



Gabrielle Civil
Swallow the Fish

#RECURRENT Series

Civil Coping Mechanisms

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Memoir / Performance Art / Autobiography

[Civil Coping Mechanisms](#)

Gabrielle Civil's *Swallow the Fish* is a memoir in performance art that explores the medium from within its beating heart. Adding its voice to black feminist conversations, it combines essays, anecdotes, and meditations with original performance texts to confront audience, motivation, and fears. Both joy and panic appear in Civil's world of performance, where neither walls nor city limits set the scope of the stage. Civil bares vulnerabilities and entralls readers, asking essential questions and embodying dreams.

"Enjoy. Enjoy? Enjoy!" Perhaps this is Gabrielle Civil's calculus for performance art, though I suspect that accuses her praxis of being too pat. Instead, *Swallow the Fish* discloses that the "Enjoy?"—that doubt, her sense that she's maybe said or done the wrong thing—is catalyst and outcome. Thus, this remarkable book is a monograph and manual, a catalog and travelogue rendered as a progress of generative failures. An intimate showcase for Civil's fierce eros, mordant humor, and intellectual appetites, *Swallow the Fish* is also a vital record of how a black woman moves through spaces where desire and aversion make equally rough contact. So, enjoy! But enjoy(?), too.

—DOUGLAS KEARNEY, Author of *Mess and Mess and*

This book paints a beautiful Black woman sky of possibilities. This book makes me want to perform/it makes me want to write-to holla-to hold it close. I love this book!

— SHARON BRIDGFORTH, Writer/Performing Artist

This book is so meticulous and so absorbing, I am in awe. It is declamation, reflection, proposal, documentation, blueprint. Gabrielle Civil is revealed as an artist perfectly poised to speak to how race, gender and sexuality enact embodied performativity. She writes and performs herself into history in ferociously intelligent and relentlessly personal ways. And I've never read such a perfect articulation of the turbulence of performing - the way that externalizing the possibility and conflicts of one's body leaves you open and vulnerable to the quagmire of interpretation, misunderstanding and projection. How the specificity of identity mixes with desire to confound, comfort or disrupt public space. As with so many things that I love, I want everyone to read this book.

— MIGUEL GUTIERREZ, Music & Performing Artist