

CARRYING THE KNOWLEDGE / PERFORMING THE ARCHIVE

An Afternoon with Marsha P. Johnson

On a perfect September afternoon in 2018, we gathered together in the lobby of The Kitchen, a black box theater and performance space in Chelsea, New York City.¹ The small crowd of twenty-something to seventy-something hipsters, activists, artists, musicians, and scholars tried to contain its excitement as the doors opened. When invited, we moved quietly and methodically into a cozy darkened theater. We found a stage framed with silver streams of tinsel that twinkled under the spotlights. Blood-red roses and white candles in clear glass jars were placed delicately at the foot of the stage. The chatter ended when the filmmakers entered the space. Wearing flowing scarlet garments that were distinct but clearly coordinated, Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel faced each other with microphones in hand. They whispered lovingly in unison into the



FIGURE 3.1 Marsha P. Johnson. Photographer and date unknown.

microphones: “Marsha, Marsha, Marsha, Marsha; Sylvia, Sylvia, Sylvia, Sylvia; S.T.A.R., S.T.A.R., S.T.A.R., S.T.A.R., S.T.A.R.”

Ethereal sounds emanated from the collection of keyboards, microphones, and percussion instruments that would be providing live accompaniment for the afternoon.² Egyptt LaBeija warmed the stage in a turquoise and indigo peacock feather-patterned gown. She glided effortlessly across the stage, performing Patti LaBelle’s “Changed.” Once the rousing performance was complete, a screen unfurled at center stage. The film *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* began to play.

The experimental short film *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* juxtaposes black-and-white archival footage of Marsha P. Johnson with lush narrative sequences designed in crimson and gold, set in New York City in 1969. In this segment of the archival footage, Marsha is sitting on a chair wearing her signature crown of

flowers, talking to the person behind the camera. Marsha laments with laughter: “I got lost in the music in 1963 at Stonewall. . . . No, no it was Stonewall—it was 1967 that I got lost. In 19—oh my dear, Stonewall, I got lost at Stonewall. Heard it through the grapevine. 1969. I got lost in the music and I couldn’t get out. I still can’t get out of the music.” With a lilt in her voice and earnestness in her eyes, Marsha remarks that her computer gets all tangled up. The film moves back and forth from this archival footage of Marsha with its pale veneer of videotape to rich narrative sequences of a Stonewall-era drama that centers Marsha, Sylvia Rivera, and their friends. In the narrative portion of the film, we see Marsha, played by Mya Taylor, on a street in the West Village near the Stonewall Inn. Marsha happens upon a nefarious exchange between the police and the managers of the Stonewall Inn; the police are extorting money from the bar in tacit agreement that they will not raid the place later on that night. The police notice Marsha passing by and approach her. They grab her and push her into the brick wall of the Stonewall Inn. The flowers that she is holding and the invitations to her birthday party that she handcrafted fall to the ground. After the police let her go, Marsha collects her things and continues on with her day. She strolls through the village, inviting her friends to her party that evening; it is her birthday. Back at her apartment, Marsha sinks into a bath. As she washes, bubbles in the bath water part revealing bruises and scrapes on her legs. All dressed now, and ready for the party, Marsha ices her cake and then waits. She becomes disappointed as time passes and no one shows up for her party. She calls her friend Sylvia Rivera, played by Eve Lindley, who apologizes for missing her party. They agree to meet and celebrate at the Stonewall Inn. On her way to the bar, Marsha sees a friend, Junior, driving by in a convertible. Marsha hops in along with her other friends and they all head down to the bar.

The film stops midway through and the screen rolls up.

Eve Lindley, in character as Sylvia, appears on stage before the audience. She is steeped in the late 1960s, wearing a slight pompadour hairstyle, cat eyes fashioned with liquid eyeliner, a halter top, a miniskirt, and knee-high boots. The charge, the attitude, the presence of Sylvia Rivera is before us. Sylvia spins a loving tale about Marsha. She was a friend who would give you the shoes off her feet, her last dollar, the coat off her back. Sylvia describes the work she and Marsha did with S.T.A.R. (Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries), taking care of sex workers and cofounding a community home, S.T.A.R. House, which was located in an apartment they rented in the East Village.³ Sylvia remembers marching for liberation alongside the Young Lords and how the Black Panthers were in solidarity with S.T.A.R.; they never humiliated her or looked down on her. Sylvia recalls how Marsha discovered that she had syphilis but that it was

diagnosed much too late to treat. Sylvia tells us of the pact she and Marsha made that neither one of them would kill themselves and leave the other alone to fight. Marsha went missing in the summer of 1992. When they found her body in the Hudson River, the police ruled Marsha's death a suicide. Because of their pact, Sylvia does not believe that Marsha threw herself into the Hudson; Marsha would not have broken their promise. Sylvia recalls that a group of guys was seen giving Marsha a hard time the day she died. She remembers that during the last days of her life, Marsha started to see her father in the river and wonders if maybe she tried to go out there to find him. Sylvia accepts that Marsha may have drowned but insists that she did not kill herself.

Jimmy Camicia, Marsha's friend and a poet who plays himself in the film, takes the stage after Sylvia. He recites a poem that captures Marsha's sensibility, voice, and humor. Jimmy's poem remembers Marsha as an integral part of the cabaret performance group Hot Peaches, of which Jimmy was the founder. He recounts the ways that Marsha was generous with everything that was in her possession; if you liked her scarf, she would give it to you. She would stand in front of Village Cigars and ask the passersby, "Can you spare any change for a dying queen, darling?" She was beloved, unabashedly herself, generous beyond belief, and full of joy. Jimmy tells the story of the *P* in Marsha P. Johnson's name. One day when Marsha was in court, on the charge of solicitation, the judge asked Marsha what the *P* in her name stands for. Marsha replied, without missing a beat, that the "*P* stands for Pay it no mind, honey." Jimmy exits the stage. The screen unfurls once more and the film resumes.

Marsha and her friends are now inside the Stonewall Inn. Egyptt LaBeija performs on the small stage. The tinsel curtains that frame the stage in the film mirror the curtains that frame the stage at The Kitchen, the theater where this film and performance are unfolding. Marsha and her friends order drinks from the bar and begin to celebrate Marsha on her birthday. It seems that as soon as the celebration begins, it comes to a crashing end—the police raid the bar. The bartenders hide the cash from the till before the police can snatch it. The police begin to beat everyone up and the melee ensues. The Stonewall rebellion has begun. The film ends. The screen rolls up.

The quiet, almost solemn space inside The Kitchen gave way to glamour and fabulosity when Egyptt LaBeija appeared on the stage performing Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive." Mya Taylor, the actor who portrayed Marsha in the film, did not appear in the stage production of this event. We saw cinematic representations of Marsha but she did not enter the proscenium, as did Sylvia Rivera, Egyptt LaBeija, and Jimmy Camicia. There was a way that Egyptt LaBeija's performance of "I Will Survive" channeled Marsha and filled the room with Mar-

sha's love of singing and performance. The absent presence of Marsha settled into the space. While we were remembering and honoring Marsha's life, her loss became palpable; the loss of Marsha was alive in this performance. The film, the performances, the opening incantation, and the audience all conspired to usher in a visitation with Marsha and Sylvia that took place at The Kitchen on September 22, 2018.⁴

In the analysis of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* that follows, I discuss the ways that performance complements Black feminist avant-garde film as a method of contending with an archive of violence and the violence of the archive itself. I examine the presence of archival material in the theatrical performance and avant-garde film that are brought together in this production. I am interested in the way that knowledge is transmitted through performances steeped in the archive and consider the performativity of the archival document that is the S.T.A.R. Manifesto. In my analysis of the relationship between archival violence, theatrical performance, and narrative film in *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*, I discuss Tourmaline's relationship to this archive and examine what is revealed at the juncture of performance and film that enables occluded archival documentation to emerge through this meeting. I consider the contradictions and moments of convergence that occur when archival exploration rubs up against performance and the cinematic. The cinematic archival intervention that Tourmaline and Wortzel issue with this film demonstrates the inherent value of trans women of color, which is a hallmark of the Black feminist avant-garde. The filmmakers' integration of avant-garde film with live performance in *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* ratchets up the stakes of the Black feminist avant-garde. The friction between their experiments with the historical film genre, archival documentation, and performance make immediate the relationship between western epistemology, cinematic temporality, and embodied knowledge. Tourmaline and Wortzel's performative cinematic experience becomes an event that represents and riffs on the archival documentation of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera's lives together. The film *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* also serves as a visual and performative text that contributes to the archival documentation of Marsha P. Johnson's life. By focusing on Marsha's life through a film that captures a moment in her life, by bringing her friends to the stage, both alive and passed on, to offer beautiful testimonials about their relationship, this production conjures up a visitation with Marsha P. Johnson that enlivens her archival corpus.

Tourmaline and Wortzel's presentation of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* at The Kitchen upends the staid film-screening convention of a film programmer introducing the film and filmmakers, screening the film for an audience, then hosting a Q&A with the filmmakers after the film ends. The filmmakers eschew

the traditional mode of introduction and open the stage with an incantation that invites the presence of the ancestors whose lives are being represented on stage and screen; this ceremonial opening makes room for a visitation to unfold in the theatrical space. Because they immerse their film within a stage performance, the work of cinema takes on a performative role. The filmmakers de-center their film, and it becomes an element in a production that channels the presence of Marsha P. Johnson. Their presentation of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* weaves together theatrical performance, cinematic narrative, archival documentation, musical accompaniment, and a calling in of the ancestors that honors Marsha, Sylvia, and S.T.A.R. and lifts up their legacies in our contemporary place in LGBTQ history. The defiance of convention and innovation of form, the use of performance to connect with Marsha, and the centrality of the archive in all these facets of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* exemplify the political imperatives and complex aesthetics of the Black feminist avant-garde.

Tourmaline's extensive archival research of Marsha P. Johnson's activism, her friendship with Sylvia Rivera, and their strategies for survival are made salient in this Black feminist avant-garde piece. The film and theatrical production lay bare the affective and archival labor that Tourmaline has exerted over the past decade to bring Marsha P. Johnson out of the shadows of LGBTQ history and into the prominence that she deserves. Aside from being a filmmaker and archivist, Tourmaline is also an activist and a scholar.⁵ She held the position of Activist in Residence at the Barnard Center for Research on Women from 2014 to 2016. Tourmaline's archival research, interviews, and publications have broken new ground in recording the legacies of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera and have brought these figures into the foreground of contemporary conversations about trans, queer, and/or LGBTQ activism. Tourmaline's archival labor, which includes scouring newspapers, periodicals, and archival collections for documentation of Marsha P. Johnson, has played a fundamental role in bringing Marsha P. Johnson's life and legacy into the current discussion of LGBTQ history. Tourmaline freely shares this archival material on her website and has done so since 2012.⁶ Her website is an archive itself, hosting interviews in which she discusses prison abolition, archival records of Marsha P. Johnson's activism, and Johnson's work with Sylvia Rivera and S.T.A.R. As a scholar, Tourmaline has made a hefty contribution as coeditor of the visionary and vital anthology *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility* with Eric A. Stanley and Johanna Burton. As a filmmaker, Tourmaline is both lauded and accomplished.

Happy Birthday, Marsha! was included in the Brooklyn Museum's 2019 show that commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Stonewall rebellion, *No-*

body Promised You Tomorrow. The Brooklyn Museum and High Line Art co-commissioned a film by Tourmaline, *Salacia: Ill of Fame*, which was featured in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow* and was the first film commissioned as a High Line original. In addition to the Brooklyn Museum, the High Line, and The Kitchen, Tourmaline's work has been presented at the Museum of Modern Art, PSI, BFI Flare, the New Museum, the Whitney Museum, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Venice Biennale. Tourmaline's body of cinematic work, which also includes *Atlantic Is a Sea of Bones*, *The Personal Things*, and *Lost in the Music*, all lyrically and vibrantly contends with Black trans and queer life in a way that both spans epochs and dislocates time.⁷ Tourmaline's extensive and groundbreaking archival research of Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and S.T.A.R. has been a driving force in centering Marsha and Sylvia in our memory of the Stonewall rebellion and the history of gay liberation; this labor clearly undergirds this film and buttresses the theatrical cinematic experience of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*

In an interview archived at the Barnard Center for Research on Women, Tourmaline discusses the fact and the impact of the historical erasure of trans women of color.

I was trying to connect myself at a time when I didn't feel connected to a history of other trans women of color, and it was really hard. There was the Sylvia Rivera Law Project and I kind of heard a little bit about Marsha P. Johnson. But not anywhere where it is right now. And I felt really disconnected from any kind of past. And I think that made me feel really isolated and increased the levels of isolation that I was having to deal with every day. It was a kind of historical isolation. And I think through doing this kind of archival work, it made me think that that historical erasure is like a form of violence. And, then it really made me feel that doing that work is even more important. Right? Because trans communities, our legacies and our work is so often erased. So, I just wanted to find out as much as possible.⁸

As Tourmaline documents in her interview, historical erasure is a kind of violence. She describes an archival violence that not only happens through an institutional devaluing of archival documentation of trans women of color but raises to the surface the impact of that historical erasure on trans people who become isolated in their estrangement from their elders and ancestors by this violent archival process.

The archive of Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and S.T.A.R. is composed of interviews with Marsha and Sylvia recorded on audio and video, newspaper ar-

ticles, flyers for events and meetings, their open letters to the community, the S.T.A.R. Manifesto, and photographs of these activists at protests and marches. Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and S.T.A.R. have a substantial archival presence, yet the photographs, audio and video recordings, and written material are located in several archival collections that are held across the New York Public Library (NYPL), the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the LGBT National History Archives, and in private collections. That the archival documentation of their activism has been preserved is fortunate. The dispersal of these records, however, makes accessing the archive much more difficult; this element of the Johnson/Rivera/S.T.A.R. archive contributes to the kind of violence through estrangement to which Tourmaline was referring. Tourmaline's archival research, her labor and generosity, has brought together many of these archival elements and made them available on her website. The historical isolation that Tourmaline felt, as documented in her interview, had to be countered through her own archival labor, and she offered up that labor to her community to help assuage that sense of isolation for other trans people of color looking for their history. Tourmaline's research, her archival and affective labor, courses through the film and the theatrical presentation of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* In an effort to historically situate the archival footage, narrative sequences, and stage performances in Tourmaline and Wortzel's *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*, I will offer a discussion of the Stonewall rebellion that draws together the dispersed archive of Marsha, Sylvia, and S.T.A.R.

What Happened at the Stonewall Inn?

The uprising at the Stonewall Inn erupted around 1:00 a.m. on June 28, 1969.⁹ In a 1989 interview with Eric Marcus, Sylvia Rivera recounts what happened at the Stonewall Inn the night of the rebellion.¹⁰ As she explains: "The Stonewall wasn't a bar for drag queens. Everybody keeps saying it was. So this is where I get into arguments with people. They say, 'Oh, no, it was always a drag queen bar and it was a Black bar.' No, Washington Square Bar was the drag queen bar. Okay, you could get into the Stonewall if they knew you and there were only a certain amount of drag queens that were allowed into the Stonewall at that time."¹¹

Sylvia Rivera recounts in her interview with Marcus that nickels, dimes, and quarters started flying and hitting the police when the uprising broke out. She believed that throwing these coins was a symbol of resistance to police brutality and corruption, that this act of hurling coins was a statement about the practice of police extorting gay bars. Sylvia remembers that the effeminate men and

butch women would get the brunt of the police punishment and that they were tired of being in the closet. They were not going to get back in that closet! The gay patrons and the drag queens who were at the Stonewall Inn that night did not go quietly into the paddy wagons as they had done before. The police panicked when the patrons of the Stonewall Inn resisted; they did not expect the resistance, and the resistance grew.¹²

In the documentary film about her life, *Major!* (2015), trans activist, prison abolitionist, and elder Miss Major Griffin-Gracy offers an oral history of the Stonewall rebellion and the role that trans women played in the uprising. Miss Major was at the Stonewall Inn on the night of the rebellion. She describes the moment when the rebellion ignited:

And what happened was, that night it was just a matter of they used to do that to us all the time. Just come into the bar and the lights would go on and everybody would just stream out. Nothing ever really had to get said because you knew that's what had to happen. You knew that's what the routine was. And it was just a night that it simply wasn't going to happen. You know it's just it's a feeling you get when you all go to the movies and see something together and everybody "ah" and gasps at the same time. That's the feeling. You just knew. Everyone just looked at one another and said, Enough. Not leaving. Not going anywhere.

This rebellion certainly was a flashpoint in the lineage of gay liberation and gender self-determination. Marsha P. Johnson was there, Sylvia Rivera was there, Miss Major Griffin-Gracy was there; three iconic historical figures of the gay, lesbian, and trans movement were present for the moment when the queers fought back in a collective and sustained way. The archival presence of these three iconic trans leaders is concretized through the documentary films and interviews recorded of them, which offer a measure of archival reversal for the historical erasure of trans women from the gay liberation movement.¹³ Their memory of the night of the Stonewall rebellion situates them at the center of this moment of collective resistance. Upon further examination, it becomes clear that the Stonewall rebellion may have happened spontaneously, but it did not happen out of nowhere. The problem with locating the beginning of the gay liberation movement at the Stonewall rebellion is that it obfuscates the work of trans women in liberation movements before Stonewall and overlooks gay activists who were active in other liberation groups. In order to understand the many facets of liberation that helped ignite the Stonewall rebellion, it is necessary to discuss the liberatory movement-building work that was taking place before the uprising at the Stonewall Inn.

The Stonewall rebellion and the gay liberation movement happened during an era of political upheaval in which resistance to the Vietnam War, police brutality, racism, and class warfare was being waged by groups like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP), and the Young Lord's Party, which were all part of the New Left.¹⁴ New Left groups demonstrated, boycotted, and issued their critiques of capitalist exploitation, racial oppression, and US militarization within and outside the United States. They organized to fight imperialism and end racial and class oppression. New Left organizations recognized how their distinct experiences of oppression were tied together, yet they were not immune to overlooking or reinforcing oppression. While these groups had Marxist critiques of capitalism and deep anti-imperial commitments, their approach to destabilizing dominant power elided gender and sexuality. Feminists and women-of-color activists of the New Left critiqued the ways that these groups held patriarchal beliefs about women and fixed women in supportive roles rather than in positions of leadership. Even though gay and lesbian activists were participating fully in these liberation groups, the groups did not overtly fight for gay civil rights, and some group members harbored homophobic beliefs.¹⁵ Feminist organizations, like the National Organization for Women, focused on middle-class white women's issues and were rightly critiqued for not addressing issues important to working-class women of color. Women in the SDS and the BPP were often silenced or expected to serve the men in those movements; masculinist attitudes and homophobic rhetoric were wielded by some men in these groups to shore up and display the patriarchal power of these movements.¹⁶ The word *faggot* was used as a virulent metaphor to describe the power that the state had over men, a power that the revolution would reinstate to the people.¹⁷

During the 1950s and pre-Stonewall 1960s, groups in the homophile movement did focus their attention on gay and lesbian rights but did not have the radical edge of the New Left. Homophile groups such as the Los Angeles-based Mattachine Society focused on gay men's issues, and the Daughters of Bilitis, out of San Francisco, focused on issues that lesbians faced. Mattachine and Daughters of Bilitis, under the threat of criminalization because of anti-sodomy laws, worked to combat isolation by secretly connecting gays and lesbians. Even though the Mattachine Society's founders had communist political beliefs, this was not a politically radical organization like those in the New Left. These groups did not make themselves visible as radical gay activist organizations in the larger public forum; they were covert groups that connected gay men and brought lesbians together through newsletters and local gatherings.¹⁸ Both

Mattachine and Daughters of Bilitis were committed to proving that homosexuals were respectable and not pathological. Their public efforts were used to resist the image of gay and lesbian promiscuity and make gay and lesbian people more palatable to the mainstream. It is important to note that during the era in which Mattachine and Daughters of Bilitis operated, being out of the closet was a terrifying prospect: people caught committing homosexual acts could be arrested and jailed, lose their families or their jobs, or be involuntarily hospitalized and lobotomized. In 1962 Illinois was the first state to decriminalize homosexuality, and it was not until 2003 that the Supreme Court decision *Lawrence v. Texas* struck down anti-sodomy laws in Texas and the remaining thirteen states that still kept these laws on the books.

After the Stonewall rebellion in 1969, several gay liberation groups emerged that shed the confines of the closet and demanded gay liberation in public. The Gay Liberation Front (GLF), a New York-based gay political organization, formed immediately after the Stonewall rebellion.¹⁹ The GLF was committed to radical change; GLF members were not interested in assimilation or respectability but were dedicated to fighting for radical systemic change. By 1970 the GLF had chapters across the country.²⁰ Some members of the GLF were committed to ending oppression of all kinds, while other members wanted to focus their attention solely on issues of sexuality; this distinction caused a defining rift in GLF when some members wanted to donate five hundred dollars to the Black Panther Party.²¹ Given the heterosexism that circulated in New Left movement groups, it came as a surprise that the leader of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, Huey P. Newton, publicly supported the Gay Liberation Front in a statement released in 1970.²² Frustration with the leaderless style of the GLF, its decision to monetarily support the BPP, and its choice to use its resources to combat multiple forms of oppression—and not exclusively fight for gay rights—led some members to leave the GLF. In the winter of 1969, members of the GLF broke off and formed the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA).²³

The momentum for gay liberation kept building during the months following the Stonewall rebellion. In the summer of 1970, the GAA organized a series of dances at New York University's Weinstein Hall to raise money for legal, medical, and housing expenses for people in the gay community. Two dances had been held earlier that summer without incident. The administration balked at the third dance but eventually allowed it to proceed. The fourth dance was canceled, and the university forbade any events that were centered on gay issues until a panel of medical professionals and clergy convened and made a decision about the morality of homosexuality. The NYU student organization Gay Student Liberation organized a protest and asked the GLF for sup-

port. Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson were some of the GLF members who showed up to occupy Weinstein Hall in protest of NYU's anti-gay policy.²⁴ The occupation lasted for five days and ended with New York City's Tactical Squad demanding that students leave the premises. Sylvia Rivera refused to leave and was subsequently arrested.²⁵

In an interview with Leslie Feinberg, Sylvia Rivera recounts that S.T.A.R. emerged out of the action at Weinstein Hall.²⁶ Sylvia tells Feinberg:

S.T.A.R. was for the street gay people, the street homeless people and anybody that needed help at that time. Marsha and I had always sneaked people into our hotel rooms. Marsha and I decided to get a building. We were trying to get away from the Mafia's control at the bars.

We got a building at 213 East 2nd Street. Marsha and I just decided it was time to help each other and help out other kids. We fed people and clothed people. We kept the building going. We went out and hustled the streets. We paid the rent.

We didn't want the kids out in the streets hustling. They would go out and rip off food. There was always food in the house and everyone had fun. It lasted for two or three years.

We would sit there and ask, "Why do we suffer?" As we got more involved into the movements, we said, "Why do we always got to take the brunt of this shit?"²⁷

Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson began organizing as Street Transvestites for Gay Power after the Weinstein Hall event. In the fall of 1970, they augmented the name and emerged as Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries (S.T.A.R.). Sylvia and Marsha produced a manifesto that outlined a nine-point plan for gender self-determination, the end of job discrimination, the end of police harassment and exploitation by doctors, the ability to have one's gender listed correctly on one's identification, and free education, health care, clothing, food, and housing for trans people, gay people, and all people. They wanted access to all areas of society and full participation in liberation struggles.

In her interview with Feinberg, Sylvia Rivera enters into the record that the S.T.A.R. banner was first carried publicly at a demonstration in 1970 to protest police violence and remembers that members of the Young Lord's Party showed them respect as human beings; Sylvia became a member of the Young Lord's Party. She also describes meeting Huey Newton in Philadelphia in 1971; he recognized S.T.A.R. as a part of the revolution. Sylvia and Marsha, as founders of S.T.A.R., were revolutionary leaders of their movement committed to fighting for gay power. Their presence as members of the gay community forced gay and

lesbian organizations like GAA to confront their own oppressive conceptions about gender.²⁸

A painful and elucidatory example of the contempt for trans women in the gay liberation movement was on full display in 1973, after the Christopher Street Liberation Day March held on June 24 (see figure 3.2). In the rally at Washington Square Park, where the march culminated, S.T.A.R. had not been given the opportunity to address the crowd. Sylvia demanded that she be given a chance to speak and worked her way onto the stage. As she began her speech, lesbian separatists and gay men heckled her. The audience booed her at first but Sylvia pushed on (see figure 3.3).

Y'all better quiet down. I've been trying to get up here all day for your gay brothers and your gay sisters, in jail, that write me every motherfucking week and ask for your help. And you all don't do a goddamn thing for them.

Have you ever been beaten up and raped in jail? Now think about it. They've been beaten up and raped after they've had to spend much of their money in jail to get their hormones, and try to get their sex changes. The women have tried to fight for their sex changes or to become women. On the women's liberation—and they write S.T.A.R. Not the women's groups. They do not write women. They do not write men. They write S.T.A.R. because we're trying to do something for them.

I have been to jail. I have been raped. And beaten. Many times! By men! Heterosexual men that do not belong in the homosexual shelter. But, do you do anything for them? No. You all tell me to go and hide my tail between my legs. I will no longer put up with this shit. I have been beaten. I have had my nose broken. I have been thrown in jail. I have lost my job. I have lost my apartment for gay liberation and you all treat me this way? What the fuck's wrong with you all? Think about that!

I do not believe in a revolution, but you all do. I believe in the gay power. I believe in us getting our rights, or else I would not be out there fighting for our rights. That's all I wanted to say to y'all people. If you all want to know about the people that are in jail and do not forget Bambi L'amour, and Dora Mark, Kenny Mesner, and other gay people that are in jail, come and see the people at S.T.A.R. House on Twelfth Street on 640 East Twelfth Street between B and C apartment 14.

The people are trying to do something for all of us, and not men and women that belong to a white middle-class white club. And that's what you all belong to!



FIGURE 3.2 *Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, Christopher Street Liberation Day March, June 24, 1973. Photo by Leonard Fink. Courtesy of LGBT Community Center National History Archive.*



FIGURE 3.3 Sylvia Rivera, “Y’all Better Quiet Down” speech at Christopher Street Liberation Day rally, Washington Square Park, New York City, June 24, 1973 (video still). Recording by LoveTapesCollective. Courtesy of Lesbian Herstory Archives.

REVOLUTION NOW!

Gimme a G! Gimme an A! Gimme a Y! Gimme a P! Gimme an O!

Gimme a W! Gimme an E! Gimme an R!

[*Sylvia begins to cry*]

Gay power!

Louder!

GAY POWER!²⁹

The crowd joined in with Sylvia in her chant; they gave her a “G.A.Y. P.O.W.E.R.” when she asked for it from the stage. Sylvia challenged the crowd’s resistance, withstood their virulence, and eventually won the audience over. This is a heartbreaking moment to witness for Sylvia, who had dedicated herself to fighting for the rights of the very people who were booing her.

After Sylvia left the stage, Jean O’Leary, a former member of GAA who left the group to start Lesbian Feminist Liberation, gave a speech that critiqued men who dressed in drag for entertainment purposes, and in her critique, she conflated trans women, drag queens, and cross-dressers. This conflation became abundantly clear when she denounced the presence of Sylvia Rivera on the stage and with seething vitriol referred to Sylvia as a man wearing women’s clothes.³⁰ The refusal to acknowledge trans women in O’Leary’s speech reveals a hostile entrenchment within the lesbian feminist organizing communities.

In his 1989 interview with Sylvia Rivera, Eric Marcus asks about her activism and political work; the betrayal that she experienced from the gay community rises to the surface.

SYLVIA: And the gay rights bill, as far as I'm concerned, you know, to me, the gay rights bill and the people that I worked with on the gay rights bill and when I did all the petitioning and whatnot, when the bill was passed . . . that bill was mine as far as I'm concerned. I helped word it and I worked very hard for it. And that's why I get upset when I give interviews and whatever, because the fucking community has no respect for the people that really did it. Drag queens did it. We did it. We did it for our own brothers and sisters. But, damn it, don't keep shoving us in the fuckin' back and stabbing us in the back and that's . . . And that's what really hurts. And it is very upsetting.

ERIC: Not only do you get beaten up by the straights, you get beaten up by the gays.

SYLVIA: You get beaten up by your own and that's what hurts.

Marsha and I fought a lot for the liberation of our people. We did a lot back then. Marsha and I had a building on Second Street, which is called STAR House. And when we asked the community to help us, there was nobody to help us. We were nothing. We were nothing. And now we were taking care of kids that were younger than us. I mean, Marsha and I were young and we were taking care of them. And GAA had teachers and lawyers and whatnot and all we asked them was is, well, if you could help us teach our own so we can all become a little bit better. There was nobody there to help us. There was nobody.

ERIC: They left you.

SYLVIA: They left us hanging. There was only one person that came and helped us. Once again is . . . Bob Kohler was there. He helped us paint. He helped us put wires together. We didn't know what the fuck we were doin'. I mean, we took a building that was, I mean, a slum building. We tried. We really did. We went out and made that money off the streets to keep these kids off the street.³¹

The multiple forms of oppression that S.T.A.R. was working to combat become apparent in the archived audio and video recordings that document acts of violence that Sylvia, Marsha, and the S.T.A.R. children suffered both within and outside the gay liberation movement. The records of GAA, GLF, the Mattachine Society, and the Daughters of Bilitis are all accessible, cogent collections.

The violence of the archive itself becomes apparent through the disparate archival location and occlusion of S.T.A.R. in narratives of LGBT history and activism. The archival subsumption of S.T.A.R. persisted until quite recently, when Tourmaline's archival research, labor, and publicization of S.T.A.R. lifted the group to the foreground of the history of LGBTQ activism. The archival material, interviews, video footage, photographs, newspaper articles, and oral history of Stonewall all demonstrate that S.T.A.R. was mobilizing a vision of freedom on the vanguard of what has become the contemporary LGBTQ movement. Marsha P. Johnson's place in the archive is less obvious than Sylvia Rivera's but quite evident in the photographs of the marches and protests at NYU and Bellevue (see figures 3.4 and 3.5) and at the Christopher Street Liberation Day March and rally in post-Stonewall New York City.³²

Because Sylvia Rivera was willing to put herself and her body literally on the line for gay power and trans liberation, her presence in the movement is at the forefront: she has become the voice of S.T.A.R. and trans justice during the Stonewall era. Marsha P. Johnson was less vocal than Sylvia Rivera, but as can be seen in photographs of Sylvia at the rallies and marches in the early days of gay liberation, Marsha was right by her side. Marsha's role in the movement is less evident because the archival record of her activism is scattered, but when an intrepid exploration to find Marsha P. Johnson in the archive is undertaken—as exemplified by Tourmaline's extensive work in the archives and the research that I undertook for this chapter—Marsha's archival trace can be found. The archival labor that Tourmaline has exerted is a response to the violent erasure of trans women in the archive, and for trans women of color, the archives of violence are deep and pervasive. The suspicion, exclusion, and hostility that trans women suffered during this monumental era in lesbian and gay history haunt queer and feminist liberation struggles in the new millennium. Trans liberation is not a foregone conclusion in contemporary LGBTQ activism. Transphobia has a stronghold in some quarters, and trans-exclusionary radical feminists do still exist. The lethal violence that trans women like Sylvia and Marsha struggled to survive, and too often succumbed to, persists into our contemporary moment. There is a direct historical connection between the violence that trans women suffered in 1969 and the violence that trans women suffer today. By 2019, fifty years after the Stonewall rebellion, digital space and social media platforms had become an archive for the murders of trans women; this digital space had become a social media graveyard, vigil, and memorial. With Tourmaline and Wortzel's *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*, a pause has been initiated, and in the abeyance created with their piece, these filmmakers offer a cinematic and performative event that is as rooted in archival concerns as it is in the avant-



FIGURE 3.4 *Marsha P. Johnson hands out flyers for support of gay students at N.Y.U., 1970.* Photo by Diana Davies. Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-57bo-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>.

garde, is as dedicated to archival recovery as it is to defying any conception of historical accuracy, is as much a film as it is a performance as it is a mediation as it is a séance.

Performance, the Archive, and the Black Feminist Avant-Garde

The theatrical event *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* builds on the performativity that was raised in the second chapter's analysis of Kara Lynch's *SAVED :: video postcard*. Both pieces draw issues of performance and performativity into my conception of the Black feminist avant-garde; the incorporation of performance adds temporal multiplicity to the cinematic space carved out in these projects. The archival embodiments and connections that unfold in *SAVED :: video postcard* and the archival conjuring that takes place in *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* are activated through the performances staged in each work of art. The political stakes and aesthetic imperatives of avant-garde cinema that trouble the visual, destabilize the spectator, and upend conventions of time are amplified

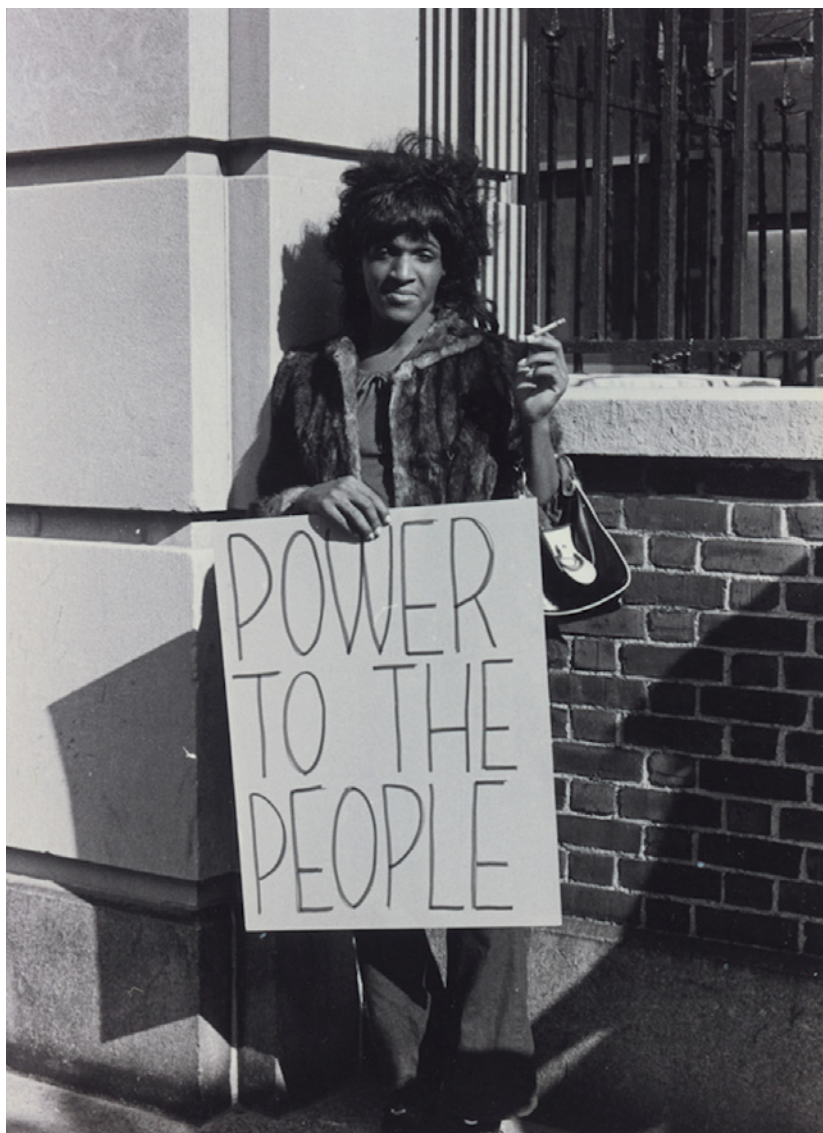


FIGURE 3.5 *Marsha P. Johnson pickets Bellevue Hospital to protest treatment of street people and gays, ca. 1968–75. Photo by Diana Davies. Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-5fa8-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>.*

through engagements with performance in Black feminist avant-garde films. The film *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*, I argue, actually takes on a performative quality as it is woven into the performance and staging of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* at The Kitchen. Both the film and the theatrical performances in *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* intervene in the archive of the Stonewall rebellion and gay liberation by centering Marsha P. Johnson and disrupting the epistemological power of an archive that subsumes her. The relationship between issues of the archive and performativity in performance studies scholarship has been an uneasy one that is embedded in the foundation of the field. When this relationship is explored, it exposes the hierarchy of western systems of knowledge production that emerge out of histories of conquest and have produced and continue to instantiate racial and gender stratification. The archival process of amassing, cataloging, and storing records enacts a privileging of the written word and visual evidence. Through documentation, hierarchical categorization, and ease of retrieval, western modes of knowledge production are made more legitimate than that which cannot be collected, stored, and documented on paper, in audio recordings, or on film. The value placed on the written word makes illegible the nonwritten or not impeccably written work, and dehumanizes people and groups of people whose mode of carrying knowledge exceeds the written word or is not recognized as valuable enough to be preserved in the repository.³³

Western epistemologies that privilege observation, reason, and the empirically proven proclaim that systems of western knowledge production are devoid of bias and subjectivity, yet this premise is deeply duplicitous given that this very method of knowledge production is based on the presumptive historical belief that white, landowning men are the universal subject. This belief produced racial, class, gender, national, and ableist hierarchies that permeate systems of knowledge that continue to structure everyday life. In “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” Dwight Conquergood refers to the process of devaluing knowledge as epistemic violence and contends that “what gets squeezed out by this epistemic violence is the whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, co-experienced, covert—and all the more deeply meaningful because of its refusal to be spelled out.”³⁴

The radical intervention of performance studies destabilizes the hierarchy of the written word, by valuing nonwritten expression and recognizing knowledge bases, forms, and modes of expression that have been subjugated by the epistemic violence of western regimes of knowledge production. Performance becomes an interrogative through which text and practice, theory and creation, critique and memory, history and culture interact, struggle, and are then hur-

tled into question.³⁵ Conquergood contends: “Performance studies struggles to open the space between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice. This embrace of different ways of knowing is radical because it cuts to the root of how knowledge is organized in the academy.”³⁶

Performance studies offers methods for understanding performance in ways that expose the intentional and tacit performances of social life. Performance can be understood as a discrete cultural event with players, an audience, a beginning and ending, like a theatrical production or a happening, or it can be concerned with less self-aware social performances like clothing choices, greetings and salutations, and moving through space.³⁷ Theories of performance have been foundational in excavating the insidiousness of heteronormativity on the production of gender and sexuality. The relevance of the relationship between performativity and gender is made salient when one looks back at the first issue of the premier journal *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. This inaugural issue opens with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*,” followed by Judith Butler’s “Critically Queer.” In tandem, these articles track the history of the term *performativity* from its theatrical consideration to its use in analyzing speech acts, capitalist efficiency, and deconstructive textual analysis, topics that all lead toward understanding the regulatory regime of gender construction and its effect on the subject.³⁸ The relationship between performance and activism is taken up in Diana Taylor’s *Performance*, in which she explores the world-making impetus of performance as it is used in struggles for freedom; her analysis foregrounds the way that the body becomes a crucial performative site in this context.³⁹ Taylor closes *Performance* with a recognition of the world-making quality of performance:

As a practice, performance constitutes a means of communication, a doing, and a doing *with* and *to*. As an act of imagination, performance allows us to imagine better scenarios and futurities. José Esteban Muñoz put it eloquently: “Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for the minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds.”

Performance is world-making. We need to understand it.⁴⁰

The world-making that is performance tracks back to the archive as well. In her earlier published volume *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Taylor challenges western epistemology by unseating the dominant position that writing holds in the production of knowledge and

by recognizing that performance is an “embodied praxis and episteme.”⁴¹ Taylor argues that because we have accepted writing as the preeminent way of producing knowledge, the written word has taken the place of embodiment. Taylor contends that when we take “‘performance’ seriously as a system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge, performance studies allows us to expand what we understand by ‘knowledge.’”⁴² Tourmaline and Wortzel’s *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* elicits an examination of the role of performativity in archival documentation, political protest, and trans liberation as they are staged in the theatrical event of which this film was a central part. The archival documentation of Marsha and Sylvia’s resistance to gender domination and homophobia, their desire to create a cooperative movement for gay liberation with GAA, and the actualization of gender self-determination and community building with S.T.A.R. House demonstrate the world-making impetus that is a defining feature of performance.⁴³ What is most compelling for my analysis of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* is Taylor’s insight that “performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called ‘twice-behaved behavior.’”⁴⁴ My analysis of knowledge production and transfer in *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* raises questions about the use of archival material, the incorporation of the document, and the archival impulse at work in the film and theatrical production.

In Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s analysis of the archive, as discussed in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, he identifies dimensions of power at play within an archive. In his discussion of archival power, Trouillot addresses the inequalities of the archival process that privileges some voices and experiences while silencing others. He then examines the assembly of the archive within an institution and the power exerted in the process of collecting and cataloging archival materials.⁴⁵ In an observation that appears axiomatic, Trouillot recognizes that the ability to locate archival material is paramount in the process of archival research and discovery; the power, though, lies in the way that archival access ultimately impacts the production of history.⁴⁶ He insists: “Archives assemble. Their assembly work is not limited to a more or less passive act of collecting. Rather, it is an active act of production that prepares facts for historical intelligibility.”⁴⁷

The scattering of Marsha P. Johnson’s archival materials across collections and institutions reflects both a recognition of her historical relevance and a concomitant diminished value in making cogent and easily accessible the body of archival material she generated in her lifetime. It is clear that archival power inflects archival choices, produces silences, and determines what will be understood as fact and, as a result, as history itself.

The dislocation of Marsha's archive across the archival collections of LGBTQ organizations and individuals means that the assembly of her archive happens in the retrieval process. Without a central location for all the photographs in which Marsha appears, the manifesto she helped draft, the newspaper articles in which she was mentioned, or the film footage and sound recordings that capture her voice in a time and place, her archival presence remains diffuse. Yet Marsha P. Johnson does have an archival presence. This fact of the Marsha P. Johnson archive exemplifies Trouillot's concern with the power of archival retrieval. If the archival documents are not easily found or are few in number, then the knowledge of Marsha P. Johnson will be obscured and her place in LGBTQ history will be lost.

The unevenness of accessibility is made salient when the archival presence of a more dominant gay liberation group, such as the Gay Activists Alliance, is held in contradistinction. The GAA's archival material is held together at the NYPL; there are eleven linear feet of documents. This archive is fixed, stable, and accessible. Because of the accessibility of this archival material, the GAA can more easily become the focal point of this historical moment, and the work of Marsha, Sylvia, and S.T.A.R. fades into the background. An LGBTQ history told without Marsha, Sylvia, and S.T.A.R. is an incomplete history that subjugates these foundational leaders, who were the vanguard of trans liberation.⁴⁸ The challenges in archival retrieval produce a silence and an archival occlusion, even though some documents have been preserved and cataloged. This challenge, in part, enables the mythology of Stonewall to exist as a spontaneous eruption of gay people who were tired of harassment. By overlooking the concerted effort of trans members of the pre-Stonewall community to organize with gay activists, the messy history of gay liberation, which includes vehement contempt for trans women by lesbian and gay organizations, is sidestepped. The archival abundance of the larger organizations like GAA, GLF, the Mattachine Society, and the Daughters of Bilitis overwhelms knowledge of Marsha, Sylvia, and S.T.A.R. and situates the more prominent groups at the helm of gay liberation. The archival dispersal and occlusion of knowledge both reflect and produce Marsha's place in the archive of LGBTQ history and the memory of the Stonewall rebellion.

The oral history that Miss Major offered in the documentary film about her life, *Major!* (2015), documents the ways that trans women have been left out of the legacy of the Stonewall rebellion:

You know the girls, we can put up with some stuff, you know, but I guess it was just like at that time, we were done. Can't take anymore. This has got

to stop here. You know. After that, years, you've heard that oh someone threw a shoe. Someone threw a beer bottle or whatever have you. I don't know who threw what and it doesn't matter. All that mattered was, we were bustin' the cops' ass. And when the community at large got involved, all of a sudden it was the white gay guys who had did this and the lesbians. And oh there might have been a drag queen or two there. Really? When we frequented that bar, you know what I mean, and hung out there.

The community at large, to which Miss Major is referring, consisted of the gay activist organizations that were founded after the Stonewall rebellion like GAA and GLF. When discussing the Stonewall community, I would be remiss if I did not mention Stormé DeLarverie, a Stonewall Inn regular who was present when the Stonewall rebellion began. Rumor has it that DeLarverie's retaliatory punch, which laid low the police officer who struck her and bloodied her eye, was the catalyzing event of the uprising. DeLarverie—a butch lesbian, a singer who performed ballads dressed in a tuxedo in the Jewel Box Revue, and an MC—worked to protect the LGBTQ community in public spaces like the Stonewall Inn and, later, at Henrietta Hudson's. Insurgent voices of trans activists like Miss Major and archivist/filmmaker Tourmaline correct the force of dominant history that elides trans people who refused domination at the Stonewall Inn. The oral histories recorded by Eric Marcus and those that appear in documentary films like *Major!* collect firsthand testimonies of trans history that together work to dismantle the production of knowledge that excludes trans people from LGBTQ history and the flashpoint of the Stonewall rebellion. Miss Major's, Sylvia Rivera's, and Marsha P. Johnson's oral histories; Tourmaline and Wortzel's film; Tourmaline's archival research and assembly on her website; and scholarly texts like this one all combine to reassemble the archive with trans women's archival presences as the nexus and connective tissue during this pivotal moment in the history of our contemporary LGBTQ movement/moment.⁴⁹

Another example of trans exclusion from the history of the Stonewall rebellion takes place not inside a repository but in public space. When remarking on the monuments to commemorate Stonewall located in Christopher Park, which sits across the street from the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, Miss Major expresses deep disappointment about there being statues of two gay men and two lesbians.⁵⁰ No transgender women are memorialized in the park at all. She asks: "Where are we? We were such a part of this, you know. Where is the respect for the folks that have gone through this? Where is Sylvia Rivera, you know, and Marsha Johnson? . . . There were other people there who had a voice before this happened. You know. Who was trying to make things better. Girls of

color. Friends. You know. And they just berated them. And talked about them like they were drug addicts and alcoholics. And in going through this, they pulled this thing away from us.”⁵¹

Members of GLF and GAA such as Jim Fouratt, Arthur Bell, and Arthur Evans have described their experiences of gay life in the village before and after the Stonewall rebellion; it is clear that the Stonewall Inn was not a place they frequented. According to Fouratt, he was walking home from work and happened upon police activity in front of the Stonewall Inn, and because of his work in left politics, he wanted to support the struggle. He described the Stonewall Inn as a dive bar that was “really horrible. And drug den, chicken hawk heaven.”⁵² Bell and Evans, members of the GLF and founding members of the GAA, did not know of the Stonewall Inn and did not participate in the rebellion, but they were politicized by attending a GLF meeting in the wake of the rebellion in August 1969.⁵³ It is important to remember that the GAA was formed by members of the GLF who decided to split off from the GLF. As described by GAA founder Arthur Evans, GAA was formed to focus solely on issues of sexuality faced by gays and lesbians and was not committed to building a liberation front to combat the interlocking oppressions of racism, capitalism, homophobia, misogyny, and imperialism, as was GLF’s commitment.⁵⁴ The issue of gender freedom and transgender liberation was outside the purview of the GAA; the archival footage of the 1973 Christopher Street Liberation Day rally, where Sylvia Rivera was heckled and booed, makes this tension painfully evident. Even though the Stonewall Inn was a bar frequented by trans women and reviled by members of the gay community, somehow in the historical process of commemorating the rebellion at the Stonewall Inn, trans women are erased from the scene. That archival erasure is violent. The archival violence happens with a rewriting of history that displaces the trans women who frequented the Stonewall Inn and replaces them in history with gay and lesbian people who get to centralize themselves at this epochal turning point of LGBTQ history and activism. Miss Major, Marsha P. Johnson, and Sylvia Rivera are not recognized as leaders of this movement. Archival violence compounds the physical violence that trans people withstood during the raids and arrests that led up to this moment of rebellion; the terror they experienced is occluded and devalued through the epistemological violence of archival occlusion and erasure.⁵⁵

S.T.A.R.

One of the most valuable pieces of archival material that can name and counter this violent archival occlusion and epistemological erasure of trans women from LGBTQ history is the S.T.A.R. Manifesto. This document is part of the New

York Public Library's archive, which is the most comprehensive archival collection for S.T.A.R. held by an institution; the file has seventeen documents. The S.T.A.R. Manifesto is performative. It incites action. It captures the feeling of the post-Stonewall historical moment within the gay and lesbian activist community, which excluded trans women. The manifesto demands room for gender self-determination and is working to develop the language with which to name transgender embodiment and politics decades before the theoretical and academic infrastructure for trans studies and queer theory emerged. The S.T.A.R. Manifesto registers the need for resources for the trans community and offers a cogent and brave critique of capitalism and imperialism. The manifesto opens with a statement about the oppression that trans people have to contend with in daily life:

The oppression against transvestites of either sex arises from sexist values and this oppression is manifested by heterosexuals and homosexuals of both sexes in the form of exploitation, ridicule, harassment, beatings, rapes, murders.

Because of this oppression the majority of transvestites are forced into the streets we have framed [*sic*] a strong alliance with our gay sisters and brothers of the street. Who we are a part of and represent we are; a part of the revolutionaries armies fighting against the system.

While trans studies has moved away from the term *transvestite* in the intervening years, S.T.A.R. was clearly offering a critique of the violence of heteronormativity and homonormativity that insidiously emanated through exploitation, ridicule, and harassment, and which manifested abominably in the beatings, rapes, and murders of trans people in the 1960s and 1970s; this kind of violence is still being waged against trans people fifty years later.

S.T.A.R.'s nine-point plan begins with a prescient demand for the right to gender self-determination, a call that also includes the right to have identification that matches one's gender identity. The manifesto calls for the end of job discrimination for trans and gay street people and an end of police harassment that is paired with a demand for the release of all gay and trans people from jail, as well as all political prisoners. S.T.A.R.'s critique of exploitive systems of labor that leave trans people vulnerable to police harassment and arrest is met by a critique of the medical industrial complex; S.T.A.R. demands an end to the medical exploitation of trans people by doctors and psychologists. The manifesto calls for equal rights and free education, health care, food, clothing, transportation, and housing for trans people, gay street people, and all oppressed people. The S.T.A.R. Manifesto ends with the following point:

We want a revolutionary peoples' government, where transvestites, street people, women, homosexuals, blacks, puerto ricans, indians, and all oppressed people are free, and not fucked over by this government who treat us like the scum of the earth and kills us off like flies, one by one, and throws us into jail to rot. This government who spends millions of dollars to go to the moon, and lets the poor Americans starve to death.

Power to the People

S.T.A.R.

In this call to action, S.T.A.R. is responding to the interlocking oppressions of homophobia, transphobia, sexism, patriarchy, poverty, ablism, and racism that leave people vulnerable to state violence waged by the police and codified by the prison industrial complex and the medical industrial complex. Before queer theory was canonized, before intersectionality was coined, before the term *trans* was used, S.T.A.R. produced a manifesto that leveraged a critique of capitalism and imperialism while it envisioned a liberatory future for all oppressed people. S.T.A.R. was doing the queer coalitional work that Cathy J. Cohen would later theorize in her immensely important article "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" (1997). In this article, Cohen is skeptical about the efficacy of "queer" except as a framework through which the radical potential of queer politics can be harnessed to enact transformative coalition building between differently marginalized groups. Cohen envisions "queer" as that which can activate "a politics where one's relation to power, and not some homogenized identity, is privileged in determining one's political comrades. I'm talking about a politics where the nonnormative and marginal position of punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens, for example, is the basis for progressive transformative coalition work. Thus, if there is any truly radical potential to be found in the idea of queerness and the practice of queer politics, it would seem to be located in its ability to create a space of opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformational political work can begin."⁵⁶

The S.T.A.R. Manifesto delineates Johnson and Rivera's investment in the radical potential of transformative political work. S.T.A.R. was theorizing and actualizing a transformative queer politics that recognized how all marginalized people were interconnected and was ready to move in solidarity to resist dominant power and end oppression for all people. With their community home, S.T.A.R. House, and in their visionary nine-point platform, Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson were using their power to create the political landscape imagined by the GLF, and yet they had to contend with groups like the GAA who were only interested in rallying around the single issue of gay sexuality. The

radical potential of queer transformative politics was envisioned in the S.T.A.R. Manifesto and put in practice by S.T.A.R.'s movement-building work. This manifesto offered tools for resisting domination, but it required the willingness to pool resources and engage in resistance activities that did not always yield results for every person's needs at the same time. It required sacrifice—something that Marsha and Sylvia offered willingly. Marsha and Sylvia were marching, sitting-in, and protesting for their gay brothers and sisters, yet when it was time for solidarity with trans women, the support was not returned. The speech that Sylvia had to fight to make at the 1973 Christopher Street Liberation Day rally, where she was met by a chorus of boos by lesbians and gay men in the crowd, is a most salient demonstration of the failure of gays and lesbians to participate in the coalitional world-making project that S.T.A.R. was in the process of actualizing.

Performativity of the Document: The S.T.A.R. Manifesto

The S.T.A.R. Manifesto is a rallying cry meant to forge solidarity across differently marginalized groups and enact coalitional politics that could save the lives and support the well-being of all oppressed people. I am interested in thinking about the performance of the document—what is lost, what has disappeared, what has been saved, what has come to pass. The world-making that S.T.A.R. envisioned, what was being activated in the manifesto and actualized with S.T.A.R. House, exemplifies the world-making drive of performance. The relationship between an archival document and performance is taken up by Rebecca Schneider, who contends with the incongruence between the archive, which is understood as that which remains of history, and performance, which is understood as that which disappears.⁵⁷ Schneider interrogates the western conception of knowledge production that places more value on the stability of the document, which in turn undergirds the conception of the total impermanence of performance. This archival process reveals loss and showcases what is missing while leading us to who has disappeared. Schneider argues: “The archive itself becomes a social *performance* of retroaction. The archive performs the institution of disappearance, with object remains as indices of disappearance and with performance as given to disappear.”⁵⁸ Schneider is pointing to the way that the archive holds in place the document that turns us backward, that gestures toward what has gone and lays bare what remains.

The S.T.A.R. Manifesto holds in time Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera's vision for the future as it engenders in us a social performance of retroaction. By turning back with Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera through the S.T.A.R. Manifesto, we can tap into both the anger and the possibility that is at work in

this document. Marsha and Sylvia are offering theories of complex gender dynamics that capture the urgency of the moment in a document that demonstrates the technology of the past, typewritten words from which the phantom smell of mimeographic ink wafts, and one that captures in tone, language, and imagination the tenor of street life and survival. The misspellings, the cross-hatches, the fervor, and the platform of the manifesto itself all reach back in time through this document. The nine-point format is historically, ideologically, and formally linked to the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense's ten-point program.⁵⁹ The refusal to conform comes through in the exigency of the message, the clarity of the demands, and the disinterest in producing a perfect document. The S.T.A.R. Manifesto is a work of proto-trans theory, a documentation of gender self-determination that outlines trans concerns about the openly and defiantly hostile gay community; this document demonstrates that Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera were actualizing trans theory before trans theory or queer theory existed. The S.T.A.R. Manifesto is a call to action and as such, this document performs—it visualizes a liberatory future and demands actions from the community that will make material that liberatory future in the present moment. The revolutionary moment of the 1970s is being performed in the crispness of the language and the audacity of the demands in this manifesto. Abolition is at work in this document, before the vision of prison abolition took flight. If the gay community at that time could have rallied with S.T.A.R., as opposed to dismissing the group and excluding it because members of the gay community could only see pathology and not brilliance in its presence, they would have been able to shrink the separation between marginalized groups and move closer to liberation for all. What I encounter when I turn back, through this manifesto, is an overwhelming sense of pride in S.T.A.R.'s vision and action as well as a profound sense of loss about what the movement could have been had S.T.A.R. been recognized as the vanguard that it was. The S.T.A.R. Manifesto envisions the transformative potential of radical queer politics just as it captures the loss of having had the chance to begin this work back in 1970. S.T.A.R. was and still is *avant-garde*.

The S.T.A.R. Manifesto, following Schneider, is the object remains from S.T.A.R.'s movement-building work. While the everyday movement-building actions of revolutionaries, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, are given to disappear, the manifesto holds a vision of that work in place and the archive keeps this precious document fixed, locatable, and preserved. The social performance of retroaction carries with it the knowledge of the cost of the community failure to build a queer coalition with S.T.A.R. What remains alongside the revolutionary vision of a liberated people captured with this document is the knowl-

edge of the loss of Sylvia, the loss of Marsha, and the short-lived S.T.A.R. House that could still be a home for queer and trans youth today.

While the S.T.A.R. Manifesto, as a performative document, enacts movement and emblazons in memory the pain felt for its authors and a cascade of forsaken possibilities, this document also brings forward the vision of Sylvia and Marsha and the promise of a future in which marginalized people, no matter their differing experiences of oppression, could find common cause, resist domination, and upend power structures meant to strip them of their rights, safety, education, health care, and home. This manifesto is a beautiful, heartbreaking document, something that remains of S.T.A.R., an archival object that viscerally carries forward those who are gone, that which no longer remains, and all that is still possible (see figures 3.6 and 3.7). While we haven't conquered capitalism, imperialism, or the prison industrial complex yet, some of S.T.A.R.'s demands have been actualized. We have trans theory, queer theory, access to trans medical care for many, not all. We recognize gestating parents—not just mothers—and we have gender self-determination on government IDs in some states. Prison abolition and a movement to defund the police have entered the national lexicon, and we have begun to destabilize the gender binary—made most explicit by the discussion of pronouns and the introduction of the singular “they” in institutional and familial spaces. We are living in a world envisioned by the avant-garde of S.T.A.R.

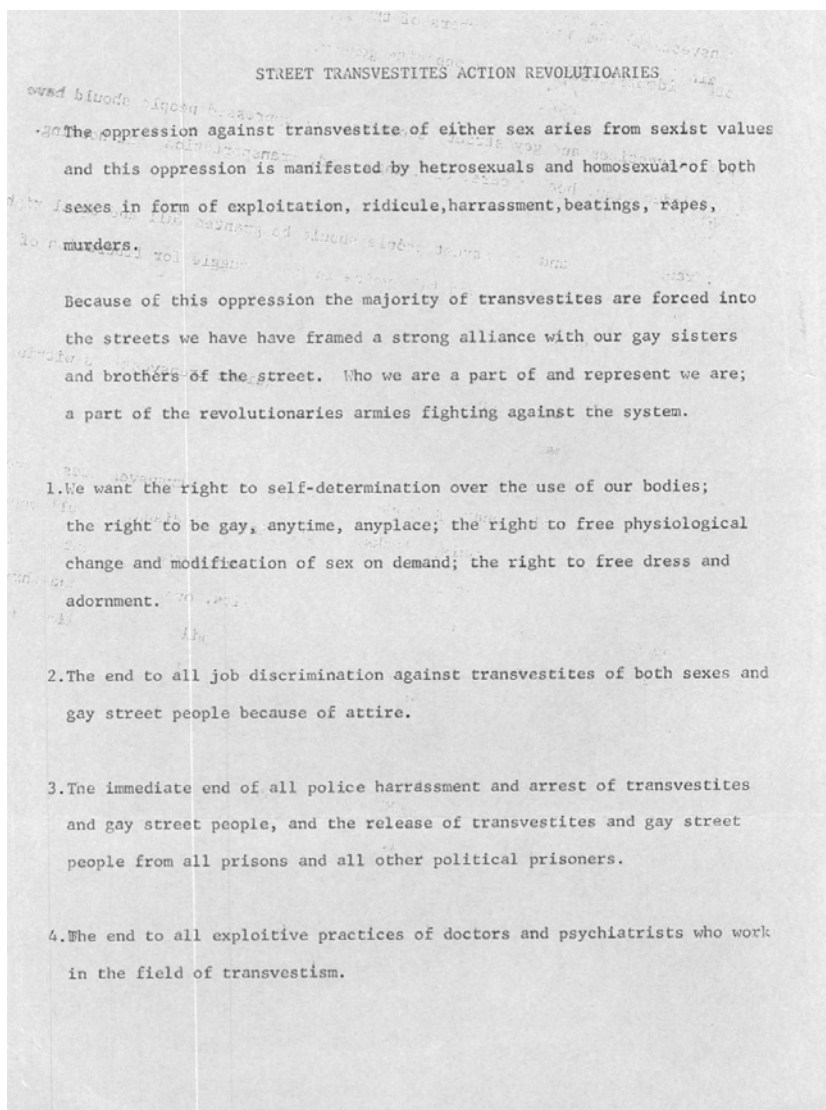
The Archive of Marsha P. Johnson

As this chapter has worked to explicate, the place of trans women in the gay liberation movement of the 1970s has been occluded and through that occlusion the record of Marsha P. Johnson's life as an activist has been overlooked, until recent years, as a vital part of LGBTQ history. Because of her work in gay liberation movements like GLF, GAA, and S.T.A.R., and because of her larger-than-life presence, Marsha P. Johnson has left an archival trace. The documentary films about her life, the photographs of her activism and stage performances, and the audio recordings and newspaper articles that feature her contribute to Marsha P. Johnson's archival presence. The documentary films that chronicle her life tend to mythologize her in their desire to memorialize her legacy, and in one case, the filmmaker capitalizes on the mystery surrounding her death.⁶⁰ In the first feature-length documentary film about Marsha, *Pay It No Mind: Marsha P. Johnson* (2012), community members and friends of Marsha offer their first-person testimonies, which are complemented by archival footage of Marsha P. Johnson, and together these elements illuminate her personality and demon-

strate the impact that she had on the gay community in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s in New York City.⁶¹ Friends such as Randy Wicker, Rich Shupper, Sasha McCaffrey, James Gallagher, and Agosto Machado tell stories about Marsha, remembering that she would spend her last ten dollars on flowers and bedeck herself with a floral crown for the night. In Greenwich Village, she would dress in extravagant handmade gowns and adorn her hair with strings of Christmas lights and ask passersby, “Do you have a dollar for a dying drag queen?” She would sleep in movie theaters when she did not have any other place to go or rest under tables in the flower district surrounded by the fragrant zest of lilies. She was generous with the money she earned and with her joy, of which she seemed to have an abundance. Some of those who knew her thought of her as a saint; others deemed her the mayor of Christopher Street. She had a beautiful, attentive, and kind spirit and was even loving with those in the LGBTQ community who had nothing but disdain for her.

Pay It No Mind culls together a narrative of the Stonewall rebellion that substantiates the mythology of that night and demonstrates how Marsha’s mythic role in it began to evolve. David Carter, author of *Stonewall*, declares authoritatively in the documentary film that two “very important figures in the Gay Activist Alliance,” Morty Manford and Marty Robinson, reported that Marsha P. Johnson yelled “I got my civil rights” and then threw a shot glass into a mirror, which was the catalyst that kicked off the Stonewall riots. Carter, through a haughty grin, acknowledges that in GAA this became the legendary “shot glass that was heard around the world.”⁶² This extraordinary characterization of Marsha is meant to humanize her by mythologizing her, a contradiction that while well-meaning has insidious consequences. In their memories of Marsha, her friends weave together stories that depict her as an outlandish, saintly, magical figure, but this kind of beatification ameliorates the impact that systemic gender, racial, and economic oppression had on her in everyday life. It is clear from the stories shared in *Pay It No Mind*, by friends and famous passersby, that Marsha was loved, and she certainly had charm, charisma, and a style all her own. Yet a tone that is carried across some of these testimonies has within it a kind of surprise that indifferent New Yorkers would embrace Marsha just as she was. This surprise, along with the deification of Marsha, does the work of making her an exceptional “street person” who deserves recognition. While it is undeniable that Marsha was an exceptional human rights activist, fashionista, and survivor of the New York City streets, there is a sense of awe that she could earn this kind of respect.

Agosto Machado very gently and lovingly describes Marsha as follows in *Pay It No Mind*: “Marsha’s like a Bodhisattva. Her presence on Sheridan Square. On



FIGURES 3.6 AND 3.7 "S.T.A.R. Manifesto," 1970. Box 19, Folder IGIC Ephemera, STAR File, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

5. Transvestites who live as members of the opposite gender should be able to obtain identification of the opposite gender.

6. Transvestites and gay street people and all oppressed people should have free education, health care, clothing, food, transportation, and housing.

7. Transvestites and gay street people should be granted full and equal rights on all levels of society, and full voice in the struggle for liberation of all oppressed people.

8. An end to exploitation and discrimination against transvestites within the homosexual world.

9. We want a revolutionary peoples' government, where transvestites, street people, women, homosexuals, blacks, puerto ricans, indians, and all oppressed people are free, and not fucked over by this government who treat us like the scum of the earth and kills us off like flies, one by one, and throws us into jail to rot. This government who spends millions of dollars to go to the moon, and lets the poor Americans starve to death.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

S. T. A. R.

Christopher Street, or wherever she stopped and asked for spare change or chatted with people. It was a religious or holy experience. And all of us who did drag, or partial drag, always admired her.”⁶³ Machado’s memory of Marsha is glowing, but I am wary of the need to make her more than human in our memory of her and the subsequent archival documentation. I worry that the impulse to deify Marsha will get in the way of remembering her as a human being, an elder, an activist, a sex worker who struggled with being housed and with her mental health, who was a fierce advocate and a loving human being. The superhuman mythos about Marsha makes the real-world violence that she suffered less apparent because what also circulates within that mythos is the dehumanization and precarity with which trans women—pre-Stonewall, post-Stonewall, and in the new millennium—have to contend. These interviews also show that members of the gay community who were active during the Stonewall era have made strides in recognizing that trans women are important members of the queer community, but the notes of tolerance coupled with the mythologization of Marsha exposes a remaining difficulty in simply beholding and loving trans women in their humanity.

The presence of disdain wrapped in reverence for Marsha shows up in an interview that Eric Marcus conducted with gay activist and GAA member Randy Wicker, which was later broadcast on Marcus’s podcast, *Making Gay History*.⁶⁴ Because Marsha was a close friend and roommate of Randy, her oral history was recorded in this interview, but she was not the archival figure Marcus was initially interested in interviewing. Marcus acknowledges that he set out to interview Randy alone but Randy insisted that Marsha be part of the interview. When they met at Randy’s Hoboken apartment in 1989, Marsha was there. Marcus was then able to document Marsha P. Johnson’s oral history about what happened at the Stonewall Inn on the infamous first night of the rebellion. This accidental interview exemplifies the historical occlusion of Marsha’s role in gay liberation that this chapter is working to address, but through a fortunate coincidence her oral history was recorded and now exists in Marcus’s archive. Marcus’s short interview is precious in that it captures Marsha’s memory of Stonewall, her voice, her cadence, and her relationship with Randy Wicker, with whom she lived during the last twelve years of her life. It is clear that Randy has grown to love Marsha, even though he admits that he was skeptical of her when they first met because she was a “transvestite” sex worker. Marsha was a Stonewall regular before the rebellion and in the interview with Marcus, she offers a little history of the Stonewall Inn: “At first it was just a gay men’s bar and they didn’t allow no women in. And then they started allowing women in. And then they

let the drag queens in. I was one of the first drag queens to go to that place. . . . And then they had these drag queens working there. They never arrested anybody at the Stonewall. All they did was line us up and tell us to get out.”⁶⁵

In his interview in *Pay It No Mind*, Tommy Lanigan-Schmidt describes the clientele of the Stonewall Inn: “We were all runaways. Some were like fourteen years old. Some people had scalding water thrown on them by their parents. People that couldn’t go back home no matter what. Couldn’t go back to school no matter what. And that group of people was the catalyst in the riots. It was the street kids who had nothing to lose that were the force that got it going.”

In the Marcus interview, Marsha offers details of her experience of the events of the night of the rebellion; it becomes clear that contrary to the legend, Marsha P. Johnson was not the “drag queen” who started the rebellion by throwing a shot glass into the bar room mirror and shouting “I got my civil rights” because she arrived after the conflict had already begun.⁶⁶ She describes the events of the night of the rebellion as follows:

The way I winded up at Stonewall that night, I was having a party uptown and we were all out there and then Sylvia Rivera and them were over in the park having a cocktail. I was uptown and I didn’t get downtown ’til about two o’clock. ’Cause when I got downtown the place was already on fire. It was a raid already. The riots had already started. And they said police went in there and set the place on fire. They said the police set it on fire. Because they originally wanted the Stonewall to close so they had several raids. The night before the Stonewall Riots started before they closed the bar we were all there and we all had to line up against the wall and they were all searching us. They searched every single body that came there because the place was supposed to be closed and they opened anyway. ’Cause every time the police came what they would do is they would take the money from the coat check room and take the money from the bar. So if they heard the police were coming they would take all the money and hide it up under the bar in these boxes, out of the register. And you know and sometimes they would hide it like under the floor or something. So when the police got in all they got were the bartender’s tips.⁶⁷

When asked by Randy Wicker, with whom she is being interviewed by Eric Marcus, if she was one of the people standing in the chorus line kicking up her heels at the police, Marsha laughed and said, “No. No. We were too busy turning over cars and screaming in the middle of the street. Because we were so upset because they closed that place.”⁶⁸

The legendary tales of the Stonewall riots may have been created in the aftermath of the rebellion, but for Marsha her very real politicization began that night. The interview with Marsha in *Pay It No Mind*, recorded just days before she died, is a vital piece of archival film footage. Here we see and hear her in time and space offer pieces of her own story, which is a formative complement to the testimonies about her recorded after her death. She shares that in “1969 when the Stonewall Riots started, that’s when I started my little riot. I have been in gay liberation ever since it first started in 1969. I was in the Stonewall Riots.”⁶⁹

She describes her early commitment to the movement in her work with Alternate U, before S.T.A.R. was founded.

I was one of the first drag queens to try and help the drag queens and other people have food, at the Alternate U. Alternate U was one of the places that we first tried to help college queens open their drawers to gay liberation. When I started getting in the newspapers, on TVs at the gay pride parade, I was one of the queens who helped feed the queens that were hungry. And I started S.T.A.R. House. I didn’t actually start the S.T.A.R. House, Sylvia Rivera started the S.T.A.R. House and I was just one of the queens that was behind her, like the Vice President of S.T.A.R.⁷⁰

In his memory of S.T.A.R., Randy’s dismissal of Marsha and Sylvia’s revolutionary movement, and the shelter they provided for trans youth, is made quite evident.⁷¹ He describes S.T.A.R. House as follows: “It was a bunch of flakey, fucked up transvestites living in a hovel and a slum somewhere calling themselves revolutionaries. That’s what it was in my opinion. Now Marsha has a different idea.”

Thankfully, Eric Marcus requests input about S.T.A.R. from Marsha, who describes the liberation group differently, lovingly.

It was a group for transvestites, men and women and transvestites. . . . Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries started out as a very good group. It was after Stonewall, they started, they started at GAA. Mama Jean DeVente, who used to be the marshal for all the parades. She was the one that talked Sylvia Rivera into leaving GAA, ‘cause Sylvia Rivera who was the president of S.T.A.R. was a member of GAA, and started a group of her own. And so she started Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries. And she asked me would I come be the Vice President of that organization.⁷²

Even though Eric Marcus did not set out to record an interview with Marsha P. Johnson, he was lucky enough to happen upon this chance. His expertise as an interviewer shone through and he was able to capture a moment in time with Marsha that has become an invaluable contribution to her archive.

The care that emerges in this interview is quite distinct from the tenor of the Netflix documentary *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*. The scandal of this film is not only that the filmmakers use the true crime convention to drive the narrative of this documentary that is centered on Marsha's unsolved murder but that the archival labor of a Black trans woman, Tourmaline, was blatantly and despicably exploited in the process.⁷³ Tourmaline made a social media post about the filmmaker, David France, stealing her archival labor, and news stories about this theft were published in the *Los Angeles Times* and *Teen Vogue*, quoting her social media posts: "This week while I'm borrowing money to pay rent, david france is releasing his multimillion dollar netflix deal on marsha p johnson. i'm still lost in the music trying to #pay_it_no_mind and reeling on how this movie came to be and make so much \$ off our lives and ideas. . . . This kind of extraction/excavation of Black life, disabled life, poor life, trans life is so old and so deeply connected to the violence Marsha had to deal with throughout her life."⁷⁴

Tourmaline recounts the details of how her archival labor was stolen:

David got inspired to make this film from a grant application video that @sashawortzel and I made and sent to Kalamazoo/Arcus Foundation social justice center while he was visiting. He told the people who worked there—I sh/*t you not—that he should be the one to do this film, got a grant from Sundance/Arcus using language and research about STAR, got Vimeo to remove my video of Sylvia's critical "y'all better quiet down" speech, ripped off decades of my archival research that I experienced so much violence to get, had his staff call Sasha up at work to get our contacts, then hired my and Sasha's *ADVISOR* to our Marsha film Kimberly Reed to be his producer.⁷⁵

The archival violence that Tourmaline documented in her post, as perpetrated by the filmmakers of *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*, is a perverse yet unsurprising addition to the archival violence of devaluation and occlusion that was exacted upon S.T.A.R., Marsha, and Sylvia. Tourmaline spent the past decade conducting archival research and interviewing Marsha's and Sylvia's friends and peers. Tourmaline has been carrying the archive of Marsha P. Johnson forward. Like Alice Walker did with Zora Neale Hurston, Tourmaline has been committed to collecting the articles and photographs and interviews

and archival footage of Marsha so that she may be recognized as a trans activist elder and so trans people who are her legacy know about the work that she did in her time. Since 2012, Tourmaline has made her archival recovery work of Marsha P. Johnson open to the public on her website, where she shares newspaper articles about Marsha, Sylvia, and S.T.A.R.⁷⁶ By collecting this archive and making it accessible to the community, by speaking about Marsha, Sylvia, and S.T.A.R. at community events and academic conferences, Tourmaline has been bringing forward this history and connecting the trans community to a historical legacy that has been at times mythologized but most often obfuscated. Tourmaline is intervening in the historicist subsumption of Marsha, Sylvia, and S.T.A.R. after scouring the landscape for buried archival treasure. *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* becomes a part of Marsha's archive as it draws from the documents, photographs, and recordings that chart the legacy of our trans elder Marsha P. Johnson. To then integrate that archival work, while contending with her own epistemic, archival, psychic violation by a member of the LGBTQ community, David France—which replicates the violence that Marsha and Sylvia were documenting during their lifetimes—compounds the affective labor that undergirds this film. Through all of this, Tourmaline and Wortzel were able to produce a short film and showcase it in a stunning, cinematic performative event. Because *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* incorporates archival film footage, includes live performances of monologues and poetry that are rooted in archival events, and represents historical figures on stage and in the film, the relationship between archival documentation and performance becomes inextricable. In what follows, I discuss the way that knowledge is transmitted through *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* in the theatrical performance, the film, and the dialectical relationship that emerges through their juncture.

Black Feminist Avant-Garde and Happy Birthday, Marsha!

Happy Birthday, Marsha! unearths an archive of Marsha P. Johnson's life and visualizes, through narrative reinterpretation, the moment that the Stonewall rebellion erupted. Because Marsha has an archival presence that, though dispersed, can be retrieved, what remains in the archive determines the narrative of Marsha's life. With *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*, Tourmaline and Wortzel are not stymied by the gaps in the archive or burdened by the fragmentation. They use experimental cinematic techniques that produce an affective experience and create a sense of what Marsha may have felt, not simply what she did, during the time of the Stonewall rebellion. Rather than render her a saint on earth or capitalize on the mystery of her death, *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* opens up a field

of emotion that gives us time with Marsha. The filmmakers produce an otherworldly feeling with the slowed-down pace of the film that creates an out-of-time, nonlinear sensation. The ethereal nondiegetic soundscape and the kaleidoscoping mandala-like visual treatments sprinkled throughout the film are conduits that transport the viewers into another dimension. With their choice to juxtapose two Marsha P. Johnsons in the film, the filmmakers elicit a direct confrontation with archival preservation, a move that disrupts the solace of historical veracity promised by western epistemological standards. This doubling raises questions about the stability of an archive and offers an opening for creative intervention into the violent terrain of knowledge production.

Marsha was portrayed by Mya Taylor in the narrative portions of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*, which butt up against archival film footage of Marsha P. Johnson, creating an epistemological friction within the world of the film. I want to return to the opening moments of the film, as it begins with this friction. The sound of a tape being placed into a video camera is heard. Then the first images of the film are revealed; this is a close-up of Marsha P. Johnson in a black-and-white video. She is wearing a headdress of baby's breath and glittering beads that frame her face (see figure 3.8 and 3.9). She looks up and moves closer to the camera and asks: "Oh, is the camera rolling?"

The film switches to a scene shot in sumptuous color. The title card tells us that it is New York City in 1969; a yellow cab and the sartorial design also cue us to this time and place. Mya Taylor, playing Marsha, exits the cab and saunters down the street and into the Stonewall Inn. The sound of Marsha P. Johnson's voice plays over the scene in the Stonewall Inn as Marsha, played by Mya, selects a song on the jukebox and heads to the bar: "In 1963 when I came to Forty-Second Street and I was a butch queen . . ." The film cuts to archival footage of Marsha P. Johnson in a wider shot wearing that bejeweled headdress and sitting on a small stool on a small stage next to a small table (see figure 3.10). Marsha P. Johnson continues, "And I didn't know nothing about wearing dresses or drags or anything." The film cuts back to Mya, playing Marsha, sitting on a bar stool, wearing a blonde Afro wig, a hot-pink sundress, and dramatic eye makeup (see figure 3.11). The camera pushes in toward Mya/Marsha sitting on the bar stool, gazing into the camera. We hear Marsha P. Johnson's voice: "I went there and honey these queens start calling me Marshall. And I was just . . . and they would just call me Marshall. And I was gagging. And then they start calling me Marsha."

The film cuts to a close-up of Marsha/Mya smiling as she gazes into the camera, as Marsha P. Johnson's voice is heard saying with delight: "And I liked it so much. [Marsha giggles.] I said that's who I'm gonna be. I'm gonna be Marsha."



FIGURES 3.8–3.11 Tourmaline, *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*, 2018 (film stills).



The film sinks back into the Stonewall Inn with Mya/Marsha wearing a longer blonde curly wig and a glorious floral tiara. She smiles unabashedly as she glides onto the stage.

The doubleness of the cinematic representation of Marsha refuses the archival promise of offering pathways to definitively answer historical queries, yet we hear Marsha's voice sharing the story of how she got her name. The joy in her voice when she says "and I liked it so much" communicates a feeling of belonging that is visceral and penetrative. The cinematic imbrication between narrative drama and archival footage produces a kind of visual and epistemological superimposition that agitates rather than solidifies the archival inquiry. The dreamy, nonlinear cinematic instigation that is *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* exudes layers of meaning with its screening inside the theatrical production staged at The Kitchen, in Chelsea, in 2018.

In her foundational performance studies article "The Ontology of Performance," Peggy Phelan insists that the filmed recording of a performance is no longer a performance.⁷⁷ The filmed performances within *Tourmaline* and Wortzel's short film may not be performances but rather the recording of a performance, yet in the event held at The Kitchen, the film takes on a performative role.⁷⁸ The archival footage of Marsha and the cinematic reconstructive representation of Marsha, through Mya Taylor's performance of her in the film, become a part of the theatrical performance by the inclusion of this work of cinema in it. The archival aspects of the theatrical production saturate the stage during *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* When Egyptt LaBeija graces the stage as the chanteuse that she played in the film, the space between the cinematic and the performative shrinks. When Eve Lindley, the actor who plays Sylvia Rivera in the film, appears on stage as Sylvia Rivera, the narrative film bleeds into the live performance; the cinematic becomes a performance. When Marsha's friend Jimmy Camicia, who appeared in the film, comes onto the stage as himself and delivers a poem about the joyful and generous person that Marsha was, the archive is performing.

By following Diana Taylor's notion of repertoire, which "allows for an alternative perspective on historical processes . . . and invites a remapping . . . this time by following traditions of embodied practice," I am able to examine the ways that an archive performs, cinematically and theatrically, in time and space.⁷⁹ Taylor's analysis recognizes the term *performance* as "a process, a praxis, an episteme, a mode of transmission, an accomplishment, and a means of intervening in the world, it far exceeds the possibilities of these other words offered in its place."⁸⁰

When the archive is being performed on stage, the tension between that which vanishes and that which is fixed in time bubbles under the surface. The

transmission of archival knowledge that happens in a live performance exceeds the document, yet what remains from the archival document or archival video footage in the performative space of the theater is carried with those who were in attendance. The performance vanishes, yes, as Phelan insists, but the performance remains, as Taylor shows us, through the transmission of knowledge. *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* is a performance of unearthing archival documentation; it is immersive and cinematic, musical and archival. This production participates in the expansion of those terms; traditional notions of the archive must expand with this theatrical, cinematic production. Schneider wrestles with Phelan's claim that performance "becomes itself through disappearance" and in turn pushes the notion of disappearance to account for what performance becomes.⁸¹ Schneider writes about "performance as a medium in which disappearance negotiates, perhaps becomes, materiality."⁸² If performance is a medium of becoming, and disappearance is not the only achievement of performance—if what remains could become something material—what would that material be? Taylor, I believe, would recognize the transmission of knowledge through performance as something made material. In the immersive, cinematic, theatrical performance of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*, what becomes, what is made material, is the knowledge that is transmitted both affectively and narratively. The filmmakers' choice to bring Sylvia, Jimmy, and Miss Egyptt LaBeija out of the world of the film and into the proscenium to recite poetry about Marsha, to recount stories about life in the Village, and to perform songs on stage makes material Marsha's heartbreaking absence.

The condition of archival lack is mitigated with the film and the theatrical presentation of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* The absence of the material body of Marsha P. Johnson in our community is made present through this performance. Through a refusal to produce the surrogate Marsha on stage, the satisfaction of being in proximity to at least one Marsha is foreclosed; the cinematic performs the presence of Marsha, and her absence is made salient in the theatrical production. This cinematic archival performance of Marsha—both Marshas—heightens, amplifies, and intensifies the great loss of her in life, and what emerges through this performance of documentation, surrogation, and absence is a visitation by Marsha P. Johnson.

Happy Birthday, Marsha! engenders a visitation through a cinematic presence that shapes a performance of absence made material by the juxtaposition of the theatrical performance, filmic imagination, and archival video footage. By carrying forward the archival remains and transforming them through the cinematic landscape and then recomposing them within the theatrical space, *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* becomes itself and produces a visionary work of the Black feminist

avant-garde. By resisting cinematic, archival, performative conventions, and by producing the weight of Marsha's absence without spectacle, without sanctification, Tourmaline and Wortzel conjure up a visitation that can only be felt in the space of the performance. The absences are made material and multiple and carried out by each person in attendance. That absence makes room to experience the loss of Marsha P. Johnson from our community, yet the film, poems, monologues, stage performances, and musical accompaniment also invite Marsha into the space. The knowledge that is transmitted produces an arena in which to commune with and celebrate Marsha as it saturates us with the gravity of our loss. What her presence and absence leave us with—gratitude, joy, heartbreak, kinship, a commitment to community and liberation—is what remains. A visitation with Marsha is what occurs through the archival remains and theatrical performance of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* Our respect and adoration for an activist, an advocate, a style icon, a trans elder, a Street Transvestites Action Revolutionary who put the community, action, and loving one another before everything else; this is what we are left with when the screen rolls up, the music ends, the lights come on, and the applause rings out. The visit happened and the sensation, the knowing that a visitation with Marsha occurred, is that which remains from Tourmaline and Wortzel's archival, cinematic, theatrical performance of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*