

**No “Gestures of Return”? Querying Queer Aesthetics in North American Art**

Erin Silver

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

July 2009

© Erin Silver, 2009



Library and Archives  
Canada

Bibliothèque et  
Archives Canada

Published Heritage  
Branch

Direction du  
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-63103-4*  
*Our file* *Notre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-63103-4*

**NOTICE:**

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

**AVIS:**

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

---

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

  
**Canada**

## ABSTRACT

No “Gestures of Return”? Querying Queer Aesthetics in North American Art

Erin Silver

Queer art holds a troubled, and troubling, position in art and aesthetic discourse. The task of defining an authoritative queer aesthetics is complicated by the nature of queer theory, a framework liable to shifts in definition, and founded on a commitment to sociohistorical, sexual, and gender transgression. The range of artworks considered queer is both broad and ahistorical. Certain exhibitions have taken on the task of surveying or representing queer art; using different categorical guidelines, they have naturally achieved very different results. The thesis wants to ‘out’ the queer aesthetic dilemma by asking how the radically pliant, uncontainable nature of queer theory can be represented in queer art?

Four queer artists—Kim Kielhofner, Robert Rauschenberg, Emily Roysdon, and David Wojnarowicz—and one queer arts community—Toronto’s present-day Queen Street West arts community—are considered. Their production is evaluated in terms of its contributions to a theory of queer aesthetics based on divergence, or, as queer theorist Sara Ahmed puts it, “fail[ure] to make ... gestures of return.” Identifying strategies of relationality, intergenerational transmission, cultural coding, alternative autobiography, and queer world-making as notable aspects of queer cultural production, this thesis shows how queer artists both resist and appropriate cultural hegemony in order to preserve queer legacies. It is through this engagement and disassociation that queer art and queer aesthetics come to be defined.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are a number of individuals who must be thanked for their contributions to my Master's research and the writing of this thesis. First, however, I want gratefully to acknowledge the financial support that has made my studies possible: a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Master's Scholarship; the Fonds Québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture (FQRSC) Master's Scholarship; the Bourses d'études Hydro Québec Graduate Award; and Concordia's J.A. de Sève Cinema Scholarship.

Within the Department of Art History, I would like to thank Dr Alice Ming Wai Jim and Dr Martha Langford for offering me Research Assistance experience, and Dr Catherine Mackenzie for her granting of three Teaching Assistant Fellowships, the third in cooperation with Dr Thomas Waugh and the Department of Film Studies. I especially want to thank outgoing Graduate Program Director Dr Mackenzie for her unwavering support of my endeavors, for providing me the financial ability to focus on my studies, and for always being supportive of my professional and pedagogical choices. I am also grateful for the enduring support provided to me by Department Chair Dr Loren Lerner throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies. I thank Graduate Program Administrator Dr Anna Waclawek for her close attention to my concerns over the past two years, as well as Ms JoAnne Anselmi for consistent administrative support over the years. I also want to express deep gratitude to Dr Cynthia Hammond for the close reading and editorial advice that has enriched the final version of my thesis. Dr Hammond's support of my work has inspired my approaches to academia, activism, and art, and I am fortunate to have benefited from her committed attention over the years.

Fellow students, friends, and family have played important roles in my education. I want to thank the insightful and energetic graduate students who participated in Dr Langford's PhD seminar "What Do We Owe the Object?" for their role in forming the questions that have become so central to this thesis: Mark Clintberg, Aurèle Parisien, Pablo Rodriguez, and Kathryn Simpson... thank you for the inspiration. On a personal note, I would like to thank my good friend Clara Bird for taking the time to provide thoughtful commentary on the first formative stages of my draft, and Katrina Enros for being a patient and engaged partner and motivating me to keep at it. To my parents, Joel Silver and Linda Overing, and my siblings, Matt Silver, Andrea Silver, and Mike Silver, thank you for forgiving my absenteeism over the course of my writing of this thesis, and for inspiration derived from your own support of and participation in fields of cultural and artistic production.

Finally, my warmest thanks go to my supervisor, Dr Martha Langford, who has filled many roles throughout my five years, and two degrees, at Concordia, namely those of professor, boss, supervisor, mentor, and friend. I could not have had a more attentive ally or dedicated advocate throughout my academic and professional pursuits. My own research has benefited immensely from the breadth of Dr Langford's knowledge, her commitment to intellectual rigour, and her active engagement in the arts community, all of which I aspire to in my academic and professional pursuits. The process of writing this thesis and the two years preceding its completion were especially rewarding times for dialogue and learning. Martha, let this thesis be a marker of our time together at Concordia and a call to future collaboration. Thank you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>List of Figures</b>	vii
<b>Introduction</b>	
The Troubled and Troubling Position of Queer Art	1
<b>Chapter One</b>	
Relational Art and the Preservation of Queer Legacies: David Wojnarowicz and Emily Roysdon in Conversation	20
<b>Chapter Two</b>	
Collage, Coding, and Queer Infiltration: Queer Identity in the Work of Robert Rauschenberg and Kim Kielhofner	45
<b>Chapter Three</b>	
Queer Art on the Beat: Radical Queer Mobilization on Toronto's Queen Street West	74
<b>Conclusion</b>	
Who is Queer Art Really For?	98
<b>Bibliography</b>	105
<b>Figures</b>	116

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Étienne Carjat, *Portrait of Arthur Rimbaud* (ca. 1871). 8 x 4.2 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
2. David Wojnarowicz, excerpt from the series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-79). 24 gelatin silver prints. Dimensions variable. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York
3. David Wojnarowicz, excerpt from the series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-79). 24 gelatin silver prints. Dimensions variable. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York
4. David Wojnarowicz, excerpt from the series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-79). 24 gelatin silver prints. Dimensions variable. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York
5. David Wojnarowicz, excerpt from the series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-79). 24 gelatin silver prints. Dimensions variable. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York
6. David Wojnarowicz, excerpt from the series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-79). 24 gelatin silver prints. Dimensions variable. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York
7. David Wojnarowicz, excerpt from the series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-79). 24 gelatin silver prints. Dimensions variable. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York
8. David Wojnarowicz, excerpt from the series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-79). 24 gelatin silver prints. Dimensions variable. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York
9. David Wojnarowicz, excerpt from the series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-79). 24 gelatin silver prints. Dimensions variable. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York
10. David Wojnarowicz, excerpt from the series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-79). 24 gelatin silver prints. Dimensions variable. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York
11. Emily Roysdon, excerpt from the series *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* (2001-2008). 12 black and white photographs, 2 embroidered. 11 x 14 in. Courtesy of the artist
12. Emily Roysdon, excerpt from the series *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* (2001-2008). 12 black and white photographs, 2 embroidered. 11 x 14 in. Courtesy of the artist
13. Emily Roysdon, excerpt from the series *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* (2001-2008). 12 black and white photographs, 2 embroidered. 11 x 14 in. Courtesy of the artist
14. Emily Roysdon, excerpt from the series *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* (2001-2008). 12 black and white photographs, 2 embroidered. 11 x 14 in. Courtesy of the artist
15. Emily Roysdon, excerpt from the series *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* (2001-2008). 12 black and white photographs, 2 embroidered. 11 x 14 in. Courtesy of the artist
16. Robert Rauschenberg, *Should Love Come First?* (1951, destroyed). Oil, printed paper, and pencil on canvas, 24 x 30 in. Licensed by VAGA, New York and reproduced in Jonathan Katz, "'Committing the Perfect Crime': Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art," *Art Journal*, Vol. 67, Issue 1 (Spring 2008): 38-53
17. Kim Kielhofner, excerpt from *The Black Book Project* (2004-present). Notebooks, collage. 11 x 8.5 in. (closed). Courtesy of the artist

18. Kim Kielhofner, excerpt from *The Black Book Project* (2004-present). Notebooks, collage. 11 x 8.5 in. (closed). Courtesy of the artist
19. Kim Kielhofner, excerpt from *The Black Book Project* (2004-present). Notebooks, collage. 11 x 8.5 in. (closed). Courtesy of the artist
20. Kim Kielhofner, excerpt from *The Black Book Project* (2004-present). Notebooks, collage. 11 x 8.5 in. (closed). Courtesy of the artist
21. Kim Kielhofner, excerpt from *The Black Book Project* (2004-present). Notebooks, collage. 11 x 8.5 in. (closed). Courtesy of the artist
22. Kim Kielhofner, excerpt from *The Black Book Project* (2004-present). Notebooks, collage. 11 x 8.5 in. (closed). Courtesy of the artist
23. Allyson Mitchell, *Lady Sasquatch* (2005). Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Toronto. Courtesy of the artist
24. GB Jones and Paul Petro, *Queercore Punk Archive* (2006). Paul Petro Special Projects Space, Toronto. Courtesy of Paul Petro

## INTRODUCTION

### The Troubled and Troubling Position of Queer Art

On the one hand, we expect and we know that art is representational. It's about images, allegories, symbols, passion, affect, ideas clothed in metaphors, a highly mediated, highly interpretational, passionate emotional body of work and practice. On the other hand, when these works enter public cultural institutions, we additionally expect them to be representative. We celebrate artists because they are marginal, because they take us where people normally do not go in their daily lives. – Homi K. Bhabha<sup>1</sup>

The question of representation—more specifically, queer visual representation, its roots in queer theory, and its troubled, and troubling, position in art and aesthetic discourse—is at the core of this project. It has been inspired by the unified goal of conceptualizing a queer aesthetics that responds adequately to queer theory, a task much easier to theorize than to accomplish. We can conceive of a wide range of artworks deemed to be queer, but owe this classification to theory, rather than the characteristics of the objects. We can also compile a list of exhibitions that have attempted to present something called 'queer art', though we quickly realize that none of them have arrived at the same conclusions. Is it possible, or even useful, then, to continue to attempt to define the parameters of queer art? Or should a definition of queer aesthetics take as its emphasis an intention to reflect the radically pliant—and thus uncontainable—nature of queer theory?

Queer theory, as we understand it today, emerged in the 1990s in tandem with a turn, in politically radical and marginal communities, toward political action inspired by

---

<sup>1</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "The Subjunctive Mood of Art," *Unsettling "Sensation": Arts-Policy Lessons from the Brooklyn Museum of Art Controversy*, ed. Lawrence Rothfield (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 93.

identity politics and seeking to critically dissect conventionally fixed notions of subjecthood. Entering the arenas of gender and sexuality, queer theorists, notably Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, picked up Michel Foucault's social constructivist work on sexuality and put it to work destabilizing gender and sexuality studies as they had developed to that point. With a point of departure of gender being "performative"—what Butler conceives of as the repetition of stylized acts over time that result in the appearance of an essential, or core, gender—third-wave feminist and queer theory responded to the essentialist understandings of and approaches to sex, gender, and sexuality that prevailed in second-wave feminism. The inception of queer theory helped to identify what could be regarded as an assault on individual sexual and gender expression and delineated the ways in which this occurred, as well as how queer consciousness mobilized against this injustice. Cultural theorist Cherry Smith argues for the politically strategic function of the word "queer," writing that it defines

... a strategy, an attitude, a reference to other identities and a new self-understanding. For many, the term marks a growing lack of faith in the institutions of the state, in political procedures, in the press, the education system, policing and the law. Both in culture and in politics, queer articulates a radical questioning of social and cultural norms, notions of gender, reproductive sexuality and the family. We are beginning to realise how much of our history and ideologies operate on a homo-hetero opposition, constantly privileging the hetero perspectives as normative, positing the homo perspectives as bad and annihilating the spectrum of sexualities that exists.<sup>2</sup>

Although the foundation for queer theory had been well established at this point, "queer" as an identity category came into usage as a result of the term's reclamation by radical LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual) activists responding not only to

---

<sup>2</sup> Cherry Smith, "What is This Thing Called Queer?" in *The Material Queer: A LesBiGay Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Donald Morton (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 280.

the AIDS crisis but also to its intersections with other pervasive forms of homophobia. The homophobic neglect of the American government to act in the face of the epidemic showed the depths of social and political ignorance toward queer sexualities and ignited the identity community's commitment to radical political action.

Since this reclamation of “queer” in the 1990s as a term loosely combining radical sexual identity with radical political identity, queer has nevertheless resisted static definition. In cultural studies alone, one encounters numerous uses of the term, often overlapping but certainly without clear rules of usage. At the core, the term denotes strangeness or oddness, unconventionality and eccentricity—simply put, that which is “other” from that commonly accepted as “normal.” First used to mean “homosexual” in the early twentieth century, queer can be construed in several different ways that serve to denote its deviation from heteronormativity. Queer theorist Sara Ahmed contends that “Neither the object nor the body have integrity in the sense of being ‘the same thing’ with and without the others. Bodies as well as objects take shape through being orientated toward each other.”<sup>3</sup> She constructs heteronormativity as a series of lines from which one must not diverge, lest heteronormativity be forfeited, and argues that to be queer indicates a divergence from the lines that police identities. Specific sexualities are described as queer, Ahmed argues, when they are seen as “odd, bent, twisted. In a way, if we return to the root of the word ‘queer’ (from the Greek for cross, oblique, adverse) we can see that the word itself ‘twists’.”<sup>4</sup> Applying this etymological definition to queer lives, Ahmed writes:

---

<sup>3</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 54.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

... life gets directed in some ways rather than others, through the very requirement that we follow what is already given to us. For a life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good, which means, imagining one's futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course. A queer life might be one that fails to make such gestures of return.<sup>5</sup>

Failing to make such gestures of return, as Ahmed puts it, aptly summarizes what seems to be at the root of queer identities and theories: a resistance to the doctrines of dominant societal forces that fail to take queer and other marginalized lives into account; a failure to make good on certain societal expectations; a righteous perception that said failures are actually victories against a society that fails many; an employment of “wrongness” to right wrongs. As Ahmed argues, queer “embraces the ‘not’; it embraces its own negation from the sphere of ordinary culture. But I am not sure how it is possible to embrace the negative without turning it into a positive. To say ‘yes’ to the ‘no’ is still a ‘yes.’”<sup>6</sup> We might follow Ahmed and explore the spaces introduced by this intentional, positive negation—where “failure” is not to be regarded as lacking, but as opening up the realm of social discourses to take into account those viewpoints that are both critical of the status quo and productive in constructing alternatives. I begin my study from this perspective because of how it resituates the role of the queer in society and gestures at the process of *reclaiming* the culture, community, and identity that the word “queer” initiates. But apart from this, I will argue that it also transforms “queer” into an active agent in its own societal construction and an inherently resistant force against those who attempt to dominate it.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ahmed, 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

Considering the rewards of my own research focus on contemporary queer art and its intersections with queer theories, histories, practices, and identities, my question then becomes, why not celebrate, rather than denigrate, this fabulous failure? I call this failure “fabulous” as a reaction to a recent cultural history whereby queer individuals were depicted as anything *but* fabulous—positioned as self-hating, tragic inverts and destined for melancholic lives of loneliness lived shamefully.<sup>7</sup> As Heather Love writes

Whether understood as throwbacks to an earlier stage of human development or as children who refuse to grow up, queers have been seen across the twentieth century as a backward race. Perverse, immature, sterile, and melancholic...<sup>8</sup>

Love argues that inasmuch as there is something to be gained in examining the cultural works that depicted homosexuality in this light, there is also “an obligation to counter them.”<sup>9</sup> During the first half of the twentieth century, there was the elusive Camp, which served as a cloaking strategy, “a homosexual lingo, a way to communicate among those ‘in the know’, while (for survival reasons, both legal and psychological) excluding those whose ‘normality’ couldn’t be let into this outlaw, and yet proximate community.”<sup>10</sup>

Although the term has been complicated in contemporary scholarship by multifaceted

---

<sup>7</sup> Literary depictions of the homosexual figure throughout the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century were, indeed, very bleak, even as depicted by homosexual writers such as Walter Pater, Willa Cather, and Radclyffe Hall. As such, Heather Love argues, a tension exists in contemporary queer studies as to whether or not to examine this damage, based on what Love calls a “need to resist damage and to affirm queer existence.” Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Love, 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Fabio Cleto, ed., “Introduction: Queering the Camp,” in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 9.

cultural and aesthetic uses, the element of Camp that I am interested in extracting here is its relevance to style: from the French slang *se camper*, meaning “to pose in an exaggerated fashion,”<sup>11</sup> or, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, “(of a man or his manner) ostentatiously and extravagantly effeminate; deliberately exaggerated and theatrical style.”<sup>12</sup> This is certainly an oversimplified definition, but this stylistic aspect of Camp seems to balance between a definition of “fabulous” as extraordinary, and “fabulous” as mythical, conjuring images of Christopher Isherwood’s early-twentieth century literary depictions of underground nightclub drag queens, and even of the nineteenth century concept of the dandy, the somewhat troubling but nevertheless seminal figure in Camp studies;<sup>13</sup> as Susan Sontag writes, “...as the dandy is the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s surrogate for the aristocrat in matters of culture, so Camp is the modern dandyism. Camp is the answer to the problem: how to be a dandy in the age of mass culture.”<sup>14</sup> Gay and lesbian history posits an understanding of this obligation, beginning with the Stonewall Riots, the 1969 violent demonstrations that occurred in New York City’s Greenwich Village as a response to the police raid of the gay Stonewall Inn. Nights of altercation between the Stonewall’s gay patrons and the police led to the mobilization of activist groups who concentrated their efforts on securing safe spaces for openly gay individuals. The riots are widely regarded as the first instance of gays fighting

---

<sup>11</sup> Alan Brien, “Camper’s Guide,” *New Statesman*, 73 (23 June 1967), 873-4.

<sup>12</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “camp”.

<sup>13</sup> Although Sontag understands Camp to denote “a certain mode of aestheticism...an aesthetic phenomenon...the degree of artifice, of stylization” and as “particularly suited as a justification and projection of a certain aspect of the situation of homosexuals,” queer scholars tend to take issue with Sontag’s unification of “homosexual” and “camp” as advocating the appropriation of homosexual “taste” for a “degayfied” culture (Cleto, 10). See Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” (1964) in *Against Interpretation and other essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 277, 290.

<sup>14</sup> Sontag, 288.

back against the systems that attempted to oppress them. Sociologist Alan Sears comments on the implications of the riots for sexual politics, writing that what emerged was:

a kind of sexual utopianism, which cast the erotic as a realm of liberation. These politics were utopian in that they located the spaces of sexual practice as sites of freedom in which the oppressive relations of the everyday, and particularly daytime, world were overcome.<sup>15</sup>

Extinguishing a legacy of shame ignited an emphasis on pride, celebrated annually at gay pride parades across North America and marking the anniversary of Stonewall—one venue, among the many that have proliferated since 1969, permitting GLBT individuals to simultaneously pay homage to their tumultuous cultural history and distinguish those productive failures from the pool of failures proscribed by mass culture that have historically served to further marginalize queer identity.

But ‘fabulous’ is relevant to queer cultures for more than just this phoenix-from-the-ashes origin story: an important shift occurs after gay liberation, one that divides the gay movement into those seeking to obtain rights on par with heterosexual members of society while distancing themselves from other radical markers of their oppression and those who recognize the implicitly intersecting nature of their oppression with other forms of oppression and mobilize in a call to resist a capitalist society that would happily suppress their unique positions in order to silence political dissonance. Gay assimilationists are regarded as opposing the “fringe elements of the gay population”<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Alan Sears, “Queer Anti-Capitalism: What’s Left of Lesbian and Gay Liberation?” *Science & Society*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (January 2005), 96.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Piontek, *Queering Gay and Lesbian Studies* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 34.

that make it difficult for mainstream, “virtually normal” gays to properly assimilate into heterosexual mainstream society,<sup>17</sup> while radical queers fight against a “ravenous gay mainstream [that] seeks control, not only of our bodies and minds, but of the very ways we represent our own identities. Assimilation means erasure; any queers that call attention to this tyranny risk ostracism, imprisonment, or worse.”<sup>18</sup> In a sense, there is a return to Camp in twenty-first-century queer communities, though now put to the service not of concealing or minimizing the social implications of homosexual identity, but of making it well known, and a prime ingredient in the success of queer artwork. This distinction is important, in that this thesis will be focused on explicating it and the tensions that develop for queer artists struggling to adhere to the radical tenets of their identities while navigating the mainstream art world.

If deviation and failure are, indeed, integral to queer theory, why is it that curators of queer art, as well as art historians, often neglect to take proper advantage of this queer standard of deviation? Is it that space does not exist for the development of a truly radical art history—one that admits radical gender and sexual identity into the discourse? Or, if such space does exist, can it successfully intersect with more mainstream exhibition practices? Would queer art even seek such cohabitation or does the very nature of a work being “queer” result in its omission from mainstream acclaim? And, if that is so, who benefits, and who loses by this arrangement? The obvious danger is to queer artists themselves, in that the non-queer world is not always understanding of those who fail to make the necessary ‘gestures of return’, which can, perhaps, partly account for the

---

<sup>17</sup> Piontek, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, ed. “Breaking Glass: An Introduction,” in *That’s Revolting: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2004), 5.

impasse encountered by those attempting to introduce this type of ‘controversial’ work into mainstream exhibition space. The institutional body that is the museum is at the mercy of the private entities and the public that funds it; a failure to recognize the ultimate power held by these players may ultimately lead to financial instability (as was the case of former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani’s threat to withdraw the annual \$7 million City Hall grant from the Brooklyn Museum for hosting *Sensation*, the exhibition of the Charles Saatchi’s provocative art collection, in 1999<sup>19</sup>), exposure as unwilling to exhibit controversial or explicit work (such as in the case of The Corcoran Gallery of Art’s refusal to mount *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment*, in 1989, due to the perceived obscenity of the sexual acts depicted<sup>20</sup>), or even criminal charges for curators

---

<sup>19</sup> *Sensation* first opened in 1997 at the Royal Academy of Art in London and featured Young British Artists, including Darren Almond, Richard Billingham, Glenn Brown, Simon Callery, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Adam Chodzko, Mat Collishaw, Keith Coventry, Peter Davies, Tracey Emin, Cerith Wyn Evans, Paul Finnegan, Mark Francis, Alex Hartley, Marcus Harvey, Mona Hatoum, Damien Hirst, Gary Hume, Michael Landry, Abigail Lane, Langlands and Bell, Sarah Lucas, Martin Maloney, Jason Martin, Alain Miller, Ron Mueck, Chris Ofili, Jonathan Parsons, Richard Patterson, Simon Patterson, Hadrian Pigott, Marc Quinn, Fiona Rae, James Rielly, Jenny Saville, Yinka Shonibare, Jane Simpson, Sam Taylor-Wood, Gavin Turk, Mark Wallinger, Gillian Wearing, and Rachel Whiteread. In London, Harvey’s *Myra* ignited the most controversy for its portrayal of English serial child killer Myra Hindley, composed of a mosaic of children’s handprints, while in Brooklyn, Ofili’s *The Holy Virgin Mary* spawned protest for its use of elephant dung and pornographic material in depicting the Virgin Mary. Giuliani attempted to evict the Museum from its premises and to remove its board of trustees, arguing “We will do everything that we can to remove funding for the Brooklyn Museum until the director comes to his senses and realizes that if you are a government-subsidized enterprise, then you can’t do things that desecrate the most personal and deeply held views of people in society. I mean, this is an outrageous thing to do.” See Dan Barry and Carol Vogel, “Giuliani Vows to Cut Subsidy Over ‘Sick’ Art,” *The New York Times* (September 23, 1999), A1.

<sup>20</sup> The exhibition’s pending installation was interrupted by the outrage of conservative politicians Jesse Helms, Dick Armey, and Alfonse D’Amato, beginning with Helms, who first came across the catalogue for the exhibition and purportedly “took special offense at the shot of a small girl who is caught at the instant when she lifted her dress and thereby exposed herself.” It is purported that conservative cultural critic Richard Grenier, writing

and directors (such as in the case of the obscenity charges brought against Dennis Barrie, former director of the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, for exhibiting the same show in 1990.<sup>21</sup>) So attempts to protect the institute's finances, reputation, and workers must be considered. When controversy and its implications are not factors, the opposite problem—poor attendance—might be. If the museum defines its role in relation to the society it serves, it cannot be more progressive in its inclusion of marginalized work than its host society. Museum studies scholar Nicola Clayton argues that, "The museum community has arguably been reticent about collecting material culture with difficult or controversial associations. Groups seen as deviant remain invisible through their non-representation."<sup>22</sup> Further exclusion, as well as further invisibility, is, thus, perpetuated by this reticence. Lawrence Rothfield provides an unsettling justification for this practice, arguing that "For those privileged communities whose standards had previously stood unchallenged as public ones, efforts by museums to respond to other sensitivities [are] seen as abandonments of all standards whatsoever."<sup>23</sup> Can the museum, in its role as

---

in the *Washington Times*, labeled Mapplethorpe "the great catamite" and fantasized about dousing Mapplethorpe's body with kerosene and burning it. See Steven C. Dubin, "Gay Images and Acceptability" in *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 174-75.

<sup>21</sup> Pat Buchanan also came on board, launching the most sustained attack, as well as a petition, signed by over 100 members of congress and presented to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), threatening to seek cuts to the agency's \$170 million budget should it continue to endorse "morally reprehensible trash." See Craig Kaczorowski, "Censorship in the Arts," *GLBTQ: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender & Queer Culture*, [http://www.glbtq.com/arts/censorship\\_in\\_arts.html](http://www.glbtq.com/arts/censorship_in_arts.html).

<sup>22</sup> Nicola Clayton, "Folk devils in our midst? Collecting from 'deviant' groups," in *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, ed. Simon J. Knell (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2004), 146.

<sup>23</sup> Lawrence Rothfield, ed. "The Interests in 'Sensation'," in *Unsettling "Sensation": Arts Policy Lessons from the Brooklyn Museum of Art Controversy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 7.

educator, influence the values of its audiences? As Clayton asks, can it “afford the opportunity to alter the status of such material, desensitizing and legitimizing attitudes towards it?”<sup>24</sup>

Permission to mount the queer exhibition initiates a new set of concerns that seem to indicate that the problem of queer art in mainstream exhibition space is not always a direct result of societal ostracization. Rather, it can also be attributed to the incongruities between art historical classification and the boundless nature of queer theory and queer aesthetics, which can result in disagreement as to what works should make up the queer art canon, and why. Additionally, some artists, as well as critics and curators, question whether the very institutionalization of queer art puts it at risk of forfeiting its queerness altogether.<sup>25</sup>

Have past queer exhibitions in mainstream museums dodged these threats, or succumbed to them? Robert Atkins points to two American exhibitions, Dan Cameron’s 1982 *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art* at New York’s New Museum, and Larry Rinder and Nayland Blake’s 1995 *In a Different Light* at the University Art Museum in Berkeley—two of the rare examples of major contemporary queer exhibitions in American museums—and takes as a central concern the rejection by Cameron, as well as Rinder and Blake, of identity politics altogether in favor of

---

<sup>24</sup> Clayton, 153.

<sup>25</sup> Gay City News, “A Conversation with artists Carrie Moyer, Sheila Pepe, Stephen Mueller, Andrew Robinson and Frank Holliday,” *Gay City News*, Volume 3, Issue 353 (December 30, 2004 – January 5, 2005), <http://www.acrstudio.com/projects/word/queeringmoma/index.htm>.

aesthetics—as Rinder put it, the emphasis was on “poetics rather than polemics.”<sup>26</sup> While Atkins recognizes that identity politics is potentially ghettoizing, he also takes issue with queer exhibitions that neglect to represent queer art history and the leading queer artists that form its categorical significance. One could add that it seems counter-intuitive at best and ingenuous at worst to strip an inherently political term of its political meaning. At the same time, however, Atkins is intrigued by Rinder and Blake’s decision to include heterosexual artists, such as Carolee Schneemann and Ree Morton, in the Berkeley show, thereby abandoning the argument that queer art necessarily be made by queer artists and echoing Cameron’s argument that, “To assume that gay content cannot be present without a strong and clear indication that someone involved has sex with members of the same gender is to underestimate both the flexibility of the idea of content and the gay imagination.”<sup>27</sup> That being said, this openness further complicates attempts at classification. From these examples, it becomes clear that the development of queer aesthetics remains a highly subjective exercise. However, rather than regard this as a problem, I hail this very ambiguity as a necessary condition of queer art, and therefore fundamental to any serious attempt to discuss aspects of queer aesthetics.

Although we can trace some of the histories of present-day uses of the term “queer,” the applications of the catalytic ideologies remain numerous and unwieldy. If queer theorists and curators of queer art cannot hope to find a cohesive origin, mandate, ideology, or set of goals, what I propose is not to impose one but, rather, to examine the

---

<sup>26</sup> Robert Atkins, “Goodbye Lesbian/Gay History, Hello Queer Sensibility: Meditating on Curatorial Practices,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4, *We’re Here: Gay and Lesbian Presence in Art and Art History* (Winter, 1996), 82.

<sup>27</sup> Dan Cameron, *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art*, exh. cat. (New York: New Museum, 1982), 9.

very phenomenon of divergence, or “failure,” as I introduced it earlier, and how concepts of failure service the development of a radical queer aesthetics. My thesis confronts the lack of coherence in conceptions of queer by examining ways in which psychological, phenomenological, narrative, and historiographical conceptions of queer speak directly to this divergence. The only coherence, I will argue, is found in what queer rebels *against* in establishing its own discursive power. In his curatorial essay accompanying the *In a Different Light* exhibition, Blake writes, “Previous attempts to discuss the relationship between sexual preference and art-making have asked the question, ‘What does gay art look like?’ We decided to ask the question, ‘What do queer artists do?’”<sup>28</sup> I’d like to take this development one step further by determining what it is we can learn about queer aesthetics and their place in exhibition practice by examining what it is queer artists *don’t* do—following Blake and Rinder’s emphasis on resistance and showing that this insistence on resistance is foundational to a constantly developing system of classification for queer aesthetics. Blake’s questions, encouraging my own, refer me to Michel Foucault’s examination of ways that homosexual identities are activated and enacted. In “Friendship as a Way of Life,” Foucault denounces the “tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to the problem of ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What is the secret of my desire?’”<sup>29</sup> I believe there is something useful to be gained by employing an approach based not only in divergence but also in these relationships that Foucault gestures at, an approach that potentially avoids some of the traps and criticisms that have bedeviled

---

<sup>28</sup> Nayland Blake, “Curating In a Different Light,” in *In a Different Light: Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*, ed. Blake, Lawrence Rinder, Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995), 11.

<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life,” *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity, Truth, Vol. 1*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1994), 135.

many queer art exhibitions to date. To remove the requirement that an artwork portray particular, or explicitly queer, formal qualities prompts my interest in examining those relationships in which artists and artworks speak to each other, as though they are constructing the aesthetic almost as an afterthought to reflect these tendencies. Jonathan Weinberg reminds us that, “Homophobia is not a mere byproduct of the ignorance and prejudice of a segment of the population, but an aspect of the way power is organized and deployed throughout society.”<sup>30</sup> Bearing this in mind, I would like to move beyond sexual and gender identity to examine the artistic resistance to cultural and societal norms that is inspired by these socially contested identities, focusing on a number of examples in terms of their challenge to institutional hegemony and the dominant societal beyond.

Before proceeding, I want to make it clear that the goal of this thesis is not to dismiss work done thus far in the field of queer aesthetics, nor to advance my own insights into queer aesthetics as definitive. Rather, I am building on extant scholarship, inspired by my own investment as an emerging scholar and curator interested in testing, expanding, and infiltrating the limits of queer visual representation. The thesis is an attempt to compile the many questions, problems, and possibilities prompted by the integration of queer theory into aesthetic discourse and the entrance of queer art into the cultural realm. By applying a critical social theory model to this study, notably, its emphasis on social emancipation and the provision of critical tools put to the use of defending this autonomy, my aim is to position queer art practice, queer visual representation, and the communities formed by queer artists as catalysts for radical social transformation. My intention in providing sets of case studies for each chapter is not to

---

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Weinberg, “Things Are Queer,” *Arts Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4, We’re Here: Gay and Lesbian Presence in Art and Art History (Winter, 1996), 11.

limit the types of work that can be considered within the frameworks I establish, but to exemplify how these frameworks lend themselves to, and are informed by, queer visual representation.

In Chapter One, I begin by confronting what has already been recognized as the expansive and amorphous nature of queer aesthetics, thereby acknowledging the benefits of recognizing its relative lack of boundaries. Because queer aesthetics takes queer identity as a catalyst, it immediately becomes clear that formal aspects will not be the sum total of queer aesthetics. However, recognizing this approach does not lend queer aesthetics much credibility when attempting to insert itself into art historical discourse and exhibition display. I therefore propose a mode of classification that emphasizes two sometimes antithetical concepts: the creation and habitation of an ideological space removed from, and reflective of, dominant society; and a relational and appropriative approach to cultural production. I consider critical theorist Jürgen Habermas's participatory democracy, political scientist Benedict Anderson's imagined communities, and various conceptions of a Queer Nation, from the original use of the term by radical queer activists in the 1990s to the theoretical and geographical connotations of the term in current usage. These theories inform my apparently speculative development of a space in which queer artistic production might flourish; in fact, queer art is *already* creating this imagined space. Reviving the question of what queer art looks like, what queer artists do, and what queer artists do not do, I turn to analytic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's Family Resemblance theory, art critic Nicolas Bourriaud's theory of relational art, and political theorist Ernesto Laclau's empty spaces to help me formulate an identification of the appropriative and relational practices of queer artists.

In presenting my argument, I examine the late David Wojnarowicz's photographic series, *Arthur Rimbaud in New York, 1978-1979* and Emily Roysdon's *untitled (David Wojnarowicz Project)*, from 2001. Wojnarowicz himself began the process of appropriation that proliferates in relation to this work through his photographic masking exercise, situating Arthur Rimbaud in various underbelly locations in New York City in the late 1970s (locations that Wojnarowicz felt Rimbaud would have frequented had he been alive in the late twentieth century) and speaking to a history of queer alienation and the imagined communities formed in response. Twenty years later, also a decade after Wojnarowicz's death, Roysdon is inspired by his project and takes him, calling him "David," as her mask. Reenacting the photographic series and imbuing it with queer and third-wave feminist theory, Roysdon represents the multilayered conversations between Rimbaud and Wojnarowicz, and then Rimbaud, Wojnarowicz, and Roysdon, as well as the relational and appropriative uses of history to make invisible queer histories visible.

In Chapter Two, I force the queer artwork to face its publics by considering ways in which queer artists have historically conveyed queerness, despite threats to success, safety, reputation, and belonging, through a nuanced and deliberate process of coding that mirrors the practice of queer coding throughout history. Reflecting on the relationship between vernacular objects and queer practices and identities, I imbue said objects with biographical relevance and collective significance to queer artists who, at times throughout history, were forced to conceal sexual and gender identity in order to evade discrimination and exclusion. Outlining the history of queer cultural coding, from red ties to hanky code, I will argue that this type of coding has remained useful to queer artists

over time, once permitting closeted artists to pass, and now allowing contemporary artists to reflect on their tumultuous cultural histories and to contribute to this history by developing new codes for contemporary queer communities. I consider as well the relationship between coding and gossip, arguing each to be effective strategies of inclusion for queer artists—in fact, an “in-crowding” practice for queer artists that leaves mainstream audiences clamouring to get in and inspires a unique language for conveying and preserving queer histories.

In this same chapter I consider autobiographical readings of the work of American Neo-Dada artist Robert Rauschenberg and, in particular, his 1951 work, *Should Love Come First?* as analyzed by queer art historian Jonathan D. Katz in relation to Rauschenberg’s closeted homosexuality, how he distanced himself from out or overtly effeminate male artists, how he measured successes, and defined his mission, through painting, to bridge the gap between art and life. Moving into the current century, with queers facing less overt (though nevertheless present) forms of discrimination, being permitted to work as out artists, and, in many cases, achieving critical acclaim, I remain interested in choices made by queer artists to perpetuate forms of cultural coding. I show how Montreal-based emerging artist Kim Kielhofner, whose own collage practice mirrors the autobiographical strategies employed by Rauschenberg, invokes a new set of codes relevant to queer artists working today and illustrates coding’s continuity. By examining these two artists’ works, I demonstrate how the work contains and inspires alternative forms of historiography, visible in the content and apprehensible in the autobiographical lens used to examine and discuss the work.

Finally, in Chapter Three, I test the problems of mounting queer art exhibitions in public space by demonstrating how many queer artists working today have diverged from and chosen to work and display in alternative spaces such as artist-run centres, temporary galleries, and the spaces opened up by zine production and other ephemeral art practices. This chapter refers back to the ideological spaces carved out in Chapter One and attempts to explain how queer art practice can work to ‘corporealize’ this discourse and, indeed, represent the significance of political action—here in the form of art installation—to queer communities. Reconsidering the networks queer artists establish between themselves, their communities, and history, I examine current queer curatorial trends for their embodiment of these networks and their licensing of temporary physical occupation of ideologically queer space.

An examination of the history of Toronto’s Queen Street West as a site of alternative arts and queer communities anchors my discussion of the interplay between radical communities and the institutionalization of public space as prompted by gentrification. I speculate on the possibilities of queer world-making afforded by the relationships between artists, queers, and urban development, the ideological conflicts encountered within, and the innovative art practices undertaken by the neighbourhood’s queer contingent—most notably by the art communities surrounding Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Paul Petro Special Projects Space, and the now-defunct Zsa Zsa Gallery. Understanding the work undertaken by this community of queer artists as the embodiment of a queer *Gesamtkunstwerk*, I show how it promotes the relevance of queer art to aesthetic discourse and the radical nature of queer communities as activated by cultural positioning.

It may strike the reader that I have structured my thesis into binaries of chronology, comparison, problems and solutions—all of which might seem to undermine a study on the limitless nature of queer art. My hope, in employing this structure, is that it reinforces what remains at the core of each of my chapters: first, a playful use of dominant institutional, artistic, societal, and sexual systems to ultimately subvert them; two, license, in the twenty-first century, to use these systems to reclaim histories and voices; and three, an opportunity to criticize, appropriate, or reject them completely. Taken as a whole, my thesis will demonstrate certain possibilities afforded by tactical attempts by queer artists, to stay on the outside.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Relational Art and the Preservation of Queer Legacies: David Wojnarowicz and Emily Roysdon in Conversation**

A work of art is simply a monument to the temporal within eternity. Art alone can confer and transmit to other ages an enduring validity of what is trapped within its own era. – Ernst Fuchs<sup>31</sup>

We have had the opportunity to cull our history and in that action we perform our future. What we remember, the spaces we inhabit, the jeans of a lover, the face of a lost friend. We can't release them, so we play with them. – Emily Roysdon<sup>32</sup>

Behind every man now alive stand 30 ghosts.<sup>33</sup> – Arthur C. Clarke

#### **Ghosts, Nomads, and Other Useful Transients**

Faced with the constant threat of cultural erasure, queer communities seem to recognize the need to maintain their legacies. They embed histories of queer struggles within their daily ones, commemorate sites of homophobic violence and queer victories, and define their own heroes. Abandoning a notion of belonging based in place, queers form communities in which they become scavengers, time travelers, and nomads in constructing their own belonging and cultural voice. Feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti claims, “Not all nomads are world travelers; some of the greatest trips can take place without physically moving from one’s habitat. It is the subversion of set conventions that defines the nomadic state.”<sup>34</sup> Building on French philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s call to

---

<sup>31</sup> Ernst Fuchs, quoted in Robert Venosa, *Illuminatus* (Sydney: Interface Press, 1999), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Jean Carlomusto and Emily Roysdon, “Radiant Spaces,” *Corpus* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 2006), 78.

<sup>33</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, “Foreword,” *2001: A Space Odyssey* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968), unpaginated.

<sup>34</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 5.

systemic deterritorialization in the face of fascism, Braidotti also wants to emphasize the possibilities nomadism affords interconnectedness; she writes, “nomadic becoming is neither reproduction nor just imitation, but rather emphatic proximity, intensive interconnectedness. Some states or experiences can merge simply because they share common attributes.”<sup>35</sup> By way of nomadism, Braidotti argues, also exists opportunities to write the self as selves and to redesign the boundaries of place.

Nomadism functions here as an entry point, for it is one way that queers might abandon the world as we know it toward forming their own. This is an ideological abandonment, of course, but carrying with it realistic implications for a community spanning the globe, without a geographic site to call home. What role do queer artists play in forming this world? How does the practice of art-making contribute to a politics of resistance against cultural erasure? This chapter will show how queer artists participate in this regrouping by engaging in collaborative, appropriative, and relational practices that serve to resurrect and mobilize generations of artists working toward the same radical goals. Examining two photographic series, David Wojnarowicz’s *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1979-1980) (fig. 2-10) and Emily Roysdon’s *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* (2001) (fig. 11-15), I will show how the relationship between the two projects echoes the “emphatic proximity” that Braidotti argues is initiated by the sharing of similar experiences across spatial boundaries.<sup>36</sup> By being proximate, these artists contribute to the defence of their cultural legacy.

---

<sup>35</sup> Braidotti, 5-6.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

Wojnarowicz's series is comprised of twenty-four black and white gelatin silver prints and depicts a tall and lanky male figure (Wojnarowicz's friend Brian Butterick<sup>37</sup>) donning the mask of the poet Arthur Rimbaud photographed as a seventeen-year-old by Étienne Carjat ca. 1870 (fig. 1).<sup>38</sup> The masked figure is photographed in and around New York City, in places such as Brooklyn, the Meat Packing District, the Bowery, and the West Side Piers, chosen for their "underground" connotations. The figure is shown engaging in intravenous drug use, urinating in a decrepit bathroom, hustling in Times Square, and masturbating in bed. In some of the photographs "Rimbaud" appears alone while in others he is all but lost in the crowd, the mask being all that sets him apart. Roysdon's series is made up of twelve images (ten black and white photographs and two embroidered works on photo paper) and closely mirrors Wojnarowicz's in regard to the locations in which her figure is situated. However, the Rimbaud mask is substituted by a mask of Wojnarowicz, and it is the artist herself who enacts the poses portrayed in Wojnarowicz's series.<sup>39</sup>

What purposes do Wojnarowicz's masking and Roysdon's reenactment serve? Certainly, to don the masks of historical figures is a meaningful act, but why have these particular masks been chosen? How do their identities mingle with the identities of their wearers? What messages do their presences convey? Can we conceive of these projects as following the history of artistic appropriation? Are they interconnected, rather than

---

<sup>37</sup> Mysoon Rizk, "Constructing Histories: David Wojnarowicz's *Arthur Rimbaud in New York*," in *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire*, ed. Deborah Bright (New York: Routledge, 1998), 179.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> According to Roysdon, the photograph of Wojnarowicz was probably taken by Wojnarowicz's long term partner and collaborator Peter Hujar on one of the pair's trips to Mexico. Roysdon photocopied and "sharpied" the photograph many times to get the desired contrast and shapes (Roysdon, e-mail to author, June 15, 2009).

imitative and, if so, what are the implications of this reading for the construction and preservation of queer communities across spatial and temporal lines? To begin to answer these questions, it is important to further develop the ideological ground that unites queers across geographic, as well as temporal, borders via an emphasis on relational, rather than physical, proximity. Drawing on literature that informs conceptions of queer geographies, I show how queer geographies are also ideologically relevant to the relational art practices that construct queer communities. First, I establish how queers mobilize in resistance to heterosexist society through structures of feeling, a theory first developed by Raymond Williams and subsequently queered by Gregg Bordowitz and José Esteban Muñoz. Once mobilized, though, where do queers act? To this end, I survey theories of democracy and public space as developed by Jürgen Habermas and Yin-Kun Chang to investigate how the public realm accommodates queer bodies. I then turn to the means through which queer communities establish queer space by considering the ideological possibilities afforded by imagined communities, as theorized by Benedict Anderson, and translated into concepts of queer nationhood. Returning to Braidotti's conception of "emphatic proximity," I show how other theories of relationality benefit the development of a queer nation and prepare me to demonstrate how relational aesthetics, rooted in Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of Family Resemblance and pushed forward in art theory by Nicolas Bourriaud, are thus useful to not only queer visual representation, but also queer community formation. Returning to Wojnarowicz and Roysdon, I show how each artist enacts resurrections of influential queer historical figures as acts of resistance against the societal forces that would otherwise bury them.

## Expanding Community Lines

Queer communities are formed piecemeal by the individual and collective defections of their constituents, regrouped across a spectrum of spatial and temporal realms. Sara Ahmed writes, “bodies, as well as objects take shape through being orientated toward each other.”<sup>40</sup> Likewise, communities represent a process by which the individual recognizes the self in relation to others, who group together in recognition of their shared identity traits—or in their rejection of others. Queer pedagogy scholar Yin-Kun Chang points to the usefulness of radical democracy to queer communities and explains Habermas’s division of democracy into the categories of liberal democracy (thin democracy), socialist democracy (strong democracy), and deliberative democracy (participatory democracy).<sup>41</sup> Chang identifies radical democracy as belonging to the participatory type, citing it as a “powerful tool for oppressed peoples, such as political or sexual minorities, to express their voices.”<sup>42</sup> He argues that radical democracy preserves the individuality of its subjects and “engage[s] the far more dynamic domain of cultural representations and social practices,” and highlights the need for a radical democracy to occupy space in the public sphere.<sup>43</sup> However, Chang also takes Habermas to task for his conception of the public sphere, whereby social inequality is assumed to be inconsequential to the discussions that take place within the public sphere, a sphere that Chang claims is “practically monopolized by men, whose political, economic and social superiority is reproduced in public discourse and media representation,” and a monopoly

---

<sup>40</sup> Ahmed, 54.

<sup>41</sup> Yin-Kun Chang, “‘Can Queer Pedagogy Be Articulated from a Position of Radical Democracy?’,’ The Spatial Performance of Democracy in Cyberspace,” *Formosan Education and Society*, No. 8 (2004.12), 44.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

further legitimized by an illusion of equality perpetuated by all those—dominant and marginal—who act within it.<sup>44</sup> To combat this circuitous problem, Chang calls on the notion of a “counter-public” as an empowering mode through which marginalized communities might occupy parallel space by creating and operating an alternative network of sites, knowledge, and dialogues. There is a sense in which this mobilized effort, as carried out by a group of likeminded individuals, might be construed as an application of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities,” a term that, according to Anderson, casts a definition of nationalism to account for a variety of actions undertaken in the name of nations.<sup>45</sup> Anderson argues that a nation “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>46</sup> Anderson’s emphasis on abstract, rather than physical, interaction leading nonetheless to a notion of group affinity is useful to a conception of local, national, and global queer communities and the breadth of sexual and gender expressions encompassed within. It evokes the notion of a “Queer Nation”—originally the name of the 1990s American queer activist organization but quickly co-opted by the global queer activist community. Cultural scholar Terry Goldie suggests that the “nation” of Queer Nation can be interpreted in two opposing ways, explaining that

One is a belief in a community which superseded the traditional view of the nation state. In this the nation is a greater tie between two homosexuals than between a heterosexual and a homosexual in the same state. The other interpretation is what might be called “a life of irony” ... [which considers] the

---

<sup>44</sup> Chang, 50.

<sup>45</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London & Brooklyn: Verso, 1991)

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

camp way that gay and lesbian activists in the United States use symbols of patriotism such as the flag. The traditional American patriot stands in front of the Stars and Stripes, his hair cut to marine length, holding a gun. The queer nationalist is in the same pose, with the same haircut, but has traded the gun for a dildo, and is quite likely a she. This is not so much a greater nation as the old one turned upside down.<sup>47</sup>

Goldie's two interpretations point back to Anderson's contention that a nation and its peoples are caught up in a symbiotic performance of genesis, insofar as the existence of a Queer Nation as a liminal space depends on the continued devotion of its citizens, who expect their Queer Nation to validate their identities, creating the momentum to enact commanding instances of spatial appropriation. Artists have also pointed to this contingent and subjective relationship; in his artist statement for *There Is No "Queer Space," Only Different Points of View*, an installation for the 1994 *Queer Space* exhibition at the Store Front for Art and Architecture in New York, Brian McGrath writes that, "Queer space' exists potentially everywhere in the public realm. ... it is the individual's appropriation of the public realm through personal, ever-changing points of view."<sup>48</sup> Christopher Reed argues that no space is "totally queer or completely unqueerable," but that queer space is "imminent."<sup>49</sup> Reed elaborates:

... *imminent*: rooted in the Latin *imminere*, to loom over or threaten, it means ready to take place. For both advocates and opponents, the notion of queerness is threatening indeed. More fundamentally, queer space is space in the process of, literally, *taking place*, of claiming territory.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Terry Goldie, "Queer Nation?" *Eleventh Annual Roberts Lecture*, York University, Toronto, Ontario, March 4, 1997, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Brian McGrath, with Mark Watkins and Mao-jung Lee, *Queer Space*, exh. pamphlet (New York: Store Front for Art and Architecture, 1994), unpaginated

<sup>49</sup> Christopher Reed, "Queer Space in the Built Environment," *Art Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4, *We're Here: Gay and Lesbian Presence in Art and Art History* (Winter, 1996), 64.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

The term “queer” itself, according to David Halperin, designates “a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance.”<sup>51</sup> Queer individuals, it can be argued, transgress the “finite, if elastic boundaries”<sup>52</sup> of other nations and undertake acts of comradeship in the name of their own.<sup>53</sup>

### **More Than a Feeling**

The theories I have identified as contributing to the formation of queer space support a conception of queer communities as nomadic, for as Braidotti asserts, “nomadic consciousness ... is a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self.”<sup>54</sup> In his essay, “The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous,” queer artist and writer Gregg Bordowitz attempts to pinpoint the unique nature of queer experience, writing:

Within the relation between two factors, a queer structure of feeling is formed. These two factors are: how heterosexist oppression attempts to contain queer sexualities, and how queers fight oppression by forming communities. Thus a queer structure of feeling can be described as an articulation of presence forged through resistance to heterosexist society.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, 6-7.

<sup>53</sup> The range of scholarship on queer geographies is constantly growing and is, indeed, central to queer scholarship. For more on queer geographies and their relevance to queer identity and community formation, see David Bell and Gill Valentine, ed., *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexuality* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), and Beatriz Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).

<sup>54</sup> Braidotti, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Gregg Bordowitz, “The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous,” in Bordowitz, *The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous and Other Writings, 1986-2003*, ed. James Meyer (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2004), 49.

Bordowitz's conception of a "queer structure of feeling" is echoed by other writers on queer subjecthood, notably Performance Studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz, who writes that it "encompasses same-sex desire and other minoritarian sexualities but also holds other dissident affective relationships to different aspects of the sex/gender system."<sup>56</sup> Both Bordowitz and Muñoz draw on cultural theorist Raymond Williams's conception of "structures of feeling," which Williams argues "can be defined as social experiences *in solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been *precipitated* and are more evidently and more immediately available"—in other words, an individual's subjective impressions and responses to the culture that they inhabit and confront.<sup>57</sup> But the queer structure of feeling brings us back to the negative that forms a positive; it is delineated by that from which it is alienated, and born of what it subsequently seeks to become.

Williams, Bordowitz, and Muñoz all want to show how structures of feeling can be read in cultural production and preserved over time; Williams contends that distinct social formations can be read in specific kinds of art, while Bordowitz argues for queer art that reflects the heterosexist resistance that contributes to queer structures of feeling.

He writes:

Cultural work can be considered within a queer structure of feeling if self-identified queers produce the work, if these producers identify the work as queer, if queers claim the work has significance to queers, if the work is censored or criticized for being queer. A particular work is queer if it is viewed as queer, either by queers or bigots.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," *Women and Performance*, Volume 8, Issue 2 (1996), 10-11.

<sup>57</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 134.

<sup>58</sup> Bordowitz, 49.

Bordowitz looks to embed queer experience in visual representation, while Muñoz rounds out this project by asking how it can maintain its cultural relevance over time. He points to ephemera as useful to its preservation, stating that, “Ephemera includes traces of lived experience, maintaining experiential politics and urgencies long after these structures of feeling have been lived.”<sup>59</sup> The artwork might fulfill a dual role here by providing the visual representation Bordowitz is intent on seeing within queer structures of feeling and by acting as ephemeral trace of the structure of feeling as experienced by the individual as it instigates community mobilization.

How might queer structures of feeling and the imagined community they form serve relational understandings of art, art-making, and cultural dissemination? It is difficult to contest queer’s pervasive presence and influence in cultural sectors. However, queer presence and influence are often understood to be dependent on a hegemonic conception of the art world. It is therefore devoid of its own agency, reliant on the mainstream for validation, and misunderstood in scope, relevance, and intention. The task of defining an authoritative queer aesthetics is further complicated by its indebtedness to queer theory, itself liable to shifts in definitions. Queer theory takes, as its own foundation, a commitment to sociocultural, sexual, and gender transgression—a confidence in what Annamarie Jagose describes as the “incoherences in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender, and sexual desire.”<sup>60</sup> Indeed, scholars in the fields of art history, film studies, performance studies, and visual culture have recognized and elaborated this inextricable relationship, celebrating queer theory for what

---

<sup>59</sup> Muñoz, “Ephemera as Evidence,” 10-11.

<sup>60</sup> Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 3.

it affords contemporary discourse on cultural production: uniquely broad, malleable, and numerous queer ‘canons’ that these works form. However, to introduce a set of formal and conceptual qualities to which the queer art object must adhere is to risk denying the queer art object the very thing that makes it queer in the first place. If, as Ahmed contends, the queer subject, “deviates and is made socially present as deviant,”<sup>61</sup> and if, as Thomas Piontek argues, queer gains “its critical edge by defining itself against the normal,” then we must prioritize this emphasis on deviation above all others, allowing for a queer aesthetic whose parameters may be constantly shifting as well.<sup>62</sup> It would seem that cultural scholars have, indeed, been careful to stress the evasive nature of queer work; in *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queer Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas*, queer cinema scholar Thomas Waugh acknowledges his use of “queer,” throughout his survey of Canadian queer cinema, as a:

continuum, a spectrum encompassing both a fixed sense of queerness as a grid—a network of discrete sexual identities, social constituencies, and strategic political agendas with a cultural canon belonging to them through historical accident and active construction—and a fluid sense of queerness as a “zone of possibilities” troubling the traditional configuration of sexual identities.<sup>63</sup>

Although catalyzed by queer film studies, Waugh’s multifaceted intentions for the use of the term “queer” nevertheless suitably position the relationship between broader queer and aesthetic discourse as a tumultuous, yet fulfilling, marriage, one that has been examined repeatedly and enduringly in the fields where queer meets aesthetic

---

<sup>61</sup> Ahmed, 21.

<sup>62</sup> Piontek, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Waugh, *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queer Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 8, quoting Jagose, 8.

scholarship. However, Waugh seems to anticipate a tension between the canonical and the transgressive, aligning queer cultural production with the “zone of possibilities” that queerness affords and acknowledging the need for an inclusive and pliant methodological tool. Waugh’s notion of a “continuum” functions to classify objects whose grouping does not compromise integrity. The employment of an appropriately expansive continuum, then, may be useful in the establishment of alternative modes of queer aesthetic classification.

To adopt an understanding of queer cultural work as following a continuum leads to questions about how the work both reflects the fixity of queerness and distinguishes itself along the line—how it represents the notion of ‘static fluidity’ that seems to be at the core of queer theory. A brief consideration of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s theory of Family Resemblance offers a foundational understanding of this kind of relationality and propels a more elaborate examination of relational art practices and how they form queer communities. Family Resemblance, Wittgenstein theorizes, functions as a method of classification by which things can be grouped together for their shared qualities, accepting that all qualities need not be shared. Wittgenstein’s classic example is the reason why all “games” can be classified as such despite their apparent differences:

... if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that ... we can see similarities crop up and disappear. And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), § 66.

Wittgenstein theorizes the possibility of corporeal unity that does not require unity of form. As such, we can admit seemingly diverse objects into the same group, provided that each individual objects relates, in some manner, to another object in the same group. Family Resemblance has been taken up by aesthetic theorist Maurice Mandelbaum, who argues that features common to *all* works of art may not

... consist in some specific, directly exhibited feature. Like the biological resemblances among those who are connected by family resemblances, or like the intentions on the basis of which we distinguish between fortune-telling and card games, such a characteristic might be a relational attribute, rather than some characteristic at which one could directly point and say: "It is this particular feature of the object which leads me to designate it a work of art."<sup>65</sup>

It is not my intention here to determine what can and cannot be designated a work of art, though Mandelbaum's building on Family Resemblance to include the term "relational" would be useful if it were, for, as he continues, "that which is held to be common to ... otherwise diverse objects is a relationship which is assumed to have existed, or is known to have existed, between certain of their characteristics and the activities and the intentions of those who made them."<sup>66</sup> Mandelbaum introduces the importance of process to a discussion of relationality, developing what could be seen as a precursory definition of relational aesthetics, the concept coined by Nicolas Bourriaud at the end of the twentieth century in an attempt to identify an accurate mode of classification for Postmodern art and to reject a "dated" art history by which little room was left up to the open-ended nature of Postmodern art practices. In *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud defines Relational Art as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and

---

<sup>65</sup> Maurice Mandelbaum, "Family Resemblance and Generalization Concerning the Arts," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (July 1965), 222.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent private space.”<sup>67</sup> Bourriaud claims that the role of artwork is “no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real.”<sup>68</sup> This is not to be read as contradicting the model of “imagined community” and its service to queer cultural production; on the contrary, it is rooted in the same aspiration: to create useable models for interaction that respond to contemporary culture. As art critic Claire Bishop writes:

Rather than a discrete, portable, autonomous work of art that transcends its context, relational art is entirely beholden to the contingencies of its environment and audience. Moreover, this audience is envisaged as a community: rather than a one-to-one relationship between work of art and viewer, relational art sets up situations in which viewers are not just addressed as a collective, social entity, but are actually given the wherewithal to create a community, however temporary or utopian this may be.<sup>69</sup>

Bourriaud argues that the form of relational art “invent[s] possible encounters” and the “conditions for an exchange.”<sup>70</sup> Bourriaud understands relational art to be interested in displacing the utopias that were sought after in earlier countercultural practices in favor of microtopias, by which artists learn “to inhabit the world in a better way” in the present.<sup>71</sup> As art critic Anthony Downey reflects,

Aesthetic practice, in this instant, requires a reply of sorts—or, at the very least, a reaction. In focusing on ‘relations of exchange’, social interplay and inter-subjective communication, relational art practices—in their

---

<sup>67</sup> Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2002), 113.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>69</sup> Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October*, 110 (Fall 2004), 54.

<sup>70</sup> Bourriaud, 23.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

exhibitionary method—also provide nodal points for reflection on their socially transitive potential.<sup>72</sup>

Conventions of relationships are thus examined and subsequently agitated; for instance, what does ‘author’, or ‘audience’, come to mean in this new relational context? Who comes to comprise the audience when the audience now contributes as an author? A long history of artistic appropriation might indicate that artists are already in the opportune position to be affected, and subsequently, effective, in the audience role. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall’s contribution to reception theory similarly engages the audience, his theory of encoding and decoding building on Roland Barthes’s work on semiology and exploring the scope of audience participation in the form of negotiation or opposition, initiating audience activity in both instances.<sup>73</sup> Hall’s division of the types of readings a text may incite can also translate here into a useful framework, as he argues that the social situations of individuals who comprise an audience will determine the readings each individual constructs in regard to that which is being read: “dominant” readings are constructed by those in social situations that reflect the preferred reading; “negotiated” readings by those able to reconfigure the preferred reading to take into account their social situation; and “oppositional” readings by those whose social situation completely conflicts with the preferred reading.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Anthony Downey, “Towards a Politics of (Relational) Aesthetics,” *Third Text*, Vol. 21, Issue 3 (May, 2007), 268.

<sup>73</sup> See Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 32-51.

<sup>74</sup> See Stuart Hall, “The Television Discourse—Encoding and Decoding,” *Studies in Culture: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan (London: Arnold, 1997), 28-34.

Hall's theory was first applied to television and media analysis, but its subsequent employment in other disciplines, such as theater and performance studies, demonstrates its relevance to a broader spectrum of audience and reception theory. Hall's "reading" can be applied to cultural production in the sense that the audience who "reads" the work becomes the artist in producing a response to it. Dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings can occur in each unique instance, but there is also a sense by which art production *itself* also functions as a reading and, in terms of queer cultural production, as an oppositional one that critiques the dominant discourse. Meaning can thus be seen as developed collectively by an audience, an audience that is also a community, a community loosely held together by shared readings of the world, a world that both inspires and comes into being through cultural production.

### **Life Lines**

The works of David Wojnarowicz and Emily Roysdon engage in a process of queer space reclamation, community formation, and cultural preservation through the establishment of intergenerational, cross-temporal relationships that situate each artist in "emphatic proximity" to one another. The masks depicted in Wojnarowicz's *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* and Roysdon's *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* invoke other artists, raised here as if to elicit an ethereal critical mass of bodies long dead. Past lives are projected onto present experiences. Although the physical space of the city provides the integral backdrop to the projects each artist executes, it is how each artist situates identity, and identity in relation to other identities, present and past, that is most significant here.

Wojnarowicz's *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* demonstrates the artist's psychological and political identification with the late poet. Wojnarowicz describes the project as "... playing with ideas of compression of 'historical time and activity' and fusing the French poet's identity with modern [N]ew [Y]ork urban activities mostly illegal in nature."<sup>75</sup> Situating Rimbaud in parts of New York City, Wojnarowicz determines what might have been Rimbaud's most likely haunts should he, almost a hundred years dead at the time of the project, have been alive in Wojnarowicz's own era. Those choices speak to Wojnarowicz's understanding of the nineteenth-century poet as an "illegal" in his own rite: a young transient who engaged in homosexual relationships and drug use and whose influence on modern culture was established through works produced before reaching the age of twenty-one (he died in 1891 at the age of 37, which was also Wojnarowicz's age at the time of his death). These haunts also demonstrate Wojnarowicz's own familiarity with the significance of these locations to the "illegal" activities for which he chooses them: sites not only of drug use, cruising, and sex work, but also of community for those left unaccounted for by the New York City machine. Alienation is certainly expressed through the representation of this illicit activity, but alienation is also perpetuated in photographs in which Rimbaud appears to seek out belonging in crowds of people who seem to be repelled by his presence, as though they can sense his stigmas. The public sphere is not his place; the general public, not his people.

Wojnarowicz takes on Rimbaud as an anti-hero, perhaps related to Rimbaud's alienation in his own era and the way, as Whitney Museum of American Art Senior

---

<sup>75</sup> David Wojnarowicz, "Biographical Dateline," *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame*, exh. cat. (Normal, IL: University Galleries, 1990), 118.

Curatorial Assistant Carrie Springer describes, both “struggled to come to terms with their position in a larger society that neither shared nor condoned their reality.”<sup>76</sup>

Wojnarowicz emerged from an abusive upbringing into a gritty adulthood that included time spent as a teenage sex worker before establishing his life as an artist experimenting with a variety of media—painting, sculpture, printmaking, music, film, video—to reflect, divulge, and interrogate his life lived as an outsider. As Donald Kuspit writes, “The criminal or outlaw experience gave [him] pleasure—[his] art in fact is a kind of homage to the pleasure principle, celebrated as illicit...”<sup>77</sup> In a sense, then, Wojnarowicz’s alienation results not from unease with the avenues through which Rimbaud obtains his pleasure—or reprieve from pain—but perhaps from the systemic and social demands that Wojnarowicz, and others like him, forfeit their societal belonging, care, and advocacy in the name of these pursuits. For the most part Wojnarowicz didn’t seem to mind, writing:

When I was younger and living among the city streets I assumed the smoking exterior of the convict. I entered the shadows of mythologies and thieves and passion: the bedroom of waterfront nights where nameless men lay blooming along the floorboards; where meals and cots and train tickets could be found in a stranger’s hip pocket, and nothing was lost but slender minutes.<sup>78</sup>

Wojnarowicz’s perception of this time carries with it the queer sensuality that can be read into Walter Benjamin’s flâneur—the figure being guided through the city by the signs of the “underworld” and the promise of possibility through anonymity and escape into—or out of—this dreamy, seductive scene—possibilities that are mirrored in the recollections

---

<sup>76</sup> Carrie Springer, “David Wojnarowicz: *Arthur Rimbaud in New York*,” Whitney Museum of American Art, [https://www.whitney.org/www/exhibition/feat\\_voj.jsp#notes](https://www.whitney.org/www/exhibition/feat_voj.jsp#notes).

<sup>77</sup> Donald Kuspit, “David Wojnarowicz: The Last Rimbaud,” *Queer Cultural Center*, [http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/DavidW/DW\\_Kuspit.html](http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/DavidW/DW_Kuspit.html).

<sup>78</sup> Wojnarowicz, quoted in Springer.

of gay male cruising that Wojnarowicz alludes to.<sup>79</sup> The scene nevertheless seems to take its toll on Wojnarowicz, echoing Rimbaud's words in *Une saison en enfer* [*A Season in Hell*], "Au matin j'avais le regard si perdu et la contenance si morte, que ceux que j'ai rencontrés ne m'ont peut-être pas vu." [I had so vacant a look and so dead an expression that those I met perhaps did not see me]<sup>80</sup> Wojnarowicz describes feeling like "a Xerox version of myself ... a blank ... a copy of my features."<sup>81</sup> Wojnarowicz's masking of the figure that assumes the role of Rimbaud illustrates this sentiment by concealing the identity of the wearer. We can conceive of Rimbaud/Wojnarowicz as alone in a city of dense inhabitation, seemingly invisible to those around him, or made invisible by the occasional silence of exilic space. But we can also conceive of Rimbaud/Wojnarowicz as artist and agitator, the influence of each artist prevailing into the present day. Maybe it is this sense of alienation itself that resonates as "... the most powerful element in the ... *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* series as a whole. The poet appears in the photographs as if in a dream. He is out of place in the twentieth century, just as he was strangely out of place in his own life time."<sup>82</sup> By transposing Rimbaud onto New York City's twentieth-century underground urban landscape, Wojnarowicz forges a relationship to the poet, promotes a kinship that brings each artist out of ideological isolation, a pair of misfits with an army of cultural misfits following behind and ahead. Wojnarowicz identifies the historical aspect of his project, writing, "History

---

<sup>79</sup> Dianne Chisholm, "The City of Collective Memory," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 7, Number 2 (2001), 202.

<sup>80</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, *Une saison en enfer* (1873), [http://abardel.free.fr/tout\\_rimbaud/une\\_saison\\_en\\_enfer.htm](http://abardel.free.fr/tout_rimbaud/une_saison_en_enfer.htm).

<sup>81</sup> David Wojnarowicz, quoted in Catherine Wood, "David Wojnarowicz: Cabinet/Between Bridges, London, UK," *frieze*, issue 100 (June-August 2006), [http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/david\\_wojnarowicz/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/david_wojnarowicz/).

<sup>82</sup> Springer.

has been written and preserved by and for a particular class of people so in my work I want to rewrite or give new meaning to the histories that exist in textbooks using present day experience as departure.”<sup>83</sup> Here, through photography, Wojnarowicz reclaims part of the city as his own, but also belonging to generations of social outcasts who call on the preservation of queer legacies to keep them ‘alive’.

Wojnarowicz also died young. AIDS was especially unkind in its first epidemiological decade, a decade that all but wiped out a generation of sexual ‘subversives’. Government bodies were slow to respond, igniting accusations of homophobic intent to erase homosexual communities from the societal radar. Other forms of erasure began to transpire around this time, as well, and were just as systemic and just as insidious: particularly relevant to this chapter is the phenomenon of the late twentieth-century gentrification that continues to adversely affect already-marginalized segments of the population. Gentrification is a violent process that reveals society’s limits on acceptance, compassion, inclusivity, and advocacy. It disproportionately and most overtly neglects the needs of marginalized communities, whose spaces tend to be co-opted. The recent transformation of New York City’s West Side Piers, where Wojnarowicz photographed parts of the Rimbaud series, from a site of queer belonging to a site of queer policing, exemplifies this effect.<sup>84</sup> Dianne Chisholm asks

How can queer collective memory be fixed by an image of the city when that image is stormed by development and dilapidation without resistance afforded by aristocratic families and urban patriarchs? How can queer city space serve collective memory when it is threatened by legal and social violence, as in, for

---

<sup>83</sup> Wojnarowicz, quoted in Felix Guattari, “David Wojnarowicz,” (1989) *Queer Cultural Center*, [http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/DavidW/DW\\_Gutari.html](http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/DavidW/DW_Gutari.html).

<sup>84</sup> Benjamin Shepard, “FIERCE! Youth vs. ‘Residents in Distress’ and Other Gentrifiers,” *Counterpunch* (October 5, 2002), <http://www.counterpunch.org/shepard1005.html>.

instance, the frequent invasion and vandalizing as well as endemic poverty and marginality of “women-only space,” or the raiding, razing, and closing of venues for gay men, as with New York’s gay bathhouses? Finally, how does the city function as a vision of collective memory when official history and mass media dominate the universe of image production in ways that either abolish and disfigure the representation of gay city life or reconfigure that image for commercial profit?<sup>85</sup>

As political authorities continue to inflict this cultural razing, how do queers preserve their cultures and, subsequently, themselves? Where Wojnarowicz’s project introduces the strategic power of visual appropriation as put to the use of historic preservation, Roysdon enacts it, considering her position in present day society and fighting visually against forces that have threatened, and continue to threaten, queer communities. In 2001, over twenty years after Wojnarowicz’s original series and almost a decade after his death, Roysdon revisits Wojnarowicz’s project with her series *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)*, only here donning the mask of Wojnarowicz, rather than Rimbaud, in her pursuit of preserving Wojnarowicz’s legacy. Roysdon cites Ernesto Laclau’s theory of “empty spaces” as influential to her project, stating that, “It is in this empty space in which our feminist queer identities become analogous and our performances collaborative.”<sup>86</sup> Laclau’s concept of empty space was originally used metaphorically to refer to universalism and the theorizing of radical democracy. Laclau argued that, despite the failure of liberal democracies to deliver on the promise of universal freedom, universalism should nevertheless not be rejected, for in its place, particularism without the existence of universal norms would result in a disservice to marginalized communities without a dominant reference from which to diverge—and thus, from which

---

<sup>85</sup> Chisholm, 196.

<sup>86</sup> Emily Roysdon, “Artist’s Statement,” *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* (2001).

to establish identity.<sup>87</sup> In articulating the use to which Laclau puts universalism, Feminist geographer Geraldine Pratt writes:

Universality is not a process through which difference can be finally overcome, or individuals come to recognise a shared essence. It is an ongoing, conflictual process, through which antagonistic struggles articulate common social objectives and strategies.<sup>88</sup>

Laclau argues universality to be a symbol of the “pure cancellation of all difference.”<sup>89</sup>

Because identities, Laclau claims, can only be constituted through their differences from other identities, they cannot be complete in and of themselves but, rather, are symbolized by universality’s “absent fullness”.<sup>90</sup> Universality, political scientist Linda Zerilli argues,

is not a preexisting something (essence of form) to which individuals accede but, rather, the fragile, shifting, and always incomplete achievement of political action; it is not the container of a presence but the placeholder of an absence, not a substantive content but an empty place.<sup>91</sup>

Bearing Roysdon’s own identification with Laclau in mind, we might come to see how Roysdon’s photographic series serves the dual purposes of permitting her to self-identify in relation to the empty space Wojnarowicz’s project calls on her to occupy (while also contributing to Wojnarowicz’s own identification) and locating this occupation as a radically political action of its own. When Jean Carlomusto asks Roysdon if her work, her position as Wojnarowicz, is a guest spot, Roysdon answers:

---

<sup>87</sup> Geraldine Pratt, *Working Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 82-83.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Linda M.G. Zerilli, “Review: This Universalism Which Is Not One,” *Diacritics*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), 15.

It's both to say definitely a guest spot, in having the phallus, in making the sex and sexy images, and also feeling a desire to work with David, stitch myself into bed with him, turn myself into a fag. Yes, turn myself into a fag, allow my desire to move my body, change my body, to make something that gets me closer.<sup>92</sup>

Roysdon confuses notions of essentialized gender and sexuality by assuming the identity of "David," a gay man, maintaining particular traditionally 'female' attributes, such as breasts, and occasionally amplifying her 'maleness' through the use of 'props', as can be seen in her reenactment of Wojnarowicz's Rimbaud masturbation photograph, in which she straps on a dildo—an iconic sexual object in queer cultures—and assumes Wojnarowicz's pose, her female features made visible as well. Where Wojnarowicz poses his model with a needle in his arm, Roysdon poses herself partially nude on a bed with a needle in her thigh—a reference here to the injection not of recreational drugs, but of testosterone—adding a new layer of gendered meaning—transgendered meaning—to the project. These are not simply appropriative gestures on Roysdon's part; they also carry with them strategies of solidarity, resistance, community formation, and remembering. As Roysdon makes clear:

I think especially from the ravaging of our communities through AIDS and the straight world we live in, queers are less willing to forgo our icons and the lessons from the past. We have had the opportunity to cull our history and in that action we perform our future. What we remember, the spaces we inhabit, the jeans of a lover, the face of a lost friend. We can't release them, so we play with them.<sup>93</sup>

I bring this quote back here because it serves to demonstrate multiple meanings: how the danger of queer invisibility, if not complete obliteration in some cases, permeates and is

---

<sup>92</sup> Carlomusto and Roysdon, 78.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

perpetuated on a variety of levels social and systemic, and how queers both respond to and resist the violence enacted against their communities. A 1990 manifesto, “Queers Read This,” published anonymously by queers and appearing on the ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) New York website, cautions its readers

How can I tell you. How can I convince you, brother, sister that your life is in danger: That everyday you wake up alive, relatively happy, and a functioning human being, you are committing a rebellious act. You as an alive and functioning queer are a revolutionary. There is nothing on this planet that validates, protects or encourages your existence. It is a miracle you are standing here reading these words. You should by all rights be dead.<sup>94</sup>

The “Queers Read This” manifesto was published almost twenty years ago, at the height of the AIDS crisis,<sup>95</sup> but the sentiment it conveys arguably remains relevant: in societies that continue to systematically ignore, oppress, and problematize queer and other marginalized communities, collaborating in resistance to these regimes can, indeed, be a revolutionary act. The queer adage, “every time we fuck, we win,” need not be read as explicitly literal: it incorporates a strategy of survival through a mode of collaboration that preserves the radical nature of the communities that gender and sexuality become instrumental in constructing.<sup>96</sup> Reed asserts that, “queer space is the collective creation of queer people. But that doesn’t mean it disappears when we leave.”<sup>97</sup> Both Wojnarowicz and Roysdon’s projects emphatically promote this approach in refusing to yield to

---

<sup>94</sup> Anonymous queers, “Queers Read This” (June 1990), <http://www.actupny.org/documents/QueersReadThis.pdf>.

<sup>95</sup> The first decade of the AIDS crisis is purported by many, including Wojnarowicz, to have been a homophobic, systematic attack on queers through government indifference; Wojnarowicz was once famously photographed from behind, wearing a jean jacket emblazoned with the text, “IF I DIE OF AIDS – FORGET BURIAL – JUST DROP MY BODY ON THE STEPS OF THE F.D.A.”

<sup>96</sup> Anonymous queers.

<sup>97</sup> Reed, 64.

sociosexual conventions. In doing so, they emblemize the relationships, histories, and struggles that forge community longevity against the odds.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Collage, Coding, and Queer Infiltration: Queer Identity in the Work of Robert Rauschenberg and Kim Kielhofner**

We are all collectors. Our rooms are not decorated to announce our occupation or our family status; they are not really 'domestic' interiors. They need reflect nothing but the states of their owner, the pleasure he takes in his life, his ability to choose and arrange his possessions. Think of the sequence of rooms through which your seductions have taken you, the living rooms, the bedrooms, and how their contents have impressed you, how they have been as sensual and as significant for you as their owners themselves. – Neil Bartlett<sup>98</sup>

Who ... has created the 'creator' as a recognized producer of fetishes? – Pierre Bourdieu<sup>99</sup>

#### **Getting Past the Door**

In his article, "Sexual Things," anthropologist Mark Graham reflects on the significance of finding an old can of Crisco vegetable oil in the bathroom of one of his research subjects. He recounts the concern of its owner that his parents might have discovered the can on one of their visits, writing:

Since 1911 Crisco has been advertised as an element of traditional heterosexual family life, with Mom cooking in the kitchen, sometimes aided by her young daughter. Among gay men, the brand is so well known that bars have been named after it in, among other places, Berlin, Florence, and Stockholm. Baking or fist fucking? Heteronormative gender or hardcore gay male sexuality? The can can open in either direction, depending on what is known about the thing and which of its uses eclipses the others.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1988), 178.

<sup>99</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 290.

<sup>100</sup> Mark Graham, "Sexual Things," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 10, Number 2 (2004), 301.

Graham suggests that the implications of the object desperately depend on our cultural point of departure, and that our understanding of the use of objects is necessarily related to cultural identity—how we are positioned in society will influence how we make sense of the world. This concept was employed in Chapter One to service an understanding of how oppositional readings of hegemonic culture influence the formation of networks of relationships—communities—that can subsequently influence radical cultural response. But there are ways in which this initial recognition of the subject’s relationship to the world can be reconfigured and still ultimately arrive at the same end; Graham’s example shows how cultural affiliation itself can be delineated through identifications with the object as carrier of symbolic meaning. Apart from this delineation, recognition of the object’s symbolic meaning might also hold implications for subtle, yet effective, acts of identity affirmation, even in potentially hostile environments. It is through “artifactual literacy,” Graham argues, that we can “read the sexuality of things or, rather, of the assemblages of which they are part.”<sup>101</sup>

Queers have enduring relationships to coding that often originate in serious deliberation on how to effectively communicate queerness, and queer desire, in societies with little tolerance, and little affinity, for these realities. From language codes to hanky code,<sup>102</sup> a complex mode of communication between queers has been developed over

---

<sup>101</sup> Graham, 302.

<sup>102</sup> An example of a positively queer code is hanky code, believed to have originated in fetish and BDSM communities in the 1970s as a way for members of these communities to communicate sexual preference to potential partners. However, hanky code has carried over into other segments of the queer population, both as a style accessory and as a signifier of radical sexuality. The color of the handkerchief denotes the preferred sexual act, while the location (typically back left or right pant pocket) of the handkerchief denotes the preferred position as “top” (dominant) or “bottom” (submissive) in the act’s execution.

generations, each generation building on the legacy left to them and imbuing new importance on cultural signifiers. Objects, as well as their owners or makers, can sometimes get past the door—the door to societal acceptance, to professional success, to institutional recognition—when the artifactual literacy of those who would deny them entry is deficient. To infiltrate is to “enter or gain access to (an organization, place, etc.) surreptitiously and gradually, esp. in order to acquire secret information,” to “permeate or become part of...,” to “spread into or invade.”<sup>103</sup> This chapter will now consider how all three of these definitions are applicable to an understanding of how queer artists might be positioned both within and outside the art world by examining how the mid-twentieth century collage and assemblage practice of Robert Rauschenberg and the contemporary collage practice of emerging artist Kim Kielhofner demonstrate their own artifactual literacy, acting as queer ‘infiltrators’ by prompting queer speculative readings of the elements that comprise them. Both Rauschenberg and Kielhofner, I will show, exemplify how queer coding remains a powerful mode of artistic expression—one that positions the queer artist as authoritative, a role reversal that leaves the mainstream art world on the outside, clamouring to get in.

My focus will be on two works, Rauschenberg’s *Should Love Come First?* (1951, oil, printed paper, and pencil on canvas, destroyed) (fig. 16) and Kielhofner’s *The Black Book Project* (2004-present) (figs. 17-22). *Should Love Come First?* comprises four distinct images, collaged onto a single plane. Dominating the right side of the image is an imprint of a mapping of time changes relative to Washington DC, and the number 8, circled and repeated. To the bottom left is a foot aligned with a waltz diagram from the

---

<sup>103</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “infiltrate”.

male position, while the top left features the words “should love come first?” in a font used in advertising at the time. *The Black Book Project* is not a single work but a collection of black notebooks filled with an array of collage elements both artistic and ephemeral. Drawings and photographs are juxtaposed with media imagery, film stills, bus passes, and movie tickets and punctuated by the artist’s own writing. In extracting possible—though never confirmed—meaning from these works, I am interested in how these artists not only make it past the door, but also do so in ways that preserve their queer identities. Outlining a speculative approach to art history that admits unofficial record into consideration in determining meaning, I will show how this approach serves to preserve the queerness of queer art and its makers. From here, I consider how contemporary autobiography studies, developed in part as a response to the New Criticism of the first half of the twentieth century that denied the significance of authorial intention to textual interpretation, can contribute to queer identity affirmation by emphasizing the subjective manner by which experience can be interpreted and told. Returning to Rauschenberg and Kielhofner, I attempt speculative readings of the content of their work and explain how these readings both conceal and reveal the queerness of their makers.

### **First Person**

In *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*, Richard Meyer describes his own tenuous position as a historian of homosexuality and American art, writing:

I have wondered—and sometimes worried—about the discomfort my work might arouse in various audiences. I have worried that teachers, colleagues,

students, readers, even family members would not consider my work fully professional, that, on some level, all it would signify to them would be sex, and, more especially, gay male sex ... In this sense, the respectability of my own practice as an art historian has been an ongoing—if, until now, unspoken—concern.<sup>104</sup>

In the same vein, Gavin Butt perceives art history to be weighted to favor heterosexual readings of art over any others, claiming that, “For even if art history *has* been customarily interested in tales of artists’ intimate lives, it has been largely afflicted by a heterosexism which has admitted only stories about normative masculinity as legitimate artistic narratives.”<sup>105</sup> To problematize these tendencies might result in queer artists making the choice to omit sexual identity from public practice altogether which, though it may prevent misreadings of their work, might also result in misrepresentations of themselves, for, as Eve Sedgwick argues:

“Queer” seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person’s undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation. A hypothesis worth making explicit: that there are important senses in which “queer” can signify only *when attached to the first person*.<sup>106</sup>

Between means that result in the same delegitimizing end, might there exist space for alternative approaches to queer artistic representation and historiography that take into account the hypothetical requirement that Sedgwick has posited? Art history’s evolution toward the end of the twentieth century into a field concerned with social history has resulted in the move toward an art history also more genuinely concerned with matters of

---

<sup>104</sup> Richard Meyer, *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 277.

<sup>105</sup> Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 3-4.

<sup>106</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 9.

gender and sexuality. Queer art history and visual culture have been developed by a handful of committed scholars, notably Gavin Butt, Amelia Jones, Jonathan D. Katz, Richard Meyer, and Jonathan Weinberg, to name a few, and intersecting with the fields of feminist, postcolonial, queer, performance, sexuality, gender, trans, and masculinity studies.<sup>107</sup> This scholarship reveals that many artists working in the twentieth century did, indeed, develop modes through which to embed sexual identity in their work without compromising their social and professional success, modes that remain relevant to queer artists working today. Butt explains the perceived role, to many of these scholars, of the gay artist in queer art historical narratives, stating that:

... the gay artist is appealed to as the “truth” of the work’s meaning, the paintings themselves cast as confessional texts which speak to their maker’s gay subjectivity in hidden or coded language... “disclosure” is the preferred metaphor here, implying that the hermeneutic job at hand is one of unearthing, of making visible what is hidden, of making the silenced gay self “speak.”<sup>108</sup>

Butt asserts that, in many ways, “academic inquiry into matters queer” is intended to serve the pursuit of historical truth.<sup>109</sup> However, this truth is not based solely on the evidential, but on “a mixture of biographical and iconographical analysis in making such gay subjects belatedly present, both to the contemporary viewer of the works of art in question, as well as within the disciplinary narratives of the art historical record.”<sup>110</sup> Autobiography, as Butt alludes to, would seem to service this project by making the queer self undeniably present. As literature and film studies scholar Julia Lesage argues

---

<sup>107</sup> See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>108</sup> Butt, 5.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Autobiography asserts other kinds of subjective presence in the world than those ordinarily acknowledged. In particular, diaries, journals, and autobiographies fill a special need for people living in adverse circumstances. Those removed from social power use these vehicles of first person expression to articulate the ways that they and others are kept from living a full life.<sup>111</sup>

Autobiography, according to Lesage, empowers the powerless by providing them a forum in which the subject wields control over representation of the self—and of reality—allowing for a telling of experience that serves to benefit the teller over the oppressor or, as postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak articulates, “giving witness to oppression, to a less oppressed other.”<sup>112</sup> After the New Criticism that rejected both biography and intention in textual readings,<sup>113</sup> as well as Barthes’s “The Death of the Author,” which also denied the presence of meaning as derived from authorial intention, contemporary autobiography studies have re-introduced a mode of textual reading that admits first-person accounts into both the text and textual readings.<sup>114</sup>

However, queer scholars contend that the possibilities for queer autobiography remain nevertheless troubled by the lack of queer autobiographical precedence, which introduces the risk of queer autobiographers perpetuating a dominant worldview that ultimately negates queer subjectivity. Queer theorist Brian Loftus explains that

---

<sup>111</sup> Julia Lesage, “Contested Territory in *Finding Christa*,” *Documenting the Documentary*, ed. Barry Grant (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/%7Ejlesage/Juliafolder/CHRISTA.HTML>.

<sup>112</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts and Circumfession,” in *Postcolonialism and Autobiography*, ed. Alfred Hornung and Ernstpeter Ruhe (Amsterdam & Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998), 7.

<sup>113</sup> See William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 3-18.

<sup>114</sup> See Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image, Music, Text*, 142-48.

Queer autobiography ... is a tradition without base of reference. If conventional autobiography documents "the historical forces that pressed persons into certain subjectivities" and so consolidates and constitutes the social space of the speaking "I," ... how can a text consolidate a subject on the grounds of sexuality when that sexuality has no history to document, no proper cultural space and no symbolic categories?<sup>115</sup>

Loftus argues that the spectrum of modes of autobiographical expression still disserves the needs of queer identities. As such, the development of more appropriate modes of expression and of interpretation would arguably compensate for the inadequate representation that has undermined queer autobiography to date. To express resistance to the ways in which conventional autobiography excludes queer lives might be made possible by emphasizing the possibility of pluralistic approaches to autobiography. As Lesage argues, "The self that everyone has is not singular but plural. Selves. And these selves change over time. Contemporary autobiographers, both in literature and in the visual media, try to depict this plurality."<sup>116</sup> To acknowledge this plurality of selves and put it to use might permit queer autobiographers to establish their unique cultural position, to execute and interpret unique codes through which to tell of their experiences, and to reject dominant cultural forces that demand assimilation via the threat of historiographical erasure.

The case for pluralistic approaches to autobiography is further strengthened by Sara Ahmed, who shows that in Sigmund Freud's study, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman," Freud explains his case by constructing a linear narrative

---

<sup>115</sup> Brian Loftus, "Speaking Silence: The Strategies and Structures of Queer Autobiography," *College Literature*, Vol. 24, Issue 1, *Queer Utilities: Textual Studies, Theory, Pedagogy, Praxis* (Feb. 1997), 31, quoting Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 18.

<sup>116</sup> Lesage.

that includes all the possible causes for his subject's homosexuality, so that "the chain of events appears continuous," even though, Ahmed notes, life does not follow such clear linear directives.<sup>117</sup> She counters, "In reading backward, Freud is not simply 'finding a line' but also reading 'for a line.' But what if we read between his lines?"<sup>118</sup> Piontek is also critical of this tendency toward cause-and-effect historiography, arguing against such a possibility in the narratives of the 1969 Stonewall Riots. In commenting on Martin Duberman's supposed "full story"<sup>119</sup> of Stonewall,<sup>120</sup> Piontek states:

[Duberman's] virtually unbroken belief that the historian discovers facts and that history conveys an objective truth can be sustained only by ignoring postmodern arguments that ... "encourage an incredulity towards meta-narratives, trouble closure and resolution, valorize instability, and remain suspicious of coherence."<sup>121</sup>

The implications of linear readings on queer lives, lives that, in themselves, trouble the linear, are problematized by Ahmed. Autobiography might provide the initial avenue through which to begin to speak, but autobiography may nevertheless be useless to queer individuals if its structure cannot reflect the tenuous and fragmented position of the queer in society.

---

<sup>117</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Freud*, vol. 18, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 167.

<sup>118</sup> Ahmed, 72.

<sup>119</sup> Piontek, 25.

<sup>120</sup> Here Piontek is referring to Duberman's *Stonewall*, in which Duberman constructs a narrative of the Riots and their implications on gay liberation based on the accounts of six individuals who were involved in the event. See Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Dutton, 1993).

<sup>121</sup> Piontek, 26, quoting Scott Bravmann, *Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture, and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 31.

## “I” Falls to Pieces

Creating a link between the critical historiographical deconstructions required by Ahmed and Piontek and the place of art in legitimizing queer autobiographical narratives, Feminist scholar Gwen Raaberg argues that, “artists who are culturally marginal may find certain strategies particularly useful in representing that position.”<sup>122</sup> The discourse surrounding collage practice runs a similar course to theories of queer historiography. There is obvious overlap between Fredric Jameson’s claim that collage is “symptomatic of the fragmentation, ‘schizophrenia’, and ahistoricism of postmodern culture”<sup>123</sup> and Chris Beasley’s reminder that, “Queer Theory’s concern with disrupting identity, as well as assumptions about what is central or foundational within society, signals its links to a Postmodern agenda.”<sup>124</sup> Both emphasize the fragmentation and ruptures of postmodern culture, Jameson arguing that collage represents this and Beasley positing that queer theory mirrors it. Can collage, then, subsequently be put to the use of queer theory? In considering the radical collage aesthetic, art historian Lucy Lippard posits that it works at “putting things together without divesting them of their own identities,”<sup>125</sup> and that it suggests “a kind of positive fragmentation ... Collage is born of interruption and the healing instinct to use political consciousness as a glue with which to get the pieces back

---

<sup>122</sup> Gwen Raaberg, “Beyond Fragmentation: Collage as Feminist Strategy in the Arts,” *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, Vol. 31, Issue 3, Winnipeg (Sept. 1998), 154.

<sup>123</sup> Raaberg, 156. See also Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

<sup>124</sup> Chris Beasley, *Gender and Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers* (Sage Publications Inc., 2005), 108.

<sup>125</sup> Lucy Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: New Press, 1995), 209.

into some sort of new order.”<sup>126</sup> This reconfiguration of “pieces” echoes semiologist Susan Stewart’s claim that the collection’s “function is not the restoration of context of origin but rather the creation of a new context, a context standing in metaphorical, rather than contiguous, relation to the world of everyday life.”<sup>127</sup> Lippard and Stewart present a conception of collage that considers the realm of the real but from which its representation is permitted to diverge in conversation and contest with the images the world provides—an ideal situation for a culture disenfranchised by the values of the world-at-large. Jameson argues that postmodern art as a whole, indeed, relies heavily on pastiche, a “rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers,”<sup>128</sup> or what Jacques Rancière calls the “strangeness of the aesthetic experience with the becoming-life of art and the becoming-art of ordinary life.”<sup>129</sup> Taken in tandem with the possibilities for identity construction and affirmation afforded by contemporary autobiography studies, collage might simultaneously signal dissatisfaction with conventional narrative tropes and generate an appropriately queer model through which to amalgamate queer identity and experience.

### **Reading Between the Lines**

Jonathan D. Katz has devoted much of his scholarship to making visible that which is queer in the lives and works of artists working throughout the Cold War and into the Proto-Pop and Pop movements, and most specifically, on what he has called the

---

<sup>126</sup> Lippard, 136, 168.

<sup>127</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 152.

<sup>128</sup> Jameson, 26.

<sup>129</sup> Jacques Rancière, “Problems and Transformations in Critical Art,” in *Participation*, Claire Bishop, ed. (London: MIT Press & Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2006), 84.

“interpictorial dialog” in the work of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg.<sup>130</sup> In “‘Committing the Perfect Crime’: Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art,” Katz examines the intersection of Rauschenberg’s public art and private life, pointing to the markers, in his work, of the dissolution of his marriage to Susan Weil and the rumoured development of his romantic relationship with Cy Twombly. Pausing on Rauschenberg’s *Should Love Come First?*, Katz first considers what Rauschenberg has elected to include in his collage: the imprint of the foot aligned with the waltz diagram from the male position so that the two “feet” denote a male-male waltz; the mapping of time changes relative to Washington, DC—what Katz reads to convey “the measurement of difference from a presumed governing standard—a lovely analogue of Rauschenberg’s increasingly self-conscious straying from the standard of heteronormativity”;<sup>131</sup> and the number 8, circled and repeated, as though expressing an emphasis on identical forms, “seemingly another oblique pictorialization of the attraction of same to same.”<sup>132</sup> In reflecting on Rauschenberg’s use of collage, Katz writes:

in collage, initially flat materials are very easily domesticated pictorially, willing to be reengineered to serve new pictorial purposes largely severed from their original functions, their formal utility to the composition as a whole easily trumping their object nature. This is not to say that the collage materials do not betray an extrapictorial origin—their autonomous sign quality is rarely so completely circumscribed by the new pictorial context—but they do not insist on their original identity, context, or utility. In short, as already flat elements easily married to the support of each other, the collage elements in *Should Love Come First?* barely resist Rauschenberg’s pictorial repurposing.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> See Jonathan D. Katz, “Lovers and Divers: Interpictorial Dialog in the Work of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg,” *Frauen, Kunst, Wissenschaft* 25 (June 1998), 16-31.

<sup>131</sup> Katz, “‘Committing the Perfect Crime’: Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 67, Issue 1 (Spring 2008), 39.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

Katz first emphasizes the materials put to use in Rauschenberg's work but then shifts to analyzing how the materials come to serve new meaning, that of intentionality on Rauschenberg's part. While this in itself is hardly novel, speculation on the particulars of Rauschenberg's intention is. For what Katz ultimately argues is that Rauschenberg's use of collage does, indeed, represent a plurality of selves—Rauschenberg's multiple selves—that, Lesage argues, benefit from contemporary autobiographical discourse. Katz reminds the reader that Rauschenberg's work has consistently been read as highly autobiographical, while Rauschenberg both confirms and denies this reading: In 1959, he writes, "Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made (I try to act in the gap between the two.)"<sup>134</sup> Here, it would seem that Rauschenberg is acknowledging the credibility of autobiographical readings of his work, suggesting that there is an inextricable, intentional link between his work and his life. However, in a 2005 interview with Rosetta Brooks, he becomes more elusive regarding the question of intentionality, owing the outcome of his sculptural collages (known as Combines) to chance:

ROSETTA BROOKS: For some reason, I've always thought that your *Combines* came about because you had a habit of walking round the block before the trash was picked up in the city, collecting what interested you and taking it back to the studio. Is that true?

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG: Yes. That's right. I wanted something other than what I could make myself and I wanted to use the surprise and the collectiveness and the generosity of finding surprises. And if it wasn't a surprise at first, by the time I got through with it, it was. So the object itself was changed by its context and therefore it became a new thing.

RB: Why a surprise?

---

<sup>134</sup> Robert Rauschenberg, quoted in Dorothy Miller, *Sixteen Americans* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), 58.

RR: To feed my curiosity. The objects' uniqueness was what fed my curiosity. They didn't have a choice but to become something new. Then you put them in juxtaposition with something else and you very quickly get a world of surprises.<sup>135</sup>

Although the content of this interview does not necessarily contradict Rauschenberg's 1959 statement regarding his artistic motives, it certainly troubles autobiographical meaning: in 1959 Rauschenberg seems to believe that art and life are conjoined; in 2005, he seems to be saying that what he includes in his art is not necessarily meaningless, but certainly open to meaning, shifting the onus of intention onto the viewer. What I take from this shift in emphasis is a clarification, on Rauschenberg's part, that his work has *always* carried with it a challenge to viewers to make interpretations. In relinquishing his own authorial intention, Rauschenberg permits for a variety of readings, betraying the societal emphasis on truth by constantly obscuring his own.

The relationship that is subsequently formed between representation and interpretation is thereby based in speculation, which, in itself, agitates the conventional limits of truth and fact. Butt, whose *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963* is primarily concerned with the phenomenon of gossip and its discursive power in interpreting art and art movements, argues that the scholarly acceptance of gossip and other forms of unofficial disclosure would benefit the study of queer art history, as it permits for discussions of those aspects of queer life most often omitted from the art historical record, but that are nevertheless implicitly relevant to queer art. Butt finds the unofficial record particularly relevant within the context of the homophobia that pervaded the art world during the mid-twentieth century, but also shows

---

<sup>135</sup> Rosetta Brooks and Robert Rauschenberg, "Round the Block Once or Twice: A Conversation with Rosetta Brooks," *Modern Painters* (December/January 2005), 71.

that it remains relevant to examinations of contemporary art, as well as in contemporary reflections on art produced then. Rather than set up a binary by which fact is verifiable and gossip, unverifiable, Butt positions gossip as a destabilizing supplement, not to be relegated to footnote status, writing that,

By adding in gossip to the category of evidence, by allowing it to supplement the “hard facts” of history, I offer a rethinking of the evidential which deconstructs the bases of authoritative constructs of truth. This I do by allowing the *dangerously* supplemental nature of gossip to displace so-called verifiable truths from their more positivistic frames of reference and to render them, instead, like gossip’s narratives, as projections of interpretative desire and curiosity.<sup>136</sup>

Butt identifies the capacity of gossip to fill in the gaps of official knowledge and to be based in intersubjective exchange, rather than in adherence to the document.<sup>137</sup> He sees a significant difference between an art history that looks for visible iconographic signs in an artwork and his project, which, he claims, “pay[s] heed in what follows to those meanings which exist ... *to the side* of the image; ones which refuse to stabilize as visible sign but which nevertheless come to animate its significance or affect.”<sup>138</sup> Like the “dangerous supplement” Jacques Derrida employs in destabilizing representation, Butt introduces gossip as an agitator whose presence prompts recognition of aspects of visual representation traditionally omitted from the record.<sup>139</sup>

Is it possible that Rauschenberg identified this supplement long before Butt did?

Katz, in demonstrating how Rauschenberg’s artistic choices provided him a venue

---

<sup>136</sup> Butt, 7.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>139</sup> Jacques Derrida develops this concept of the “dangerous supplement” in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

through which to covertly express his sexual identity, seems to suggest this possibility.<sup>140</sup> He reports that Rauschenberg and Johns (believed to be romantically involved at the time) kept Andy Warhol at a distance because they found him “too swish,”<sup>141</sup> and also that Rauschenberg and Johns’s relationship ended as a result of the “embarrassment of being well-known,”<sup>142</sup> of it being gossiped about publicly that “the two most well-known, up and coming studs were affectionately involved.”<sup>143</sup> Rauschenberg and Johns’s relationship was not exactly a secret, but it nevertheless carried with it parameters that dictated the extent to which it could be officially known. In *The Novel and the Police*, D.A. Miller introduces the notion of the “open secret,” stating that, “the fact that the secret is always known—and, in some obscure sense, known to be known—never interferes with the incessant activity of keeping it,” as though there is something advantageous to be gained—or perhaps something detrimental to be avoided—in keeping the secret, all the while acknowledging that one is, indeed, keeping it.<sup>144</sup> Miller claims that the function of this open secret is the result of some other motive entirely, that “... secrecy would seem to be a move whose ultimate meaning lies in the subject’s formal insistence that he is radically inaccessible to the culture that would otherwise entirely

---

<sup>140</sup> It is important to consider the political climate of the era, which saw Communist witch hunts scrutinizing the lives of not only suspected Communists, but also homosexuals. Of the climate, Katz writes, “During the Red Scare, more homosexuals than Communists lost jobs in the Federal government, and homosexuality and its evils became an unprecedented topic of public discourse.” See Katz, “The Art of the Code,” in *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, ed. Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 194.

<sup>141</sup> Kelly M. Cresap, *Pop Trickster Fool: Warhol Performs Naivete* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 73.

<sup>142</sup> Katz, “The Art of the Code,” 190.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 206.

determine him.”<sup>145</sup> What begins as a marker of stigma, that which is to be concealed—what Erving Goffman termed “passing”—originally to safeguard against realistic threats is subsequently imbued with an avant-garde edge and given a subtle opportunity to creep out into the light.<sup>146</sup>

An integral tension exists between the queer art historical project and the continued safeguarding of identity through coding that occurs in queer art. For Rauschenberg, mid-twentieth century, this safeguarding was a matter not only of privacy, but also of a need to bridge another gap: the gap between the limits of sexual expression and the desire for personal validation. To return to the relevance of codes and their intentional employment by homosexuals and queers throughout history, art practice, it can be argued, fulfilled the same purpose. Katz writes

Many gay men knew differently. Branded unnatural by the dominant culture, hounded and persecuted, the limits on their individuality were enforced by law. Gay men were therefore keenly aware of the limitations of romantic individualism. If the dominant culture offered the myth of self-determinism, a myth central to Abstract Expressionism’s founding ideology, gay men like Rauschenberg never had the luxury of believing in expression as an individual struggle of the will ... Rauschenberg’s art would soon come to reflect the insights born of marginality, refusing a painted world in favor of opening up the canvas to the detritus of culture.<sup>147</sup>

According to Katz, expanding the parameters of the canvas permitted Rauschenberg to concurrently expand the art world from which he was displaced. However,

---

<sup>145</sup> Miller, 195.

<sup>146</sup> Related to this discussion of the open secret and passing is the queer conception of “The Closet” and “coming out of the closet”—a fitting example of the open secret, in that an individual might speculate on another’s remaining “in the closet” and yet, the individual in the closet is permitted to guard their “secret” by remaining in the closet. See Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>147</sup> Katz, “The Art of the Code,” 195.

Rauschenberg's artistic innovations certainly complicate the interpretative methods of visual representation. The very fact that Rauschenberg destroyed *Should Love Come First?* is not in itself revelatory; Rauschenberg was known to destroy his work (notably, the silk screens he used on canvas, in an attempt to avoid repeating himself<sup>148</sup>). But Katz speculates that the destruction of *Should Love Come First?* may have been the result of Rauschenberg's belief that the collage elements of the painting were too pictorial, "betray[ed] an inescapably controlling hand and thus—dangerous, given the homoerotic subject matter and the historical context—point back to an author, to Rauschenberg himself."<sup>149</sup> Before his death in 2008, Rauschenberg had neither confirmed, nor denied, the nature of his relationships with Twombly and Johns, or of there being explicitly homosexual subject matter in his work. Queer readings of his life and work have nevertheless proliferated based on the unofficial record, and the understanding of some readers of his work of the cultural signifiers present. To Katz, assemblage

... is the perfect medium for committing the perfect crime, the one where you do not get caught—caught in authoriality, intentionality, or worse still, self-revelation, not least when the subject in question includes desires actively persecuted under conventional social codes.<sup>150</sup>

It would seem that Rauschenberg agreed: at the symposium accompanying the *Art of Assemblage* show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961, Rauschenberg had the following to say to exhibition organizer William Seitz:

---

<sup>148</sup> Dorothy Seckler and Robert Rauschenberg, "Robert Rauschenberg interview, 1965 Dec. 21," Smithsonian Archives of American Art,

<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/rausch65.htm>.

<sup>149</sup> Katz, "'Committing the Perfect Crime,'" 43.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG: Also, being a good artist is like committing the perfect crime—you don't get caught.

WILLIAM SEITZ: I'm talking about crimes you get caught for.

RR: That's not art.<sup>151</sup>

### **Truth in Fiction**

Rauschenberg's legacy and the critical queer methodology that has come to be applied to his work might contribute to an understanding of how queer artists working in the present day have similarly activated a speculative queer methodology. Sedgwick claims that queer effectively exists only when attached to the first person. If queer individuals in past generations had to initiate a certain disconnect from the queer aspect of their identities, then there is a sense in which, if we agree with Sedgwick, this resulted in "unformed" selves. However, now fifty years removed from the era of Rauschenberg's artistic acts of coding, the limits of queer disclosure have been expanded, the repercussions of this disclosure made less severe. This is not to say that there are no longer systemic or social barriers to full queer disclosure (indeed, violence continues to be committed against queers and queer communities), but rather, that activist and cultural work done over the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first has facilitated the formation of strong queer communities and alliances that permit more fluid explorations of sexual and gender identity. The very inception of the label "queer," as is explained in the introduction, is owed to a move in the 1990s toward identity politics activism that emphasized sexual and gender agency, highlighting the destabilized and

---

<sup>151</sup> Robert Rauschenberg, in unpublished transcript of the symposium on assemblage organized by William Seitz following the *Art of Assemblage* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, 1961, as quoted in Katz, "'Committing the Perfect Crime,'" 45.

destabilizing position of non-normative genders and sexuality in society. This growing legacy remains foundational to contemporary queer identities. Queer autobiography shows how queer lives are both formed *and* come to be told. Barbara Steiner and Jun Yang write that,

[The current] concept of identity is quite different from the one that underlay earlier autobiographical research, whose starting-point was the assumption of a fully formed identity—a completed self, looking back on how it was shaped over the years. Now identity must be seen as contingent and forever incomplete, continually changing as it generates and regenerates itself. Thus, to write an autobiography means, in essence, to write one's own identity.<sup>152</sup>

Steiner and Yang contribute to the understanding of contemporary autobiography as reflective of the fragmented, postmodern condition—what Beasley argues envelopes queer identities. But what they add to the discussion is the argument that autobiography also plays an active role in identity's very development. The lack of precedence for queer autobiography may actually be the impetus for the development of alternative strategies of identity expression that simultaneously expand on the radical ways in which artistic avenues for identity expression can be put to use.

Rauschenberg's place in this chapter hinges on what I regard as a clever move, on Rauschenberg's part, to infiltrate queerly into what Butt has called a heterosexist art history "which has admitted only stories about normative masculinity as legitimate artistic narratives," his work hinting at sexual divergence while camouflaging him against social and professional discrimination through an exercise in coding.<sup>153</sup> Montreal-based emerging artist Kim Kielhofner appeals to this study for several reasons. For one, there is

---

<sup>152</sup> Barbara Steiner and Jun Yang, *Art Works: Autobiography* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 16.

<sup>153</sup> Butt, 3-4.

an obvious formal similarity between her collage work and Rauschenberg's, as well as what appears to be a similar tactical approach to collage and the possibilities for communication it affords queer artists. However, while Kielhofner reactivates Rauschenberg's coding project for the new queer generation and, to this effect, produces an intergenerational relationship that strengthens queer history, Kielhofner's collages also activate imagination. In doing so, Kielhofner shows how autobiography can be used to undermine historical objectivity and privilege subjective truth.

Kielhofner's art practice is varied in scope and, like Rauschenberg's evades unanimous interpretation, in part because of the way Kielhofner recycles previous work into new compositions, media, and configurations, resulting in ongoing transformations of the message as a whole. While a work's original manifestation may assume the form of traditional collage, from there Kielhofner may photograph or scan the collage, transform it into digital collage, photograph this collage as it appears on her blog, and place this photograph into another notebook collage. Original meaning becomes difficult to extract as images are obscured, made less prominent, brought into focus, and resituated among other images. As video artist and curator Anne Golden reflects on Kielhofner's frenetic practice:

Kielhofner is working at a fast pace, offering images that we barely register but which still contribute to an overall impression. Her videos are like stories being displayed on the far edges of our retinas, fleeting and elusive but meaningful and weighty. At some point, I stop trying to shoehorn her videos into my own narrative readings ... It is like watching a compendium, a flipbook narrative.<sup>154</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> Anne Golden, "The Ambulant Flipbook Museum (Some of) the videos of Kim Kielhofner," *No More Potlucks*, No. 3 (mai – June 2009) <http://nomorepotlucks.org/article/ego/ambulant-flipbook-museum-some-videos-kim-kielhofner>.

Golden's conception of Kielhofner's work as a "flipbook narrative" is apt: a lack of understanding of each individual element that comprises Kielhofner's configurations is mitigated by shifting the emphasis toward process—like the process of activating a flipbook's animated end result, a process that positions the user as co-author in creating meaning. Several of Kielhofner's projects seem pathological: *The Black Book Project* comprises countless black notebooks filled with intricate collage works that function as visual diaries or, perhaps more accurately, visual archives by which the most important aspect of the project seems to be the act of collecting itself—the preservation of objects and images from life that, when grouped together, come to hold autobiographical meaning. Golden similarly comments on this aspect of Kielhofner's practice, writing:

I think of Kielhofner's work as offering glimpses into her personal image bank. She serves the function of curator for her archive of images but does not generally impose meaning. Ultimately, I am a flawed viewer enjoying direct references ... less direct ones ... and processing the overall impact of images and voice.<sup>155</sup>

As Kielhofner's work is conveyed through traditionally diaristic mediums—on her blog and in her notebooks—it seems safe to approach it through an autobiographical lens. But this is also collage work, so it is important to point out in that Kielhofner has, to some extent, intentionally chosen her objects. Between these two aspects of the work, we might come to regard it as not only autobiographical in how life is conveyed, but also autobiographical in the sense that Steiner and Yang emphasize, which is as it attempts to construct the self.

---

<sup>155</sup> Golden.

Telling the truth about the self, autobiography theorist Philippe Lejeune argues, is actually fantasy, a “complex articulation of both the subject and its unconscious desire in a shifting field of desires and wishes,” rendering the act of autobiography one not grounded in factual events but in the subliminal desires of the author.<sup>156</sup> Autobiography theorist Paul John Eakin points to the distinct ways in which autobiographies are read, from historians and social scientists who seek out factual, verifiable content, to literary critics who promote autobiography as an “imaginative art.”<sup>157</sup> Autobiographers, Eakin argues, “perform willy-nilly as both artists and historians, negotiating a narrative passage between the freedoms of imaginative creation on the one hand and the constraints of biographical fact on the other.”<sup>158</sup> He goes on to assert autobiographical truth to be not fixed, but rather, constantly evolving in a process of self-discovery and self-creation, a process by which the self at “the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure.”<sup>159</sup> Memory, Eakin continues, no longer serves the autobiographer as a repository from which the past can be drawn; rather, the autobiographer regards the autobiographical act as one by which the “materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness.”<sup>160</sup> Autobiography, in this light, functions not only to chronicle what has happened and what has been thought and felt, but also to construct identities that mingle with what one aspires—and *inspires*—to

---

<sup>156</sup> Philippe Lejeune, quoted in Victor Burgin, “Fantasy,” in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Blackwell Books, 1992), 84.

<sup>157</sup> Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 3.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

have happened or been thought or felt, like a Lacanian mirror through which the author *finally* recognizes the self.<sup>161</sup>

Determining the possibilities afforded by the unofficial record in making visible crucial aspects of queer identity also serves to establish how best to interpret it. To this end, we need here to acknowledge the space that a pluralistic approach to autobiographical representation opens up to the imagination, and how both real *and* imagined identities and experiences comprise queer subjecthood. While Paul de Man argues against the possibility of language ever being fully able to accurately represent reality,<sup>162</sup> James Olney asserts that while it is possible to know the truth of the writer through the autobiography they write, said truth should not be read as fact.<sup>163</sup> Olney demands of autobiography that its referent exist, while de Man suggests that it is possible that “the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life.”<sup>164</sup> In returning to the autobiographical possibilities of collage, what are the implications of these disparate arguments? Olney’s demand for the referent may be met in introducing

---

<sup>161</sup> Jacques Lacan’s “mirror stage” was first posited to be the stage in which the infant’s Ego is formed via their identification with his or her own image, but also the stage in which the infant comes to confirm his or her own image via proximity to the “other,” classically a parent, traditionally the mother. Also relevant to this study is Lacan’s closely tied theorization of the Imaginary Order, by which the individual creates fantasy images of him or herself, as well as his or her ideal object of desire, a process that continues throughout the individual’s life. See Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 75–81.

<sup>162</sup> See Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) and “Autobiography as De-Facement,” *Modern Language Notes* 94, No. 5 (December 1979), 919–30, reprinted in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 67–81.

<sup>163</sup> See James Olney, ed. “Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction,” *Autobiography, Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3–27.

<sup>164</sup> de Man, “Autobiography as De-Facement,” 69.

the relationship between the artwork and the artist, the artist who has committed her experience in the world to the page. In Kielhofner's collages we find not only fabricated representation but also evidential documents that anchor her work to lived experience. To Olney, this would seem to substantiate autobiographical representation based in reality. But de Man is also correct in his argument that the autobiographical project may produce and determine the life: a life that Kielhofner is not able to live in reality can be experienced, in her collaged configuration, without reference to reality. Somewhere in between the two, though, exists autobiographical theory—as Eakin, Lejeune, and Steiner and Yang argue—that recognizes how this tension can ultimately service the construction of multilayered identities, of pluralistic selves.

Further complicating this lack of consensus is the introduction of new technology for representing the self, such as blogs, which Kielhofner employs in her practice. Julie Rak argues, "... the activity of blogging itself, like offline activity, produces its own subjects, whose relationships to offline discourses of truth and reality are designed to create identity as its special effect."<sup>165</sup> Kielhofner's choice to also work with more traditional mediums—the notebooks, in particular—would seem to anchor the blog work to an official referent, one that positions the virtual as being rooted in a 'more' authoritative point of origin, a relationship reflective of what Jean Baudrillard calls "an escalation of the true, of lived experience, a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared."<sup>166</sup> However, just as Butt "offer[s] a rethinking of

---

<sup>165</sup> Julie Rak, "The Digital Queer: Weblogs and Internet Identity," *Biography* 28.1 (Winter 2005), 180.

<sup>166</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 257.

the evidential which deconstructs the bases of authoritative constructs of truth” through his elevation of the function of gossip in art history, so, too, does Kielhofner agitate the evidential by prompting us to believe in truth; the notebook collages may here become more ‘true’ simply because the virtual collages, by virtue of being virtual, are less ‘verifiably’ true.<sup>167</sup>

Just as Katz argues to be the case in Rauschenberg’s *Should Love Come First?*, there are particularly queer connotations to Kielhofner’s object choices. A glimpse at Kielhofner’s blog provides the most comprehensive understanding of her production and introduces a cast of characters that appear frequently in her work. Joan of Arc, Saint Sebastian, and Kathy Acker transcend time and place to make cameo appearances. Photographs of pets—dogs, cats, and guinea pigs—lay alongside photographs, drawings and screenshots of animals, both domestic and wild, elevated to the significance of the human figures due to their proximity to the depictions of the artist, who is represented over and over again in a variety of modes: drawings, straight photography, and screen shots, collaged and photo-montaged consistently throughout the notebooks as represented on the blog. Joan of Arc has been chosen because of Carl Dreyer’s film *Jeanne d’arc*, as it provides, in Kielhofner’s opinion, “one of the most intense studies of the face that [she has] seen.”<sup>168</sup> It is fitting, then, that so many of the pictures of Kielhofner are imbued with the same closeness and intensity, as though each portrait of Kielhofner reveals something novel about her. Saint Sebastian is of interest to Kielhofner because “of the homoerotic imagery that is used with him and continues into contemporary times ... he is used as the saint of HIV/AIDS (the plague) (unofficially of course) and

---

<sup>167</sup> Butt, 7.

<sup>168</sup> Kim Kielhofner, e-mail to author, March 13, 2007.

homosexuality.”<sup>169</sup> His image is also positioned prominently, as can be seen in Kielhofner’s video *Sea of Possibilities* (a title that nods to 70s feminist punk icon Patti Smith) in the form of a large tattoo that runs down Kielhofner’s left arm. Saint Sebastian, then, exists for Kielhofner in many layers: internally, corporeally, virtually. Of Joan of Arc and Saint Sebastian, Kielhofner writes, “both these figures ... represent pain and suffering.”<sup>170</sup> Acker makes her appearance in the video *Legions of Horribles* (a title borrowed from Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* and also the name of one of Kielhofner’s artist books<sup>171</sup>), in which Kielhofner appropriates Acker’s text and sets it to her own montage of images—employing Acker’s own ploy of appropriation and introducing the question of interpretation—as well as reinterpretation and the relational—into her self-representation. Kielhofner’s family and friends remain, for the most part, out of the virtual picture. But in her virtual world, her own cast of characters—real, historical, imagined—make excellent stand-ins.

What can we make of this cast of characters and of their anachronistic turn?

Surely, they appeal to Kielhofner in large part due to their iconic queer status. But the process by which Kielhofner levels them to mingle among her pets, her sketches, and herself signals toward not only intergenerational collaboration, but also a process by

---

<sup>169</sup> Kielhofner.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> Kielhofner references *Blood Meridian* for her perception of it as a “nomadic novel of a band of roughs... the novel very much is about violence, fragmentation... I liked how the phrase sounded and wanted to use it for ideas of the nomadic, the abject, alienation.” (Kielhofner, e-mail to author). This notion is confirmed in McCarthy’s description of the legion of horribles: “A legion of horribles, hundreds in number, half naked or clad in costumes attic or biblical or wardrobed out of a fevered dream with the skins of animals and silk finery and pieces of uniform still tracked with the blood of prior owners...” McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* or *The Evening Redness in the West* (London: Picador, 1990), 52.

which Kielhofner's guests become vernacular—or Kielhofner, venerable. Avenging her fallen heroes, Kielhofner takes it upon herself to alter the playing field, to demand more of her world than what has been historically entitled to her.

### **Queer Infiltrators**

Cultural Studies scholar Jakki Spicer theorizes that, “Autobiography insists that the figure of the individual be *imagined* as a reality...”<sup>172</sup> Both Rauschenberg and Kielhofner put collage to the service of autobiography, but with different emphases: for Rauschenberg, collage purportedly enabled a covert form of queer expression that did not carry with it the requirement that he compromise himself in his art, even if he had to compromise himself in his public life; for Kielhofner, collage permits for a social restructuring altogether, by which Kielhofner authors her own reality to service her ideological conception of the world. As queer infiltrators, Rauschenberg and Kielhofner not only create the environments for their own queer expression, but also incite us to attempt to interpret them in ways that preserve the intentions of the artists, even when they are reticent to make these intentions ultimately known. It is left up to the viewer, Spicer argues, to “decide whether what they are reading refers to what had once existed in the world, in the life and/or mind of the author; whether it is an entirely self-contained textual universe; or whether it exists in some middling ground between the two.”<sup>173</sup> Through autobiographical construction, Rauschenberg and Kielhofner point to the possibility of inherently speculative relationships between artists, artworks, and

---

<sup>172</sup> Jakki Spicer, “The Author is Dead, Long Live the Author: Autobiography and the Fantasy of the Individual,” *Criticism*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Summer 2005), 400.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 388.

interpreters, relationships that expand the domain of representation to accommodate queer artists on their own terms.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Queer Art on the Beat: Radical Queer Mobilization on Toronto's Queen Street West

By queer culture we mean a world-making project, where 'world', like 'public', differs from community or group because it necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright. The queer world is a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies. – Laurent Berlant and Michael Warner<sup>174</sup>

#### How to Have Queer in an Exhibition

The analysis of queer aesthetics from a variety of theoretical standpoints reveals its troubled, and troubling, position in aesthetic discourse. This position has been anchored through close examinations of certain paradigmatic works that introduce both obstacles and solutions to queer art display. This chapter will demonstrate how queer aesthetics further evades conventional analysis due to its ideologically conflicted relationship to mainstream institutional and public space. Certainly, curatorial attempts to exhibit queer art have been and continue to be made, but is queerness, as it has been theorized throughout this study, necessarily compromised? In regard to the institutional space that is the museum, artist Carrie Moyer argues that, "It isn't possible for a museum to be queer on a consistent basis. By the time the artwork gets into the collection, the so-called transgressive moment has already passed."<sup>175</sup> Does Moyer's statement affirm a

---

<sup>174</sup> Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Intimacy (Winter 1998), 558.

<sup>175</sup> Gay City News.

reality about the implicit outsider position of queer art, or does it challenge the limits of curatorial practice and exhibition space?

To answer these questions, I want to consolidate my research to conceptualize a space in which queer art can be appropriately accommodated and encountered. My Introduction theorized possible reasons why it remains difficult to integrate queer art into mainstream exhibition space, citing issues of vagueness or instability of categories, censorship, lack of access or cuts to funding for queer shows, as well as the problem flagged by Moyer: the loss of queerness at the hands of institutional assimilation. Chapters One and Two considered the work of four artists—David Wojnarowicz, Emily Roysdon, Robert Rauschenberg, and Kim Kielhofner—to demonstrate that queer artists seem to be acutely aware of these dangers, as evidenced by the employment of queer cultural codes, the mobilization of queer artists into autonomous communities, and the continued commitment to preserving queer legacies and the radical politics that inform them. However, while these efforts advance artistic production and interpretation, there has been little analysis of problems of dissemination. Of the four artists discussed, Rauschenberg arguably achieved the most commercial success, Jerry Saltz going so far as to suggest that Rauschenberg may even be “the American Picasso.”<sup>176</sup> But of these four artists, Rauschenberg is also the artist who most guardedly concealed his sexual identity. Wojnarowicz’s acclaim can in part be attributed to an institutional perception of the artist as a rebel hero of his generation and an outspoken voice during the first decade of the AIDS crisis, but an argument can be made that the whole of the avant-garde art canon rests on the valorization of radical markers. These examples show how queer art from

---

<sup>176</sup> Jerry Saltz, “Our Picasso?” *The Village Voice* (Tuesday, January 3, 2006), <http://www.villagevoice.com/2006-01-03/art/our-picasso/>.

past decades has struggled to affirm its unique identity, only to be swiftly co-opted into mainstream institutional frameworks.

Both of these chapters speculate on the ways that queer artists have used the art object to occupy ideological space. However, it remains to be seen how these ideological conceptions might be made physically manifest. Attempts to corporealize the concepts of imagined communities and Queer Nation are rife with problems; the expansiveness of the so-called “Queer Nation” makes it realistically impossible to contain, or even to delineate. Similarly, the empty spaces opened up by relational art practices exist only ideologically, often trespassing temporal and spatial lines. Jürgen Habermas’s notion of a systemic radical participatory democracy currently exists as a governing system only in the minds and microtopic communities that are formed by radicalism’s activist army. Without a spatial model, it becomes difficult to conceive of what a radical queer physical space might actually *look* like, if conceptions of this space could ever be universalized, and what steps could even be taken, first to secure it, then to preserve it. Moyer’s contention that queer cannot exist within the institution is, in a sense, refuted by such artists as Brian McGrath, who argues that, “‘Queer’ space exists potentially everywhere in the public realm ... [that] it is the individual’s appropriation of the public realm through personal, ever-changing points of view.”<sup>177</sup> Is it possible for both of these stances to be true?

This chapter seeks to reconcile the social position of the queer artist with these two opposing positions by introducing what cultural theorists Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner call “queer world-making” as a performative methodology that can

---

<sup>177</sup> McGrath, unpaginated.

contribute to an understanding of the work that queer artists do and do not do.<sup>178</sup> Drawing on theories of the impact of gentrification on cultural mobilization developed by David Ley as influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural and economic capital, I will chronicle the transformation of Toronto's West Queen Street West gallery strip, from its designation as a locus of DIY-spirited creative energy in the 1970s and 1980s, through the resulting shifts in the strip's makeup due to gentrification, to its present day uses as a site of commercial tourism and arts commercialism. Arguing that the galleries on this strip are complicit in this cyclical process, I will show how the convergence of queer art spaces and practices on Queen Street West—places such as Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Paul Petro Special Projects Space, and the now-defunct Zsa Zsa gallery—simultaneously practice queer world-making, or a queer *Gesamtkunstwerk*, by innovating discursive queer space and welcoming queer tourism to subvert public perception of the uses of the strip.<sup>179</sup>

### **The Old (New) Guard**

Attempting to create an art movement, community, or identity completely removed from dominant society may very well be a futile task. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu points to the intersubjective relationship between the artist, the art world, and

---

<sup>178</sup> Berlant and Warner, 558.

<sup>179</sup> The *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a term traceable to Richard Wagner's 1849 essay "Art and Revolution" and attempted by Wagner in his operatic productions, refers to the "total work of art": the intention to create an art experience fusing disparate elements into a unified whole and engaging all of the senses. See Wagner, "Art and Revolution," as well as Wagner, "The Art-Work of the Future," (1849) where he expands his meaning of the concept. A socially and politically relevant update on the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is provided by Annette Michelson in "Where Is Your Rupture?": Mass Culture and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*," *October*, Vol. 56, High/Low: Art and Mass Culture (Spring, 1991), 42-63.

the social conditions that produce the art world as imbuing the artwork with value. He writes:

The quasi-magical potency of the [artist's] signature is nothing other than the power, bestowed on certain individuals, to mobilize the symbolic energy produced by the functioning of the whole field, ie. the faith in the game and its stakes that is produced by the game itself.<sup>180</sup>

According to Bourdieu, it is not possible for the artwork to exist independently of the society that informs its production. Thus, meaning is determined through a parasitic relationship whereby dominant culture influences the production of elements that comprise it. Even the most radical and emancipated arts communities gain their radical edge via their resistance to the dominant art world. The recent history of Toronto's Queen Street West serves as an exemplary model of this relationship and parallels this phenomenon as it applies to the strip's present day queer interventions.

Queen Street West, once part of Toronto's garment district, has been the site of several generations of cultural occupation. The 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a migration of cultural activity away from the Yorkville, Annex, and Riverdale neighbourhoods to the west side of town.<sup>181</sup> During this time, several disparate arts communities responded to the relative lack of venues in which to show (the three main ones being A Space Gallery, Carmen Lamanna, and Isaacs Gallery) and a belief that Canada lacked an art scene of its own by mobilizing on Queen Street West, first at bars such as the Beverley Tavern and with General Idea (GI) at the core of this coming

---

<sup>180</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 81.

<sup>181</sup> David Ley, "Artists, Aestheticisation and the Field of Gentrification," *Urban Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 12 (November 2003), 2540.

together. As GI member AA Bronson relates in “The Humiliation of the Bureaucrat,” his personal chronology of the development, in the early 1970s, of Canada’s own artistic identity:

As such a Canadian artist desiring to see not necessarily himself, but the picture of his art scene pictured on TV; and knowing the impossibility of an art scene without real museums ... without real art magazines ... without *real* artists ... as such an artist desiring such a picture of such a scene ... it was natural to call upon our national attributes—the bureaucratic tendency and the protestant work ethic—and working together, and working sometimes not together we laboured to structure, or rather to untangle from the messy post-Sixties spaghetti of our minds, artist-run galleries, artists’ video, and artist-run magazines. And that allowed us to allow ourselves to see ourselves as an art scene. And we did.<sup>182</sup>

Art critic Earl Miller points to GI’s 1977 move to Simcoe Street (just south of Queen Street) and their founding of *FILE* “Megazine” as critical moments in the formation of the Queen West arts community: GI’s social notoriety and the way in which *FILE* set out to chronicle and promote this new scene, in effect, gave birth to the scene. Miller writes, “From its first issue on, *FILE* was a progenitor of the cultural changes—artistic, political, sexual and musical—that the postmodern movement embodied.”<sup>183</sup> Miller also sees in *FILE* an early queer sensibility; the megazine featured

numerous bondage, leather and drag references and images: like those of the artist Michael Morris, a.k.a. Marcel Idea, who won the 1971 Miss General Idea beauty pageant, or the ongoing use of a fetish motif, the word appearing in various layouts and on GI’s black Fetish T-shirts.<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>182</sup> AA Bronson, “The Humiliation of the Bureaucrat: Artist-run Spaces as Museums by Artists,” in *From Sea to Shining Sea*, ed. AA Bronson with René Blouin, Peggy Gale, Glenn Lewis (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1987), 164.

<sup>183</sup> Earl Miller, “File Under Anarchy: A Brief History of Punk Rock’s 30-Year Relationship with Toronto’s Art Press,” *C: International Contemporary Art*, No. 88 (Winter 2005), 33.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

*FILE* also came to feature “BZZZ, BZZZ, BZZZ,” a gossip column and, in 1975, what has come to be perceived as GI’s manifesto, whereby they wrote:

We wanted to be artists and we knew that if we were famous and glamorous we could say we were artists and we would be... We knew Glamour was not an object, not an action, not an idea. We knew Glamour never emerged from the ‘nature’ of things. There are no glamorous people, no glamorous events. We knew Glamour was artificial. We knew that in order to be glamorous we had to become plagiarists, intellectual parasites.<sup>185</sup>

GI’s belief in “Glamour” being born of a sort of cultural recycling points to a critical embeddedness within a larger culture and the coming to self-recognition via resistance—an interest in consuming society’s assumptions in order to project something radically new. GI’s founding, in 1974, of Art Metropole as a distribution site for artist books and ephemera helped to further materialize the national art scene that Canadian artists aspired to create.<sup>186</sup> Other factors have been recognized as contributing to the new energy that came over Toronto’s arts community as newly-anchored in the Queen West neighbourhood: Toronto-based curator Philip Monk argues that the revitalization of the arts community resulted from the 1978 federal and provincial cut to funding to the Centre for Experimental Art and Communication (CEAC) for their purported promotion of the violent overthrow of authority as expressed in the CEAC-associated journal *Strike* (this forced CEAC’s closure in 1980) and the dissolution of A Space’s board preceding its move to Queen West. Each instance, Monk argues, opened up a space for a younger generation of artists to conceptualize what they wanted their art scene to look like, and

---

<sup>185</sup> General Idea, quoted in Diedrich Diederichsen, “Glad Rag,” *Artforum* 40.8 (April 2002), <http://www.aabronson.com/art/gi.org/artforum.htm>.

<sup>186</sup> Art Metropole, “History,” *Art Metropole*, [http://www.artmetropole.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=about.FA\\_dsp\\_history](http://www.artmetropole.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=about.FA_dsp_history).

new spaces, such as the Music Gallery, YYZ, and Mercer Union, came into being.<sup>187</sup>

Monk also notes a burgeoning sense of radical social responsibility, resulting in the cross-community support of such events as the censorship battle fought by Toronto's gay newspaper *The Body Politic*. In her 1986 "What Ever Happened to Queen St. West?" cultural historian Rosemary Donegan comments on the intersecting political, artistic, cultural, and recreational interests of Queen Street West's demographic, writing that:

With the coming of age of the Queen St. West scene, Toronto of the 1980's appears to have developed its own official "art scene," full of budding potential and style. The scene not only focuses on music and the visual arts, but is also associated with theatre, design, fashion, and the perennial favourites—eating, drinking, and dancing. In recent years, the community has also developed a consciousness of black, feminist, gay and lesbian issues.<sup>188</sup>

Donegan's view of the street points to its development from an artist colony to a more overarching way of life for its residents. However, by the time of Donegan's designation of the street as such, the demography had already begun to shift. As Monk writes

Today, the designation "Queen Street" is shorthand for Toronto's downtown entertainment and shopping district... The current boom in administered loft-living trades on the imagined lifestyle of the artists who for the most part no longer live there and who, in fact, started to depart in the mid-1980s in the first wave of suburban discovery and commercial gentrification... art communities dissolve, as Toronto's of that time did. Some deconstruct due to internally motivated ideological disputes; others collapse with the departure of the generation that created the scene; all respond, inventively or disastrously, to the boom and bust of economic cycles.<sup>189</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> Philip Monk, "Picturing the Toronto Art Community: The Queen Street Years," *C: International Contemporary Art*, No 59 (Fall 1998), published in conjunction with the Power Plant exhibition, "Picturing the Toronto Art Community: The Queen Street Years," September 25 – December 20, 1998 and available online at [http://www.yorku.ca/gyu/curate/site\\_design/essays/PicturingToronto.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/gyu/curate/site_design/essays/PicturingToronto.pdf).

<sup>188</sup> Rosemary Donegan, "What Ever Happened to Queen St. West?" *Fuse*, No. 42 (Fall 1986), 10.

<sup>189</sup> Monk. "Picturing the Toronto Art Community."

As Monk sees it, Queen Street West's economic development partly initiated the departure from the neighbourhood of many of the artists and art communities that had originally defined it and had come to be defined by it.

This story is not unique to Queen Street; countless studies of the causes and effects of gentrification position artists at the core of this phenomenon and demonstrate how artists seeking to resist commodification unwittingly participate in its cultural manifestation. As urban studies theorist Richard Florida speculates on this phenomenon:

Look at the cities and regions thriving in today's economy—places such as San Francisco, Seattle, Boston, New York, Minneapolis, Chicago, Paris, Dublin and, yes, Toronto. These regions share some curious traits. They're well-known havens for music from rock to world beat; they're cauldrons for artists of all styles and persuasions. And they are open, tolerant places where gays, bohemians and immigrants want to live.<sup>190</sup>

Urban geographer David Ley attributes two main factors to influence artists' decisions to occupy inner-city neighbourhoods: one is the obvious affordability of these neighbourhoods, and the other is what Ley identifies as the "authenticity"<sup>191</sup> these neighbourhoods provide—a necessary element for the individual with an "aesthetic

---

<sup>190</sup> Richard Florida, "A creative, dynamic city is an open, tolerant city," *The Globe and Mail* (24 June, 2002), T8. Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), *Cities and the Creative Class* (2005), and *The Flight of the Creative Class* (2005) all aim to demonstrate the ways in which "high bohemians" (artists, musicians, GLBTQ individuals, and high-tech workers) influence economic development by creating environments that attract more creative people, businesses, and capital. However, through this emphasis, Florida drew criticism from fiscal and social conservatives who believed Florida's theories to betray both big business and family values. Florida has also been accused of promoting an elitist approach to urban development, one that prioritizes creative people as leaders, and of pushing a predetermined liberal-leaning agenda that overlooks the needs of wants of cities' residents. See Steven Malanga, "The Curse of the Creative Class," *City Journal* (Winter 2004), 36-45, and Jamie Peck, "Struggling with the Creative Class," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 29.4 (December 2005), 740-770.

<sup>191</sup> Ley, "Artists, Aestheticisation and the Field of Gentrification," 2534.

disposition.”<sup>192</sup> This mindset, Ley argues, allows the artist to provide aesthetic valorization to decaying neighbourhoods. Ley writes:

It is the aesthetic eye that transforms ugliness into a source of admiration ... Such an aesthetic sensibility is found particularly among social groups rich in cultural capital but poor in economic capital. At the core of such groups is the urban artist.<sup>193</sup>

Ley follows Bourdieu’s thinking on the relationship between aesthetic disposition and economic and cultural capital, and argues that artists, though disproportionately economically poor despite generally higher levels of education, are nevertheless members of the dominant class. But artists, Ley argues, “are very special members of the middle class for they stretch its imagination, its desires, even its practices, beyond its norms and conventions.”<sup>194</sup> Choosing to live and work in places “valorised as authentic, symbolically rich and free from the commodification that depreciates the meaning of place...”<sup>195</sup> Ley contends, nevertheless becomes a valuable entrepreneurial resource, and “the accrued cultural capital of a location can be traded in for economic capital, as the edge becomes the new centre.”<sup>196</sup>

Artists are not the only ones who occupy this core position; queers are also considered to contribute to the rich development of the cosmopolitan experience as a whole. Studies such as Richard Florida and Gary Gates’s “Technology and Tolerance: The Importance of Diversity to High-Technology Growth” determine that “diversity”,

---

<sup>192</sup> Ley, “Artists, Aestheticisation and the Field of Gentrification,” 2531.

<sup>193</sup> Ley, *The New Middle Classes and the Remaking of the Central City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 301.

<sup>194</sup> Ley, “Artists, Aestheticisation and the Field of Gentrification,” 2533.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 2535.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 2541.

namely, high gay, artist, and immigrant populations, are key factors in the economic growth of cities, with a high “gay index” being the leading indicator of a metropolitan area’s high-technology success.<sup>197</sup> Florida and Gates write, “Gays are frequently cited as harbingers of redevelopment and gentrification in distressed urban neighbourhoods.”<sup>198</sup> Originally drawn to affordable, high-density neighbourhoods away from “property, family and the high class: the old triad of social conservatism,” this first wave of queer settlement tends to be driven out by more affluent gays whose presence ushers in a new wave of development, increased property values, urban appeal for non-homosexual potential buyers, and commercial appeal for both gay *and* non-gay businesses.<sup>199</sup> With this commodification has come a form of queer tourism, undertaken by non-queer visitors, by which queers both become spectacles and are subjected to a policing of their identities and practices to appeal to non-gay audiences. Urban geographer Dereka Rushbrook provides the example of Montreal’s 1992 Pride Parade by which organizers issued “prohibitions against cross-dressing and ‘vulgar’ or ‘erotic’ displays to avoid offending straight spectators,” going on to explain how annual Pride Parades across the world have become major sources of revenue for the cities in which they are held.<sup>200</sup> This cursory explanation highlights the implicit tension that exists between queer communities

---

<sup>197</sup> Richard Florida and Gary Gates, “Technology and Tolerance: The Importance of Diversity to High-Technology Growth,” *The Brookings Institution Survey Series* (June 2001), 2.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>199</sup> Manuel Castells and Karen Murphy, “Cultural Identity and Urban Structure: The Spatial Organization of San Francisco’s Gay Community,” in *Urban Policy Under Capitalism*, ed. Norman Fainstein and Susan S. Fainstein (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1982), 250.

<sup>200</sup> Dereka Rushbrook, “Cities, Queer Space, and the Cosmopolitan Tourist,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 8, Number 1-2 (2002), 191-92.

and their host societies and serves to demonstrate how, like artists, queers attempting emancipation from dominant culture nevertheless end up at its service.

Like artists, queers remain inextricably caught up in urban gentrification, entering into this social and economic relationship, very much as artists do, as an effect of seeking out economic and cultural belonging. As such, queers are often also unable to remain completely emancipated from the mainstream culture from which they are nevertheless detached. This being said, queer urban geographers show how these sites of assimilation also offer ideological opportunities to reclaim and strengthen identity. Rushbrook suggests that the “zones of difference” that are produced within these sites function as what Michel Foucault terms “heterotopias”. She cites Foucault as he elaborates heterotopias to be

countersites where other sites in the culture are “represented, contested, and inverted” ... Foucault notes the bounded and isolated yet permeable nature of these sites, where entry is either compulsory or requires permission; instances in which entry appears open to everyone conceal that “we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded.”<sup>201</sup>

Rushbrook seems to be arguing that, within co-opted spaces, there are aspects of queer identity that remain unattainable to dominant forces by the very nature of their uniqueness to queer experience. The term “queer world-making” also seems to carry this connotation: in “Sex in Public,” Berlant and Warner argue that the formation of hegemonic culture is dependent on both intimacy and the upholding of sexual privacy, pointing to the ways in which this delimits culture as heterosexual. They write:

---

<sup>201</sup> Rushbrook, 185. See also Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986), 22-27.

A complex cluster of sexual practices gets confused, in heterosexual culture, with the love plot of intimacy and familialism that signifies belonging to society in a deep and normal way. Community is imagined through scenes of intimacy, coupling, and kinship; a historical relation to futurity is restricted to generational narrative and reproduction. A whole field of social relations becomes intelligible as heterosexuality, and this privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy. This sense of rightness—embedded in things and not just in sex—is what we call heteronormativity.<sup>202</sup>

Berlant and Warner are quick to elaborate that to be against heteronormativity is not to be against norms, but that to “relax from an artificially stimulated ‘fear of normalcy’” carries with it a sense whereby the “price [people] must pay for social membership and a relation to the future is identification with the heterosexual life narrative.”<sup>203</sup> Berlant and Warner’s mission is to loosen the stranglehold heterosexuality has on innumerable aspects of hegemonic culture by engaging in a queer world-making project, a project they characterize as queer culture. They argue that, “Every cultural form, be it a novel or an after-hours club or an academic lecture, indexes a virtual social world,” a world that subsequently contributes to the concretization of a queer counterpublic.<sup>204</sup> Berlant and Warner note that queer world-making is, in fact, a long-standing project:

Queer insurgents have long striven, often dangerously or scandalously, to cultivate what good folks used to call criminal intimacies. We have developed relations and narratives that are only recognized as intimate in queer culture: girlfriends, gal pals, fuckbuddies, tricks. Queer culture has learned not only how to sexualize these and other relations, but also to use them as a context for witnessing intense and personal affect while elaborating a public world of belonging and transformation.<sup>205</sup>

---

<sup>202</sup> Berlant and Warner, 554.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 557.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 558.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

Acknowledging that affective—in other words, personal, or intimate—life is constantly overlapping with professional or political life, creating so-called “border intimacies,” Berlant and Warner argue that the public sexualization of these intimacies remains a transgressive act.<sup>206</sup> The zones in which this occurs are often regulated by the state but, according to Berlant and Warner, inevitably spill out of their designated areas.<sup>207</sup> Quickly, the zones come to denote more than their pre-determined zoning stipulations would indicate: “A critical mass develops. The street becomes queer. It develops a dense, publicly accessible sexual culture.”<sup>208</sup> Berlant and Warner’s belief in this queer counterpublic serves as a reminder of the distinction between ‘queer’ as a tangible community (eg. Toronto’s “queer community”) and ‘queer’ as an ideological position; it sets limits on the degree to which ‘queer’ can be co-opted by the mainstream, for queer, as an ideology, necessarily evades this co-opting. So, there is a sense in which multiple layers of queer can be enacted in public: some are visible, commodifiable, and there for the taking, while others remain the unique ideological property of those who live

---

<sup>206</sup> Berlant and Warner, 560.

<sup>207</sup> Berlant and Warner cite former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s 1994 development of an antiporn zoning code that delimited the physical parameters of the sex trade business. His code prohibited any sex trade business larger than 10,000 square feet or operating within 500 feet of residences, churches, day-cares, schools, or one another. The city was also granted the right to remove any visible markers of the sex trade that were deemed to not meet the approval of the zoning board. The population density and overlap between residential and commercial zones made the effects of this code immediately predictable: many of the businesses were forced to close. Katherine Liepe-Levinson writes, “Giuliani appeared less interested in actually forbidding the sale of erotic or pornographic goods than in eliminating any explicit *signs* of sexual desire (along with any signs of ‘social trouble’ in all senses of the phrase) from the official map of his city.” See Liepe-Levinson, *Strip Show: Performances of Gender and Desire* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 20.

<sup>208</sup> Berlant and Warner, 562.

‘queerly’, those for whom assimilation is not possible by the very nature of existing outside of heteronormativity.

Queer world-making introduces non-normative sexuality into the public realm, but it also refashions heteronormative culture into something decidedly queer. José Esteban Muñoz emphasizes the performative function of queer world-making, writing that:

The concept of worldmaking delineates the ways in which performances—both theatrical and everyday rituals—have the ability to establish alternate views of the world. These alternative vistas are more than simply views or perspectives; they are oppositional ideologies that function as critiques of oppressive regimes of “truth” that subjugate minoritarian people. Oppositional counterpublics are enabled by visions, “worldviews,” that reshape as they deconstruct reality.<sup>209</sup>

Muñoz argues that world-making is a practice of appropriating hegemonic culture in order to express criticism of it, a practice that results in new worldviews. This practice, what Muñoz calls “disidentification,” maintains the dominant; it “disassemble[s] that sphere of publicity and use[s] its parts to build an alternative reality. Disidentification uses the majoritarian culture as raw material to make a new world.”<sup>210</sup> The discussion at the beginning of this chapter of General Idea’s *FILE* and GI assuming the roles of “plagiarists, intellectual parasites” in constructing glamour shows how this practice has already been put to use by generations of artists who are not content to maintain the

---

<sup>209</sup> Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 195.

<sup>210</sup> Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 196.

cultural status quo. To be a queer artist in mainstream culture provides the conditions for numerous creative acts of disidentification.<sup>211</sup>

### **An Army of Lovers**

Amid the rapid transformation of Queen Street West into a site of mainstream consumerism exists an enclave of queers who both recall the collaborative efforts of their artist ancestors and engage in acts of queer world-making. Dissatisfaction with the perceived inaccessibility of Toronto's commercial, apolitical east end gay village resulted in the 2002 formation of Toronto's Queer West Village and the Queer West Community Network, which is now a registered charity governed by a Board of Directors.<sup>212</sup> An exploration of the Network's website presents an array of activities undertaken in affiliation with the Network: the weekly *Wilde Chats Philosophy Café*, which has been held in various locations in the west end, such as Alternative Grounds, the Gladstone Hotel, and now, Naco Gallery; Queer Peers, a mentor/mentee pairing program for queer youth; and the Queer West Arts Festival, which runs concurrent to but independently of Toronto's Pride Week, showcasing a combination of emerging and established artists and musicians and espousing an anti-corporate vision of Toronto's queer community. This said, the political position of the Network seems to be somewhat moderate: the Queer Peers program, for example, aims to expose queer youth to "healthy lifestyle choices and thus [help] them to set right priorities at the early stages of their lives."<sup>213</sup> While this, in itself, is a constructive program for those who fit into its mandate, it seems to neglect the importance of queer subcultural practices and those who take part in them, instead

---

<sup>211</sup> General Idea, quoted in Diedrich Diederichsen.

<sup>212</sup> Queer West Community Network, <http://queerwest.org/>.

<sup>213</sup> Queer Peers, "Our Mission," <http://www.queerpeers.queerwest.org/>.

presenting somewhat paternalistic goals for its participants and an underlying assimilationist mentality. The Network's mandate makes brief mention of working toward gender parity, but little is said about how to implement this goal, or any broader concept of anti-oppression politics, or its likelihood, given the currently all-white male make-up of the Board of Directors. Though seemingly more active and mobilized than Toronto's Church Street east gay village, the Queer West Community Network still seems to fit respectably within a sanitized picture of the new Queen Street West, leaving itself open to exploitation and transformation by non-queer tourists. The incorporation of the Queer West community by the Queer West Community Network thus seems to have resulted in a public presence whose once radical ideology has been left behind.

But perhaps this is a convenient front for radical queers working along the Queen Street West strip. Queer tourists might be sated by the most easy to digest elements of Queen Street West's queer community, leaving its more difficult manifestations to the neighbourhood's radical queer contingent. This contingent has, in a sense, created another queer community within the neighbourhood, one more specifically rooted in and influencing its present day arts scene. The 1990s saw the inauguration of a new wave of art spaces along Queen Street West, creating a new conglomeration of artist-run centres, not-for-profits, and commercial galleries "engaged with social commentary and dangerous aesthetics" that permitted artists to "flit back and forth between the artist-run centres ... and the commercial galleries run by art dealers ... circling their easels like pioneer wagons against commercial convention while selling work nonetheless."<sup>214</sup> This

---

<sup>214</sup> Kevin Temple, "Toronto needs freakier rich people," *The State of the Arts: Living with Culture in Toronto*, eds. Alana Wilcox, Christina Palassio, and Johnny Dovercourt (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2006), 75.

newfound commercial appreciation of so-called “dangerous aesthetics” has perhaps permitted for the development, preservation, and continued legacy of such galleries as Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Zsa Zsa Gallery, and, after the closure of Zsa Zsa, Paul Petro Special Projects Space, which opened in its place (962 Queen Street West).

Paul Petro Contemporary Art has been a fixture on Queen Street West since 1993. Covering two floors, the gallery represents a combination of established and emerging artists, and the space is usually divided between two shows, with an upstairs room reserved for Petro’s multiples collection—a combination of Petro’s personal ephemera, as well as ephemera collected from some of the artists he represents. This extra room, as well as the backroom kitchen on the ground floor, imbues the space with a sense of home and an air of intimacy somewhat uncommon in commercial gallery space. Down the street from Paul Petro Contemporary Art is Petro’s other venue, Paul Petro Special Projects Space, a small one-floor storefront gallery that opened in 2005 after the closure of Andrew Harwood’s Zsa Zsa Gallery (1998-2005). Harwood, who is one of the founding members of the Toronto Alternative Art Fair International (TAAFI) Collective, is considered to be one of the first artists to establish a queer presence on the Queen Street West strip, no doubt due to the high concentration of queer exhibitions at Zsa Zsa over its seven-year run. Although Harwood’s gallery was arguably the queerer of the two spaces during its run, the continued collaboration between Petro and Harwood’s artists, as well as Harwood himself, has ensured queer representation on the strip. Both Petro and Harwood seem to approach queer art as a curatorial challenge to visually emphasize the ideological, rather than tangible, components of queer identity and communities, favouring installation-based practices that have the effect of creating temporary alternate

realities. The employment of the historically commercial storefront window for artistic ends creates the feeling of looking into a full size diorama—Jacques Louis Mandé Daguerre’s early nineteenth-century invention that predated Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* as an immersive virtual experience. These storefront dioramas portray not a seamless illusion of what is but, rather, what *could be*, or perhaps, what exists in the ideological worlds inhabited in the queer imagination.

An emphasis on performative installations and the recycling of the cultural detritus of mass culture points to the way in which these spaces can be conceived of as discursive venues of disidentification. Art critic Jon Davies credits Harwood as the “grande doyenne” of the strip, and notes the prominence of Zsa Zsa’s storefront performative installations of the Toronto/Creemore-based queer-Witch duo FASTWÜRMS (Kim Kozzi and Dai Skuse).<sup>215</sup> Their use of kitsch, vernacular, high art, and mass culture to create “residual mise[s]-en-scène... of crafting, socializing, play and performance” figured prominently on the strip between 1999 and 2008.<sup>216</sup> Reflecting on two FASTWÜRMS installations at Zsa Zsa, *Unisex House of Bangs* (1999), a hair salon featuring walls covered in wigs and hairdressing tools and featuring FASTWÜRMS and Harwood as hairdressers, and *Blood and Swash* (2002), where an ideological tattoo parlour was set up, and needles were replaced with pen and marker, Davies writes:

Attesting to Zsa Zsa’s openness and its status as an interactive, semi-public space, its bite-size floor plan blending with the street life outside, the hair salon and the tattoo parlour were service-oriented projects where enthusiasm trumped expertise and everyone who walked in—artists, queers, mental health patients and neighbourhood residents—could depart transformed, not only by

---

<sup>215</sup> Jon Davies, “Props to the Fairy People,” *C: International Contemporary Art*, No. 98 (Summer 2008), 27.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

their new 'do and Sharpie tattoo, but by the class-mixing, queer-inflected sociability encountered within.<sup>217</sup>

This sense of “queer-inflected sociability” has also thrived in the queer installations featured at Petro’s two galleries, where samplings of the various segments that comprise the queer community have been represented through a combination of art, ephemera, and props creating the scene. Queer textile and installation artist Allyson Mitchell’s *Lady Sasquatch* installation was featured at Paul Petro Contemporary Art in 2005 and featured a combination of furs, fun furs, sculptural and embroidered sexualized half-human, half-animal figures amid a backdrop of vernacular objects that created a kitsch-inflected wilderness environment (fig. 23). As art critic Helena Reckitt describes the scene:

Mixing elements from natural history displays, roadside sculptures and 70s rec rooms, the installation’s faux diorama housed 9-foot creatures with teddy-bear eyes and snouts, opulent curves and multi-teat breasts upholstered in fun fur, baring their incisors in mock scary poses. A fake fire and a corner sofa draped with homely fabrics, flanked by plastic ornamental trees, encouraged thoughts of lounging, snacking and making out.<sup>218</sup>

A curatorial pattern can be discerned in the similarities between FASTWÜRMS’s use of mass culture’s objects and their use by Mitchell for similarly queer ends. Calling on her own adolescent memory of mainstream sexual imagery, Mitchell appropriates this reserve to reflect her sexual reality, “recycling for dykey ends images that were intended for straight men”<sup>219</sup> in a manner that exemplifies Eve Sedgwick’s account of “the many

---

<sup>217</sup> Davies, 29

<sup>218</sup> Helena Reckitt, “My Fuzzy Valentine: Allyson Mitchell,” *C: International Contemporary Art*, No. 89 (Spring 2006), 15.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them.”<sup>220</sup>

Queer group shows, such as the 2006 *Queercore Punk Archive*, curated by GB Jones and Petro at the Special Projects Space (fig. 24), and the 2008 *Wild Things*, Paul Petro’s annual Pride exhibition also at the Special Projects Space, attest to queer world-making as a ‘family’ affair. *Queercore Punk Archive* was comprised of Jones’s personal collection of posters, zines, record sleeves, and correspondence that document the queer punk movement perceived to have originated in the 1980s with the founding, by Jones and Bruce LaBruce, of the zine *JDs*. Jones reflects on Toronto’s gay scene at the time: “You were supposed to look a certain way, you were supposed to behave a certain way... Anything outside of those very narrow parameters was scoffed, your politics were scoffed at. And the fact that you were really poor didn’t help either.”<sup>221</sup> Seeking refuge in the punk scene, Jones and LaBruce came up against more resistance—this time, for being gay. As LaBruce explains, “... that made us even more marginalized and more angry, because we rejected the gay community and we were rejected by punks. So we were doubly alienated.”<sup>222</sup> The Paul Petro installation visually reflected the ad-hoc community created by likeminded queers through the linking of ephemera plastered across the gallery walls by pieces of black tape decorated with silver arrows. The grid-like image wall also

---

<sup>220</sup> Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,” *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, ed. Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 151-2.

<sup>221</sup> GB Jones, quoted in Sholem Krishtalka, “We are Queercore: Toronto Punks / A ‘porntastic fantasy’ made flesh,” *Xtra!* (Thursday, January 4, 2007), [http://www.xtra.ca/public/viewstory.aspx?AFF\\_TYPE=3&STORY\\_ID=2528&PUB\\_TEMPLATE\\_ID=2](http://www.xtra.ca/public/viewstory.aspx?AFF_TYPE=3&STORY_ID=2528&PUB_TEMPLATE_ID=2).

<sup>222</sup> Bruce LaBruce, quoted in Krishtalka.

served a mapping function by grouping documents according to geographic origin, “capturing the more-or-less spontaneous creation of self-made culture across a continent.”<sup>223</sup> The *Wild Things* show, which featured John Abrams, Patrick DeCoste, FASTWÜRMS, Clint Griffin, Andrew Harwood, Matthias Herrmann, Sholem Krishtalka, Allyson Mitchell, and Will Munro, also defended the ideological tenets of radical queer communities. It was displayed in the gallery during Pride Week—what has arguably become the most blatant display of gay commercialism in cities across North America. The show’s description reads:

“Wild Things” ...the concept came from Maurice Sendak’s “Where the Wild Things Are” ... dark forests and wild creatures lurking behind the trees... or in the shadows of the parks or bars on the Queen West strip. Shades of “Snackers”, a long-running weekly Tuesday night of music and video at the now-defunct Vatikán ... where we coined the phrase Queer St West. A night that was so far under the radar the plant life was white and the fish were translucent...

And now the question emerges... Where Are the Wild Things? ... and what makes ‘em wild?<sup>224</sup>

Featuring works such as rugs by Mitchell embroidered with the words “Dyke Pussy,” Krishtalka’s sketches of Robert Rauschenberg, and Abram’s paintings based on the 2005 film *Brokeback Mountain*, the show combined subverted representations of mainstream cultural perceptions of gay identity with a positioning of the radical queer as an endangered species in a rapidly homogenizing world.

In his article, “Show’s Over Folks, Move Along: The Institutionalization of Art and the Secret Life of the Underground,” Monk expresses concern over the constant

---

<sup>223</sup> Krishtalka.

<sup>224</sup> Paul Petro Special Projects Space, “Wild Things,” *Paul Petro Contemporary Art/Special Projects Space*, [http://www.paulpetro.com/projects/2008/wild\\_2008.shtml](http://www.paulpetro.com/projects/2008/wild_2008.shtml).

assimilation of subcultural expression into the mainstream, asking, “Can an *image* alone sustain some reference to the underground without being its actual documentation? Are reprising roles enough to keep a dialogue with the idea of the underground at least intermittent?”<sup>225</sup> If the curatorial and artistic practices of Queen Street West’s radical queer arts community are practices in queer world-making, then they are not images, but interventions, not passive documentation, but active preservation. The brief sampling of queer exhibitions at Paul Petro and Zsa Zsa points to a much larger curatorial interest in not only representing artists engaged in queer practice, but also playing an active, directorial role in producing radical sites of display. Amid the constantly looming threat of hegemonic consumption, Queen Street West’s radical queer artists define themselves, their practices, and their spaces via counter-consumptions of their own.

### **Back in the “Real” (Art) World...**

I have focused this chapter on the transformation of one arts community from artist-initiated microtopias, to a commercially-driven arts scene and gentrified gay village, to a combination of all of the above with an added queer twist, creating for a physical embodiment of queer world-making. At the beginning of this chapter, I considered Carrie Moyer’s argument that queer art could not survive transplanting into the museum and asked: Do queer art exhibitions, and the queer communities that produce them, benefit from a degree of institutionalization, and to what end? At first glance, institutionalization seems to counter the emancipatory attitude of queer art and to increase

---

<sup>225</sup> Monk, “Show’s Over Folks, Move Along,” *Future, Present, Past: La Biennale di Venezia, XLVII Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte* (Venice: Electa, La Biennale di Venezia, 1997), 452-54, available online at [http://www.yorku.ca/gyu/curate/site\\_design/essays/Show'sOver.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/gyu/curate/site_design/essays/Show'sOver.pdf).

the threat of assimilation at the hands of the general public. The cycle of gentrification functions as a parallel to the threat of queer assimilation, by which queer cultural production, which can never be completely dissociated from the mainstream public, might maintain its autonomy by approaching dominant culture from a queer perspective. For, as Sheila Pepe argues in regard to whether or not a queer moment can exist in institutional space:

Not really. A queer moment can be experienced here but we are the performer. It's the way we interact with the collection. I mean they don't have to be interested in me for me to be interested in them. I don't have to wait for their acceptance to participate in the dialogue and I can use the collection for my own needs, for my own queer moments.<sup>226</sup>

Queer exhibitions in alternative spaces teach both queer and straight audiences how to look at art queerly; they ask for a critical evaluation of heteronormative modes of interpretation and demand that these are checked at the door. But they also encourage audiences to maintain this perception after leaving the gallery, to consider other visual experiences via a queer framework. No, queer space doesn't disappear when queers leave. But the present-day queer interventions that take place on Toronto's Queen Street West strip serve as reminders that perhaps the task for both queer and straight audiences is to make it appear upon entering.

---

<sup>226</sup> Gay City News.

## CONCLUSION

### Who is Queer Art Really For?

The citing of the dominant norm does not, in this instance, displace that norm; rather, it becomes the means by which that dominant norm is most painfully reiterated as the very desire and the performance of those subjects. – Judith Butler<sup>227</sup>

Simply because [the *In a Different Light*] show is appearing in a museum, the art world should not think that it has done “queer,” and queer should not think they are done with the art world. Rather than submitting ourselves to another cycle of marginalization and cultural amnesia, we should continue to learn from the past and keep queering the discourse. – Nayland Blake<sup>228</sup>

When Nayland Blake writes of “queering the discourse,” an agitation occurs in me, one that can perhaps be connected to Judith Butler’s insight. What has been grappled with throughout this study is queer’s continued dependence on what Butler calls the “dominant norm” for validation. Indeed, as noted in the Introduction, the very structure of this thesis is binary, constantly confronting the notion of the dominant norm by identifying how it is resisted. By these accounts, then, it can be—and has been—argued that queer not only remains inextricably connected to the culture it resists, but also only becomes visible as a reaction against that which it opposes. As Judith Halberstam writes:

the assumption that cultural production will always only represent the dominant economic order erases the multiple disruptions to hegemony that

---

<sup>227</sup> Judith Butler, “Gender is Burning: Questions of appropriation and subversion,” *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 456

<sup>228</sup> Nayland Blake, “Curating In a Different Light,” *In a Different Light: Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*, Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder, Amy Scholder, eds. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995) 42-43

have emerged from subcultural and avant-garde art practices in the past, and it leaves us with a sense of inevitability about our relation to the dominant.<sup>229</sup>

The artists and queer arts communities discussed and the ways in which they are positioned, throughout this study, as outside, but nevertheless definitionally dependent on, the dominant, perpetuates the threat that Halberstam identifies. But it could also be argued that this is not necessarily a negative component of the formation of queer identities: as José Esteban Muñoz shows, to disidentify is to critically reveal the failings of hegemonic culture *and* to make a new world in its place. Thus, for queer to have something to resist, this binary must remain in the picture, provided it does not take up the whole picture. Queer is, in a sense, avant-garde, and that which is avant-garde is in the dangerous position of constantly having to reinvent itself in order to maintain that position. It will always be easy for dominant culture to integrate subcultural practice into mainstream representation. But queers, it must be noted, are also appropriative, for to ‘queer’ something is to tease out of something non-queer its well-guarded elements, its norms. The demand on queers, though, is that they continue to produce manifestations of their ideological resistance so as not to become unnamed, inactive ‘others’ that simply reinforce the norm, but rather maintain, and continue to develop, their own complex and powerful identities, complete with histories and modes of telling.

In queer art, these constructions are manifested in a variety of representational ways that, though they create obstacles to the formation of an authoritative formal classification of queer artwork, shift the emphasis, like many avant-garde art movements, from image to process. An examination of relationships between queer artworks and

---

<sup>229</sup> Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 98.

queer artists focuses on the intangible, but nevertheless powerful, mobilization across spatial and temporal, state and generational lines—an effect of the desire, among queer artists, to prevent, rather than perpetuate, the erasure of queer legacies. Emily Roysdon’s ideological and, in many ways, intimate relationship with David Wojnarowicz, and Kim Kielhofner’s evocation of historical queer heroes reflect this continuum of queer existence and activate the queer past’s relevance to the present and future. Mobilization against queer erasure can also be traced in the queer recognition of the often dangerous act of self-revelation and the long history of subcultural coding that has developed concurrently. The growing body of speculative writing on the homosexual signifiers in Robert Rauschenberg’s collages demonstrates how queer artists are in the position not only to communicate queerness, but also to covertly enter the art historical canon without checking queerness at the gates. A concrete test to Halberstam’s concern over queer’s assumed relationship to the dominant occurs when examining queer art and queer artists’ relationship to physical space, and the ideological innovations that serve to preserve queerness amid the threat of mainstream assimilation. The gentrification of Queen Street West, and the radical queer artists that nevertheless continue to work and display along the strip, together point to the possibility of queer thriving within and in close proximity to a community that threatens to subsume it.

Surely, society is oppressive to queers and other marginalized peoples in countless ways. But, and here agreeing with Halberstam, there seems to exist a perception of queers as complicit in this process as a result of being helpless to resist it. This thesis has set out to prove otherwise. The practices of the artists discussed, as couched in radical queer theoretical discourse, are as much activist projects as they are art projects: indeed,

the conditions that have been laid out throughout this thesis would have it that it is impossible to extract the radically political nature of queer theory from a queer aesthetics—the term, as is argued in regard to the antithetical queer communities that have resulted from the gentrification of Queen Street West, would subsequently lose its implicit meaning. However, if queer is an inherently radical ideological term, then it gains its potency through active dissonance, and its call to active mobilization.

There will always remain the threat of mainstream assimilation of queer culture. However, in making explicit this threat, what must then be considered are the ultimate motives of queer culture as an ideological construction: does queer culture exist only as a rebellion against accepted norms, or can queer culture hope to see its tenets employed in the dominant culture it opposes? The answer is arguably two-fold: victories are undoubtedly gained when mainstream culture recognizes the social, economic, and political significance of queer culture and employs this recognition to the improvement of society. But this is not to say that queer culture is necessarily de-accessioned of its unique position: as Thomas Crow argues in regard to mass culture, subculture, and assimilation:

Exploitation by the culture industry serves at the same time to stimulate and complicate those strivings in such a way that they continually outrun and surpass its programming. The expansion of the cultural economy continually creates new fringe areas, and the young and more extreme members of assimilated subcultures will regroup with new recruits at still more marginal positions. So the process begins again.<sup>230</sup>

Crow points to the phenomenon by which the assimilation and de-politicization of marginal and avant-garde practices, identities, and communities are not altogether

---

<sup>230</sup> Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 35.

avoidable. Ideologically, however, it is possible to remain critically aware of threats to individual freedom as they are enacted by dominant culture; as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue, to be against heteronormativity is not to be against norms, but to reveal the ways in which these norms are often employed at the cost of non-normative expression. This statement resonates in Sara Ahmed's conception of queer lives, a conception that has anchored and inspired this study: that to be queer is, in effect, to fail to have made the normative gestures of return. However, as Heather Love makes plain in her literary history of queer experience pre-Stonewall, sometimes a 'negative' remained a negative. Characters in such mid-century novels as Patricia Highsmith's lesbian romance-thriller *The Price of Salt* are exemplary of a time before the shift toward the positive occurred: in her parting letter to her illicit lover, Therese, the tortured Carol explains her predicament, writing:

It was said or at least implied yesterday that my present course would bring me to the depths of human vice and degeneration. Yes, I have sunk a good deal since they took you from me. It is true, if I were to go on like this and be spied upon, attacked, never possessing one person long enough so that knowledge of a person is a superficial thing—that is degeneration. Or to live against one's grain, that is degeneration by definition.<sup>231</sup>

---

<sup>231</sup> Patricia Highsmith, *The Price of Salt* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 229-30. *The Price of Salt* is particularly relevant to this argument due to the shift in public reception of the novel between the time of its original publication in 1951 and its reprint in 2004. Written by Highsmith but originally published under the pseudonym Claire Morgan because of the publisher's refusal to print it, the book was briefly marginalized as lesbian pulp fiction, rousing anxiety, Highsmith believed, as the first gay book with a happy ending. In the 'Afterword' to the 1984 Naiad Press reprint, entitled *Carol*, Highsmith writes, "My young protagonist Therese may appear a shrinking violet in my book, but those were the days when gay bars were a dark door somewhere in Manhattan, where people wanting to go to a certain bar got off a subway station before or after the convenient one, lest they be suspected of being homosexual. The appeal of *The Price of Salt* was that it had a happy ending for its two main characters, or at least they were going to try to have a future together. Prior to this book, homosexuals male and female in American novels had had to pay for their deviation by cutting their wrists,

By reconfiguring failure, Ahmed makes a case for the continued relevance of the darker parts of queer history, in a sense arguing that one cannot become ideologically queer without the experience of this failure, followed by its recognition as radically productive, rather than shameful. The mobilization of queers into communities anchored by failure documents its validity as a social position and enables it to gain discursive strength. Thus, there is a sense by which institutions that threaten to assimilate queerness ultimately contribute to its emancipation. In the same conversation in which Carrie Moyer points to what she perceives as the implicit danger of admitting queer art into the institution, Sheila Pepe counters, “I really think the queer moment is when we walk in the door. I mean they set up this really conservative model and we can walk through and use and interpret this collection anyway that we want to.”<sup>232</sup> In making this claim, Pepe shifts the onus from the collection itself to that which the visitor brings to it, or, more specifically, that which queer presence makes possible—Gregg Bordowitz’s notion of the queer structure of feeling, but here activated and test driven in mainstream space.

Throughout this study, I have privileged this argument, transforming the question from “What constitutes queer art?” and “Can a particular work be viewed as queer?” to an emphasis on questions of why and how this viewing occurs and how queer aesthetics maintains its discursive power in cultures that constantly threaten to subsume it. Queer aesthetics is born of, and perpetuates, a position of radical otherness at a time in which the fields of art history and visual culture continue to expand to include multiple

---

drowning themselves in a swimming pool, or by switching to heterosexuality (so it was stated), or by collapsing—alone and miserable and shunned—into a depression equal to hell.” (261) By the time of its 2004 printing, the book was being attributed to Highsmith and has come to be seen as a seminal work of queer literary *and* general literary fiction, purported to have inspired Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*.

<sup>232</sup> Gay City News.

intersecting interpretations of otherness. As such, queer art is now in the position not only to participate in the dialogue, but also to stretch its limits from within.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London & Brooklyn: Verso, 1991
- Anonymous queers, "Queers Read This." (June 1990).  
<http://www.actupny.org/documents/QueersReadThis.pdf> (accessed January 4, 2009)
- Art Metropole, "History." Art Metropole.  
[http://www.artmetropole.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=about.FA\\_dsp\\_history](http://www.artmetropole.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=about.FA_dsp_history)  
(accessed June 7, 2009)
- Atkins, Robert. "Goodbye Lesbian/Gay History, Hello Queer Sensibility: Meditating on Curatorial Practices." *Art Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4, We're Here: Gay and Lesbian Presence in Art and Art History (Winter, 1996): 80-86
- Barry, Dan and Carol Vogel, "Giuliani Vows to Cut Subsidy Over 'Sick' Art." *The New York Times* (September 23, 1999): A1
- Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977
- Bartlett, Neil. *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1988
- Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra." In *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*. Ed. Brian Wallis. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984: 253-81
- Beasley, Chris. *Gender and Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers*. London & Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 2005
- Bell, David and Gill Valentine, ed. *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexuality*. London & New York: Routledge, 1995
- Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Intimacy (Winter 1998): 547-566
- Bhabha, Homi K. "The Subjunctive Mood of Art." In *Unsettling "Sensation": Arts-Policy Lessons from the Brooklyn Museum of Art Controversy*, ed. Lawrence Rothfield. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001: 93-95
- Bishop, Claire. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October*, 110 (Fall 2004): 51-79
- Blake, Nayland, Lawrence Rinder and Amy Scholder, ed. *In a Different Light: Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995
- Bordowitz, Gregg. *The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous and Other Writings, 1986-1993*, ed. James Meyer. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2004

- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993
- . *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995
- Bourriaud, Nicholas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland. Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2002
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994
- Bravmann, Scott. *Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture, and Difference*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997
- Brien, Alan. "Camper's Guide." *New Statesman*, 73 (23 June 1967): 873-4
- Bronson, AA, ed. with René Blouin, Peggy Gale, and Glenn Lewis. *From Sea to Shining Sea*. Toronto: The Power Plant, 1987
- Brooks, Rosetta and Robert Rauschenberg. "Round the Block Once or Twice: A Conversation with Rosetta Brooks." *Modern Painters* (December/January 2005): 70-75
- Burgin, Victor. "Fantasy." In *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. Elizabeth Wright. Oxford: Blackwell Books, 1992
- Butler, Judith. "Critically Queer." In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London & New York: Routledge, 1993: 223-42
- . "Gender is Burning: Questions of appropriation and subversion." In *The Visual Culture Reader*. Ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. London and New York: Routledge, 1999: 448-62
- . *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990
- Butt, Gavin. *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005
- Califia, Patrick. *Speaking Sex to Power: The Politics of Queer Sex*. San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2002
- Cameron, Dan. *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: New Museum, 1982
- Cameron, Stuart and Jon Coaffee. "Art, Gentrification and Regeneration—From Artist as Pioneer to Public Arts." *European Journal of Housing Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (April 2005): 39-58
- Camille, Michael and Adrian Rifkin, ed. *Other Objects of Desire: Collectors and Collecting Queerly*. Oxford and Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2001
- Carlomusto, Jean and Emily Roysdon. "Radiant Spaces." *Corpus*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 2006): 72-79

- Castells, Manuel and Karen Murphy. "Cultural Identity and Urban Structure: The Spatial Organization of San Francisco's Gay Community." In *Urban Policy Under Capitalism*. Ed. Norman Fainstein and Susan S. Fainstein. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1982: 237-59
- Chang, Yin-Kun. "Can Queer Pedagogy Be Articulated from a Position of Radical Democracy?": The Spatial Performance of Democracy in Cyberspace." *Formosan Education and Society*, No. 8 (2004.12): 37-80
- Chisholm, Dianne. "The City of Collective Memory." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 7, Number 2 (2001): 195-243
- Clarke, Arthur C. *2001: A Space Odyssey*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968
- Clayton, Nicola. "Folk devils in our midst? Collecting from 'deviant' groups." In *Museums and the Future of Collecting*. Ed. Simon J. Knell. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2004: 146-54
- Cleto, Fabio, ed. *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999
- Colomina, Beatriz, ed. *Sexuality and Space*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992
- Copeland, Roger. "Merce Cunningham and the Aesthetic of Collage." *The Drama Review*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Spring 2002): 11-28
- Cresap, Kelly M. *Pop Trickster Fool: Warhol Performs Naivete*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004
- Crow, Thomas. *Modern Art in the Common Culture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996
- Davies, Jon. "Props to the Fairy People." *C: International Contemporary Art*, No. 98 (Summer 2008): 26-31
- de Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979
- . "Autobiography as De-Facement." *Modern Language Notes* 94, No. 5 (December 1979): 919-30
- . *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997
- Diederichsen, Diedrich. "Glad Rag." *Artforum* 40.8 (April 2002), available at <http://www.aabronson.com/art/gi.org/artforum.htm> (accessed June 8, 2009).
- Donegan, "What Ever Happened to Queen St. West?" *Fuse*, No. 42 (Fall 1986): 10-22
- Downey, Anthony. "Towards a Politics of (Relational) Aesthetics." *Third Text*, Vol. 21, Issue 3 (May, 2007): 267-75

- du Plessis, Michael and Kathleen Chapman. "Queercore: The Distinct Identities of Subculture." *College Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Queer Utilities: Textual Studies, Theory, Pedagogy, Practice (February 1997): 45-58
- Duberman, Martin. *Stonewall*. New York: Dutton, 1993
- Dubin, Steven C. *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions*. London & New York: Routledge, 1992
- Eakin, Paul John. *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985
- Enright, Robert. "Crafting, Every Witch Way: An Interview with FASTWÜRMS." *Border Crossings*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (March 2006): 40-51
- Faguet, Michele. "Marginally Successful: A Brief Account of Two Artist-Run Spaces." *Conference 3: Inside Out: Reassessing International Cultural Influence*. The Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, Hawaii, July 9-15, 2004. <http://www.apexart.org/conference/faguet.htm>, in <http://www.apexart.org/> (accessed April 30, 2009)
- Felski, Rita. "Fin de siècle, Fin du sexe: Transsexuality, Postmodernism, and the Death of History." In *The Transgender Studies Reader*. Ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle. New York: Routledge, 2006: 565-73
- Florida, Richard. *Cities and the Creative Class*. London & New York: Routledge, 2005
- . "A creative, dynamic city is an open, tolerant city." *The Globe and Mail* (24 June, 2002): T8
- . *The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent*. New York: HarperBusiness, 2005
- . *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. New York: Basic Books, 2002
- Florida, Richard and Gary Gates. "Technology and Tolerance: The Importance of Diversity to High-Technology Growth." *The Brookings Institute Survey Series* (June 2001)
- Foucault, Michel. "Friendship as a Way of Life." In *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity, Truth, Vol. 1*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: New Press, 1994: 135-40
- . *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1990
- . "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986): 22-27
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Freud*. Vol. 18. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1955

- Gay City News. "A Conversation with artists Carrie Moyer, Sheila Pepe, Stephen Mueller, Andrew Robinson and Frank Holliday." *Gay City News*, Volume 3, Issue 353 (December 30, 2004 – January 5, 2005).  
<http://www.acrstudio.com/projects/word/queeringmoma/index.htm> (accessed April 30, 2009)
- Gilmore, Leigh. *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001
- Goldie, Terry. "Queer Nation?" *Eleventh Annual Robarts Lecture*. York University, Toronto, Ontario, March 4, 1997
- Goffman, Erving. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963
- Golden, Anne. "The Ambulant Flipbook Museum (Some of) the videos of Kim Kielhofner." *No More Potlucks*, No. 3 (mai – June 2009)  
<http://nomorepotlucks.org/article/ego/ambulant-flipbook-museum-some-videos-kim-kielhofner> (accessed May 3, 2009)
- Graham, Mark. "Sexual Things." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 10, Number 2 (2004): 299-303.
- Guattari, Felix. "David Wojnarowicz." (1989) *Queer Cultural Center*.  
[http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/DavidW/DW\\_Gutari.html](http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/DavidW/DW_Gutari.html) (accessed May 6, 2009)
- Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998
- . *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press, 2005
- Hall, Stuart. "The Television Discourse—Encoding and Decoding." *Studies in Culture: An Introductory Reader*. Ed. Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan. London: Arnold, 1997: 28-34
- Halperin, David. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995
- Highsmith, Patricia. *The Price of Salt*. 1951. Reprint, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004
- Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press, 1996
- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991
- Jolly, Margaretta. "Coming Out of the Coming Out Story: Writing Queer Lives." *Sexualities*, Vol. 4(4) (2001): 474-96
- Kaczorowski, Craig. "Censorship in the Arts," *GLBTQ: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender & Queer Culture*,  
[http://www.glbtq.com/arts/censorship\\_in\\_arts\\_.html](http://www.glbtq.com/arts/censorship_in_arts_.html) (accessed February 20, 2009)

- Katz, Jonathan D. "The Art of the Code." In *Significant Others: Creative and Intimate Partnership*. Ed. Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron. London: Thames and Hudson, 1993: 188-207
- . "'Committing the Perfect Crime': Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art." *Art Journal*, Vol. 67, Issue 1 (Spring 2008): 38-53
- . "Lovers and Divers: Interpictorial Dialog in the Work of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg." *Frauen, Kunst, Wissenschaft* 25 (June 1998): 16-31
- Katz, Jonathan Ned. *The Invention of Heterosexuality*. New York: Dutton, 1995
- Kielhofner, Kim. *Guide to the Legions of Horribles*. Self-published Artist Book, 2007
- Krishtalka, Sholem. "We are Queercore: Toronto Punks / A 'porntastic fantasy' made flesh." *Xtra!* (Thursday, January 4, 2007).  
[http://www.xtra.ca/public/viewstory.aspx?AFF\\_TYPE=3&STORY\\_ID=2528&PUB\\_TEMPLATE\\_ID=2](http://www.xtra.ca/public/viewstory.aspx?AFF_TYPE=3&STORY_ID=2528&PUB_TEMPLATE_ID=2) (accessed April 6, 2009)
- Kuspit, Donald. "David Wojnarowicz: The Last Rimbaud." *Queer Cultural Center*.  
[http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/DavidW/DW\\_Kuspit.html](http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/DavidW/DW_Kuspit.html) (accessed May 6, 2009)
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006
- Lesage, Julia. "Contested Territory in *Finding Christa*." *Documenting the Documentary*. Ed. Barry Grant. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998.  
<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/%7Ejlesage/Juliafolder/CHRISTA.HTML> (accessed December 4, 2008)
- Ley, David. "Artists, Aestheticisation and the Field of Gentrification." *Urban Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 12 (November 2003): 2527-2544
- . *The New Middle Classes and the Remaking of the Central City*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996
- Liepe-Levinson, Katherine. *Strip Show: Performances of Gender and Desire*. London & New York: Routledge, 2002
- Lippard, Lucy. *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art*. New York: New Press, 1995
- Loftus, Brian. "Speaking Silence: The Strategies and Structures of Queer Autobiography." *College Literature*, Vol. 24, Issue 1 (February 1997): 28-44
- Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2007
- Malanga, Steven. "The Curse of the Creative Class." *City Journal* (Winter 2004): 36-45
- Mandelbaum, Maurice. "Family Resemblance and Generalization Concerning the Arts." *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (July 1965): 219-28
- McCallum, E.L. *Object Lessons: How to Do Things with Fetishism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999

- McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West*. London: Picador, 1990
- McGrath, Brian with Mark Watkins and Mao-jung Lee. *Queer Space*. Exhibition pamphlet. New York: Store Front for Art and Architecture, 1994
- Meyer, Richard. "Gay Power circa 1970: Visual Strategies for Sexual Revolution." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2006): 441-64
- . "The Jesse Helms Theory of Art." *October*, Vol. 104 (Spring 2003): 131-48
- . *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002
- Michelson, Annette. "Where Is Your Rupture?": Mass Culture and the Gesamtkunstwerk." *October*, Vol. 56, High/Low: Art and Mass Culture (Spring, 1991): 42-63
- Miller, D.A. *The Novel and the Police*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988
- Miller, Dorothy. *Sixteen Americans*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959
- Miller, Earl. "File Under Anarchy: A Brief History of Punk Rock's 30-Year Relationship with Toronto's Art Press." *C: International Contemporary Art*, No. 88 (Winter 2005): 30-35
- Monk, Philip. "Picturing the Toronto Art Community: The Queen Street Years." *C: International Contemporary Art*, No 59 (Fall 1998), published in conjunction with the Power Plant exhibition, "Picturing the Toronto Art Community: The Queen Street Years," September 25 – December 20, 1998. Available online at [http://www.yorku.ca/agyu/curate/site\\_design/essays/PicturingToronto.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/agyu/curate/site_design/essays/PicturingToronto.pdf) (accessed June 4, 2009)
- . "Show's Over Folks, Move Along." *Future, Present, Past: La Biennale di Venezia, XLVII Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte*. Venice: Electa, La Biennale di Venezia, 1997: 452-54, available at [http://www.yorku.ca/agyu/curate/site\\_design/essays/Show'sOver.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/agyu/curate/site_design/essays/Show'sOver.pdf) (accessed June 11, 2009)
- Moore, Patrick. *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004
- Morton, Donald, ed. *The Material Queer: A LesBiGay Cultural Studies Reader*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999
- . "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts." *Women and Performance*, Volume 8, Issue 2 (1996): 5-16
- Olney, James, ed. *Autobiography, Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980
- Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, revised. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005

- Paul Petro Special Projects Space. "Wild Things." *Paul Petro Contemporary Art/Special Projects Space*. [http://www.paulpetro.com/projects/2008/wild\\_2008.shtml](http://www.paulpetro.com/projects/2008/wild_2008.shtml) (accessed June 9, 2009)
- Payne, Robert. "Gay scene, queer grid." *Queer Space: Centres and Peripheries* conference at the University of Technology, Sydney, February 20-21, 2007
- Peck, Jamie. "Struggling with the Creative Class." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 29.4 (December 2005): 740-770
- Piontek, Thomas. *Queering Gay and Lesbian Studies*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006
- Pratt, Geraldine. *Working Feminism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004
- Probyn, Elspeth. "Queer Belongings: The Politics of Departure." In *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*. Ed. Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn. London & New York: Routledge, 1995: 1-18
- Queer Peers. <http://www.queerpeers.queerwest.org/> (accessed June 9, 2009)
- Queer West Community Network. <http://queerwest.org/> (accessed June 4, 2009)
- Raaberg, Gwen. "Beyond Fragmentation: Collage as Feminist Strategy in the Arts." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, Vol. 31, Issue 3 (Sept. 1998): 153-172
- Rak, Julie. "The Digital Queer: Weblogs and Internet Identity." *Biography* 28.1 (Winter 2005): 166-82
- Rancière, Jacques. "Problems and Transformations in Critical Art." In *Participation*. Ed. Claire Bishop. London: MIT Press & Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2006: 83-93
- Rando, Flavia. "Reflections on a Name: We're Here: Gay and Lesbian Presence in Art and Art History." *Art Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4, We're Here: Gay and Lesbian Presence in Art and Art History (Winter 1996): 8-10
- Reckitt, Helena. "My Fuzzy Valentine: Allyson Mitchell." *C: International Contemporary Art*, No. 89 (Spring 2006): 14-17
- Reed, Christopher. "Queer Space in the Built Environment." *Art Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4, We're Here: Gay and Lesbian Presence in Art and Art History (Winter, 1996): 64-70
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *Une saison en enfer* (1873). [http://abardel.free.fr/tout\\_rimbaud/une\\_saison\\_en\\_enfer.htm](http://abardel.free.fr/tout_rimbaud/une_saison_en_enfer.htm) (accessed May 29, 2009)
- Rizk, Mysoon. "Constructing Histories: David Wojnarowicz's *Arthur Rimbaud in New York*." In *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire*. Ed. Deborah Bright. New York: Routledge, 1998: 178-194
- Rothfield, Lawrence, ed. *Unsettling "Sensation": Arts Policy Lessons from the Brooklyn Museum of Art Controversy*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001
- Roysdon, Emily. "Artist's Statement," *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)*. 2001

- Rushbrook, Dereka. "Cities, Queer Space, and the Cosmopolitan Tourist." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1-2 (2002): 183-206
- Saltz, Jerry. "Our Picasso?" *The Village Voice* (Tuesday, January 3, 2006). <http://www.villagevoice.com/2006-01-03/art/our-picasso/> (accessed June 1, 2009)
- Schlichter, Annette. "Queer at Last? Straight Intellectuals and the Desire for Transgression." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (2004): 543-64
- Sears, Alan. "Queer Anti-Capitalism: What's Left of Lesbian and Gay Liberation?" *Science & Society*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (January 2005): 92-112
- Seckler, Dorothy and Robert Rauschenberg. "Robert Rauschenberg interview, 1965 Dec. 21." Smithsonian Archives of American Art. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/rausch65.htm> (accessed June 12, 2009)
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990
- . "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You." In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Ed. Sedgwick and Adam Frank. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003: 151-2
- . *Tendencies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993
- Shepard, Benjamin. "FIERCE! Youth vs. 'Residents in Distress' and Other Gentrifiers." *Counterpunch* (October 5, 2002). <http://www.counterpunch.org/shepard1005.html> (accessed June 11, 2009)
- Sholock, Adale. "Queer Theory in the First Person: Academic Autobiography and the Authoritative Contingencies of Visibility." *Cultural Critique*, No. 66 (Spring 2007): 127-52
- Smith, Sidonie. *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993
- Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation and other essays*. New York: Doubleday, 1990
- Spencer, Amy. *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture*. London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 2005
- Spicer, Jakki. "The Author is Dead, Long Live the Author: Autobiography and the Fantasy of the Individual." *Criticism*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Summer 2005): 387-403
- Spivak, Gayatri C. "Three Women's Texts and Circumfession." *Postcolonialism and Autobiography*. Ed. Alfred Hornung and Ernstpeter Ruhe. Amsterdam & Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998: 7-22
- Springer, Carrie. "David Wojnarowicz: *Arthur Rimbaud in New York*." Whitney Museum of American Art. [https://www.whitney.org/www/exhibition/feat\\_woj.jsp#notes](https://www.whitney.org/www/exhibition/feat_woj.jsp#notes) (accessed February 22, 2009)
- Steiner, Barbara and Jun Yang. *Art Works: Autobiography*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004

- Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993
- Sycamore, Mattilda Bernstein, ed. *That's Revolting: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*. New York: Soft Skull Press, 2004
- Temple, Kevin. "Toronto needs freakier rich people." In *The State of the Arts: Living with Culture in Toronto*. Ed. Alana Wilcox, Christina Palassio, and Johnny Dovercourt. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2006: 74-81
- Venosa, Robert. *Illuminatus*. Sydney: Interface Press, 1999
- Wagner, Richard. "Art and Revolution." (1849). Trans. William Ashton Ellis. The Wagner Library. <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagartrev.htm> (accessed June 7, 2008)
- . "The Art-Work of the Future." (1849). Trans. William Ashton Ellis. The Wagner Library. <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagartfut.htm> (accessed June 7, 2008)
- Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2002
- Warner, Tom. *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002
- Waugh, Thomas. *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queer Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006
- Weinberg, Jonathan. "Things Are Queer." *Arts Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4, We're Here: Gay and Lesbian Presence in Art and Art History (Winter, 1996); 11-14
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977
- Williams, Raymond and Michael Orrom. *A Preface to Film*. London: Film Drama Limited, 1954
- Wimsatt, Jr., William K. and Monroe Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." In *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Ed. William K. Wimsatt, Jr. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954: 3-18
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1953
- Wittig, Monique. *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992
- Wojnarowicz, David. *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame*. Ed. Barry Blinderman. Exhibition catalogue. Normal, IL: University Galleries, 1990
- . *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991
- . *In the Shadow of the American Dream: The Diaries of David Wojnarowicz*. Ed. Amy Scholder. New York: Grove Press, 1999
- Wood, Catherine. "David Wojnarowicz: Cabinet/Between Bridges, London, UK." *Frieze*, Issue 100 (June-August 2006). [http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/david\\_wojnarowicz/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/david_wojnarowicz/) (accessed February 22, 2009)

Zerilli, Linda M.G. "Review: This Universalism Which Is Not One." *Diacritics*, Vol. 28,  
No. 2 (Summer, 1998): 2-20



Fig. 1. Etienne Carjat, *Portrait of Arthur Rimbaud* (ca. 1871). 8 x 4.2 cm.  
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris



Fig. 2. David Wojnarowicz, *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-1979).  
Gelatin silver print. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York



Fig. 3. David Wojnarowicz, *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-1979).  
Gelatin silver print. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York



Fig. 4. David Wojnarowicz, *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-1979).  
Gelatin silver print. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York



Fig. 5. David Wojnarowicz, *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-1979).  
Gelatin silver print. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York

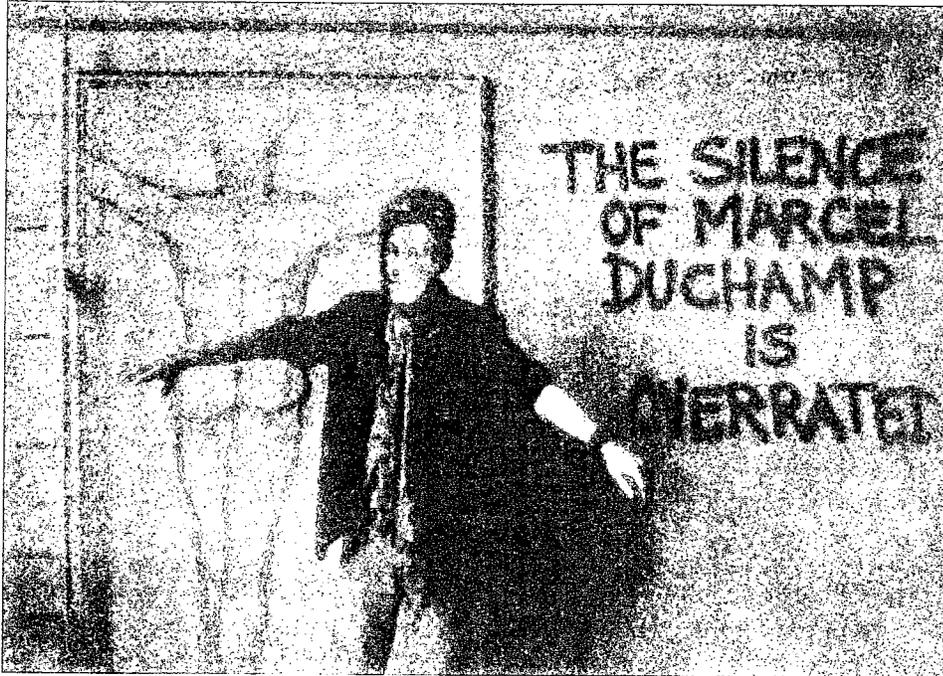


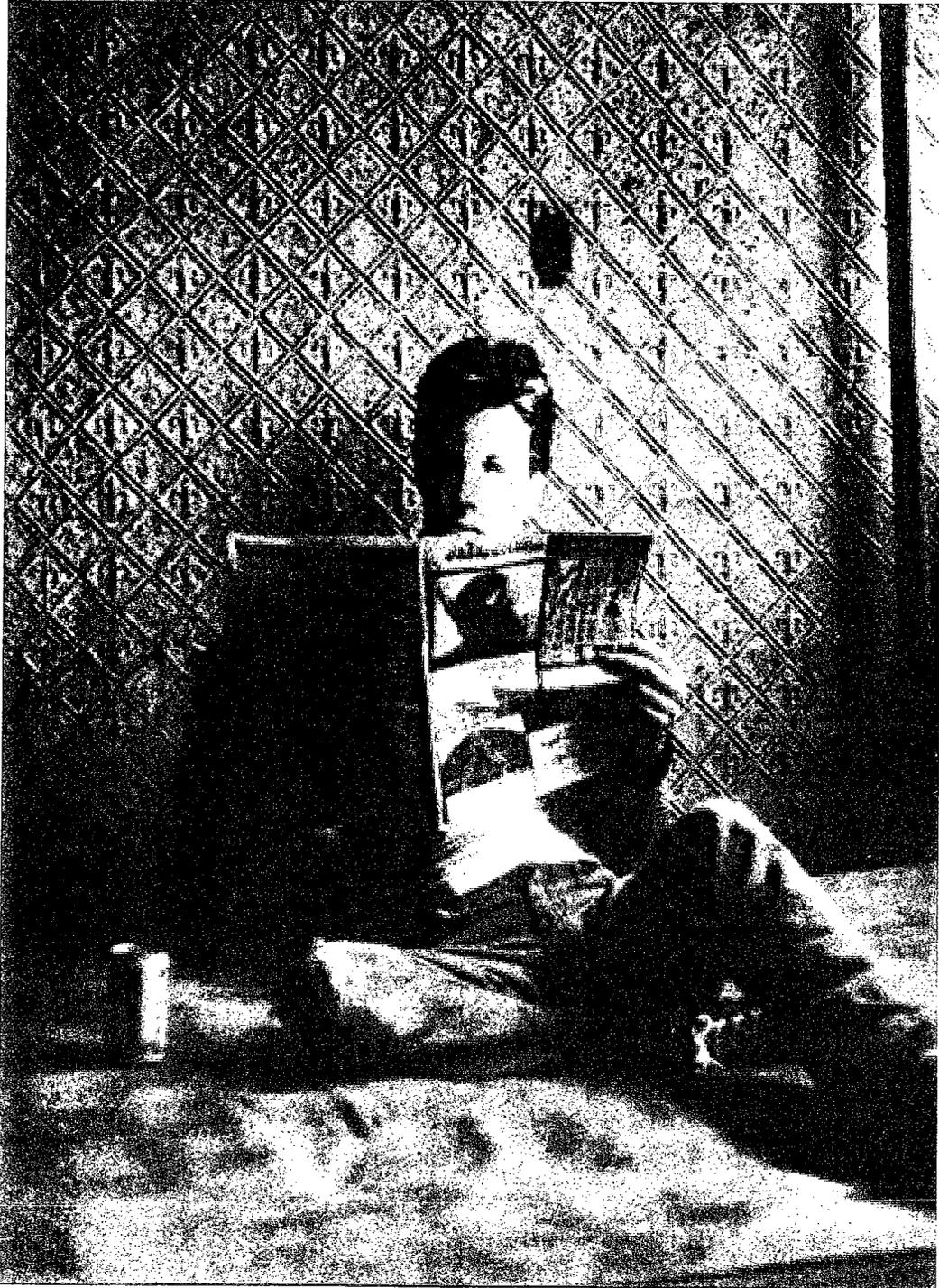
Fig. 6. David Wojnarowicz, *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-1979). Gelatin silver print. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York



Fig. 7. David Wojnarowicz, *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-1979). Gelatin silver print. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York



Fig. 8. David Wojnarowicz, *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-1979).  
Gelatin silver print. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York



**Fig. 9.** David Wojnarowicz, *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-1979).  
Gelatin silver print. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York



Fig. 10. David Wojnarowicz, *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-1979).  
Gelatin silver print. Estate of David Wojnarowicz, New York



**Fig. 11. Emily Roysdon, *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* (2001-2008). Black and white photograph. 11 x 14 in. Courtesy of the artist.**



Fig. 12. Emily Roysdon, *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* (2001-2008). Black and white photograph. 11 x 14 in. Courtesy of the artist.



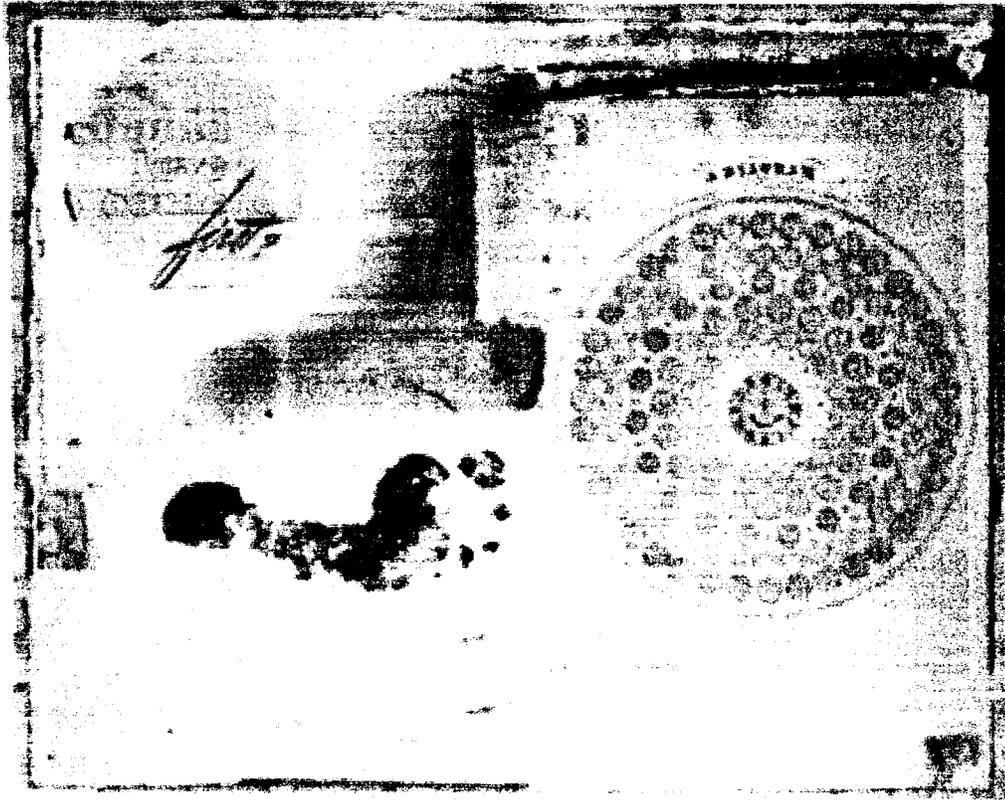
Fig. 13. Emily Roysdon, *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* (2001-2008). Black and white photograph. 11 x 14 in. Courtesy of the artist.



**Fig. 14.** Emily Roysdon, *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* (2001-2008). Black and white photograph. 11 x 14 in. Courtesy of the artist.



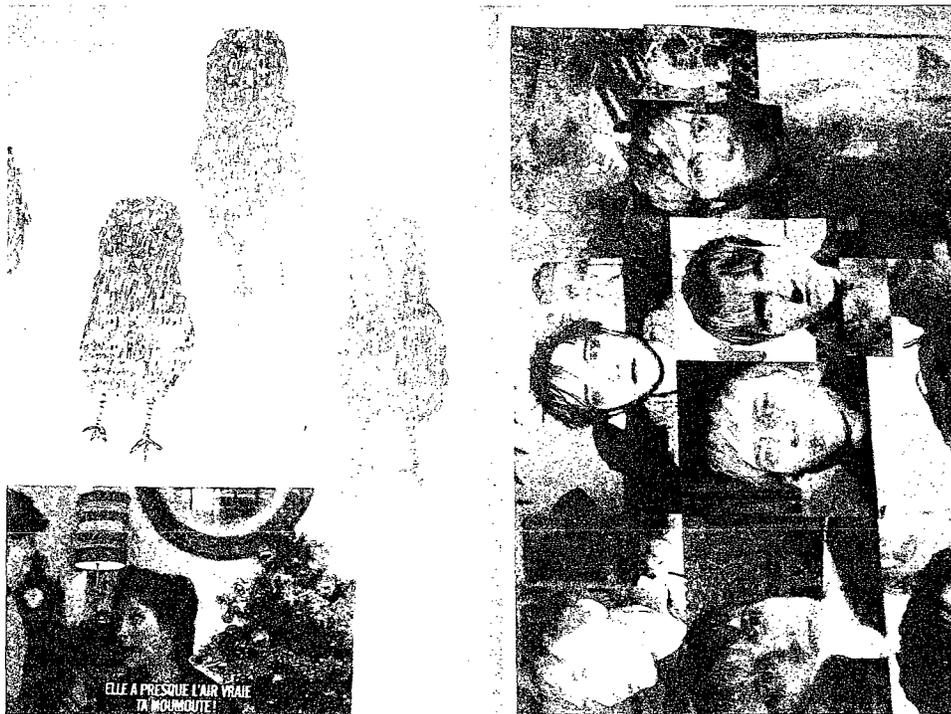
**Fig. 15.** Emily Roysdon, *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* (2001-2008). Black and white photograph. 11 x 14 in. Courtesy of the artist.



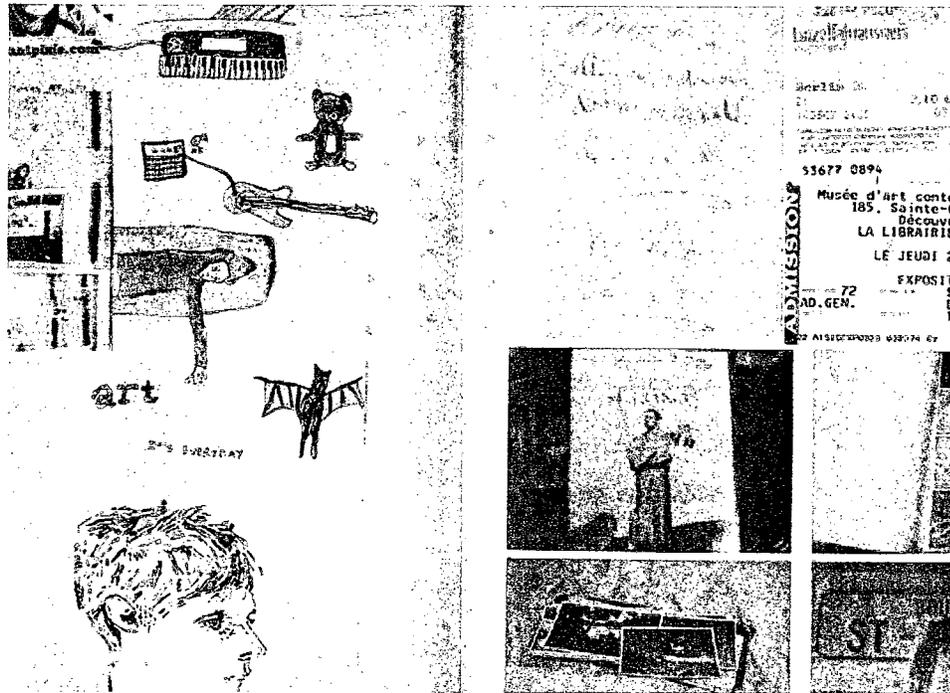
**Fig. 16. Robert Rauschenberg, *Should Love Come First?* (1951). Oil, printed paper, and pencil on canvas, 25 x 30 in. (destroyed). Licensed by VAGA, New York and reproduced in Jonathan Katz, "Committing the Perfect Crime': Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art," *Art Journal*, Vol. 67, Issue 1 (Spring 2008).**



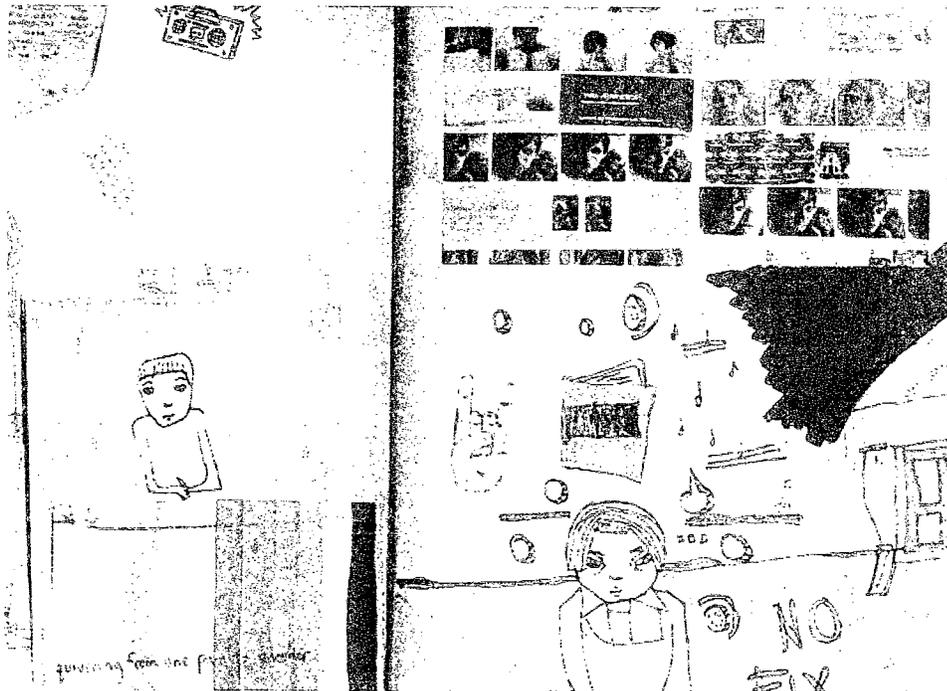
**Fig. 17. Kim Kielhofner, *The Black Book Project* (2004-present). Notebook, collage. 8.5 x 11 in. (closed). Courtesy of the artist.**



**Fig. 18. Kim Kielhofner, *The Black Book Project* (2004-present). Notebook, collage. 8.5 x 11 in. (closed). Courtesy of the artist.**



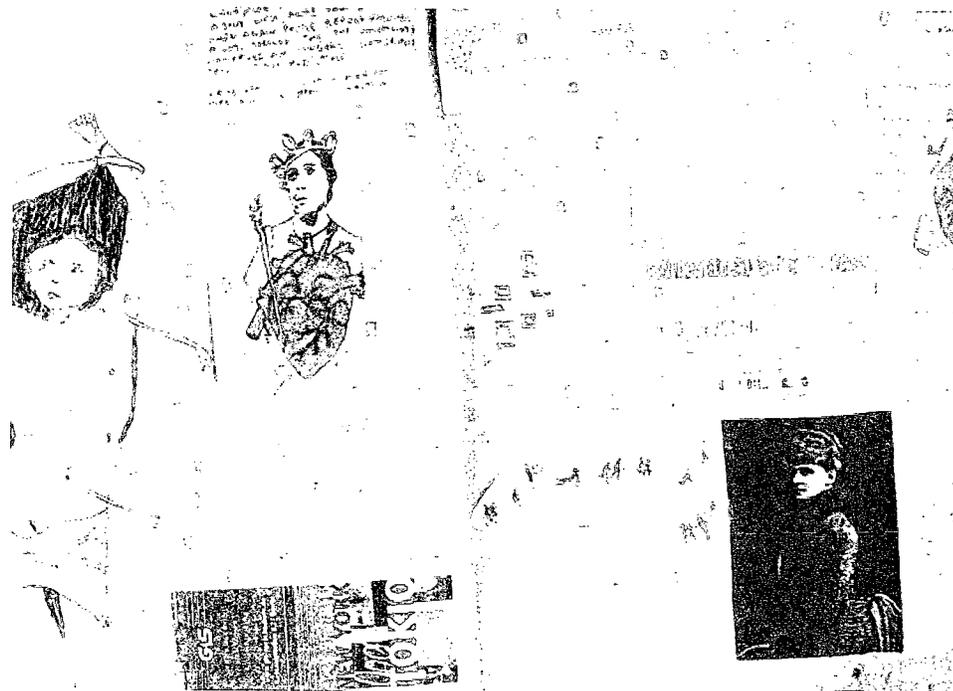
**Fig. 19. Kim Kielhofner, *The Black Book Project* (2004-present). Notebook, collage. 8.5 x 11 in. (closed). Courtesy of the artist.**



**Fig. 20. Kim Kielhofner, *The Black Book Project* (2004-present). Notebook, collage. 8.5 x 11 in. (closed). Courtesy of the artist.**



**Fig. 21. Kim Kielhofner, *The Black Book Project* (2004-present). Notebook, collage. 8.5 x 11 in. (closed). Courtesy of the artist.**



**Fig. 22. Kim Kielhofner, *The Black Book Project* (2004-present). Notebook, collage. 8.5 x 11 in. (closed). Courtesy of the artist.**



**Fig. 23. Allyson Mitchell, *Lady Sasquatch* (2005). Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Toronto. Installation shot courtesy of the artist.**



Fig. 24. GB Jones and Paul Petro, *Queercore Punk Archives* (2006). Paul Petro Special Projects Space, Toronto. Installation shot courtesy of Paul Petro.