

residue

Residue of Nakedness is a multi-media archive that presents many glimpses into the history of a performer's life. Using video, it brings the past into present. Nevertheless, something is unusual and unsettling about this particular video archive, which forces you to wander between media artifacts that offer little context or explanation. They show moments taken out of context and time that are suspended in a strange state of isolation, which we feel while gazing down the long, rectangular tube that encloses our field of vision. To look at these images of intensely physical performance is to be cut off from the body and thus to become paradoxically aware of the body, if only by means of an uncanny absence or separation, like a ghost. Certainly, the spectral glow of the video monitors display images— of ghostly figures relegated to an unidentifiable time and location— that are at once present, but also temporally distant and always partial, incomplete. Gazing into these deliberately isolated images, it is possible to sense this incompleteness, as we will never have the whole picture of the past, which is perpetually passing and cannot be recorded in its entirety, regardless of our technical prowess in the present. At best, we can hope to take note of what is left behind and overlooked as waste in the forward march of history and deposited here in carefully assembled piles, the crystallized accumulation of the unspoken past.

nakedness

But wait. The installation's title is *Residue of Nakedness*, not of history or another such abstract idea. History, however, is no mere abstraction. History lives, and it lives nowhere more indelibly than in the body. For us today, having been stripped of our cultural traditions and deprived of ritual connections to the past, it is easy to forget this lived history that resides in inherited gestures and dances. In their place, there are fetishized distractions: devices, objects, and gadgets that connect us ever more fully to the present... right? No, of course not! Even as we enjoy our technological devices, it is commonplace to denounce them for separating us from real human community and companionship in the present. The screens in *Residue of Nakedness* reflect this alienation from our present, past, and bodies, which carry this lack. In response to this condition, the bodies on screen offer themselves as waste, as residue in order to bear this historical fracture into a form that may one day perhaps be recognized, altered, and overcome. To be naked— that is, raw, unprotected, and vulnerable— is to open oneself to an event that can only take place in a time and place that escapes historical inscription: the possibility of living with and loving others.

postscriptum: a brief translation

The previous two paragraphs were written in a style intended to emulate— in some small, humble measure— the densely poetic experience of Eiko & Koma's dances and their installation, *Residue of Nakedness*. *Residue of Nakedness* is indeed an archive in the most traditional sense: it uses video recordings in order to provide an overview of the history of their live performances. However, after listening to Eiko describe her difficulty choosing the "right" archival materials in order to capture these performances, it occurred

to me that the installation was primarily functioning in a non-conventional way. As described above, I felt that her experience of being unable to adequately portray these historical events had reproduced itself in the archive's unusual mise-en-scene, which forces the audience into an uncomfortable space of solitude. Whereas spectators typically assume that video is capable of making the past fully available to the present, *Residue of Nakedness* uses space and innovative sculptural constructions around the video screens to make its audience aware that they cannot see the "whole picture." I would argue that this is true of all media. We just tend to forget that we are not seeing everything, especially when seduced by a good dramatic narrative or story, which makes up most media that we see on television and in movies.

In the second section of my writing, "nakedness," I introduce another idea—namely, that we live in a historically alienated society, in which long-standing cultural traditions and rituals have been lost. Postwar industrial society has replaced these traditions with new rituals, whose means are often highly technological, be it professional sports, movies, or the new dance culture flourishing on television and in social media.¹ Like technology, many of these new rituals are based on competition, exclusion, and profit. In other words, they are devoted to getting ahead. Instead of moving forward, upwards, and onwards, *Residue of Nakedness* asks us to remember that the story is never fully what it seems. History never tells the whole story, and it is up to us to invent new rituals and forms of performance that are capable of collecting the residue of what is all too often forgotten, abandoned, and left for dead.

¹ Incidentally, I will be studying many of these contemporary rituals in my Block 8 course, "Spectacle, Art, & Society."