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Otherwise
Imagining queer feminist art histories

Edited by Amelia Jones and Erin Silver
Otherwise


87 Allaga has noted of the show: 'This project attempts to examine feminism's contributions, during the seventies, brought to light and served as a platform to launch a series of approaches, without which it would be impossible to understand the present. Without denying the pioneering character of the many proposals that sprouted in the United States, The Gender Battle goes a step further: It addresses the problematic of the egalitarian policies emerging in countries like France, Spain (during the years of dictatorship and transition to democracy), Great Britain, Austria, including some individual figures worldwide, especially Latin American, Africa and Asia.' See press release, http://www.uno.net/it/mostra/58836 (accessed 12 September 2014).

88 Other significant international feminist art exhibitions in the 2000s included the 2005 Venice Biennale, curated by Maria de Corral and Rosa Martínez and with a strong feminist slant; the exhibition of feminist art at the Migros Museum in Zurich in 2006, It's Time for Action (There's No Option), curated by Heike Mander; the ambitious Kiss Kiss Bang Bang: 45 Years of Art and Feminism at the Museum of Fine Arts, Bilbao (2007), curated by Xabier Arraizain; and Off-Center Feminities: Regards from Serbia and Montenegro, organized by Jovana Stolic at Robert Elle Gallery, California State University, Sacramento in 2007.


91 Preciado, Tisto Junkie, 38, 39, 41.

92 Ibid., 395.

Just friends: on the making of Pop Out: Queer Warhol

Jennifer Dojcie

In the early 1990s, while we were graduate students, José Esteban Muñoz, Jonathan Flatley, and I organized a two-day conference on Andy Warhol. It was a tremendous event – high on that experience, we decided to extend our collaboration by publishing the talks that had focused on sexuality and gender, and/or which drew from queer theory to think differently about Warhol's work. That anthology, Pop Out: Queer Warhol (1996), was the first collection of essays to read Warhol's work through a queer critical lens.¹

In considering the question of queer feminist art history, as a field and as a practice, I find myself returning to our work on Pop Out, not only because that collaboration was so important to my development as a scholar but because embedded in the story of Pop Out is the story of my friendship with José.² José passed away suddenly in 2013. Jonathan and I are left holding these stories – and they should be shared out' (a phrase José used often, drawing from Jean Luc Nancy's writing in Being Singular Plural).³ José's friendship helped define much of my adult life: it was through José that I met a great number of my other friends – some of those friends are artists who José wrote about, artists who I'd write about later, following in his footsteps. Our graduate school collaboration evolved into a twenty-year dialogue about our practice as scholars and critics, about our relationship to artists, and, perhaps more implicitly than explicitly, our relationship to each other. I am part of a substantial community of artists, scholars, and friends who miss him desperately. With Jonathan, I am also part of a smaller group of people who shared a certain history with José – we were students together, and we were students of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick during exactly those years when queer studies took off.⁴ There is something about having been Eve's student that makes queer theory feel utterly organic to one's thinking. It is never easy to say what queer studies is, as if it stands independent of other aspects of one's work.⁵ In my own writing, the relationship between queer and feminist studies is not something that can be teased apart: this would feel like peeling off layers of skin.⁶ If I went to graduate school a feminist and came out a queer feminist, it is in some ways the happy accident of my history. This essay shares some of that history by describing
what it was like when queer theory emerged within our community at Duke – which is to speak of my own emergence, but also José's and Jon's, and it is to speak, too, of the emergence of our friendship.

The early 1990s was an intense time at Duke University. The three of us were PhD students in the Graduate Program in Literature. The department was then (and continues to be) an interdisciplinary studies project grounded in Marxist critical theory – the program’s name belies the diversity of the work it supports. (Its PhD students have written about television, architecture, new media, and philosophy.) Throughout our time at Duke the department was chaired by Fredric Jameson, author of Marxism and Form (1974), The Political Unconscious (1982), and Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1990). All of three of us applied to the department to work with Jameson and with the other scholars. The literature faculty then included very prominent scholars in feminist and gender studies, including Toril Moi (Sexual/Textual Politics [1985]), Janice Radway (Reading the Romance [1984]), and Naomi Schor (Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine [1987]).

The work of these three scholars exerted a definitional presence their respective fields (feminist theory, American Studies/cultural studies, and feminist/literary theory). Barbara Herrnstein Smith was also in the Literature Program; she is the author of Contingencies of Value (1991). (‘All value,’ that book’s jacket declares, ‘is contingent.’) Radway and Herrnstein Smith, with English Department chair Stanley Fish (author of Is There a Text in This Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities [1982]), were then among the most influential voices in the academy when it came to rethinking questions of taste, canon-formation, and aesthetic value.

When we entered graduate school, debates about cultural capital and what was then called multiculturalism loomed large. Cultural conservatives like Dinesh Desouza and pseudo-feminist reactionaries like Camille Paglia dominated public discussion of arts politics with sneering polemics that took aim at just about all forms of critical theory. It was the height of the culture wars. Just before that, my own undergraduate years at the New Brunswick, New Jersey campus of Rutgers University had been shaped by walk-outs and sit-ins protesting tuition hikes and the lack of diversity in our curriculum. Students occupied administrative offices in 1990 (the year I graduated) to express outrage at a 10.8 percent tuition hike, and to protest the English Department’s decision to deny tenure to the distinguished African American poet and writer Amiri Baraka. The latter event had a profound impact on me, as an awful lesson about racism in the academy. A few years earlier, at Sarah Lawrence College, José had participated in a similar (but more impactful) occupation. When José and Jonathan arrived at Duke (both started their studies before me), Henry Louis Gates and Anthony Appiah – major figures in black studies – were on the faculty. (Jonathan and José took courses with Gates.) All three of us were propelled into graduate study by interlocking commitments to Marxist critical theory, and anti-racist and feminist struggle.

So far I have only named a few of the people who were on the faculty at the time, but one can see that when it came to challenging traditional academic formations we had access to a veritable army. If anything united the famous humanists at Duke it was this shared interest in challenging discourse on value. No one had a greater impact on us, however, than Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. There are several reasons for this. Eve’s teaching was joyful. She was a powerful thinker, and took obvious pleasure from her remarkable capacities. Eve paid close attention to pleasure, love, to forms of attachment. She could floor you with insight into things like shame, loneliness, the cruelty of certain kinds of intelligence, and the brutality of ignorance (the privilege of unknowing). She knew how to work with sharp knives. Her way of thinking turned us out. It mattered to Eve that her thinking, working, and being unfolded in a kind of happy collaboration. We were lucky to get to know this side of Eve not only from reading her books.

The scene of our relationships with Eve was the house she kept with her friend and colleague Michael Moon (author of Disseminating Whitman [1991] and A Small Boy and Others [1988]). It was a gorgeous 1960s ranch with a large common area and an open floor plan. As PhD students, trying to imagine what our lives might look like, living in common with friends (rather than with romantic partners) in a home that was also something like a community center seemed like a pretty good model. If they brought a scholar or artist to campus, Eve and Michael hosted a party. We ended the Warhol conference with a party at their house; we also threw the book party for Pop Out there. I remember spending one evening sitting on the living room floor with a crowd, watching Eve lip-sync to ‘Total Eclipse of the Heart’ with her niece; I remember watching VHS tapes of movies there, and falling asleep on the couch. I remember sitting on that couch with Eve, and receiving so much counsel – about writing, the job market, and life in general. Her partner, Hal Sedgwick, remembers that the house ‘evolved into just the kind of elastic, porous space of work and friendship that she so valued.’ This interweaving of work and friendship was a powerful ideal, especially for José, whose apartment in New York would be for his students something like what Eve’s place was for us.

I was transformed by the combination of reading her work, listening to her talk out work in progress in seminars and public lectures, and being invited into her home. ‘What I’m proudest of,’ Eve once remarked, ‘is having a life where work and love are impossible to tell apart.’ And this was the kind of life that we were seeking. Eve’s work has an ethos, and an ethics. Take her writing in Epistemology of the Closet (1990). The book opens with a series of axioms:
Axiom v: People are different from each other. It is astonishing how few respectable conceptual tools we have for dealing with this self-evident fact. A tiny number of inconceivably coarse axes of categorization have been painstakingly inscribed in current critical and political thought: gender, race, class, nationality, sexual orientation are pretty much the available distinctions. They, with the associated demonstrations of the mechanisms by which they are construed and reproduced, are indispensable, and they may indeed override all or some other forms of difference and similarity. But the sister or brother, the best friend, the classmate, the parent, the child, the lover, the ex: our families, loves, and enmities alike, not to mention the strange relations of our work, play, and activism, prove that even people who share all or most of our own positionings along these crude axes may still be different enough from us, and from each other, to seem like all but different species.19

As ‘self-evident’ as the fact of difference is, it is remarkably difficult to develop one’s scholarship around a commitment to it. This axiom’s challenge is that of the relationship of the particular to the universal, the assumption of differences into difference. What does it mean to actually hold differences in mind? What does it mean to engage and challenge the discursive forces that enlist difference in the service of the categorical, the disciplined? I see in this section of Epistemology of the Closet an anticipation of some of Eve’s most imaginative, and generous, theorizations of gender identity. In one essay published slightly later, for example, she posits that ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are not polar opposites (even discursively) so much as axes to which one might have an orthogonal relation, meaning one isn’t necessarily masculine or feminine, one might be very masculine and very feminine, or not much of either. That isn’t all, however: for Eve, these two axes are not enough – the possibilities of one’s sense of orientation and alignment must be, she thinks, infinitely variable.

If we may be forgiven a leap from two-dimensional into n-dimensional space, I think it would be interesting … to hypothesize that not only masculinity and femininity, but in addition effemacity, butchness, femmness and probably some other superficially related terms, might equally turn out instead to represent independent variables – or at least, unpredictably dependent ones. I would just ask you to call to mind all the men you know who may be both highly masculine and highly effeminate – but at the same time not a bit feminine.20

A person might be, as she put it, ‘gendery’, or a person might not be defined by gender much at all.21 She then adds other sets of possibilities: certain aspects of gender (or at least the modeling of it) might be graduated (e.g., degrees of femininity) but others might work as ‘threshold effects’ (e.g., either butch, or not). This playful introduction of the word ‘gendery’ is just one example of how Eve could expand on differences queerly, and in a way that felt, at the time, profoundly liberating. (Aspects of this line of thought appear in ‘Queer and Now’, one of her most explicit explorations of the word ‘queer’.22) When I’ve taught this essay, students immediately absorb its vocabulary, testing out ‘gendery’ as it applies not only to people, but to things like paintings, or gestures. Each application of the word loosens up its meaning. The word ‘queer’ emerges from experimentations with words like ‘gender’, and these experiments are ongoing (as we see in the way the word ‘trans’ functions now). As much we might try to stretch these words, or perhaps I mean ‘stretch ourselves and each other; at some point they snap back into the awful sex/gender grid and its either/or; its us/them’s. And we start again.

The Warhol project grew out of a 1991 seminar that Eve and Michael co-taught, on ‘Sex, Gender, and Representation.’ When Jonathan reminded me recently of the seminar’s name he joked, ‘remember, this was before queer theory.’ When we enrolled at Duke, ‘queer theory’ was not quite a stable intellectual formation. The word ‘queer’ did not define our paths into graduate study. In my application, I described myself as a radical feminist and quoted Monique Wittig (I am still prone to doing both). But by 1991, everyone was reading Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble (1990). We were also reading Simon Watney’s Policing Desire (1987) and watching Isaac Julien’s 1989 film Looking for Langston (which Henry Louis Gates screened for the seminar that José and Jonathan took with him). We were all navigating the AIDS crisis: although being in graduate school in North Carolina put us at a certain remove from social responses to the disasters unfolding in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, AIDS, ACT-UP, and AIDS activist writing were a big part of our lives, as was a certain fear and outrage. (A whole group of us made the five-hour drive to Washington, DC, for a 1993 march for LGBT rights; we trekked to New York City for Pride. We campaigned against the awful North Carolina senator Jesse Helms. José and Jonathan were part of a group that founded an ACT-UP chapter for the region.) We had all read Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherríe Moraga as undergraduate students and wanted to carry the wisdom of their writing into our own. Our engagement with the work of feminists of color would be as much a constant in our lives as our engagement with Marxist thought. We also loved the work of certain artists and writers. If Jonathan, José, and I worked well in collaboration, it was because we had these commitments in common. We could not separate our Marxism from our work as feminists or from our work as anti-racist and anti-homophobic scholars – none of this could be separated from desire to write about (or perhaps I mean more, ‘with’) art. Figuring out what this meant was not easy, and what it meant would be different for each of us.

None of us, for example, wanted to collaborate in the placement of Warhol at the center of narratives about aesthetics and politics. Writing about Warhol
most influential example of this disavowal is Fredric Jameson’s discussion of Warhol’s *Diamond Dust Shoes* in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Merck unpacks the distinction that Jameson draws between Warhol’s paintings of shoes (flattened out, glittery, cascading pumps), and Van Gogh’s (worn, dirty, peasant boots). Jameson turns to Heidegger’s writing on Van Gogh’s shoes (in *The Origin of the Work of Art*) in order to describe Van Gogh’s paintings of worn peasant boots as conjuring (in Jameson’s words) not only ‘a whole missing object world’ but a world of equipment and utility, a world of productive labor. In contrast, Merck observes, for Jameson Warhol’s shoes appear to us as ‘quite useless.’ She continues:

Jameson pronounces *Diamond Dust Shoes* mute (‘I am tempted to say that it does not really speak to us at all’), ineffectual (‘nothing in this painting organizes even a minimal place for the viewer’), and lifeless (‘a random collection of dead objects’). The accusation becomes one of fetishism, in both the Freudian and Marxist senses; the latter alleging the shoes’ commodified indifference to mere use value, the former consigning them to a perversion explicitly contrasted with Van Gogh’s heteronormative shoes [as Jameson calls them, drawing from a moment in Derrida’s writing about this work].

This reading of *Diamond Dust Shoes* (as always already empty) assumes a viewer with no desire to fill them – a reader totally unable to imagine the subjective world of the person to whom they might have once belonged. In fact, at this moment in his essay, one cannot imagine a subject who would want to think of such things: Jameson reads the painting’s formal structure as precluding even the desire for this origin story. This is one aspect of the work’s flattening out, its operation as pastiche, and its appearance to many as ‘affectless’. From this, Merck maps out a queer analysis of Warhol’s work (drawing from both Marx and Freud in the process). In doing so, she also stages a queer intervention in Jameson’s reading. ‘Figuring Out Andy Warhol’ restores the shoes’ contexts – as artifacts of feminine performance, as instruments of drag, as indicators of gendered labor. She then places the desire to restore these shoes to their ‘original owners’ in relation to theorizations of the origins of the work of art, the function of the art object as itself an origin, and in relation to the gender trouble that haunts all origin stories. That, here, we are all talking about shoes only makes her reading all the more devastating. The shoe, after all, is ‘an ideal transitional object’. It is the accessory to the foot (recall the Freudian narrative explaining foot fetishism: as the child looks away from the mother’s vagina, his eyes drop to the feet). The show is put to ‘perverse use’ in Warhol’s work not as a ‘substitute for the woman’s missing penis’ (the fetish’s normative function) but as ‘the dick’s disguise, the equipment that some boys employ in the hard work of...’
We can see what these shoes are doing, then, in Warhol’s work. But how does one grow a theory of postmodern aesthetics—a theory animated by a language of profound negation—from such an infamously sexual thing without speaking to that? This is, of course, exactly how the mechanisms of disavowal work around the fact of a woman’s sexual difference. (And the sexual difference of a trans woman? Or a lesbian feminist?) Emblems of gender trouble (e.g., drag, prostitution) appear often in works defining the modern and the postmodern. (This is the subject of my own essay in *Pop Out,* which focuses on the rhetoric of prostitution in much criticism on Warhol.) Merck’s analysis suggests that the rhetoric of disorientation that characterizes theorizations of the postmodern indicates that a kind of gender/identity panic lies at the heart of discourse on ‘the cultural logics of late capitalism.’ It suggests that no theorization of the aesthetic practices of this period would be complete without an accounting of its sex/gender politics. Gendered modes of performance emerge as powerful interpretive frameworks in Merck’s essay—the scene of drag might, she proposes, hold together the Marxist, feminist, and queer readings of Warhol’s work. Her talk floored us; it named something many of us had felt about theories of postmodernism, which almost uniformly excluded all discussion of art by women and artists of color (something her essay does not address, but is as much a feature of such writing as is gender-panic). She didn’t just point out the absence of critical attention to sex. She theorized it. What she said that day was so right, and so true.

Mandy Merck is easily one of the most knowledgeable people I’ve ever met. The talk was exhilarating—she is a terrific speaker. Fredric Jameson was in the audience; he was chair of the department, after all. I think there was some kind of exchange between them, but I can’t remember for certain. Whatever was said wasn’t nearly as memorable as what happened the first day of business after the conference was over. Mandy Merck had come to the Warhol conference in advance of what should have been a yearlong engagement teaching at Duke. Jameson, however, was upset; he wanted to rescind her invitation to teach. When word of his anger, and the possible consequences for Mandy, reached us, we were horrified. We also felt awfully naive. We immediately shared what we knew with faculty able to advocate for Mandy Merck. I recall only women in the department taking a position on this: they negotiated a compromise—one semester of teaching, instead of two. This would at least give Mandy a chance to land a teaching gig somewhere else for the rest of the year.

With that compromise reached, Jameson called for a meeting with us. We all went into the meeting having prepared very short affirmations of our commitment to Jameson’s work, and to the department’s intellectual mission. We all felt we needed to assert our intention to study Marxism and queer theory—that working on the latter was not a betrayal of our commitment to the former. We were all afraid of the potential consequences of becoming alienated from not just the department chair, but from the Marxist critic we all admired. He was furious at us for defending her work. He characterized her talk as rude. It wasn’t—it was written as if the author was a part of the critical community she engaged. It wasn’t anti-Marxist; it was Marxist-feminist, and anti-homophobic. The gist of that meeting: we affirmed our desire to work with him, and with Eve. It felt we were being asked to choose, and we refused. We learned that he was angry and hurt: we learned that he felt betrayed.

In the end, the material impact on us (the PhD students) was negligible. Looking back, I am amazed that he met with us at all. Plenty of faculty of his stature would not have bothered. The fact is, graduate students mattered to him. He must have felt something like what we did in Merck’s talk—a tectonic shift, but he had been placed on the wrong side of the fault line. It’s one thing to be engaged by a critic: it is another thing to feel that one can’t respond—that a conversation is being staged around and through your work in a language that you perhaps find alienating. But the fact remains that in his response to Merck’s talk, Jameson affirmed the truth of it.

Nevertheless, or perhaps exactly because, I turn to Jameson’s own writing to describe what listening to Mandy Merck’s paper felt like, for me. In *Marxism and Form,* Jameson narrates the experience of the dialectic turn in one’s thought:

It is... as though in the midst of its immediate perplexities the mind had attempted, by willpower, by fiat, to lift itself mightily up by its own bootstraps. [Dialectical thought] aims... not so much at solving the particular dilemmas in question, as at converting those problems into their own solutions on a higher level, and making the fact and the existence of the problem itself the starting point for new research. This is indeed the most sensitive moment in the dialectical process: that in which an entire complex of thought is hoisted through a kind of inner leverage one floor higher, in which the mind... now finds itself willing to take what had been a question for an answer, standing outside its previous exertions in such a way that it reckons itself into the problem, understanding the dilemma not as a resistance of the object alone, but also as the result of a subject-pole deployed and disposed against it in a strategic fashion, in short, as the function of a determinate subject-object relationship.

There is a breathlessness about this shift from the normal object-oriented activity of the mind to such dialectical self-consciousness—something of the sickening shudder we feel in an elevator’s fall or in the sudden dip in an airliner. That recalls us to our bodies much as this recalls us to our mental positions and thinkers and observers. The shock indeed is basic, and constitutive of the dialectic as such: without this transformational moment, without this initial conscious transcendence of an older, more naïve position, there can be no question of any genuinely dialectical coming to consciousness.
This is not only a helpful description of the dialectical turn; it is beautiful writing. *Marxism and Form* is one of my touchstones, as a writer and a critic. The moment of reaching this kind of understanding is just this abstract and physical. And I felt this 'breathless' in Merck's paper — we felt this way about the project that became *Pop Out*. Eve named the book: that word 'but' does not describe the outing of Warhol's sexuality (as if one needed to do that). It describes the 'turning out' of criticism. Warhol, as an object of thought, led us to a place where we could see that the opposition of Marxist critical theory and queer theory, the problem of one's relationship to the other, was itself something to reflect on, something for us each to tackle.

This is, for me, where our projects seemed to depart from Marxism, at least on the level of the landscape of the graduate student social scene. *I never* had to defend my dedications as a feminist or a queer theorist for my commitments to Marxist thinking; but my commitments to Marxist thinking were somehow watered down, rendered less serious by the fact that much of my writing is centered on sexual politics. My work, sometimes, and perhaps like Merck's essay, feels rude to people — at least to people who do not want to think about sexual politics. Perhaps I'm being rude now, sharing this twenty-year-old tale of a moment of pedagogical connection and disconnection. In that moment, I felt the incommensurability of Marxism, queer studies, and sexual difference not only institutionally, but within myself. They were not in alignment, and yet they were synchronous.

The 'this or that,' 'us or them' structure, with its brutal differentiations, was a big part of our lives in graduate school — the gulf between students who identified as Marxists and 'the queer theorists/feminist/anyone working on race' could feel insurmountable (on both sides). It was on those of us in the latter group to get 'dialectical' about the problem. This said, it bears recalling, too, that if the 'queer theorists' ratted 'the Marxists,' we were only slightly less confounding to some feminists. It wasn't unusual for people working in feminist/women's studies to pronounce Eve Sedgwick as 'not feminist,' because so much of her writing focused on relations between men (on, in other words, the gearworks of patriarchy). When, in a job interview, I alluded to her work with feminist theory in the introduction to *Between Men*, a faculty member snorted, 'You call Eve Sedgwick a feminist?!' (I didn't get the job.) Eve warned me to lightly downplay my work with her in certain contexts for this reason. I also had a very difficult relationship to women's studies at Duke: I was fired from the department (I worked as a full-time administrator for six months). It was a terrible fit in part because of how I thought and worked, as an anti-racist queer theorist, and also as a feminist. (There are so many different kinds of feminism!) In a mock job interview, Toril Moi asked me to explain the relationship of feminism and queer theory in my work. It was the first question I was asked: I remember feeling the floor drop out from under-

neath me. I grew up with feminism. I grew up, in fact, with a pretty Marxist version of it. My mother was a NOW activist in the 1970s; she left NOW because it was too bourgeois. Her very worn copy of Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectics of Sex* (1970) is one of my most treasured possessions. I realized after that disastrous rehearsal that if I stammered it was because it felt like I was being asked to explain myself. Which was to explain my ambivalent, vexed relationship to feminism — an ambivalence I inherited from my mother (a gift). (I had worked as Toril's research assistant; she knew me well.) This sense of proximity is, of course, itself *very* feminist. The accusation that I am too close to my subject is one I'll never shed, as long as sex/gender/desire figure so explicitly in my work. Now, when asked to speak to sexual difference and queer feminism, I tend to turn to specific works of art, not because of what they have to say about queer theory and feminism, but because they show us why we need both, and more.

Perhaps following the movement of my relationships, after *Pop Out* I returned to Warhol's work because it helped me think about feminism, queer collaboration, and friendship (I have twice written about women in Warhol's films). I am drawn to those aspects of Warhol's practice that invited other people into his work; I also took my cues on this point from José's writing. His essay in *Pop Out* is about Jean-Michel Basquiat's collaborations with Warhol; it is not about Warhol's work, it is about Basquiat's disidentificatory practice, as expressed through their collaboration. After *Pop Out*, José would turn to people we encounter through Warhol's films: the dancer and choreographer Freddie Herko (who features in José's *Cruising Utopia*), and the drag artist Marie Montez (who features in José's more recent writing on 'the sense of Brown'). José and I lingered together on the margins with Herko, Montez, and women like Viva from Warhol's Factory. We lingered over people who were friends with Warhol, and we lingered there together.

In his writing on the politics of friendship, Jacques Derrida extends an invitation: 'Let us cease speaking of friendship, of the *eidos* of friendship, let us speak of friends.' Writing friendship as a category with specific attributes, Derrida implies, works against the recognition of particular friends — thinking categorically about friendship iron out the texture of friendships themselves. The categorical, José and I often joked, is where thought goes to die. We tended to assert this in our conversations about the disciplines across which we worked — art history (me, more than him) and performance studies (him, more than me). That joke distilled a point made in the introduction to *Pop Out*:

the academic disciplines, defining as they do what counts as scholarly work, have encouraged the process by which concerns around sexuality are perpetually deferred to some other line of inquiry. As Foucault put it, '[a] proposition must fulfill some onerous and complex conditions before it can be admitted
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within a discipline, conditions that have played no small role in foreclosing the possibility of making any propositions about Warhol’s queerness in relation to his rich body of cultural productions.

Often, as Jonathan and José and I argue in this introduction, some of Warhol’s audiences, themes, figures, and indeed many of the works of art themselves are simply removed from the field of critical consideration. When we wrote the introduction, we were interested in recovering the world of friendship, desire, collaboration, and argument that defined Warhol’s circle: these stories are necessary for reading Warhol’s work—and not simply biographically, Warhol’s work interested us because it offered a way to stage conversations about the politics of desire, the politics of being in the world, and also about the relationship between life and labor. Warhol’s way of working may have closely parodied the world of manufacturing and commerce, but it also made room for some spectacularly ‘unproductive’ citizens and resistant subjects, and explored a wide range of intimacies—often as if one had all the time in the world to do so. Too often, these two aspects of his practice—that which is interesting for what it has to say about, say, late capitalism, and that which is interesting for what it has to say about sex/gender sexuality—are divided from each other.

In theorizing friendship, Derrida touches on the function of the opposition of éros and philia in shoring up the border between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ The difference marked through these terms is both more and less than the difference between sex and not-sex. In the philosophical tradition he challenges, women are the others against whom men define their friendships. Thus, he writes, philosophical writing on friendship is carved out against the ‘double exclusion of the feminine, the exclusion of friendship between a man and a woman and the exclusion of friendship between women.’ These two exclusions from friendship have their stories—but these two stories are linked by the problem of the feminine. Traditions in philosophy dismiss the second sex as incapable of friendship and note women’s subordination to love. Friendships with women, as French Renaissance writer Michel de Montaigne explained, are theoretically possible, but ‘their souls [do not] seem firm enough to withstand the clasp of a knot so lasting and tightly drawn.’ She is at once tyrant and slave,” Derrida writes (paraphrasing Nietzsche’s Zarathustra), ‘and that is why she (still) remains incapable of friendship. She knows only love.” Friendship with women is impossible, it seems, because women want not friends, but lovers.

Love here is understood as a feverish erotic attachment, as fundamentally hierarchical (in the overestimation of the love object, for example) and is therefore set in opposition to the more egalitarian model of brotherhood—which provides friendship’s (and philosophy’s) background. It is hard to overstate the effect of that opposition on our thinking about intimacies and attachments of all kinds. The difference between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ between desire and friend-

ship, is also raced and gendered. The opposition of desire and friendship is an effect of the discourse of sex and sexual difference; it is a colonial formation shaped by fear and desire. When Derrida ruminates on what it might mean to think outside of these philogocentric structures of differentiation and belonging, implicitly, for him, it means to find more ‘brothers’ in the world. He writes, ‘I have more than one “brother” of more than one sex, and I love having more than one, each time unique, of whom and to whom, in more than one language, across quite a few boundaries, I am bound by a conjuration and so many unuttered oaths.”

When I first read that very homo-romantic line of Derrida’s, I must admit I thought of my own friendship with José. Which is kind of embarrassing (because I am not a ‘brother’?). This, I suppose, is exactly the problem with words. The whole point, really, is to have relationships like this. To know people long enough to be known by them. José was the gravitational center for a world of people who felt this way about him; our feelings about and for each other emerge from this constellation of friends to whom we are ‘bound by a conjuration and so many,’ in our case, ‘uttered oaths.’ (Very little was unspoken between us.)

Since he died, I have read and re-read the opening paragraph to his essay in Pop Out. I hardly need to open the book: I know these sentences by heart. ‘Famous and Dandy like B. “n” Andy: Race, Pop and Basquiat’ opens with an expression of wonder that also reads as a call-to-arms.

I always marvel at the ways in which non-white children survive a white supremacist U.S. culture that preys on them. I am equally in awe of the ways in which queer children navigate a homophobic public sphere that would rather they did not exist. The survival of children who are both queerly and racially identified is nothing short of staggering. The obstacles and assaults that pressure and fracture such young lives are as brutally physical as a police billy club or the fists of a homophobic thug and as insidiously disembodied as homophobic rhetoric in a rap song or the racist underpinnings of Hollywood cinema. I understand the strategies and rituals that allow survival in such hostile cultural waters, and in turn feel a certain compulsion to try to articulate and explicate these practices of survival. These practices are the armaments such children and the adults they become use to withstand the disabling forces of a culture and state apparatus bent on denying, erasing, and in too many cases, snuffing out such emergent identity practices. Sometimes these weapons are so powerfully developed that these same queer children and children of color grow up to do more than just survive. And sometimes these shields collapse without a moment’s notice.

On 20 January 1993 José read this paragraph to me in the middle of night. We were writing side-by-side in a workroom in our department’s basement,
pulling an all-nighter. It was the night before the opening of the Warhol conference – the three of us had spent eighteen months organizing it. We were all giving papers alongside scholars we admired, and in front of our advisors. We were all scared. Jonathan went into the conference with a good draft, as the idea for the event grew out of a paper he wrote for the seminar that he and José had taken with Michael and Eve. José and I, in contrast, produced the bulk of our presentations at the last minute: we had worked hard on the conference we hadn’t had time to write – and perhaps because we were so scared, we had both procrastinated. During the night, José worked out his theorization of the practice of disidentification while I worked on my feminist analysis of the homophobic discourse that shaped Warhol’s reception history. I remember that we were both ‘in the zone’ – in my early 20s, this was a rare experience for me; writing, then, was pure torture.

José read this paragraph out loud, testing it. We talked over the presence of the billy club in the paper’s opening. It is a hard image. Is it too much, he asked, or is it not enough? We would have that conversation with each other over and over again: we supported each other’s more aggressive, interventionist impulses. It is important, though, that such moves be written in a way that the point be felt by the audience. That’s what we talked out. Did the force of it come across? In that paragraph, the billy club indexes scenes of violence. In particular, it indexes authorized, racist forms of violence directed at black and brown men. At the time, it evoked the 1992 beating of Rodney King. It also recalled the 1983 death of Michael Stewart, a black man and graffiti artist who was brutally murdered by New York City police who chocked him with a club. Stewart’s death hit Basquiat hard. (It could have been me,’ Basquiat said. He made a painting about Stewart’s murder.) This paragraph, in fact, reads like an index to José’s work – I can see traces of what we were reading then, of the debates we had with each other; I can see José’s desire for his own work in these sentences. I’ve saturated my memory of that night with twenty years of friendship, but I can also feel all the things we were reading, the things we were talking about.

In José’s writing, the billy club moves from the hands of the police to the homophobic thug – recalling the crowd of white policemen and hooligans who use their sticks to break into a queer club at the end of Isaac Julien’s Looking for Langston. (In Disidentifications, José’s essay on Julien’s film follows a chapter on Basquiat.) José’s alignment of racist and homophobic violence with the ‘disembodied rhetoric’ that shapes popular culture recalls the second thesis offered in Louis Althusser’s ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’. Ideology has a material existence – ‘not the material existence of the paving stone or a rifle, but a material life that exerts just as much force.’ José’s movement between rhetorical and actually-existing-in-the-world violence reminds me that we were all reading the work of Antonio Gramsci as well, absorbing his theorization of cultural hegemony into our understanding of the operations of racism and homophobia. In this paragraph exploring the miraculous survival of queer kids of color, we can see José working out some of the ideas about gender and performativity associated with Butler’s groundbreaking Gender Trouble. The material of the body, ideologies of race and gender, discourse on sex, the politics of location – I can see our shared library in this paragraph: Stuart Hall, Andre Lorde, and, of course, the work of our teachers.

‘Famous and Dandy’ treats Basquiat’s work as a map guiding the viewer through a treacherous landscape, a hostile world that the artist claims, powerfully but also ambivalently. José’s reading of Basquiat’s work draws from black feminist writing about film (Michelle Wallace, on Joan Crawford), Eve Sedgwick’s writing on shame and performativity (originally developed in her writing on the novelist Henry James), linguistics (Michel Pechaux, drawing a theory of disidentification out of Althusser’s writing on subject formation). He leans on a history of comic books, Sander Gilman’s writing on antisemitic discourse, Lauren Berlant’s writing on national fantasy, and Paul Gilroy’s writing on the Black Atlantic. And then he turns to Freud’s writing on melancholia. He pulls together this diverse group of theorists in order to set up his conclusion – a powerful conversation with bell hooks’s 1993 essay ‘Altars of Sacrifice: Re-remembering Basquiat.’ It is clear from José’s writing that he saw hooks’s correction of racist interpretations of Basquiat’s work as necessary and important. (Basquiat’s work was often, for example, described as playful and naïve – a characterization that was mirrored by a tendency to describe the artist himself as childlike.)

bell hooks offers an important analysis of the presence of pain and struggle in his oeuvre. But her writing on Basquiat also takes the artist to task for its preoccupation with male figures – musicians, artists, athletes. These figures, she rightly points out, are in crisis. For hooks, that world of Basquiat’s work is in crisis, however, in part because women are excluded from it. This is where José parts ways with hooks, carefully. A black feminist reading of Basquiat’s work must allow for the artist’s preoccupation with a world in which black men struggle to survive, in ways that are gendered and raced. ‘Representing the complicated and dire situation of black masculinity in U.S. culture,’ he writes, ‘is important cultural work that should not be disavowed as a limitation.’ There must be room to imagine gendered coalitions while also resisting the gender normativity that would approach a single-sex imaginary as if it were malformed. The essay recovers the specific stories of desire and loss, loss and desire that shape relationships between men of color – a story that could only be accessed through the writings of bell hooks, and Freud, and Sedgwick, and Gilroy. It concludes with these words:
There was a certain quality of melancholia intrinsic to the African American cultural worker, a quality that was absolutely necessary to navigate his way through a racist and genocidal landscape ... [A] recent history of African-American masculinity would read like VanDer Zeel’s funeral book. This is especially true of Basquiat’s painting. The shrines, altars, and portraits that Basquiat produced are not limited to the status of works of mourning. I want to suggest that within them is the potential to become meditative texts that decipher the workings of mourning in our culture. They are melancholic echoes, queer reverberations, that make possible an identity or cluster of communal identifications that are presently under siege.64

That siege is unending. Basquiat’s work holds grief open so that it might be mined for intelligence. This is what makes Basquiat’s work daring, and generative. “To assess the damage,” Cherrie Moraga wrote (in an essay José loved), ‘is a dangerous act.”64

The opening paragraph of José’s talk was one of the most daring things I’d ever heard. Delivered in the context of that conference, it resonated with anyone who felt out of place, whose mere presence in the academy was received as an act of defiance. José’s work is not only about survival. It is itself a mode of surviving. (I understand the strategies and rituals that allow survival in such hostile cultural waters, and I in turn feel a certain compulsion to try to articulate and explicate these practices of survival.) Watching José give this paper on Jean-Michel Basquiat was my first direct experience of what would become known as queer-of-color critique – it was my first experience with what that particular intervention requires of the person who makes it, and what it enables in the community that receives it.

In 1991, just before I arrived at Duke, Henry Louis Gates and Anthony Kwame Appiah had taken up positions at Harvard. They left in their wake a lot of conversations about racism in higher education in general, and at Duke in particular. If Duke was a tough place to work as senior faculty of color (at the time, this fact was freely acknowledged), it was a good deal harder on students of color (graduate and undergraduate). After Gates and Appiah left, we watched the campus struggle to make hires in every field associated with a minority community – this is a painful side of many university hiring practices, whatever racist mythology about Affirmative Action programs tells you. In the early 1990s José, Jonathan, and I, and I talked about this as much as we talked about queer theory. We in fact fought about institutional politics – José and I, in particular, would work out our relationship to feminism and to anti-racist work in the academy pretty directly. We were young, and stubborn. A turning point, for me: at a gathering described by Jonathan as one of our many ‘council meetings’ (as friends, we argued and debated just about everything, including each other’s dating choices and household arrangements), José described to his mostly white friends how it felt to have everyone wait for him to make the anti-racist and anti-homophobic intervention. Then, in the early 1990s, and there, at Duke, it was always necessary. He said something like: ‘I know you have my back, but sometimes I’d like to have yours.’ A kind of understanding was reached: we would coordinate a career-long attack on the disciplines. No one should be doing such things alone. But of course, the material reality of university life is such that faculty of color, queer faculty, queer faculty of color, women belonging to any (or none) of these categories will find themselves isolated, in direct conflict with colleagues and/or with the institution and our ‘disciplines.’ And usually, when in such a place, we would email, phone or text José.

Our experience of being together at Duke was shaped by a keen awareness of who was not there, of who moved through the space of the academy with ease and who was stopped at the gates. At its best, mobilizing a queer critical practice, practiced from within the academy, feels like breaking out of a Trojan Horse. But if the early 1990s at Duke were heady, they were also really scary. Over the years, a number of us have joked that the place nearly killed us. Of course, this is what graduate school can feel like – surely that aspect of it has only gotten worse.

This is a grim thing to joke about, however, for a circle of people who lost a friend to suicide: Brian Selsky (who was a part of the conference and published an essay in Pop Out) died in 1997. He was 30. Brian was very dear to us, particularly to José. José speaks to Brian’s importance to him in his remarkable essay on Freddie Herko (who committed suicide with a legendary, drug-fueled jeté out a window). He describes visiting the site of Herko’s death, and thinking of those around him who have struggled with suicidal depression, or who lost loved ones to its terrible grip.

But mostly I thought about my best friend from graduate school. He took his own life several years ago. I recall all the dreams I have had about him, still have about him, in which he is mysteriously alive and living in the walls of my apartment. I discover his lingering presence in this recurring dream, and I somehow know that it is my job to get him out, to save him. I never do. I always fail.65

José was the first of us to get a job: he was the first to leave. The scene of his leaving Duke was rough. It felt like a prison break. He had to write his dissertation very quickly: he was hired into the Performance Studies Department at NYU as soon as hiring a PhD student is remotely feasible. This places an incredible amount of stress on a person, even as that stress comes from something good. We watched him stare down every side of the fear of failure – dissertation-writing is dogged by it in the best of circumstances. I remember sitting on the front steps of his place in Durham one afternoon that last year together, swapping stories about anxiety and the shape of our panic. That year, José walked through fire – and Eve was right there with him. When I went
through my own process (which was slower), she did the same for me. (It took
Eve a long time to win the security of a tenured position: she knew profes-
sional rejection much more intimately than most of her readers realize and
this made her a terrific advisor.) Eve understood and believed in José. His
dissertation became Disidentifications, a field-defining book—a book that now
has a long history of making room in the world for the queer kids of color who
figure in that opening paragraph of the essay on Basquiat.

When José and I read our papers to each other in the middle of the night,
we had little idea of the impact that this Warhol project would have on our
lives. But I think we did have a sense of the importance of our relationships
to each other, and we trusted this constellation of people, friends and teachers,
to guide us to wherever we were going.

Queer feminist art history is something a few of us practice in our writing
and our teaching as a form of critical resistance. But structuring and making
that professional activity possible is something else, something like Derrida’s
world of—let us not say brothers but friends, just friends.

Notes
1 Jennifer Doyle, José Esteban Muñoz, and Jonathan Flatley, eds., Pop Out: Queer
2 The focus of this essay is my friendship with José Muñoz; he and I grew closer over
the years and our work is very much intertwined. Jonathan and I were partners
while I was at Duke. We remain friends and will always be connected by this
shared history. I am very grateful to Jonathan for talking with me about this period
in our lives; these conversations were important for recalling both the climate at
Duke in the early 1990s and the process of publishing Pop Out.
3 Jean Luc Nancy, Being Singular Plural (1998), trans. Robert Richardson and Anne
4 A (very) partial list of scholars from this circle includes the critical theorist Eleanor
Kaufmann, literary theorist and sound studies scholar Gustave Stadler, film
and German studies scholar Johannes von Moltke, feminist/queer literary studies
scholar Katharyn Kent, and Victorianist Amanda Berry. Latino studies scholar
Antonio Viego (a critical theorist working in Latino studies) is a childhood friend
of José; he was also an important part of José’s community as a graduate student.
5 Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, ‘What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About:
X?’, PMLA 110 (1995), 543–9, opens with a refusal to define queer theory: ‘In our
view, it is not useful to consider queer theory a thing, especially dignified by capital
letters. We wonder whether queer commentary might not more accurately describe
the things linked by the rubric, most of which are not theory. ‘The metadiscourse of
“queer theory” intends an academic object, yet queer commentary has vital prece-
dents and collaborations in aesthetic genres and journalism. It cannot be assimil-
ated to a single discourse, along a propositional program’ (543). This refusal, in
fact, characterizes a lot of foundation writing on the term, including Eve Kosofsky
Sedgwick’s essay ‘Queer and Now’, in Tendencies (Durham, NC: Duke University
Press, 1996), 1–20. Consider the following: ‘A word so fraught as “queer” is—fraught
with so many social and personal histories of exclusion, violence, defiance, exclu-
sion—never can only denote; nor can it only connote; a part of its experimental
force as a speech act is the way in which it dramatizes locationary position itself’
(9). One of earliest explorations of the term was a special issue of differences: A
Lesbian and Gay Sexualities’, was edited by Teresa de Lauretis. Her introductory
eyesi (iii–xvii) similarly produces queer theory as a kind of critical transgression
or intervention and not, in and of itself, a disciplinary formation. De Lauretis
in fact positions the two words ‘queer’ and ‘theory’ as interventionist modifiers
of each other. Disciplinary formation is, and always will be, in an antagonistic
relationship to both the feminist and the queer aspects of our work (this is the
point of our work). That this special issue was the journal’s third should evidence
the intimacy of the relationship between feminist and queer critical studies.
6 This said, in other works I have taken up the question of feminist friendship and
queerness. One portion of this essay (especially my attention to Derrida’s writing
on friendship below) revises the introduction to ‘Between Friends’, in The Blackwell
Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies, ed. George
takes up the challenge of friendships between men and women (gay or straight)
and advocates for queer practices of generosity. This subject is also addressed in
Sex Objects: Art and the Dialectics of Desire (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Press, 2006), see esp. xxv–xxvii, and the chapter “I Must Be Boring Someone”:
Women in Warhol’s Films, 11–16. My first publication was an encyclopedia entry on
‘Queer Theory’ in which I tracked its relationship to feminist scholarship. See
‘Queer Theory’ in The Oxford Companion to Women’s Writing in the United States
(New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 720–24. The relationship between these
two formations is taken up explicitly by Elizabeth Freeman in Time Birds: Queer
Temporalities, Queer Histories (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
7 All three of us would have both Fredric Jameson and Eve Sedgwick on our PhD
committees.
8 One could say that Badway scandalized scholars by taking fans of popular fiction
seriously, but the real scandal of her work is that it is grounded in ethnographic
research on readers—whose interests had until then been exiled from scholarship
on any literary genre, be it high or low. Schor modeled new ways of reading narra-
tive fiction by surfacing how gender politics shapes our attention. Smith’s interven-
tions are philosophical, and are not usually associated with feminist scholarship.
But her analysis of the problem of value’s contingent nature is necessary to any
feminist critical practice staged within or around the arts. A feminist art history,
for example, cannot make a universal claim, excluding its assertion that all univer-
sal claims mask the claimant’s location and the claimant’s particularity.
9 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ‘The Privilege of Unknowing: Diderot’s The Nun’, in
Tendencies, 23–51.
10 Hal Sedgwick, ‘Biography’, on his website honoring Eve Sedgwick’s life and work; see
11 Of the three of us, José’s home – an apartment in New York City – was the closest to Eve and Michael Moon’s model; José’s apartment in fact would be an even more open version of Eve and Michael’s house. And, of the three of us, José’s relationship to his students comes the closest to Bré’s. See, for example, José Esteban Muñoz, ‘Teaching, Minoritarian Knowledge and Love,’ Women and Performance 14.2 (2005), 117–21.
12 This quote can be found on the Sedgwick website: http://evkosofskyedgewick.net/ (accessed 3 October 2014).
15 Ibid.
16 Sedgwick, ‘Queer and Now’.
19 Ibid., 227.
20 Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990); the quotes cited by Merck below are taken from pages 7–10, 33–4.
23 As Amelia Jones asks of Jameson’s writing about Los Angeles as paradigmatically postmodern, also featured in the same collection: ‘what kind of disorientation is this? From what kind of orientation does it diverge?’ Amelia Jones, Self/Image Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 89.
26 José Esteban Muñoz, ‘Famous and Dandy Like B. "n" Andy: Race, Pop and Basquiat’, in Doyle et al., eds, Pop Out, 144–79.
28 See, for example, José Esteban Muñoz, ‘Wise Latinas,’ Criticism 62.3 (2014), 249–65.