

May 2, 2012

In July 2011, Joyce Joseph invited me to the Bowery Poetry Club in lower Manhattan to attend her performance, *somethymes grief goes for a walk*, a searing revelation of grief and mourning prompted by the death of her partner. I expected--and got--an unsettling experience. We don't often tread too close to that most dreaded territory, not our own nor that of others.

Earlier she had shared with me her manifesto, "Exploring Tangibility ..." an exploration shaped by Archival Poetics, a term from the essay, "Remember the Future: Archival Poetics and the War on Memory," by Steven Taylor, Naropa University.

She writes with conviction of the library as a melding of living artifact and evolving interpretation. She speaks of the sacredness of books, the public library as a place where information is free to all and ownership gives way to sharing. "An archive is a collective memory housing evidence of the past ... The archivist is the finder of documents, the processor of collections, and the enabler of access. The librarian is the tour guide guiding patrons through the galaxy of information and records . . . Fortunately, we do not live in a George Orwell, *1984* world where all concrete documentation is thrown down a memory hole, and then completely falsified by the Ministry of Truth."

I asked Joyce to repeat her performance at my institution because nothing else so eloquently demonstrated the fusion of art and the library as the repository of collective memory. Afterward she displayed slides and artifacts, diaries and mementos of the time she shared with her partner. The importance of her public performance, particularly in a library, is its power to demonstrate that we all have the potential to be the archivists of our own experience.

Joyce Joseph is an accomplished writer and performer, but as Librarian/Archivist hers is a transformative mission. She has the power to remove the library from the sphere to which it is usually relegated, that of a warehouse, and give it its proper place in the public forum. Archives are revealed as vehicles of memory and tangible artifact for all to explore, not just the privileged few. Like an alchemist, she gathers information, transforms it into art and situates it in its proper realm. Her charge as an artist and as a Librarian/Archivist is to take a stand against Orwellian machination and preserve memory, her own and that of others. She is formidable.

Jean Hines