception. Cheryl is an aspiring filmmaker who works at a video store, and is attempting to make a documentary about the (real for Cheryl) historical figure of “The Watermelon Woman,” much like the actual filmmaker Cheryl Dunye, who is attempting to document the experience of searching for the fictional character of “The Watermelon Woman.” This layering of

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<sup>89</sup> Juhasz and Oppenheimer, Interview.

identity goes one step further when Cheryl enters in and out of the ghostly presence of Fae Richards.

Dunye provides a visual symbol of this character/temporal drag in the form of a bandana, an accessory whose meaning shifts as the film progresses.<sup>90</sup> The bandana is debuted in the beginning of the film, when Cheryl introduces the audience to “The Watermelon Woman.” Cheryl is looking directly into a camera framing her face, like a filmic diary, and describes her research choice: “I know it has to be about black women, ‘cause our stories have never been told.” She wheels a television in front of the camera, and the screen plays a clip from The Watermelon Woman’s first film, 1937’s *Plantation Memories*. Fae is shown with a bandana on her head in a quotation of what mammy figures would have worn at the time (Fig 13). Here, the handkerchief is a symbol of Fae’s oppressed tokenism, a mask she has to wear in order to be allowed into the Hollywood canon. The next time we see a bandana it adorns Cheryl, who has completed several unsuccessful searches in the archive. Again taped diary-style in her personal workspace, Cheryl makes her opinion of the mammy portrayal clear. She mouths Fae’s lines from *Plantation Memories* alongside the actress, linking the two women, and concludes the scene by removing the handkerchief and blowing her nose in it (Fig 14, 15). In its next iteration, Cheryl has discovered that Fae is a queer woman, joyfully proclaiming: “I guess we have a thing or two in common, Ms. Richards: movies and women.” Here, she has made the bandana her own by tying it around her neck (Fig 16). In its final

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<sup>90</sup> This notion of temporal drag borrows from Elizabeth Freeman, who writes temporal drag embodying another time due to the “pull of the past on the present.” Elizabeth Freeman, “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations,” *New Literary History* 31 (2000): 727–44.

reveal, Cheryl has fled from her white girlfriend following multiple incidents of racial insensitivity. Cheryl angrily gets into her car, wearing the bandana around her head while she blasts rap music. When her car breaks down she attempts to make contact with the owner of an adjacent home, only to be harassed by the police. “Looks like one of our crackhead friends,” one policeman says to the other, referring to Cheryl as a boy multiple times (Fig 17). When she protests the misgendering, another officer sneers, “well you look like one, you little freak.” The blitz continues: they tell her to pull up her shirt, show them her ID, and accuse her of having stolen property. Cheryl’s bandana yields the same products as Fae’s: it is a stain on her status in the eyes of authority, no matter its temporal separation. They are marked women.

Reading the bandana and the performance surrounding it as a moment of ritual can yield insight in its purpose. Trauma in the archive, as analyzed by Diana Taylor, is often memorialized through repetition.<sup>91</sup> Routine becomes a mnemonic function that enunciates the vow to never forget, moving history away from the institution and into a human form. “Trauma lives in the body, not in the archive,” asserts Taylor.<sup>92</sup> Delving further, scholar Rebecca Schneider analyzes the role of re-performance for communities. She aligns performance art with American Civil War reenactments, establishing that both invoke a prior emotional context, which is significant in its goal to explore “temporal repetition, temporal reoccurrence,” and

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<sup>91</sup> Diana Taylor, “Trauma in the Archive,” in *Feeling Photography*, ed. Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phyl (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 247.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

the way time repeats itself within a community.<sup>93</sup> This inquiry has purpose: “entering, or reenacting, an event or a set of acts from a critical direction, a different temporal angle, may be an act of survival, an act of keeping alive *as* passing on.”<sup>94</sup> A war reenactment’s attention to trauma and reclamation finds equivalence in the call and response of the marginalized queer women of *The Fae Richards Project*. By performing Fae, Cheryl reenacts and proclaims that the traumas experienced by Fae live on and are still of importance. The bandana (amongst other connections broadcast throughout the film and photographs) forms a link between the figures that erases the notion of temporal separation and of historical change. It becomes a metaphor for the burden carried by black queer women that passes from Fae to Cheryl. However, despite the trauma that it embodies, Cheryl finds power in its connection to her muse, and at various occasions makes a point to reimagine it in a personal style.

But the bandana is imprinted with both trauma and agency. A parallel can be drawn with what Cvetkovich sees as “sites of lesbian public culture” that contain traces of trauma but “seize control over it.”<sup>95</sup> She points to riot grrrls, the feminist punk music scene, as an illustration. Bands such as Le Tigre, Sleater-Kinney, and Bikini Kill wrote politically-charged songs about bleak traumas shared by the community. But Cvetkovich sees their concerts as a way to rebel against pain: “in a concert, screaming lyrics in unison, is a way of surviving and proving your living.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1-2.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>95</sup> Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, 3.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

While a communion through shared trauma may not resolve the obstacle, there is thrill in communal expressions of rebellion against an oppressor.

Community can also be a means to revolt in a different setting: a photo shoot. When the institutional archive is lacking, it forces one to look “against the grain” for information. This is especially true for marginalized communities, inclusive of queer and black populations. Cvetkovich chronicles that it has forced groups to have to read between the lines of official documentation that is inherently negative, like finding queerness in police records, and condemnations of sodomy in religious codes. These, at the very least, confirm their existence historically.<sup>97</sup> Reading “against the grain” can be transformed into an act of pleasure, however, according to photography theorists Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer. They point to school photos as an example, citing that while they replicate hierarchical models of control in the form of teachers (who loom over students and imprint the rules of the state in their lessons), the photos can also be a point of pride in their declaration of presence: a way for the students to say, “we were here, in this grouping.”<sup>98</sup> So while they encode hierarchical systems, they also prevent records of individual existences from being purged.

When looking at the production of Zoe Leonard’s *Fae Richards Photo Archive*, one can see that the photographs resemble a role call of sorts. The crew of nearly forty-five people, which includes actors and technicians, was composed from Dunye

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<sup>97</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, “Photographing Objects as Queer Archival Practice,” in *Feeling Photography*, ed. Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phy (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 281.

<sup>98</sup> Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, “School Photos and Their Afterlife,” in *Feeling Photography*, ed. Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phy (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014) 142.

and Leonard's social network.<sup>99</sup> "Everyone volunteered," recalls Alex Juhasz. "It was a very tightly laced group of people that interacted and did politics together. Everyone who was in the photos was a friend of somebody, or many people, or everybody."<sup>100</sup> Several members of the cast played duplicate roles as actors and as part of the artists' immediate social circle. Juhasz, besides producing the film, played Martha Page and was the then real-life girlfriend of Cheryl Dunye; the wardrobe stylist featured in a family portrait; Irene Dunye, Cheryl's mother in real life and in the film, acts as Zola Hamilton, a famous Harlem Renaissance era sculptor (Fig 18); Cheryl Dunye herself anachronistically emerges in the role of "Black Dyke on Roof #2 (Fig 19)," a friend of Fae Richards.<sup>101</sup> Even the artistic collaboration was born through social connectivity: Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye were part of a circle of friends, and Alex Juhasz met Zoe Leonard in ACT UP.<sup>102</sup> The commonality generated in response to the "culture wars" of the 1990s had direct implications in the group making *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*.

A sense of joy permeates photographs where historical groups of lesbians are depicted. While photographs that stand-in as publicity shots and posed portraits have a rigid despondency to them (Fig 20, 21), the images of queer groups are replete with laughter and relaxed intimacy. A pair of photographs that appears to show a moment separated by seconds goes out of focus in the second frame, as if the photographer is laughing along with her subjects and cannot keep the camera still (Fig 22). A series of four photos that portray a group, inscribed as "Me and the girls

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<sup>99</sup> Leonard and Blume, "Leonard Interviewed by Blume."

<sup>100</sup> Juhasz and Oppenheimer, Interview.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



at the ‘Hotspot,’” show the women oscillating in and out of laughter, gazing happily across at each other with their arms around each others’ shoulders (Fig 23a,b). Unlike the publicity photos, these are worn and cracked in places, with handwriting jotted across the prints demarcating names and places. They are represented as memories that are preserved and treasured.

While this ease can be credited to Leonard’s talent as an artist in capturing convincing portrayals of candid relationships, Leonard and Juhasz recall that this joy was pronounced in the production of the photography shoots. “We had a great time working together,” interviews Leonard. “Camaraderie is the right word.”<sup>103</sup> This was part of the motivation of the project, remarks Juhasz. “There certainly was no money when we made the photos. People did it because it was fun and they believed in Cheryl’s vision and they believed in Zoe’s vision [...] People made it because they had a commitment to lesbian representation, black lesbian representation, and women’s history. [...] And the spirit is visible in the photos for sure.”<sup>104</sup>

Looking at this from the lens of Hirsch and Spitzer’s theory of the group photograph can illuminate the resonance of this spirit. The actors’ presence exists in two junctures in time: in its point of historical mimicry from 1920 to 1970, as well as its point of production in 1993 to 1996. The group photographs’ inherent declaration that “we were here, in this grouping” is both a testimony of their shared communion against forces of oppression in the 1990s and a way of projecting this communion into the past. Even if a true parallel to Fae Richards’ community cannot be found in the archives, by projecting backward the artists insist that these

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<sup>103</sup> Leonard and Oppenheimer, “Master’s Dissertation.”

<sup>104</sup> Juhasz and Oppenheimer, Interview.

communities were there. Incidentally, they also create an archive of the 1990s that remains to be studied in the present day. Moreover, while they are creating, not re-creating, a group experience, they still maintain Taylor and Schneider's model of performing trauma — just through the optics of parafiction. In fact, parafiction offers an ability to read history that would not be possible otherwise. It is in this way that the artists inject a past with claims of agency and the right to pleasure.

Glenn Ligon's contemporaneous series, *A Feast of Scraps* (1994–98), offers an interesting counterpart toward specifically queer practice that expands the notion of creating a community through historical documents. Huey Copeland succinctly describes the work as “a photo-text project in which [Ligon] took up, only to deform, the framing conceit of the family photo album. Amid vintage scenes of everyday black life, the artist interspersed images of nude men, limned with sly captions — ‘Daddy,’ ‘Brother,’ ‘Mother knew’ — so as to underscore how filial designations also gesture toward aspects of queer desire, community, and relation that heteronormative framings would banish from view” (Fig 24).<sup>105</sup> Ligon essentially recreates the family archive in order to queer it, inserting desires deemed depraved by institutional frameworks in order contend that a new structure of relationships can be drawn from memories — not only expanding Rancière's realm of sensibility, but re-drawing it. This points to a particular kind of queer practice that redesigns the past in order to contend present desires can be found between the lines of archives. Rather than find shame in imagery that is traditionally located in a

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<sup>105</sup> Huey Copeland, “Feasting on Scraps,” *Small Axe* 16, no. 2 38 (2012): 198–199.

different sphere, Ligon contends his specific form of desire can be found in an ancestry of his own making.

Fetish, or desire that alights on what Sigmund Freud refers to as the wrong kind of objects, can expand an understanding of portals that unite figures across time — among these the bandana, the photos, and even Fae Richards herself.<sup>106</sup> Ann Cvetkovich sees the interest in making collections of objects that illicit emotions as parallel to the experience of being queer, since “the forms of love that generate them resemble those of perverse or queer desire,” and queer archives (inclusive of *The Fae Richards Project*) rely on personal longing rather than the institutional record.<sup>107</sup> This is an essential component of Leonard’s *Fae Richards Photo Archive*, where contemporaneous communities’ representations of pride are fetishized over the official record. As Giovanna Zapperi notes, “*The Fae Richards Photo Archive* has an admirer’s desire and passion to recollect these objects,” which she also deems fetish.<sup>108</sup> Collecting information and photographs contend that the absence in the archive can be filled by personal desire.

Beyond the photographs, the character of Fae Richards is essentially a repository for queer desire. As a piece of fiction, she bears the weight of all who choose to engage with her and can readily adapt to their needs. In fact, as previously discussed, a called-upon figure from the past is always, in some sense, fictional: their

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<sup>106</sup> Cvetkovich, “Photographing Objects as Queer Archival Practice.”

<sup>107</sup> Sigmund Freud as quoted in *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>108</sup> Giovanna Zapperi, “Woman’s Reappearance: Rethinking the Archive in Contemporary Art: Feminist Perspectives,” *Feminist Review* 105 (2013): 21–47.

words and actions can be turned toward the needs of the person invoking them.<sup>109</sup> For Cvetkovich and others, the archive can be a way to resolve the inadequacies of the present — a repository of feelings, inclusive of pride — that allows one to form a communion with the past. The connections do exist to a certain community that finds communion in a historical moment.

The style in which the photographs are displayed is especially powerful. The photographs, as represented in print form or as a book, have an intimacy that forges a gap between the images and the institution. Scholarship points out that exhibition spaces are often complicit in imposing institutional hierarchies, which sanitize dissenting opinions by presenting only “acceptable” divergent voices.<sup>110</sup> Certain displays of *The Fae Richards Photo Archive* have acted against the notion of hierarchy, however. Collector Eileen Harris Norton, who possesses one iteration of the editioned print, has shown the work on a bookcase in her living room in picture frames amongst personal family photos. “The photos looked like they could have been of my family,” she interviews.<sup>111</sup> Through this act, the piece becomes woven into the realm of personal genealogy. This display practice carried over into the exhibition space, when the piece was borrowed (inclusive of Norton’s frame) and shown in *Agitated Histories* at SITE Santa Fe in 2011, forming a critical interpolation in traditional museum practices (Fig 25). The work maintains an air of intimacy in many of its other installations; Leonard insists it be shown without glass mediating

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<sup>109</sup> This is an essential component of Derrida’s analysis of the archive, where he looks at the way the writer Yerushalmi works to call upon Freud in order to suit his own needs as Freud cannot speak back. Freud can be anything Yerushalmi asks of him without protest. Derrida, *Archive Fever*.

<sup>110</sup> Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (1986): 3–64.

<sup>111</sup> Eileen Harris Norton and Suzie Oppenheimer, “Zoe Leonard,” May 18, 2016.

the viewer and photographs, and it is most often mounted with album corners that mirror those in traditional family photos (Fig 26).<sup>112</sup> Its display practices offer an intervention in the institutional environment that positions it toward a familial intimacy.

*The Fae Richards Project* offers an intriguing point of collapse between high art and accessible entertainment. While the printed photographs are editioned and therefore possess rarity, the published book has been accessibly priced and is obtainable to this day.<sup>113</sup> In her study of the book, Abigail Solomon-Godeau argues that this is meant to subvert the commodity status of the art object, and ultimately “destabilizes high versus low, populist versus elite.”<sup>114</sup> This notion is echoed by *The Watermelon Woman*, which is widely available and has been screened internationally. Film, Dunye interviews, “allows me to reach viewers like me who are hungry for any mediated representation of their real lives on the screen.”<sup>115</sup> While a community came together to celebrate the work’s creation, its life is extended beyond production.

*The Fae Richards Project* embodies a community’s need for self-determination that has reach outside of the artwork’s borders. Populations pushed to the margins, especially ones that face histories of social violence, find their legacy through the emotional ties that bind generations. But by keeping one foot in the door of the real while asserting the strength of fiction, Dunye and Leonard convey “a

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<sup>112</sup> Schlossberg, “(Re)mediation of Media.”

<sup>113</sup> The book is \$15 according to amazon.com’s American online store at the date of this paper’s publication.

<sup>114</sup> Solomon-Godeau, “On Ghost Writing.”, 33.

<sup>115</sup> Dunye, “Above the Line.”

desire to reclaim a queer genealogy that is not just a form of mourning over traumatic violence against African American lesbians, but also expresses a collective aspiration for empowerment and agency.”<sup>116</sup> Such is the strength of artistic parafiction: a historian must record what occurs; an artist can play with the facts and change the story.

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<sup>116</sup> Zapperi, “Woman’s Reappearance: Rethinking the Archive in Contemporary Art: Feminist Perspectives.” 44.

*The Fae Richards Project* represents the power of art-making as meaningful activism. In their work, Dunye and Leonard confront the burden of trauma on the queer community in the 1990s, where history was at best lacking, at worst violent, and the present-day was permeated by institutional brutality, identity erasure, and death. *The Fae Richards Project* finds its strength through its detachment from archival actuality. The artists may have been limited in what was historically accessible, but they could create alternative realities through imaginative constructions — by viewing the past through the lens of individual truth and projecting it backward. Fae Richards may not have been an actual historical figure, but her personhood is perhaps no less important than figures that can be found in the archives. Her significance lies in the *belief* in her existence, in her ability to act as a vault for Dunye, Leonard, and countless others who participate in and view *The Fae Richards Project*.

Value is perhaps best understood in hindsight. This paper offers a model to examine several ways that, while perhaps more unassuming than other forms of protest, *The Fae Richards Project* has nevertheless provided a means to alter how one views one's self and one's history. The ghost of Fae Richards is a representation of hope: a woman who took control of her destiny and died in the arms of another woman who loved her. Her image, made real through photographs and film, becomes a mirror. For Dunye and Leonard, she served as a way to reify the present, to certify the legibility of one's self and community, and to create joy in a past where one repeatedly finds disappointment. Simply being visible is an act of protest.

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This paper is for my parents, without whose constant, unwavering support never could have been written. It is also for Jamie, who motivates me every day.

Finally, it is for all the incredible communities that I have been lucky to have been a part of in the past, present, and future.

And for Fae Richards.

Thank you.



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Fig 1. Zoe Leonard, *Reba Richardson 1 & 2, Fred Deshields, Oscar Williams and Fae Richards, Oscar with Fae's Dog Frankie*. 1993–6. From: Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye. *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*. San Francisco: Artspace, 1996. Photographs 1–6.

Fig 2. Zoe Leonard, *Fae Richards and Martha Page*. 1993–6. From: Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye. *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*. San Francisco: Artspace, 1996. Photograph 17.

Fig 3. Zoe Leonard, *Fae Richards, Martha Page, and unidentified actress on the set of "Raising Cara"*. 1993–6. From: Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye. *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*. San Francisco: Artspace, 1996. Photograph 34.

Fig 4. Zoe Leonard, *Fae Richards and June Walker*. 1993–6. From: Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye. *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*. San Francisco: Artspace, 1996. Photographs 66–67.

Fig 5. Film still 24:15. *The Watermelon Woman*, digital video, directed by Cheryl Dunye (1996; United States: Cinedigm, 1997).

Fig 6. Film still 28:29. *The Watermelon Woman*, digital video, directed by Cheryl Dunye (1996; United States: Cinedigm, 1997).

Fig 7. Film still 59:36. *The Watermelon Woman*, digital video, directed by Cheryl Dunye (1996; United States: Cinedigm, 1997).

Fig 8. Film still 19:19. *The Watermelon Woman*, digital video, directed by Cheryl Dunye (1996; United States: Cinedigm, 1997).

Fig 9. Film still 30:28. *The Watermelon Woman*, digital video, directed by Cheryl Dunye (1996; United States: Cinedigm, 1997).

Fig 10. Film still 1:13:42. *The Watermelon Woman*, digital video, directed by Cheryl Dunye (1996; United States: Cinedigm, 1997).

Fig 11. Film still 1:18:22. *The Watermelon Woman*, digital video, directed by Cheryl Dunye (1996; United States: Cinedigm, 1997).

Fig 12. Tacita Dean, *Girl Stowaway* (detail), 1994, color and black and white 16MM film, optical sound, 9 minutes. From: Hal Foster, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency*. London: Verso, 2015.

Fig 13. Zoe Leonard, *Filmstills from "Plantation Memories"*. 1993–6. From: Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye. *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*. San Francisco: Artspace, 1996. Photographs 66–67.

[Ed. Note: this image is a photographic still of the one shown on screen during Cheryl's filmic encounter with *Plantation Memories* in *The Watermelon Woman*.]

Fig 14. 25:44. *The Watermelon Woman*, digital video, directed by Cheryl Dunye (1996; United States: Cinedigm, 1997).

Fig 15. 26:06. *The Watermelon Woman*, digital video, directed by Cheryl Dunye (1996; United States: Cinedigm, 1997).

Fig 16. 33:07. *The Watermelon Woman*, digital video, directed by Cheryl Dunye (1996; United States: Cinedigm, 1997).

Fig 17. 1:05:50. *The Watermelon Woman*, digital video, directed by Cheryl Dunye (1996; United States: Cinedigm, 1997).

Fig 18. Zoe Leonard, *Fae Richards at art opening*. 1993–6. From: Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye. *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*. San Francisco: Artspace, 1996. Photograph 55.

Fig 19. Zoe Leonard, *Eleanor VanClyde with a guest*. 1993–6. From: Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye. *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*. San Francisco: Artspace, 1996. Photograph 7.

Fig 20. Zoe Leonard, *Fae Richards (center) with unidentified friends*. 1993–6. From: Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye. *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*. San Francisco: Artspace, 1996. Photograph 64.

Fig 21. Zoe Leonard, *Fae Richards as photographed by Max Hetzl (Monsieur Max)*. 1993–6. From: Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye. *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*. San Francisco: Artspace, 1996. Photograph 42.

Fig 22. Zoe Leonard, *Fae Richards and friends*. 1993–6. From: Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye. *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*. San Francisco: Artspace, 1996. Photographs 12–13.

Fig 23 (a & b). Zoe Leonard, *Fae Richards, Martha Page, and three unidentified friends at the Harlem Hotspot*. 1993–6. From: Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye. *The Fae Richards Photo Archive*. San Francisco: Artspace, 1996. Photographs 19–22.

Fig 24. Glenn Ligon, *A Feast of Scraps* (detail), 1994–98, photo collage, 20.5 x 11.5 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles.

Fig 25. Installation view: *Agitated Histories*, SITE Santa Fe, Oct. 22, 2011– Jan. 15, 2011. <https://sitesantafe.org/exhibition/agitated-histories/>. Photo courtesy SITE Santa Fe.

Fig 26. Installation view: *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, International Center of Photography, New York, 2008. Photo courtesy International Center of Photography.



1



2



3



4



Oscar and Frankie

5

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3





65 - 67



Figure 4

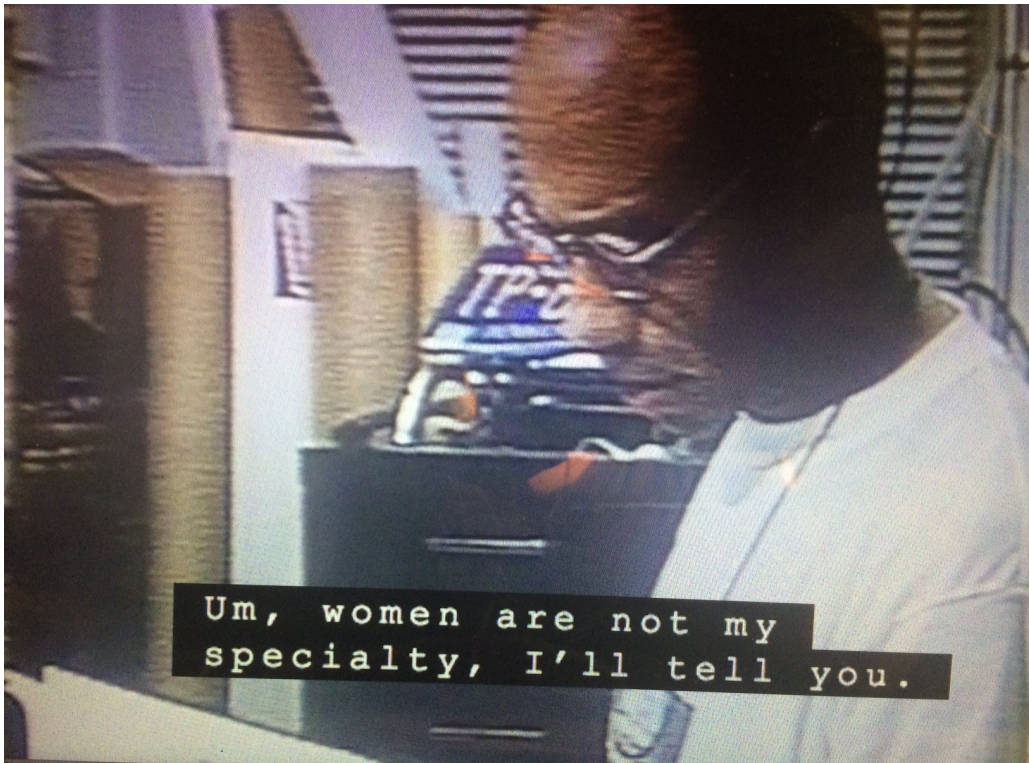


Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

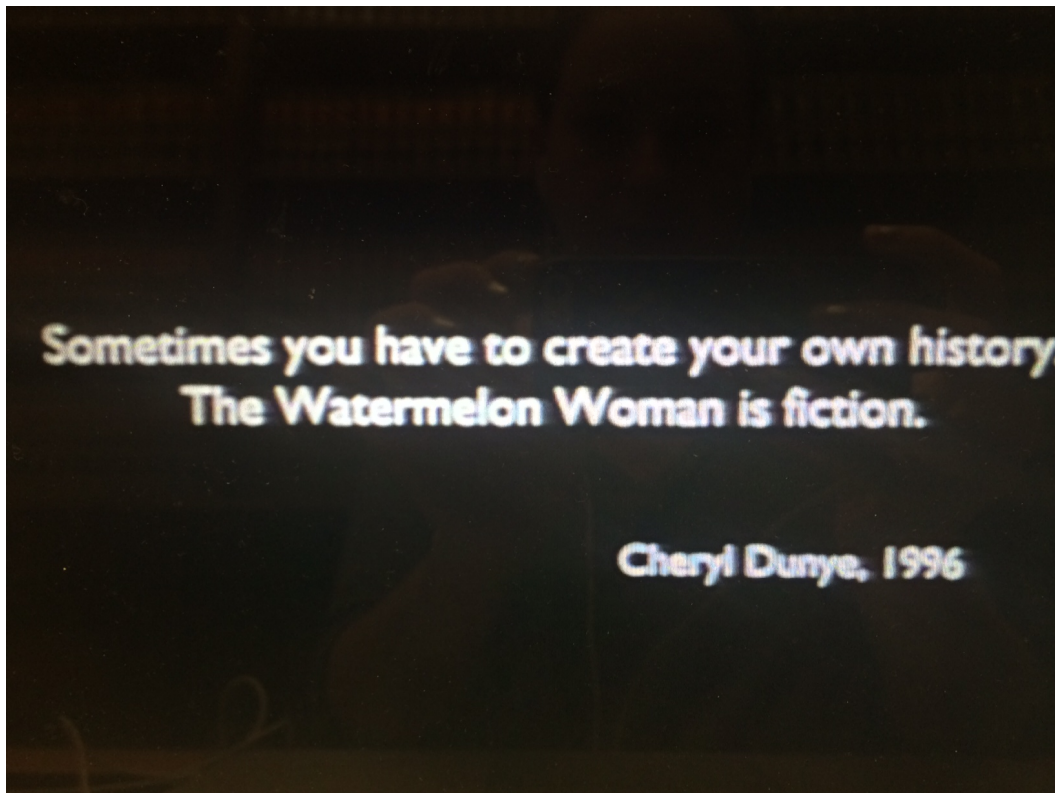


Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

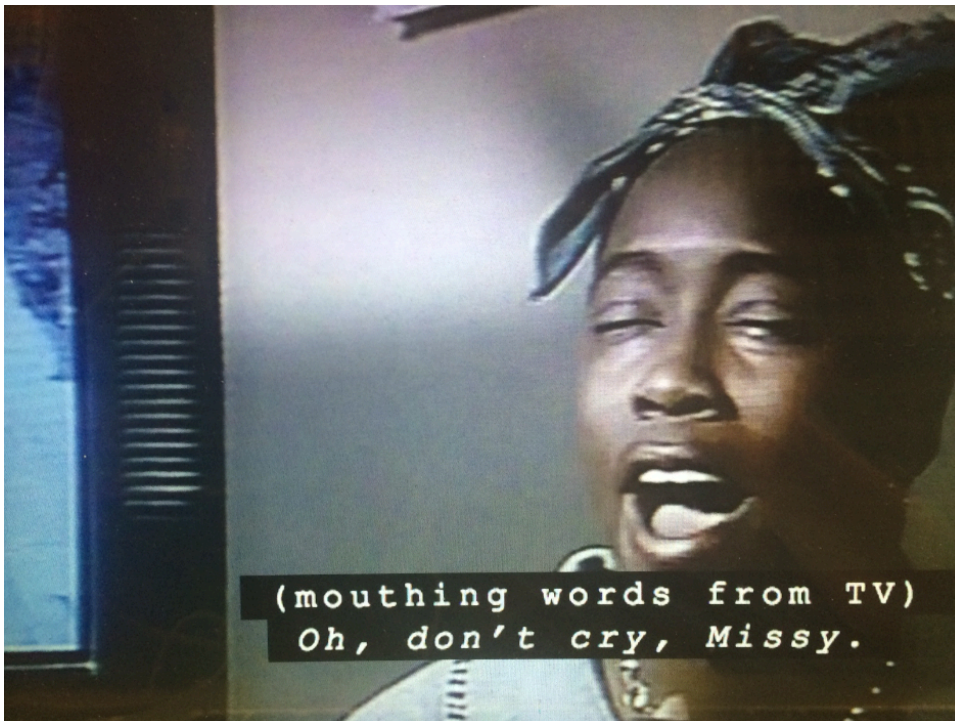
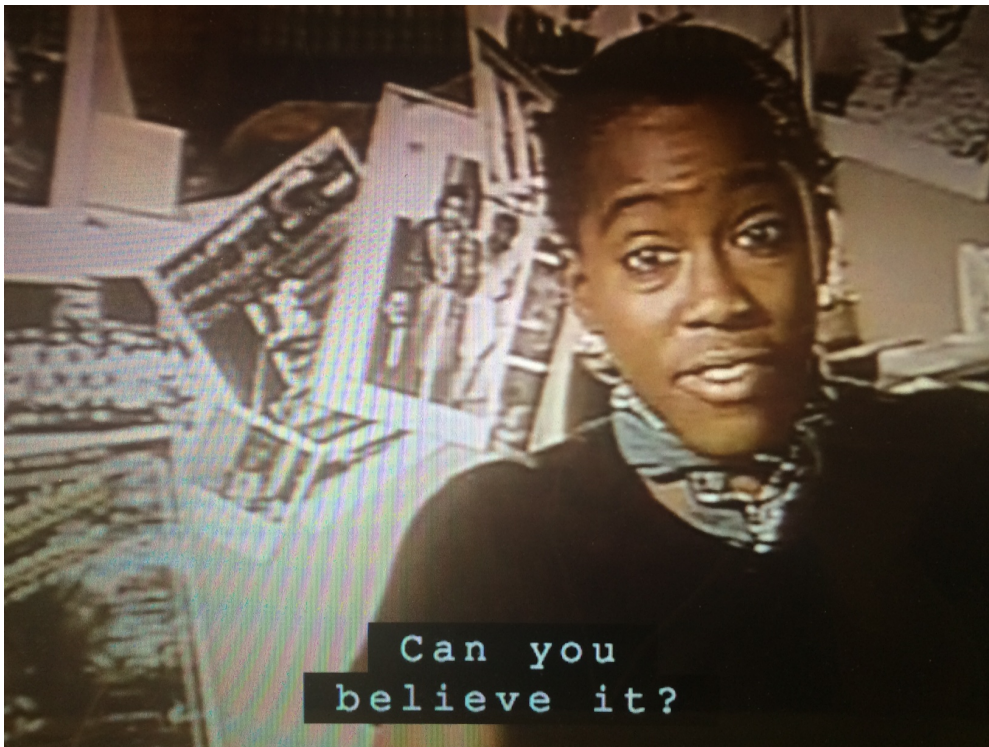


Figure 14



(blowing nose)

Figure 15



Can you  
believe it?

Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18





Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



19



*He and the girls at the "Hotspot"*

20

Figure 23 (a)



21



22

Figure 23 (b)



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26