

Variations on Broken Lines (2020)



**Reinscribing Diasporic Memory:
An Intermedial Exploration Towards A Methodology of Gesture**

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Abstract

This paper unfolds a methodology of becoming, rooted in the ontology of gesture and the body as a living archive. Through three interrelated research-creation works—*Untitled Wall*, *Variations on Broken Lines*, and *Assembly of Repair*—I reflect on how fragmented diasporic memory, subjectivity, and the transmission of embodied knowledge are negotiated through performative reenactment, intermedial choreographies, and iterative processes of inscription and activation, emerging across material, temporal, and spatial dimensions.

These works take form as open-ended assemblages manifested through an ongoing practice of diasporic worldmaking, where gesture becomes a speculative method shaped by embodiment, relationality, and experimental processes involving drawing, screendance, archival repertoires, augmented reality, and performative installation. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from performance studies, diaspora theory, and feminist new materialism, I reflect on memory, affect, materiality, and becoming. I discuss the entangled relationships between embodiment, diasporic gesture, and the performativity of archival materials while engaging the ontological, aesthetic, and affective dimensions of artistic research. These perspectives intertwine with critical approaches to performance and memory, including the repertoire (Diana Taylor), palimpsest bodies (Ruth Hellier-Tinoco), postmemory (Marianne Hirsch), and haptic visibility (Laura U. Marks). I discuss these interrelated ideas in relation to my work, and how they offer pathways into understanding how embodied memory dwells between the intimate and the distant, the physical and the virtual. These perspectives also intersect with corporeal feminist materialist assemblage (Elizabeth Grosz) to articulate a performative life of materials unfolding through choreographic and intermedial processes.

Through experimental worldmaking, I engage diasporic memory and subjectivity as affective, collective gestures—reenacting traces across bodies, technologies, and temporalities (Gopinath 2018). Diasporic aesthetics emerge not as representations of fixed identity, but as relational modes of becoming, and as an open-ended artistic research practice in motion.

Introduction

The ideas discussed here grow out of ten years of reflective and performative-based inquiry into my creative process, situated within my artistic research and shaped by ongoing research into embodiment, diasporic memory, and performative archiving. In this paper, I reflect on an interdisciplinary, performative-based research methodology for remediating embodied knowledge and fragmented diasporic cultural memory through intermedial, experimental performance. I trace the development of a diasporic aesthetic that reshapes my understanding of presence, temporality, space, embodiment, and memory—emerging through collective gesture and situated acts of becoming. Through performative exploration and a reflective entanglement with theory, I engage in dialogue as a way of reflecting on the reenactment of diasporic memory and embodied ways of knowing. The theories I engage with move with it—shaping a methodology that unfolds materially through gesture, space, and composition, while attending to emergent diasporic aesthetics. The research-creation works I discuss in this paper present significant challenges, particularly in my experience of working performatively and finding ways to mediate cultural knowledge and identity both artistically and academically. While I write this paper to establish a methodology of gesture and aesthetics within an academic context, it is important to acknowledge that, for some of us, questions of identity politics and cultural location remain complex and problematic.

Our bodies are the carriers and mediums through which cultural memory is practiced, felt, and transmitted. They operate between physical co-presence and the embodied condition of being-with and being-in the world (Flusser 2014). The performance scholar Diana Taylor writes about the vital role of our repertoire in the transmission of cultural memory and embodied knowledge across generations. These repertoires enact our embodied memory and cultural knowledge through ephemeral practices—performances, gestures, rituals, movement, dance, singing—which constitute non-reproducible knowledge (Taylor 2003). Taylor contrasts two epistemic systems: the repertoire—ephemeral, embodied, living—and the archive—documented, objectified, and potentially repeatable across time. The two are not mutually exclusive but reversible and deeply entangled (Taylor 2010). The gesture exists in the space in-between these two realms. Throughout

this paper, I reflect on diasporic gesture methodology—a process-based, intermedial approach that emerges through the interweaving of performative explorations across bodies and technology, choreographic practice, embodied inscription, and iterative enactments of memory transmission. It reflects the necessity of a performative-based methodology, a realization that embodied knowledge and diasporic formation require an epistemological approach—one that allows research-creation practice to remain open, affectively responsive, and grounded in lived experience.

The methodology emerging from my artistic work and research is grounded in performative, processual, and experiential modes of inquiry. Rather than adhering to fixed stages or stable categories, it unfolds through what Agamben describes as a "means without end" (Agamben 2000)—a gesture that does not aim at closure, but remains open, relational, and in motion. In my work, gesture functions not merely as symbolic action, but as an intermedial operation that activates the space between body, material, and meaning. This methodological gesture holds space for the complexities of diasporic identity, working through fragmentation, return, and reconfiguration. Following Agamben, I consider the notion of archiving as "heterogeneous" and "virtually infinite" (Agamben 1998).

reinscribing the hyphen

My lived experience of in-betweenness and liminality is inherent in my hyphenated identity as an Arab-Jew-Moroccan-Amazigh-Mizrahi-Israeli-Canadian. This layered, hyphenated self—especially as an Arab-Jew with a repressed Arab identity and culture—has remained estranged, increasingly othered within shifting architectures of the present, which fail to acknowledge the complexity and multiplicity that this identity carries. My investment in movement as a profound tool and gesture as conceptual methodology in artistic research stems from my lived experience. For me, movement is a mode of survival and a performative political coming-of-age; it enables me to navigate oppressive boundaries, it is a “defiant political gesture,” to use bell Hook’s words: "Moving, we confront the reality of choice of location" (Hooks 2015). It also means being attuned critically and creatively to the social structures into which I was born. Within discourses on identity politics, my identity is considered provocative enough to link, through a hyphen, presumed dichotomies.

Through performative gestures, I seek to become attentive to these complex and fluid structures of identity that are so crucial, which in turn shape and ease the tensions embedded within my

hyphenated identity. This ongoing methodology of gesture that carries my artistic research resonates with a mode of thinking-making in motion (Bolt 2009), and it is continuously shaped by what Homi Bhabha describes as "a language of doubleness that arises from the ambivalent splitting of the pedagogical and the performative" (Bhabha, 1990). The Mizrahi scholar and media theorist Ella Shohat, examines the hyphenated Arab-Jew identity and how historiographical and geopolitical forces attempt to erase its hyphen. Shohat characterizes this complex subjectivity as "an ontological oxymoron" and an "epistemological subversion," existing at the intersection of "the intimate and the distant" (Shohat 1989). In artistic practices, where the dichotomy of Arab-Jew identity manifests, Shohat notes that we narrate our memory by "reinscribing the hyphen, as it were"¹. The hyphen functions as a conjunction—a gap, a space between. The body becomes a place of passage, inhabiting both as an intra-place where memory can momentarily root itself, and an inter-place—a body as "the place of passage of the movement received and thrown back, a hyphen, a connecting link between the things which act upon me and the things upon which I act" (Bergson, 1988). Reinscribing as an artistic process gives rise to a transformative gesture—one that may emerge in the ambiguous gaps of my writing.

A self-reflexive voice, attuned to the felt dimensions of diaspora, begins by asking: how do we feel diaspora across difference? (Gopinath 2018). This question returns us to body-to-body encounters and to the space between the intimate and the distant—while also moving beyond preconceived notions of diaspora as fixed or origin. Diaspora becomes a form of "conceptual mapping"—a way of being that, as feminist thinker of diasporic topographies Avtar Brah notes, defies the search for an original absolute. Diasporic beings seek to reinscribe a "homing desire" while navigating multilayered systems of dispersion (Brah 1996). I believe these movements—carried through relational gestures that resist closure—offer a generative lens for reworking diasporic fragmentation through artistic practice, as it unfolds through cultural dislocation, affective memory, and embodied making.

¹ In *A Reluctant Eulogy: Fragments from the Memories of an Arab-Jew*, Shohat writes words that feel to me like a mnemonic compass: "Can memory exist apart from the desire to memorialize? Perhaps my narratives of displacement are no more than a monument to our parents' and grandparents' generation, which performed hairy escapes across hostile borders. A fragmented testimony, not simply to the sheer 'facts' but to the intricacies of emotions, my gesture speaks for a generation muted by the everyday burden of hyphenated realities, their dreams mutilated. Making the silences speak becomes for me an act of memorializing, a portable shrine for those taboo memories – a reluctant eulogy, lest they completely fade away." (Shohat 2022)

Intermediaries of diasporic gesture

The ideas reflected upon here emerge from a decade of artistic practice that is inherently performative and experiential, leading me to question both the materiality of my work and my own diasporic subjectivity. Working primarily through experimental performance, drawing, and various bodily and ritualistic practices, often in relation to technological mediation—I encountered questions that drew me into an ongoing process of reflecting on presence, memory, and archive. Central to this inquiry is the notion of the embodied archive: the ways in which past histories and experiences are inscribed, reinscribed, and sedimented within bodies. As Sally Ann Ness proposes, we might consider “the body as a kind of monument, a support that archives the gestures it has performed,” where gestures become “testimonials to a methodological and reasoned way of being in the world” (Ness, 2008).

These bodily inscriptions do not remain static; rather, they accumulate and layer over time, much like a palimpsest. Drawing on this analogy, the philosopher Jacques Derrida writes that “a singular monument, it is also the document of an archive. In a reiterated manner, it leaves the trace of an incision right on the skin: more than one skin, at more than one age” (Derrida, 1998, p. 19). Derrida further describes how the superimposition of these marks “accumulates so many sedimented archives, some of which are written right on the epidermis of a body proper” (Derrida, 1998, p. 19). The concept of palimpsest itself originates from the world of manuscripts: a tablet or parchment from which writing has been partially erased to make space for new inscriptions. Yet traces of the old writing never fully disappear, leaving behind layered, multi-textual surfaces where remnants of what came before remain. In contemporary thought, the palimpsest has come to signify the co-presence of multiple histories and memories, layered and entangled across time.

In *Performing Palimpsest Bodies: Postmemory Theatre Experiments in Mexico*, performance scholar Ruth Hellier-Tinoco extends this metaphor to the body, describing it as a memory site and as a manuscript that has been erased and rewritten: “Performers’ bodies, like palimpsests, carry the traces of previous texts on them; they are layered with touches of history and memory that can sometimes be read simultaneously. Through layering, accumulations and iterations, palimpsest

bodies perform complex trans-temporal provocations and re-visions” (Hellier-Tinoco, 2019).

Hellier-Tinoco further emphasizes that “experimental performance practices are particularly effective for reactivating bodies of history in order to explore collective memories and contemporary lives... Fundamentally, these practices incorporate a ‘phenomenological sense of history as experience, as active involvement and awareness—all necessarily corporeal’” (Hellier-Tinoco, 2019).

Digital recording technologies as integral media in experimental performances made me aware of how the real-time experience disappeared and simultaneously recognized the potential of connecting with collective memories, bodies, and cultural histories through diverse traces: oral stories, images, and embodied archival repertoires of movement, gesture, voice, sound, smell, and even taste. What drew me deeply into the question of archiving was the tension in-between: what feels intimate and what feels distant, what is live and what is mediated, what is ephemeral and what is tangible. These aren't simple dichotomies but rather shifting conditions that continually fold into each other. It is in this in-between that I began to explore diasporic aesthetics not only as gestures of absence or loss but as vibrant inscriptions of memory, surface, and traces. This ontological attention to inscriptions and surfaces, particularly between the visual and the virtual, has become a way for me to think about transmission of embodied knowledge.

The philosopher and corporeal feminist Elizabeth Grosz describes the notion of the corporeal inscription of body-as-surface—a body that mediates between internal psychic inscriptions and external sociopolitical realities (Grosz, 2008, p. 33). The body, Grosz suggests, is a spatial interface, inscribed by and inscribing the world. Grosz envisions this interface as a Möbius strip—a form where inside and outside are folded into one continuous surface where the passive becomes active, and the active, passive (Grosz 1994, p. 36). In this configuration, the twist—the point of inversion—is the site of self-transformation. Grosz’s metaphor of the Möbius, conceiving the body as an inscriptive conductive circuit, can help articulate how movement, sensation, and memory are entangled, looping, and co-extensive—and how our mnemonic inscriptions are linked by “unpredictable networks to other elements, segments, and assemblages” (Grosz, 1994, p.120). This Möbius body inscribes itself in unpredictable directions—its mnemonic traces coiling through sensations, memories, digital fragments, and what Grosz calls “unpredictable networks to other

elements, segments, and assemblages” (Grosz 1994, p.120). In this sense, memory should be perceived as ideational, inactive, virtual (2001, p.119). We can understand how the entanglement of technologies and bodies inscribe and reinscribe mnemonic transmissions across the digital and cyber spaces as forms of mnemonic activation. “Paradoxically,” she writes, “memory, the past, is not in us, just as perception is not in us. Perception takes place outside ourselves” (ibid). For me, this helps articulate why even habitual gestures of looking at digital images on social media can become part of an embodied transmission of memory, a kind of corporeal sensing woven into an intricate, fleshy palimpsestic narrative.

Grosz also echoes Taylor's assertion that our repertoire requires active gesture for the transmission of embodied knowledge and memory. When she writes that “the past exists, but it is in a state of latency or virtuality. We must place ourselves in it if we are to have recollections², memory images” (Grosz 2001, p.141). The performance scholar Ruth Hellier-Tinoco adds another dimension to this corporeal frame. In *Performing Palimpsest Bodies: Postmemory Theatre Experiments in Mexico*, Ruth Hellier-Tinoco uses the idea of the palimpsest to describe the body as a memory site and as a manuscript that was erased in order to create space for more writing. Our bodies, like palimpsests, carry the traces of previous texts on them; they are layered with touches of history and memory that can sometimes be read simultaneously. "Through layering, accumulations and iterations, palimpsest bodies perform complex trans-temporal provocations and re-visions" (Hellier-Tinoco, 2019). The research-creation work *Untitled Wall*, developed within this inquiry, manifested this accumulative layering through performative inscription, echoing multitemporal sedimentation across gesture, drawing, digital image, and surface.

Similar to Grosz's notion of the body as an inscriptive surface, embodied memory can dwell within experimental cinema as modes of temporal inscription. The scholar and new media theorist Laura U. Marks places the felt and the embodied as central to the transmission of diasporic memory (Marks 2000). Marks develops the concept of haptic visuality—a mode of seeing as touch, as "an

² Grosz, referring to Gilles Deleuze's “recollection-image,” connects it to memory. When stories can finally be told, a film shifts from time-image to movement-image. This forms an important dialogue with Laura Marks, who considers Deleuze's recollection-image as a form of haptic visuality, indicating the diasporic memory etched within the material quality of the image.

intimate, tactile engagement where the eye functions like a hand—feeling its way across textures, surfaces, and colors" (ibid). Diasporic artists, in particular, can embed personal, cultural, and historical traces into the *texture* of their work, where filmic or digital surfaces become "witnessing materials," capable of being touched not only by the viewer's eye but also by the artist's gestural interventions. These notions of sensorial memory transmission will be further explored in relation to the development of my work *Variations on Broken Line*, where I draw on Marks's concept of haptic visuality to investigate intermedial choreographies and assemblage in the creation of performative installation.

In *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, Hirsch describes how the second generation relates to experiences that preceded their births but were transmitted so deeply they seem to become memories of their own (Hirsch 2012). Inherited postmemories inscribe themselves on the body, forming a "living connection" (ibid). The 'post' in 'postmemory', writes Hirsch, signals more than a temporal delay; it suggests speculative and alternative approaches to reactivating memory through 'imaginative investment, projection, and creation'" (ibid). These notions of postmemory are reflected in relation to my research-creation project *Assembly of Repair*, where I draw on Hirsch's framework to consider how inherited memory emerges through autoethnographic fieldwork across borders, and how responsive and augmented technologies can remediate postmemory through multisensory and speculative forms.

These research-creation works emerge as open-ended and intermedial constellations, grounded in experiential and performative processes that move beyond fixed representations of the artwork (Bolt 2004). I choose to engage with an active voice—one that questions and reflects on these works, rather than simply presenting them. These open works are not fixed objects, but unfolding, living compositions: activated through the event of installation, and continually reshaped through archiving processes, choreographic and spatial recomposition.

From a diasporic perspective, Gayatri Gopinath argues that diasporic aesthetic practices tend to disrupt normative temporalities, spatial arrangements, and representational logics. Rather than framing diaspora solely through narratives of loss or longing for origin, Gopinath illuminates the affective, sensorial, and visual registers of diasporic experience—openings for alternative forms of belonging, memory, and worldmaking. Gopinath explains that "relationality and identification

function as a kind of propulsive force that throws one off a normative life course and into a different trajectory that is in fact open-ended, with no fixed itinerary or ending” (Gopinath 2018, p65).

The research-creation works I discuss here became a subject of investigation not only in relation to memory and identity, but also through the ontology of their materialities and interrelated components—archival material, visual art, and ongoing performative installation. I began to contemplate the identity of the work itself. Situated within intermedial choreographic practices, dance installation artist and scholar Sarah Rubidge proposes a fluid identity for such works: “An open work is a work which, by design, does not exhibit a stable temporal progression and/or material form from instantiation to instantiation.” For Rubidge, the open dance work is necessarily one of becoming—always in flux, never stable—and “requires changes in its multiple material traces if it is to be manifested as a work” (Rubidge 2000, p.6). Similarly, Italian philosopher Umberto Eco describes open works as “works in movement,” composed of unplanned or physically incomplete structural units, whose dynamic components are “polymorphous in their indeterminate relation to each other” (Eco 1962, p.13).

The notion of open work also resonates with the Deleuzian concept of assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), as both frameworks emphasize indeterminacy, instability, and becoming. As open work, assemblages are not fixed structures but dynamic constellations—always in process, composed of heterogeneous elements and unfolding through contingent relations. The theorist and new materialist scholar Jane Bennett describes assemblage as a "vibrant materials of all sorts" that hold within them both the potential for coherence and internal disruption (Bennett 2010). These open works as assemblage operate without central organization and "gesture to the multisensory unity and as a series of flows and breaks, of varying speeds and intensities" allowing "connectedness at-a-distance" (Grosz, 2008, 2001). The notion of assemblage in performance practice as reenactment of embodied knowledge is essential, as Rebecca Schneider writes, "to unsettle the rootedness of identity, to gesture not only to mobility but also to the always already crossingness, or betweenness, or relationality of the sets of associations that make up something resembling identity" (Schneider 2011, p36). In producing the fleshy archival body, as James A Lee suggests, we might be interested in “simultaneous assemblages”, along with “embodied technologies of remembering and forgetting”(Lee 2021 p78).

Links to appendices containing documentation materials for each of the discussed works are included at the end of this paper, following the bibliography. This documentation extends and communicates with the ideas developed throughout the text.

Inscriptions - Palimpsestic archive

The in- of “inscription”—a very basic yet complex prefix—is not the in- of “inside” but the in- of “into. —Sally Ann Ness

Inscription is a trace of gesture performing movement, marked upon a surface as evidence. There is a distinction between tangible inscriptions like drawing and ephemeral bodily gestures that leave traces in the air, instantly evaporating after being performed. Surfaces of inscription can include paper, canvas, metal, images, digital recordings, wax mystic pad, computer screens, walls, and other substratum. My engagement with these ideas grew over the past decade as part of an experimental performative drawing community. In that space, the dialogue between mark-making and the temporality of dance shaped my understanding of inscription. Technologies of recording, usually integral apparatuses in cross-disciplinary practices that involve dance and movement practice, became entwined with performance (Lepecki 2007). What began as an intent to document and record the documentation’s sake, gradually emerged as a curiosity about light, photographic intervention, and space.

It was through this shift that I began a collaborative, performative research project in my studio titled *Untitled Wall* (2014). The studio wall functioned as a temporary drawing surface used in experimental performances that unfolded in a liminal space involving dance, improvisation, intimacy, and embodied gestures. It was a durational project carried out over six years. The studio wall became a living palimpsest: after each performance, the drawing was erased from the wall by layering white paint, upon which another drawing was created; however, traces remained visible and continued to appear within the digital images.



This reversible entanglement between movement and its digital inscription produces a doubling effect—a phenomenon where the immediacy of performative gestures is both recorded and re-experienced, where the threshold between presence and trace blurs. It reveals an unsettling overlap of presence and absence, where bodily inscriptions are simultaneously made visible and dispersed. Grosz writes how the body can be regarded as a kind of hinge or threshold: "it is placed between a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority that produces interiority through the inscription of the body's outer surface." (Grosz 2008). The ghostly renderings, shaped by long exposure and shifting conditions of light, gradually became a method of bodily self-writing—embodying the idea that our inner world is continuously affected by our own “auto-affective” gesture (Agamben 1998). I found a language in these fractured, shimmering inscriptions that revealed the fragility and defiance of memory, of communicating a dance between internal affect and external form, and thus challenging the reenactment, materiality, embodiment, and representation of the archive.

Yet paradoxically, while drawing traditionally implies a lasting trace, in my work these inscriptions became ephemeral—disappearing from the wall and reappearing only within the digital image. What unfolds is a quiet celebration of “loss of inscription” (Novak 1997), not as erasure or disappearance, but as a passage into another form. The digital recording, rather than preserving permanence, becomes an apparatus that unsettles it. As one trace is overwritten by another, as erasure renders what was once visible nearly imperceptible, inscription itself is placed in a state of flux—continuously overwritten, re-inscribed, and re-enacted. In *Untitled Wall*, this is

visible in the process of “redoing” as well as in the recurrent “Re”—an iterative gesture that repositions the present as the origin of its own memory, rather than a mere reflection of the past.



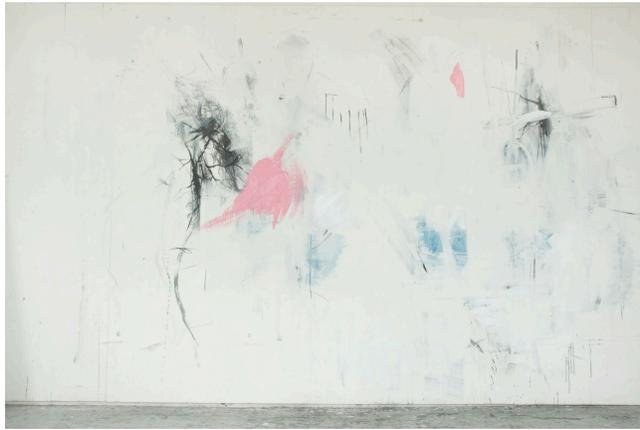
Untitled Wall, Keyframe still photograph (2015).

Untitled Wall was a collective space as much as it was my own solitary world, and it embodied the intimate and the distant in a mutual collective palimpsest. Artists, friends, and collaborators left their superimposed inscriptions on the wall, in digital image and within their own corporeal realm. By transposing a fragmented, inscriptive body into a broader corporeal collective memory, I engaged in an iterative process of reinscription—an archive of gestures³. The process opens a liberatory space to question what it means to bear witness to lived experience, and for reimagining memory as a dynamic, ever-evolving practice that both reveals and conceals, connects and disperses. *Untitled Wall* can thus be understood as a palimpsestic assemblage: a living surface where material traces accumulate, interfere, and resonate. It is not only the layering of materials that matters here, but the activation of memory as a material, affective force—what Elizabeth Grosz describes as an "incipient memory," one that "endows life with creativity, the capacity to elaborate an innovative and unpredictable response to stimuli, to react or, rather, simply to act, to enfold matter into itself" (Grosz 2008, p. 6). This tension between fixity and flux, visibility and ghostliness, becomes the guiding gesture.

Palimpsests are inherently trans-temporal, containing traces and remains of previous existences even as they are experienced in a present moment. Palimpsests are formed through movements

³ The Palestinian dancer and choreographer Farah Saleh's "Archive of Gestures" centers on the role of the body-as-archive and the possibility of body movement, enactment, and speculative performative variations directed at a future imagination. (Hochberg, Gil Z., *Becoming Palestine: Toward an Archival Imagination of the Future* 109).

over time, through layering and sedimentation, through complex arrangements and through shifts and accumulations of iterations. Palimpsests contain a plurality of fragments and ephemera, existing through simultaneity and juxtaposition. . . . Palimpsests involve strategies of re-using and re-forming, where traces endure, sometimes scarcely palpable, sometimes ghostly, yet always remaining” (Hellier-Tinoco 2019).



Untitled Wall. Documentation (2015)⁴.

Choreographies of mediation

The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning.

--Diana Taylor

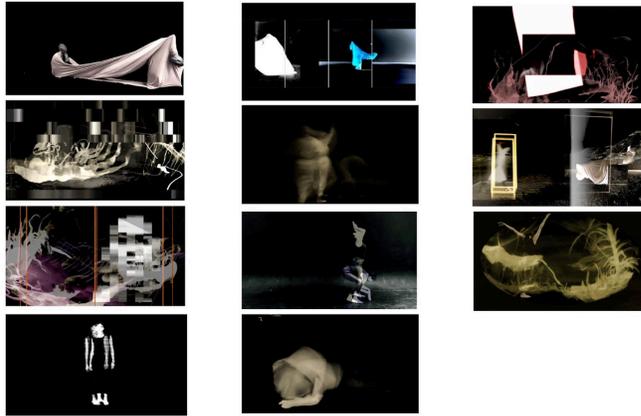
Between presence and trace, the sensuous topography lives in choreographies of touch, inscribed through everyday ritualistic gestures and movements saturated with feeling. This saturation of feeling extends into digital gestures, where our grief and joy circulate and propagate through mobile screens. Elizabeth Grosz writes about the inseparability of body and psyche, describing how memory is inscribed across the skin of mediated interaction. There is something haunting about how memory hovers on unconventional surfaces, emerging in digital space as little vignettes—strangely recognizable. In the saturated feeling of digital immediacy, the body becomes a conduit for remote intensities of trauma and joy, experienced as intimate, haptic disturbances

⁴ See *Untitled Wall* Documentation. [Link](#)

Tactile memories stretch and curl within me like sensory tendrils, encoded in the body, rooted in the little distant Maghreb of my childhood—a place that has faded, dwelling in the Morocco of my ancestors, while swirling, doubling back, and becoming re-inscribed across digital space. This unruly topography of memory traverses the liminal space between what is neither fully here nor fully there; the estrangement from rootedness pulls me to dwell in the intimate flesh of memory: intensities, glimpses, haunting fragments, shimmering signals located simultaneously across multiple dimensions—territorial, cultural, political, emotional, and psychic—entangled in the tension between intimacy and distance, a tension that is constantly choreographed in our post-digital, hypermediated world. These sensory inscriptions endure in the ephemeral markings of ritualistic writing on the skin that fade with time, in the preparation of food, and in the rituals of everyday life, as our senses are our cultural artefacts (Marks 2000). Touch and smell function as social senses, embedded in what Laura Marks calls 'sensuous geographies' in Arab and North African cultures, where touch and smell are central modes of public communication (Marks 2000).

Returning to my master's thesis, when I examined notions of liminality that shape identity and the performative archive, through performance-based research methodologies, I explored the migration of gestures and developed a deeper understanding of the possibilities of archival reenactment using creative technologies, and the potential to imagine alternative forms of presence through the reconstruction of archival materials and architectural space (Schneider 2011; Auslander 2006)⁵. Over years of interdisciplinary experimentation in performance, I developed sensitivities to a variety of mark-making and recording techniques, both physical and digital—particularly inscriptions created through light, projection, pixelization, and inversion—as a means to render tactile and multitemporal experiences, enabling experiential approaches for the transformation of archival materials within immersive installation environments, and to imagine the convergence of sensuous topography as a speculative space—where multiple temporalities and materials converge.

⁵ Waxman. Nava. Variations on Broken Lines 2020



Screendance assemblage, Variations on Broken Line. (2020)

Intermedial choreographies are experiential and involved with an open-ended approach to mediating materialities. I use the screendance approach, which is a diasporic medium—particularly the diaspora of visual arts, in the sense that it operates as a space where recollections of movement materials can be rendered and decoded (Rosenberg 2020). Recording approaches are an integral part of the choreography and are used to extend or transform the embodied gesture. Other aspirational approaches that I develop extend the choreocinematic medium developed by the experimental filmmaker and theorist Maya Deren, involving choreographic patterning and technical manipulation viscerally crafted with materials and the liberatory rendering process (Deren 1960)⁶. These choreographies enable haptic, tactile interweavings and the conception of space through colours, light, and movements dancing “symbolic acts and abstract relations” (Deleuze 1986). I find deep resonance in the diasporic cartographic propositions of Avtar Brah, whose concepts give language to my notion of “inscribing a homing desire” and embracing the “entanglement of genealogies and dispersions.” Brah’s concept of diasporic space-making as an act of “mobilizing a multi-axial performative conception” (Brah 1996).

⁶ Maya Deren in *Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality* writes: As we watch a film, the continuous act of recognition in which we are involved is like a strip of memory unrolling beneath the images of the film itself, to form the invisible under layer of an implicit double exposure. 1960



Variations on Broken Lines (2020). Left: installation. Right: detail

The research-creation project *Variations on Broken Lines* culminates the development of these ideas. The installation that emerged from this research began in 2018 with a series of performative workshops, studio work, and field research across borders, questioning alternative modes of liveness and presence in repertoires of movement rituals. This is a topography not of stable terrain, but of broken lines. *Variations on Broken Lines* functions as a multidimensional assemblage and includes several interrelated art forms: a collection of screendance works that I imagine as vignettes of rituals. The project includes collections of repertoires produced throughout the research and presents variations of movement materials from mediated performances, performative drawings, family ceremonies, and rituals. These archival repertoires function as embodied knowledge production in their own right. The work also includes moving image sculptures, wooden objects, prisms, and other performative ephemera.

As a multidimensional assemblage and as an open-ended work, the interrelated components of the assemblage are dynamic and open to different modulations in relation to the installation space, in which each iteration of the installation requires a new choreographic composition of the materials. The performative installation event is the moment when the work is activated, and where each iteration involves a choreographic topology—where multiple movement spaces and materials are choreographed through duration, revelation, connection, and dispersion—resonating with Laura Marks’s “radical gesture of unfolding” as an aesthetic approach to generate haptic visuality and succession: “Enfolding-unfolding aesthetics holds that the apparently disconnected things that surround us turn out to be not disconnected, but the peaks of deep folds” (Marks 2017). While Marks describes the inward–outward movement of inscriptions within the aesthetics of cinema, Grosz’s metaphor of the body as a Möbius-like

inscriptive conduit refers to corporeal-psychic inscription. The notion of enfolding—as wrapping, enclosing, or turning inward—suggests that what enfolds as memory in the body unfurls as a trace across surfaces, inscribing light, pixel, and touch.

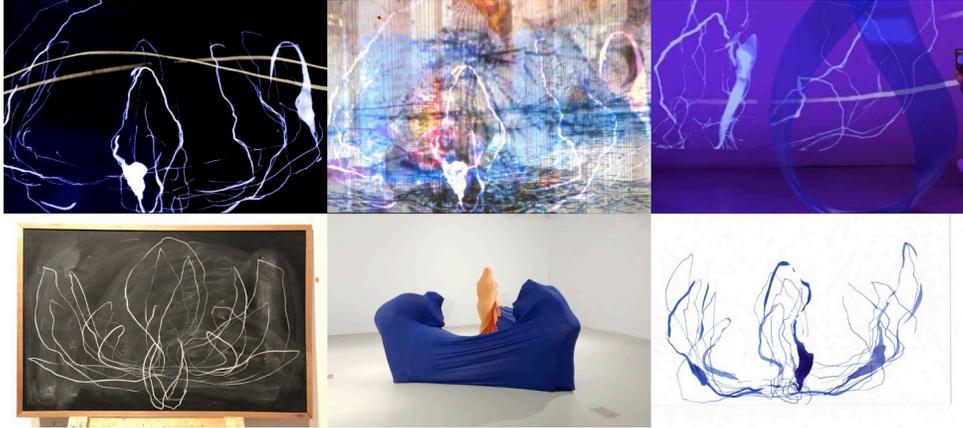
In the third iteration of the installation *Variations on Broken Line*, the work enfolded differently. The screendance assemblage adapted to the space and was reconfigured into a moving image sculpture and augmented reality environment. This iteration also engaged with what Sara Rubidge terms “choreographic space” or the notion of “choreographic dwelling,” in which choreography takes place within architectural space and is generated by the performers' actions—choreographing the work and actively shaping space and creating place. Rubidge writes: “Dwelling is not on the ‘dwelling place’ (noun), but the ‘place [as] dwelt’ (action). This enables us to take the notion of place beyond site. In a choreographic dwelling, place as dwelt becomes a condition activated through kinaesthetic agency.” (Rubidge 2014, p16).



Variations on Broken Line Third iteration (2023)

If gesture carries memory, if the diasporic body holds its own singularity of diasporic fragments, and if gesture can become an event, then—as Agamben suggests—cinema can lead images back to the “homeland of gestures.”(Agamben 2000).

I want to highlight how this openness transforms both the ontological and epistemological nature of the work. This mirrors the epistemologies of diasporic memory. The space between materials remains volatile—a deliberate gesture toward generating potential future reenactments, whether within the current installation or within other assemblages in becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The montage below is an example of what I consider a collective assemblage, where traces of archival material continue to be reactivated and reenacted.



As Rebecca Schneider writes, "To find the past resident in remains—material evidence, haunting trace, reiterative gesture—is to engage one time resident in another time... Time, engaged in time, is always a matter of crossing, or passing, or touching" (Schneider, 2011, p. 37).

Assembly of Repair

How do we choreograph a dance to repair the world? -Erin Manning

On my way to find the village of Illigh in the Souss-Massa desert—the birthplace of my father—I found my grandmother. Three years before my family left the village in 1953, she lost two daughters—my aunts, aged three and four—to an epidemic in the southern Sahara. Several generations of family relatives were born and died in the village. Returning to an untraceable point in time, Illigh existed, and then existed no longer. The village disappeared, and a large portion of the cemetery vanished when desert floods washed away the grave-marked stones. The experience of crossing borders during my autoethnographic⁷ field research in Morocco over the past several years pulled me inward, into a sensuous terrain of memory. I instinctively knew that this journey was vital to my investigation and held deep significance for both my work and my

⁷ Tami Spry. More about *Performing Autoethnography: An embodied Methodological praxis* where “the convergence of the “autobiographic impulse” and the “ethnographic moment” represented through movement and critical self-reflexive discourse in performance.

life. We carry an uncanny ability to relate—physically, emotionally, and conceptually, to a thing that is strangely present in its absence.

*Among the hills and shifting stones of Souss-Massa, I am searching for the graves.⁸
In early dawn, I stood in the middle of what is left of the Malleh Illigh, with my heart pounding so
strongly I could hear it among the eerie ululating frogs.
Every step felt so fragile, I could hear the crunching stones under my feet,
pulsing through my body. I'm in a receiving mode and I'm listening.
a gesture of witnessing all that is left of the Mellahs are glorious,
crumbling ruins gradually coloured by the light of the rising sun.
One of the ruins stands vertically as a figure, like a paralyzing testimony.
My heart, fraying at its edges, pulled across time.
I was searching for my aunts, but all I felt was my grandmother.*

This journey, I felt at the time, would bring some ease to my own feelings of loss and disorientation and my sense of self and location has shifted. It was an embodied journey of reenactment and very much a spiritual return to my ancestral landscapes as a descendant and worshiper. In search of unearthing my own personal memories of family and cultural congregations, I reenacted pilgrimage rituals and ceremonies of our lost repertoire and throughout this journey, I became an intermediary figure between myself and the women of my family, both the living who guided me and the deceased who is buried in Morocco. The ancestral knowledge, rituals, and cultural repertoire I grew up with, though invisible to outsiders, remain deeply rooted within me, and I carry this sacred responsibility passed down from them. This transformative journey was private, intimate, and metaphysical, tapping into a profound realm of spirit. I remained deeply haunted by it, which transformed my sense of self in relation to the parts of my cultural history and my place in the world. However, the experiences recorded within my sensorial realm remained largely unmarked visually. Marianne Hirsch writes about postmemory profoundly shaped by later generations who return to sites of their ancestors. “Embodied journeys of return, corporeal encounters with place, do have the capacity to create sparks of connection that activate remembrance and thus reactivate the trauma of loss.” (Hirsch 2012, p212).

⁸ Performing autoethnography, Illigh, August 2023. [Documentation](#) & [360](#) recording

Collecting research data and recording are central and integral to my process, which is both performative and reflective. The approaches to recording and documentation take many forms: writing journals, drawing, field recordings, photographs, rocks, earth, candles, family archives, existing institutional archives, oral storytelling, and online repositories. The archival collections I have produced over the last three years have become a multidimensional assemblage—incoherent, dispersed across multiple locations, and existing in various material forms. The “impulse”⁹ to record and collect exceeds the desire to simply remediate. It arises from the impossibility of finding coherence or order, revealing instead that certain experiences resist visual mediation—remaining unmediated or inscribed only invisibly. I experience a profound tension between witnessing and sensing—between what is encoded in my body and the symbolic, inner logic of my own fragmented archival worlds. When presented as evidence, a single image or recording can be misread through an exoticizing gaze, reduced to mere aestheticized symbols of otherness or political frames. As Susan Sontag reminds us, “It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude” (Sontag 2004)¹⁰. Her words remain deeply relevant in the current moment of over-circulation and representational saturation.

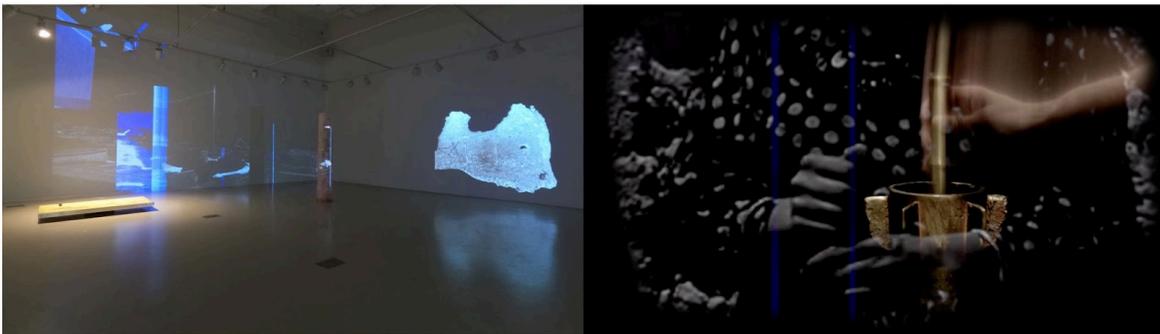
Responsive technologies like augmented reality, motion sensors, and audiovisual processing enabled me to explore how archival materials could be integrated into Augmented and Mixed Reality environments. These technologies in performative archiving processes have the potential to reveal emergent materiality of memory and archive, creating affective, embodied, and interactive encounters (Kozel 2018).

Working experientially and collaboratively with creative technologies, I improvised with tools to engage sound and visuals through choreographic and performative explorations. Augmented reality created experiential environments that enabled nonlinear relations between place and time, memory and animation. The tactile aesthetics emerged through material rendering between opacity and transparency—what Kozel terms as “viscosity”—where archival materials were processed into a spectrum of translucent textures and transformed into malleable materials,

⁹ See Foster, Hal. *An Archival Impulse. October*. Vol. 110. 238 Main St., Suite 500, Cambridge, MA MIT Press, 2004.

¹⁰ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Penguin Books, 2004.

effectively generating a "convergence between the emotional, pre-reflective, embodied and perceptual" (Kozel 2012). The integration of Augmented Reality into the physical environment (MR), created a layered and performative engagement with archival material. The affective rendering of sonic and visual archives into haptic visuals via motion tracking, synthesis, and AR— allows fragments become active agents, suggesting a rethinking of the archive as a constellation of vibratory potentials, animated through what the historian and cultural theorist Aby Warburg called an “iconology of intervals”: material relations and speculative thinking , and within “its shifting systems of spatial and temporal orientation” (Warburg 1926)¹¹.



Assembly of Repair. First iteration. (2023)

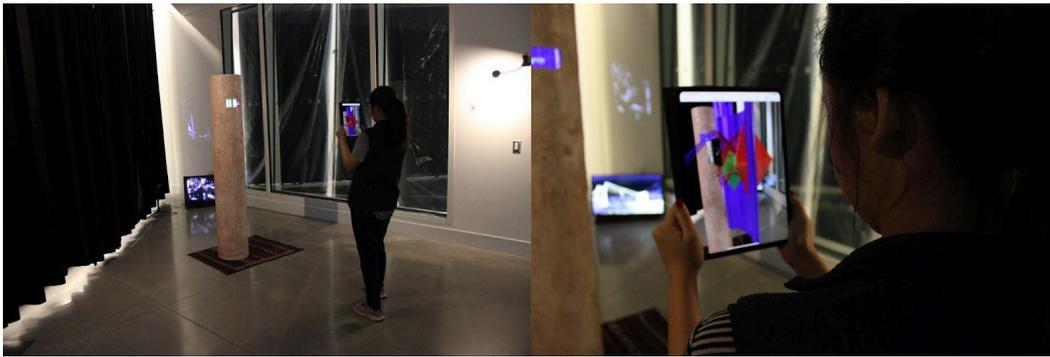
Assembly of Repair is a mixed reality environment that unfolds as a performative and speculative gathering, activating an intermedial space between sensing and witnessing. The installation brings together moving images, screendance, sculptural objects, and an augmented environment composed of 3D monuments and an interactive soundscape that interweaves with the physical space. The “minor gesture”¹² that carries and activates this assembly emerges from a sound fragment—sampled from a French propaganda film—discovered during my research. The film, produced by a French filmmaker documenting the Amazigh-Jewish community in Illigh (1950), revealed women from my community, including Zahra, engaged in the daily task of pounding wheat with wooden mortars. I transformed this sound fragment using a granular synthesis tool and experimental electroacoustic processes, sculpting the mortar's rhythmic sounds into a

¹¹ Aby Warburg, ‘The Absorption of the Expressive Values of the Past,’ translated by Matthew Rampley. Laura Marks offers a valuable reflection on Warburg's *Mnemosyne* atlas in her essay "The Radical Gesture of Unfolding." Georges Didi-Huberman also provides important insights in "Atlas: How to Carry the World on One's Back?"

¹² The *Minor Gesture* is a concept introduced by Erin Manning, in her work "The Minor Gesture" (2016). The term refers to subtle bodily movements, affects, and rhythms that are often overlooked in our everyday experiences but have the potential to disrupt conventional ways of thinking and being. Manning argues that these minor gestures are significant because they open up new possibilities for thought and action.

dynamic, immersive soundscape. This processed sound was then synthesized into visual rhythm, manifesting as a moving image sculpture. The augmented reality environment can be experienced both within the mixed reality space of the installation and within users' own surroundings through a free mobile AR application (Adobe Aero).

By enabling processes of re-territorializing the environment, participants become active agents in the transmission across space. The experience is solitary and intimate, requiring a headset. Through intuitive, embodied gestures and movements in physical space, users sense and respond to the composition intuitively.



Assembly of Repair, Second iteration (2023)

Memory is, among other things, a practice—an act of imagination and interconnection. Performing memory in multiple locations, across borders, and especially within the intimate space of performing with technologies, becomes a restorative act. Designing interactive experiences with sound and visuals means engaging in in-between choreographies: between the solitude of performing with machines, and the shared experience created for others through spatial, interactive compositions. All of this is carried by embodied gestures—gestures that move with the labor of repair. This fleshy, sensorial space—within the ongoing work *Assembly of Repair*—has summoned me into a spectral relation with the women of Illigh: with my grandmother, my aunts, and the women of my community. I became the intermediary gesture that Taylor describes:

“The Intermediary begins to imagine her heart—her memory. Memory is embodied and sensual, that is, conjured through the senses; it links the deeply private with social, even official, practices. Sometimes memory is difficult to evoke, yet it’s highly efficient; it’s always operating in conjunction with other memories, “all of them pulsing regularly, in order.” Memory, like the heart, beats beyond our capacity to control it, a lifeline between past and future” (Taylor, p89).

Diasporic Gesture

In this paper, I have tried to describe the thresholds and tensions between the intimate and the distant—tensions that emerge directly from my own lived experience. I have shown how this liminal space, although challenging, has become an important site of creativity and research in my work. In this understanding of the body and lived experience through gesture, we can assert that perhaps gesture carries a potential for holding and making visible our complex genealogies of loss and belonging. As Delia Popa writes, "the ghostly character of gestures in general, which helps us understand why our gestures never really belong just to us, marking rather the contingent history of our belonging to the social world and the experiential styles we composed in response to its challenges" (Popa 2023).

Gesture emerged from a deeper question about communicating the “incommunicability”, and about what gestures the unspeakable. How do we allow experience to retain its strangeness and untranslatability? (Taylor 2003). These experiences are not easy, and at times painful. This tension reveals itself through real-time movement in the world, through noticing my gesture being noticed by another—and sometimes, the being noticed feels like a wound. And within them, there are also moments when ghostly gestures surface, and gestures I have witnessed that etched my being. These gestures haunt me. They shape the way I move. They return. They are contingent and sometimes unresolved, and yet they form part of how I make sense of myself in the world. It is also nourished by the collective and collaborative dimensions of my practice—through moving with others in real time, through co-created encounters, and through relational, affective presence. Across these gestures, I have explored the tension between intimacy and distance, liveness and mediation, material inscription, and the sensorial dimension of remembering. Beyond the tension between the intimate and the distant that characterizes the

complexity of topographies of diasporic belonging, it is also a gesture towards the space between self and others. I do not know to what extent I succeed in communicating this, but that is also the purpose of this paper.

A Gesture also emerges from questions about communication. The way I have engaged with theoretical and scholarly knowledge in this paper is, in itself a performative gesture—a rereading of others in a contrapuntal¹³ way, not to structure them into a unifying gesture but to reflect on thinking-in-movement and evolving methodology, aesthetics, and my own becoming-theorizing within these conditions; a writing-thinking-feeling practice that loops, hesitates, contradicts, and lives through the instability of becoming. Perhaps gesture serves as a method for making sense of what exceeds language, a way of staying in motion when language fails. As Carrie Noland writes, “Gestures give shape to affects that might not have the precise, confined translatable meaning” (Noland 2009)."

And so yes, this paper constructs an unstable linguistic argument. It shapes a methodology, cites scholars, makes propositions. But beneath it all, behind every concept and citation, is a gesture trying to make itself heard, legible. So to speak of the methodology of gesture, what does it entail? It resists fixed description. Yet throughout this paper, I have described an aesthetic of gesture, intermediality, performativity, and diasporic memory. The works I discuss here do not adhere to a fixed or conventional notion of the artwork. Rather than offering closed forms or representations, they unfold as dynamic, processual, and relational constellations—works that, in Bolt’s terms, engage a “radical material performativity.”, they remain open and generate new temporal and spatial possibilities.

Notions of the gesture methodology unfold through material and temporal instability, constantly reshaped through movement, reenactment, reinscription and intermediation. It is the approach that has shaped these research-creation works. After all, gestures escape the limits of language. Gestures, as I have traced throughout this paper, may have appeared interchangeably as movement, trace, ghostly, inscription, image, choreography, flux, and mediation. They are, too,

¹³ Edward Said's contrapuntal rereading is a method of interpreting texts or cultural materials by considering multiple, often conflicting, perspectives and narratives simultaneously. "As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness" (Said 1993).

gestures as means of communicating an active performative voice of working through methodology. When Agamben describes gesture as the "exhibition of mediality," he shifts our attention away from communication as the transfer of meaning, toward the performative act as a "process of making a means visible"—a gesture that allows for the emergence of "being-in-a-medium." He writes:

"The gesture is, in this sense, communication of a communicability. It has precisely nothing to say because what it shows is the being-in-language of human beings as pure mediality. However, because being-in-language is not something that could be said in sentences, the gesture is essentially always a gesture of not being able to figure something out in language." (Agamben 2000, p. 58)

As such, gesture carries a reciprocal relation between method and being, between how we create and how we live our diasporic life. Gesture becomes a methodological medium, a performative relay, and an embodied interface. Gesture then becomes a mode of contemplating loss and erasure, or what bell hooks describes as repetition of movement that communicates "the struggle of memory against forgetting" (Hooks 2015).

Lastly, gestures draw on an unconscious bodily memory that continually shapes our daily actions and social interactions. By collecting signs of past movements and bringing them into renewed presence, gestures become living archives of bodily expression. Their significance lies not only in their immediate performance but also in their ability to reactivate earlier experiences. In light of these gestures, and within the notion of gesture as archive, Delia Popa proposes that we should consider gesture "as bodily archives that speak for cryptic inscriptions of past experiences, whose role is to keep alive a past that we cannot let go" (Popa 2023).

When these traces reappear—beyond the conscious erasure of their original meaning—forgotten aspects of those events resurface, as if granted a second life with new connections and future possibilities. In this way, the fleeting nature of gestures highlights the return of residual memories and invites their ongoing transmission. We are a body; a site of expression and epistemological repertoire, and understanding of archiving, revealing how knowledge is sedimented, transmitted, reactivated, and transformed through embodied practice.

Appendices - This **WEBPAGE** contains documentation materials for the works discussed in this paper: *Untitled Wall, Variations on Broken Lines, Assembly of Repair, and Montage*.

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