QUEERING THE MUSEUM: UTOPIAN FUTURITY IN CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

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ABSTRACT

Queering the Museum: Utopian Futurity in Contemporary Exhibitions expands the history of American art beyond its tightly policed borders to include curators, viewers, artists, *and* artworks as key players in contemporary queer exhibition surveys in U.S.-based museums. Exhibition histories are not the sole domain of museum or curatorial studies, and are as much a part of art history as artists and art objects yet they remain understudied and under-analyzed within the field. I posit that a queer art history not only analyzes the relationship between works of art, but it also engenders the potential to queer the visitor (through the viewing of artworks), considers the production and circulation of artworks within the institution, and disrupts a normative experience of time and space in the museum. Working interdisciplinarily through queer, feminist, and critical theory, my intervention offers an analysis of exhibitions, not as a history per se, but as a constellation of projects that unfolded across U.S.-based museums located in Philadelphia and New York from 2017 through 2019. Placed within the longer context of queerness in the museum I analyze three case studies: Johanna Burton's, Sara O'Keeffe's, and Natalie Bell's *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon* (2017) at the New Museum, New York; Nayland Blake's *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward* (2018) at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Philadelphia; and the collectively curated (Margo Cohen Ristorucci, Lindsay C. Harris, Carmen Hermo, Allie/A.L. Rickard, and Lauren Argentina Zelaya) exhibition *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years after Stonewall* (2019) at The Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Center. I parse what this particular constellation of exhibitions *did* at that specific moment in time, one right after the other, all clustered together both physically (within

the northeast corridor) and also conceptually. While institutional critique has primarily been applied to the production of artwork by artists who intervene in and critique various artworld structures from museums to galleries, my dissertation proposes the term to encompass the entire exhibition as a critique of normative exhibitions and the institutions that present them. The curators of these queer exhibitions engage in deterritorializing traditional museum spaces thereby reterritorializing them with nontraditional artists and artworks. In doing so, the curators construct queer sites of discourse as heterotopias both within and outside of the museum structure offering glimmers of hope, if only momentarily, for ways of being in the world.

For Maxwell and Boris

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: ANTICIPATORY ILLUMINATIONS OF THE FUTURE

Museums have not always been welcoming spaces for LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) folx.[1] Similar to other minority artists, these artists, until very recently, have been left out of the mainstream conversation in the art world. Their works have been and are often marginalized; their identities kept secret. Through much of the history of art as well as the history of exhibitions, the western canon (read white, privileged, heteronormative, and cisgender male) has dominated the conversation. How can we understand the protagonists of art history differently if we closely read objects, exhibitions, and institutions? Perhaps we can arrive at an answer if we ask ourselves the following questions: What might it be like for a queer-identified artist to have their artwork included in a *queer* exhibition?[2] What happens to the mainstream institution when exhibitions focusing on queer content are presented within their hallowed walls? Moreover, what is the potential experience for an LGBTQ+ population entering the museum to see themselves reflected in the work and finally be able to identify with its subject, theme, and/or content?

Exhibition histories are not the sole domain of museum or curatorial studies, and are as much a part of art history as artists and art objects yet they remain understudied

[1] Unless otherwise stated, I am using "queer" throughout this chapter as a stand-in for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ+). The plus sign indicate that this is an ever-expanding acronym of identifications.

[2] The term queer here means to problematize or trouble and I point to this usage in a recent online discussion of the publication *Queering the Museum* by Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton in which they argued for this critical function of the term in relation to providing a critique of normative museum structures that continue to adhere to traditional paradigms. Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton, *Queering the Museum*, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2021). See also the terminology section of this introduction for more on the use of the term.

and under-analyzed within the field.[3] Within the contemporary art world, in particular, exhibitions serve as one of the first encounters the public has with artists and art objects, especially since the art often moves directly from the artist's studio into the gallery or even sometimes it is made on site in the museum.[4] Audiences are less likely to encounter recently made work in textbooks, art history tomes, or the classroom, although in addition to museums the internet is also likely one of the first sites of encounter. There are so many contemporary artists around the globe who are making work at such a fast pace that reproductions of the art are more likely to be shown in installation images than they are in publications, which is especially true of performative works that unfold temporally.[5] My intervention offers an analysis of exhibitions, not as a history per se, but as a constellation of projects that unfolded across U.S.-based museums located in Philadelphia and New York from 2017 through 2019, including *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon* (2017), *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward* (2018), and *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years after Stonewall* (*NPYT*; 2019).

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[3] In *What Is Contemporary Art*, Terry Smith states that in addition to art objects, ideas, cultural practices, and values are also objects of inquiry in the history of contemporary art. See Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 256. I also point to Richard Meyer's remarks that "One of the things that art history is getting better at, but still has a ways to go, is understanding that the history of art is not only the history of artists and of art objects but also of exhibitions." Richard Meyer art historian, Stanford University and moderator of "A Different Light, Revisited - A Panel Discussion" presented on May 24, 2017 at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco in conjunction with the monographic exhibition *Cary Leibowitz: Museum Show*, accessed November 25, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Td5GmIUKsl8.

[4] The New Museum offered onsite artist studios to several of the artists in *Trigger*. And both the New Museum and the Brooklyn Museum commissioned artwork for *Trigger* and *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*. By "contemporary art world" I mean the various institutions, networks, organizations, and players, among others, that operate within contemporaneity. See Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?*, 241.

[5] I say this from experience as an art historian who has often taken images of work on the street, at performances, in museums, among other places, and then shown it in class the next day.

I invoke German philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin's theory of the critical constellation in which the researcher "must abandon the calm contemplative attitude toward his object in order to become conscious of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past finds itself with precisely this present."[6] Therefore, by situating these exhibitions in close proximity I reveal where they converge and diverge from one another. The cluster of case study exhibitions, while separated within their respective cities and also institutions, can be brought together to illuminate the ways in which the network of artists and curators between them cross time and space constellating with one another in various juxtapositions. I critically examine the exhibitions from as many angles as I can consider—the exhibitions and curators in relation to their host institutions; the artworks in relation to each other; the artists in dialogue with one another as many of them are featured in more than one of the case study exhibitions; and the lineage of queer exhibitions that have come before; to name only a few of the ways in which these exhibitions can be grouped together.

I argue that *Trigger*, *Tag*, and *NPYT* operate as a form of institutional critique through an "anticipatory illumination" of queerness in the present (at the time, now a more recent past) transforming the museum, momentarily, into a heterotopic space

[6] Walter Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 3 1935–1938*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2002), 262. For additional concepts of critical constellations in relation to queer and decolonial strategies see: Dianne Chisholm, "INTRODUCTION.: Sodom and Gomorrah in the Era of Late Capitalism; or, A Return to Walter Benjamin," in *Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space in the Wake of the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttsdct.6; Okwui Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition," *Research in African Literatures* 34, no.4 (Winter 2003): 57–82, doi: 10.1353/ral.2003.0097; and Eng-Beng Lim and Tavia Nyong'o, "Afterward: Queer Reconstellations," *Social Text 145* 38, no. 4 (December 2020): 149–156. doi: 10.1215/01642472-8680490.

thereby queering it. Here I borrow terms coined by Cuban American queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), related to queer futurity, and French philosopher Michel Foucault's concept, of "other" or "different" space from , "Texts/Contexts: Of Other Spaces," to think through how temporary exhibitions in mainstream institutions offer audiences fleeting glimpses into existences yet to come.[7] Entwining Muñoz's and Foucault's theories with that of art historian David J. Getsy's institutional critique, as proposed in the introduction to *Queer Documents of Contemporary Art* (2016), I argue for a queer institutional critique beyond the art object and artist, extending the form to the realm of the curatorial.[8] As much as this dissertation examines exhibitions, it also analyzes the strategies employed by the curators of the case study exhibitions who make them possible.

I parse what this particular constellation of exhibitions *did* at that specific moment in time, one right after the other, all clustered together both physically (within the northeast corridor) and also conceptually. All the exhibitions came in the wake of a very treacherous and torturous socio-political moment in the U.S. when the rights of LGBTQ+ folx were (and still are) being dismantled.[9] Although artist and curator Nayland Blake does not refer specifically to #GamerGate—which was the online harassment campaign

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[7] See José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009) and Michel Foucault, "Texts/Contexts: Of Other Spaces," in *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*, eds. Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2004).

[8] See David J. Getsy, ed., *Queer Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016).

[9] For more on this see Cullen Peele, "Roundup of Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation Advancing in States across the Country," Human Rights Campaign, May 23, 2023, accessed January 11, 2024, https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/roundup-of-anti-lgbtq-legislation-advancing-in-states-across-the-country.

targeted specifically towards female gamers—we might think of their exhibition *Tag* at the ICA Philadelphia as a counter argument to those events and other similar attacks on women, LGBTQ+ folx, and people of color in the digital realm by offering them a platform.[10] In her catalogue essay for *Trigger* at the New Museum, curator and museum director Johanna Burton references the "culture wars," the 2016 presidential election, among other hotly contested issues swirling in the cultural climate of the time as a reason why organizing an exhibition around gender was so important in that moment. And, the curatorial collective of *NPYT* corrected the corporatization and commercialism of a radical, activist uprising at the Stonewall Inn by grounding their exhibition in the lives of LGBTQ+ folx. In a culture that whitewashes, sanitizes, and outright erases certain histories, these three case study exhibitions stand as a testament to those who will not back down—the curators, artists, institutions, and audiences.

Created out of a need and an urgency to not only redress these histories, but also to create sustainable platforms for LGBTQ+ folx we can understand *Tag*, *Trigger*, and *NPYT* as new legacies. The stakes of this project cannot be more urgent, especially with the spate of recent legislation across the U.S. that strip LGBTQ+ folx of their human rights and condemn their lives to the margins. Because these exhibitions are future oriented—either in the concept or artwork included, or both—they offer glimmers of hope, if only momentarily, for ways of being in the world. This dissertation challenges the field of art history to recognize the necessity to expand beyond its tightly policed borders to include other forms of production, like exhibitions and the curatorial. This

[10] For an overview and critical assessment of this online series of events see: "In the Aftermath *Women's Changing Views on Gaming and Sexism Following #GamerGate*" in A.C. Cote's *Gaming Sexism: Gender and Identity in the era of Casual Video Games* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 177–205, ProQuest Ebook Central.

dissertation is informed by my own personal history of attending the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (CCS Bard), one of the first curatorial studies programs in the U.S., in which I was taught and mentored by art historians, among other scholars and practitioners, who insisted that students understand not only exhibition histories but also art histories and critical theory. Interestingly, I recently received feedback from a grant proposal that my dissertation project fell within "museum studies," for example, and while I do not dispute this, I do also argue that it falls within art history as well as curatorial studies, making it a much more interdisciplinary project that can certainly be part of all three. Opening up the field to other disciplines, I think, would greatly benefit art history. Hopefully, this dissertation will lead to more scholarship on the exhibitions I analyze.

History

This dissertation overlaps, intertwines, and crosses boundaries between several different aspects of contemporary art production including Institutional Critique (IC), exhibition histories, curatorial studies, and museum studies.[11] This interdisciplinary approach has led to an understanding of art history as not solely privileging the field as a study of artists or art objects. While IC has primarily been used as a term to describe the production of artworks by artists who intervene in and critique various artworld structures from museums to galleries, I apply the term in this dissertation to the exhibitions, including the curators, that operate as a critique of the mainstream institutions which host

[11] For more on the term "IC" see Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique (2005)" in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2009), 408–417.

them.[12] The curators of these exhibitions engage in what French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and French psychoanalyst Felix Guattari term as deterritorialization and reterritorialization—and further explained in the methodology section of the introduction—which is to say a non-hostile takeover of traditional museum spaces with nontraditional artists and artworks. In doing so, the curators construct queer sites of discourse within and outside of the museum structure.

Most of the publications devoted to IC approach it from the vantage point of either the site of the institution as in artist and critic Brian O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1986) and art historian and critic Douglas Crimp's *On the Museum's Ruins* (1993) or from the artists who practice it as in the case of art historian John Welchman's *Institutional Critique and After* (2006) and art historians Alexander Alberro's and Blake Stimson's *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists Writings* (2009); or both as in the case of art historian Miwon's Kwon's *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002). O'Doherty's publication, first published as essays in *Artforum*, deconstructs the "white cube" itself, which is to say the pristineness of the space, a void if you will.[13] O'Doherty analyzes this aspect through Yves Klein's *The Void Show* in Paris, which brilliantly critiques the museological aspects of the space from a guard stationed at the front door to removing

[12] For more on institutional critique and its relationship to both museums and exhibitions as the vehicle through which to do this see: Alexander Alberro, "Institutions, Critique, and Institutional Critique," in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2009), 2–19.

[13] Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica and San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986).

the furniture and showcasing art that was not there, thus drawing attention to the space itself.[14]

Crimp's *On the Museum's Ruins* analyzes the site of the museum itself, which is already dying in some sense, as he opens the title chapter with a quote from German philosopher Theodor Adorno noting that museums are more historical, as opposed to contemporary, and share a phonetic association with the term mausoleum.[15] Elsewhere in the publication Crimp discusses the commodification of art and culture and its privatization, museums as public relations machines, and artistic practices as a consolidation of power. This is a post-1989 critique of neoliberal politics and globalization as the world moves toward privatizing every sphere and subsuming it into the market. Everything's for sale!

Welchman's *Institutional Critique and After* reads like a primer on the history of IC as he argues for three phases. The first phase appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s in which artists sought to expose the innerworkings of the museum, that is the things which art museum staff try desperately to hide from the general public. The second phase of IC is located in the 1980s and 1990s of postmodernism with the work taking the form of performance or interaction. And, in the third or most recent phase of IC,

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[14] Brian O'Doherty, "The Gallery as Gesture," *Artforum*, accessed April 14, 2024, https://www.artforum.com/features/the-gallery-as-a-gesture-208475/. See also Simon Sheikh, "Positively White Cube Revisited," *e-flux Journal* 03 (February 2009), accessed March 11, 2024, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/03/68545/positively-white-cube-revisit.

[15] Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 44.
For more on the museum and its relationship to the mausoleum see Allan Kaprow and Robert Smithson, "What is a Museum? A Dialogue (1967)" in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2009), 56–60.

Welchman identifies the work as taking on issues of globalization and other pertinent issues related to the current state of affairs.[16]

Alberro's and Stimson's *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists Writings* is, as the title suggests, an anthology of artists' writings. Artist and sometimes art critic Andrea Fraser writes in her essay "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique" that she seemingly laments how IC—it even being called "IC" is an ick factor for Fraser—was essentially co-opted by the institutions themselves, but what sets the artists working in this way apart from French literary scholar Peter Bürger's notion of the historical avant-garde is that they acknowledged this was the case and that they were already working within the system.[17] One idea to consider in the dissertation is how this strategy extends to curators utilizing institutional critique within a museum setting.

Finally, Kwon's *One Place after Another* while not specifically focused on institutional critique certainly incorporates it in her genealogy of site-specific art as it moves from particular sites to more nomadic traveling. Kwon's contribution examines IC from the vantage point of the spatio-political and how capital and power govern the artworld's machinations. Kwon argues for an intersectional—class, race, gender, and sexuality—understanding of institutional critique arguing for it beyond the physical and spatial to a cultural framework.[18] This is especially important to think about as I argue

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[16] John Welchman, ed. *Institutional Critique and After* (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2006).

[17] Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists Writings*, Alberro, Alexander and Blake Stimson, eds. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 408–417.

[18] Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2002).

against the supposed neutrality of the museum space in relation to the case study exhibitions.

Exhibition histories are canonized at this point with primarily seminal, mainstream, well-known global contemporary exhibitions. Exhibition histories became important post-1989 with the rise of the professionalization of the contemporary curatorial field and the proliferation of master's programs devoted to it. Where once curators obtained degrees in art history in order to curate and/or work in the museum field—which still holds true for non-contemporary curators—suddenly there was a spate of programs opening globally catering to contemporary curating.[19] I cite my own alma mater CCS Bard on the east coast of the U.S. as well as the Curatorial Practice program at California College of the Arts on the west coast. Later, Columbia University, the School of Visual Arts, USC, among many others, all opened some type of curatorial studies/practice program. The MFA Curating program at Goldsmith's College in London is also well-known. But because they are so ubiquitous now you can find a curatorial studies program at many universities across the globe. In general, a terminal degree in art history is often not required of the contemporary curator, unless they are working for a specific kind of institution (read New York City's The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, etc.) that requires an advanced degree. Otherwise, most contemporary curators hold at most a master's degree.[20]

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[19] For more on this see: Caroline Elbaor "Getting a Master's Degree in Curating Is All the Rage. But Is It Worth it?", *artnet*, July 5, 2017, accessed January 10, 2024, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/are-masters-degrees-in-curating-worth-it-986090.

[20] The degree aspect is anecdotal information based on my own experience in the curatorial field. See also Paul O'Neill, "The Emergence of Curatorial Discourse from the late 1960s to the Present," in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press: 2012), 9–49.

German critic and art historian Walter Grasskamp's essay "For Example, Documenta, or How Art History Is Produced" in *Thinking about Exhibitions* (1996)—edited by Canadian art historian Reesa Greenberg; curator, writer, and educator Bruce Ferguson; and British art historian and curator Sandy Nairne—argues for the *Documenta* exhibitions as producers of art history and more specifically for contemporary art. Despite the fact that *Documenta* was in fact curated by academics and art historians over its first several iterations, Grasskamp argues that the exhibition produced art history because of the number of different players in the game, from the artists, to the critics, to the curators, dealers, and collectors. In other words, the study of *Documenta* is a study in art history due to the way it provides a view into the inner workings of the art world itself. He notes that the rise of the curator started with Harold Szeemann's appointment in 1972 for *Documenta5* and the shift in approach to the curator as hero.[21] This is crucial to my argument about the exhibition *Trigger* in Chapter 3 particularly as it relates to the legacy of *Documenta* and its curators as producers of art history.

Likewise, Australian art historian Terry Smith covers the same territory in *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (2012) as he analyzes Enwezor's *Documenta11* as both a game changer and as a move away from the exhibition space to a more discursive space, which is beneficial to my analysis of the case studies as heterotopias. These analyses argue for the intertwining between art history and exhibitions, reiterating that they are not so separate after all, despite what seems to be an estrangement between the academia and museums. Using key examples from recent contemporary exhibitions,

[21] Walter Grasskamp, "For Example, Documenta, or, How Art History Is Produced?," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson, Sandy Nairne, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 48–56, doi: 10.4324/9780203991534.

Smith also outlines several different types of curating such as the artist-as-curator, artist-as-producer, the educational turn, activist curating, among others, noting the vast terrain that contemporary curatorial thought covers.[22] Throughout the dissertation, I reference Smith's text to illustrate the different curatorial strategies employed by the curators of the case study exhibitions.

Other contributions to the literature are by curators and art producers including Irish curator, artist, writer, and educator Paul O'Neill, whose publication *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s*) (2016) examines the evolution of curatorship and how it has come, in many ways, to dominate contemporary art discourse especially in the way that audiences understand art.[23] The anthology he edited *Curating Subjects* (2007) includes a broad overview of curatorial practices from artists, curators, critics, writers, art historians and other arts practitioners/educators, and is viewed as a critical intervention in the field of publications devoted to the subject.[24] *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating* (2007), an anthology edited by Steven Rand, artist and founder of apexart in New York, and Heather Kouris, curator and writer, started with a series of the questions related to contemporary curating and its evolution beginning in the 1960s with the likes of Harold Szeemann and Walter Hopps.[25] And, Swiss curator and critic Hans Ulrich Obrist's *A Brief History of Curating* (2021) takes the form of interviews with well-

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[22] Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 2nd ed (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012).

[23] Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press: 2012).

[24] Paul O'Neill, ed., *Curating Subjects* (Amsterdam: de Appel, 2007).

[25] Steven Rand and Heather Kouris, eds., *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating* (New York: apexart, 2007).

known and established curators from Walter Hopps to Lucy Lippard arriving at, as the title says, a brief history of the field.[26] Although these publications may take many forms, from the critical essay to the interview, what they share is a canonical view of the field, especially rooted in the history of contemporary curating beginning with curators Szeemann and Hopps. This is why an expanded understanding of art histories and exhibitions beyond the canon is so important to the field.

Curator, writer, and educator Bruce Altshuler has also made important contributions particularly to the study of exhibitions and art history including *Biennials and Beyond—Exhibitions that Made Art History* (2013). The publication is an historical overview of some of the late 20th century's most canonical exhibitions from the first devoted to conceptual art such as *Primary Structures* (1966) to (again) *Documenta11*. Altshuler's introduction serves as a brief overview to some of the most important developments in exhibitions from the sixties to the aughts, with each exhibition highlighted somewhere between ten and twelve pages.[27] What is noticeably absent of course in many of these compendiums is anything beyond the most discussed, written about, reviewed, and acknowledged exhibitions of the last century.

Although there have been publications devoted to the notion of queer curating and LGBTQ+ issues in museums they have not focused solely on U.S.-based curating, museums, or exhibitions and not from the vantage point of institutional critique per se.

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[26] Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Geneva: JRP | Editions; Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2021).

[27] Bruce Altshuler, *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History, 1962–2002*, (London: Phaidon, 2013).

Routledge's reader *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums* (2010) edited by independent scholar Amy K. Levin bills itself as the first reader to focus on LGBT issues and museums. It includes two essays on queer theory and three essays related to LGBTQ exhibits.[28] Nikki Sullivan's, Manager of the Centre of Democracy in Adelaide, South Australia and educator, and curator Craig Middleton's more recent *Queering the Museum* (2020) offers a practical (read the administrative and business side of museums) guide by examining the policies, procedures, and conventions of institutions where interventions can be made.[29]

Art historian and curator Jonathan Katz, curator and art historian Isabel Hufschmidt, and art historian Änne Söll edited the *OnCurating* edition of "Queer Curating," which took a more global approach to the concept covering Europe and Asia, and museum director, curator, and art historian Maura Reilly's contribution of the history of queer curating in the US, which was later published in her book *Curatorial Activism Towards an Ethics of Curating* (2018). What was perhaps useful in this edition of *OnCurating* was Katz's and Söll's contribution "Editorial: Queer Exhibitions/Queer Curating" in which they outline three main areas of queer curating.[30] The first area

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[28] Amy K. Levin, ed., *Gender Sexuality and Museums A Routledge Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

[29] Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton, *Queering the Museum* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2021).

[30] Katz and Söll explain their use of the term queer as one that challenges normative systems and relations and that in its expansiveness, beyond gender and sexuality, the term connects to other forms of identity such as race, age, and ethnicity making it intersectional. In relation to queer curating they write, "'Queer' presents a challenge to the museum as a normalizing, meaning-making entity and asks how these concerns can be addressed in museum-practices, that have, for the most part, silently and unknowingly reproduced and solidified heteronormative structures and desires." Jonathan Katz and Änne Söll, "Editorial: Queer Exhibitions/Queer Curating," *OnCurating* 37 (May 2018) accessed April 19, 2020, https://www.on-curating.org/issue-37.html#.XpyGDNNKhp8.

addresses the derailing of the passive viewer, transforming them into an active one primarily through questioning; second, acknowledging the body as productive of queer desires either representationally or otherwise; and third, having to question the normative structures of the institution.[31] These definitions of curating relate to the various approaches in my case studies. Reilly's essay "Challenging Hetero-centrism and Lesbo-/Homo-phobia: A History of LGBTQ exhibitions in the U.S.," and her subsequent book project provide broad overviews of these exhibition histories, which are useful as introductions to the historiography of the field.

Art historian, curator, and critic Alpesh Kantilal Patel's *Productive Failure: Writing Queer Transnational South Asian Art Histories* (2017) advances the field by focusing on marginalized histories that are often left out of the canon that are not white nor hetero, cisgender male. They, for example, explore through a queer feminist lens the installation of *sphere:dreamz* (2006) by the collective Sphere in Manchester, England's Gay Village arguing for exhibitions as art history.[32] Patel has also critically examined the curatorial work of Enwezor with fellow art historian and curator Jane Chin Davidson for a special *Nka* journal issue (of which Enwezor was a founder), wondering why Enwezor's work as a curator is often marginalized within the field of art history—the answer it would seem is for that very reason, Enwezor was a "curator" and not an "academic".[33] Yet for so many of us whose work resides between the museum and the

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[31] Katz and Söll, "Editorial: Queer Exhibitions/Queer Curating," *OnCurating*, https://www.on-curating.org/issue-37.html#.XpyGDNNKhp8.

[32] Alpesh Kantilal Patel, *Productive failure: writing queer transnational South Asian art Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 109–149, EBSCOhost.

[33] Jane Chin Davidson and Alpesh Kantilal Patel, "Okwui Enwezor and the Art of Curating," *NKA Journal of Contemporary African Art* 48 (2021): 6–13, EBSCOhost.

university, Enwezor and his work to decolonize exhibition-making practices and art history continue to be influential. Likewise, the work of cultural theorist, curator, urbanist, and author Elke Krasny in the intersecting fields of queer feminism, curating, and radical care are examined in two anthologies *Radicalizing Care: Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating* (2021) and with visual culture scholar Lara Perry, *Curating with Care* (2023). Essays in these anthologies range from cripping to decolonizing the field through critical examinations as well as case studies and manifestoes, offering a glimpse into where the future of curating is (hopefully) heading.[34]

Methodology

Using a primarily queer feminist methodology—I invoke art historian Amelia Jones's and critical studies and visual culture scholar Erin Silver's publication *Otherwise Imagining queer feminist art histories* (2016) to think about how queer and feminism coalesce in the case study exhibitions—this dissertation seeks to excavate exhibitions that exist outside of the canon.[35] I do this excavation through the lenses of queer studies and critical theory, mostly using the work of Muñoz, my principal interlocutor, who wrote in the introduction to *Cruising Utopia*, "Queerness in not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality."[36] I take Muñoz's use of queer(ness) to not only mean LGBTQ+ people but also how it functions critically as a

[34] Elke Krasny, ed., *Radicalizing Care: Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020), doi: 10.21937/9783956795909; and Elke Krasny and Lara Perry, eds., *Curating with Care* (London: Routledge, 2023), doi: 10.4324/9781003204923.

[35] Amelia Jones and Erin Silver, eds., *Otherwise Imagining queer feminist art histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

[36] Muñoz, "Introduction: Feeling Utopia," in *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

challenge to normative practices and traditional paradigms within institutions. In the dissertation, I think about how the exhibitions radiate the warmth of queerness to museum audiences.

Muñoz was heavily influenced by German philosophers Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel as well as their line of thought running through the Marxist strain of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. But it is the philosophy of Ernst Bloch, who was loosely associated with the Frankfurt School, to which Muñoz is most indebted in his utopian vision. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz argued that we have not yet arrived at queerness because society—read capitalist and heteronormative—continues to favor straight and traditional over queer and nontraditional people and that futurity is the domain of queerness. Queerness for Muñoz exists on the horizon and is something to look forward to and achieve while not being possible in our current social, cultural, and political climate. He argued that the possibility of queerness propels us forward into the future. Queerness inhabits a longing for, not a having. In addition, queer utopia for Muñoz is performative because it is about an active doing and not only an existence, and it is through the performative—in the case study exhibitions this translates to what the curators' are *doing*—that we can glimpse a forward dawning futurity of then and there. Muñoz's theorizing of queer utopia focused more on collectivity and less on what he refers to as the "antirelational thesis"—or what he argues are "romances of the negative, wishful thinking, and investments in deferring various dreams of difference"—particularly in the work of Lee Edelman and his publication *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) to which *Cruising Utopia* polemically responds.[37] Instead of

[37] Muñoz, "Introduction: Feeling Utopia," in *Cruising Utopia*, 11; Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004)

focusing on disappearance and negativity Muñoz instead focuses on collectivity and hope, as a strategy for queer survival. I deploy Muñoz's theory throughout to consider how each of the exhibition case studies enacts in the present a utopian vision of queerness in the future.

Muñoz's warm illumination of queerness dovetails with Getsy writing in his introduction to the anthology *Queer Documents of Contemporary Art*, "the experience of seeing an object, a text or an act as queer produces not suspicion but affection."[38] That is, a queer object, text, or act *affects* the viewer in some way at the same time that it can produce *affection* in the viewer. Getsy further explores the term queer and its "adjectival disruption" in the works of contemporary artists proposing its multivalence or, "how the concept can be used as a site of political and institutional critique, as a framework to develop new families and histories, as a spur to action, and as a basis from which to declare inassimilable difference."[39] In the dissertation, I extend Getsy's queer theory of "adjectival disruption" as a form of institutional critique beyond the art object to the curator and the exhibition exploring the ways in which the audience can be queered in the viewing process.

Like Muñoz, queer theorist Jack Halberstam also explores the temporal nature of queerness in the theory of the "transgender look," posited in their publication *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies Subcultural Lives* (2005). Queer time is non-linear and disjointed and the transgender look crosses time but also space bringing together the

[38] David J. Getsy, ed., "Introduction//Queer Intolerability and its Attachments," in *Queer Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press: 2016), 15.

[39] Getsy, ed. "Introduction," in *Queer Documents*, 16.

histories, social relations, and religions that collide between viewer/artwork.[40] Here the term transgender explains how the viewer approaches an artwork both in terms of time but also in the physical space the viewer must negotiate while viewing it. I deploy the transgender look in Chapter 5 to examine the installation strategies of *NPYT* considering how the spatial layout of artworks disrupts the normative viewing experience of traditional artworks and exhibitions. I also use Halberstam's theory of queer productive failures from *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) primarily in Chapter 3 to argue how *Trigger* productively fails the New Museum.[41] *Trigger* counteracts the Museum's normative paradigm of blockbuster exhibitions, star curators, and the "bigger is better" model of 21st century hyper capitalist institutions.

Halberstam's theories intersect with those of Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of deterritorialization and reterritorialization as well as with Foucault's concept of heterotopia in my argument of how a queer exhibition operates differently than a traditional exhibition. Deleuze's and Guattari's concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization from their Marxist and post-structuralist publication *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), applies to my thinking about how curators have deterritorialized mainstream museums' traditional approaches to exhibition making by reterritorializing them with queer exhibitions. Originally used in a socio-political context the term deterritorialization and its counterpart reterritorialization are often also used outside that realm to encompass the socio-cultural. In their theory of

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[40] Jack Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 171–173, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[41] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), doi: 10.1215/9780822394358.

deterritorialization in relation to the state apparatus, Deleuze and Guattari discuss how "…it is a result of the territory itself being taken as an object, as a material to stratify, to make resonate. Thus, the central power of the state is hierarchical" and in so being "it can recombine what it isolates…through subordination."[42] Applying this concept to a radical curatorial approach we can think about how the curator strips the museum of its function of presenting traditional exhibitions and inserts their non-traditional queer exhibition in its place. Think of it in terms of a takeover, not in a hostile way, but rather as an activist strategy to rethink the territory of the museum's function in the first place. What is left in the traditional exhibition's place then is a heterotopia.

In "Texts/Contexts: Of Other Spaces," Foucault defines his post-structuralist concept of heterotopia as, "real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."[43] Heterotopias exist as *other* and *different* spaces and this concept is used to think about how the exhibition spaces, both within and outside of, the various institutions function as sites of queer discourse and how they agitate for change and work outside the bounds of the mainstream. To use Foucault's terminology, it can be said that these exhibitions shatter or tangle expected exhibition making practices.

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[42] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 433.

[43] Foucault, "Texts/Contexts: Of Other Spaces," in *Grasping the* World, 374.

In addition to the queer studies and critical theory I engage with in the dissertation, I also devised my own working methodology for each exhibition case study (Appendix A) by creating a series of eight questions which I asked of every curator(s) during interviews conducted both in-person and over Zoom. The questions ranged from conceptual, such as explaining the basis for the exhibition, to more practical, such as the number of attendees. Some of the questions were altered, only slightly, depending on to whom I was speaking; for example, the difference between Nayland Blake working alone with the ICA versus the collective of curators who worked across departments at the Brooklyn Museum. Follow up questions were asked if additional information was needed and/or for further explanation. Most, if not all, interviews took roughly one hour to conduct. Only in the case of the Brooklyn Museum was I unable to speak with all of the five curators due to some leaving the institution, however every effort was made to include them.

Every effort was also made to conduct in-person research at the respective archives for each museum. This proved to be most difficult during the early years of the COVID Pandemic, and because of the lack of access, I was really only able to conduct research on-site at the Brooklyn Museum's Library and Archives. The New Museum's physical archives, as detailed in Chapter 3, were completely inaccessible to me, however their website hosts a robust digital archive. And, because the ICA Philadelphia is part of the University of Pennsylvania, the museum's physical archive is maintained through the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books, and Manuscripts housed in the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center. I reached out to the librarians at UPenn twice to ask if the

Tag archive was accessible, and on both occasions I was told it had not yet been catalogued.

There are several limitations to Museum's physical archives; one is the resources needed to create it from the staff, and budgeting, to the space required to house it. The second issue is maintaining the archive. While the Brooklyn Museum has its own onsite library and archive with dedicated staff to do this work, the others as in the case of the New Museum were dismantled, likely during the pandemic when labor and budgets were in short supply; or the ICA who outsources this to an entirely different department on campus.

Terminology

Queer

American philosopher and gender studies scholar Judith Butler's seminal text *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) is one of the earliest in the history of queer theory. Butler dissects feminism, especially French theory, by questioning the essentialism of the term "woman" and arguing for an expansive understanding of gender beyond the binary. Butler posited that gender is a social construct and that we are always performing our identities.[44] Chapter 8, entitled "Critically Queer", of their book *Bodies That Matter On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993), finds Butler questioning how the term, which was once deployed as a pejorative, can be repurposed in our current lexicon to signify something productive.[45] Their point is

[44] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[45] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), 223.

well-taken that the term carries with it a range of histories and discursive practices that have negative connotations and then questions how this can be reworked in its current usage, suggesting, "That it can become such a discursive site whose uses are not fully constrained in advance ought to be safeguarded not only for the purposes of continuing to democratize queer politics, but also to expose, affirm, and rework the specific historicity of the term."[46]

In recent years the term has been contested for being so open-ended, so nebulous, and such an umbrella that it lacks any specificity and can swallow whole identities, such as trans, among others. However, I argue for the term's critical edge as a discursive site (read Butler) as well as a disruption of the normative (read Getsy). This discursive disruption encompasses both the term's usage as a marker of identity as well as an action (i.e. "queering the museum"). Throughout the dissertation I deploy the term queer in a variety of parts of speech including as a noun (queerness), a verb (to queer/queering), adjective (i.e. queer object), and an adverb (queerly) to consider it from all angles in relation to the protagonists of this narrative including artists, artworks, viewers, curators, exhibitions, and institutions. And hopefully prove that queer has not lost its radicality and can still be claimed according to its activist origins after the Stonewall Uprising, when identifying as queer "was embraced as a badge of honor."[47]

Queer institutional critique

Where Getsy's "adjectival disruption" was a form of institutional critique through the art object, I explore the ways in which it can also be applied to the curator and the

[46] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 230.

[47] Getsy, "Introduction," 15.

exhibition especially in the ways that audiences might be queered in the viewing process. If institutional critique, in its normative sense, serves a critical function of intervening in art world structures to expose discourses of power; then a queer institutional critique not only does this *but it also* heightens our awareness of the (hetero)normative structures that govern our daily lives in ways of which we may not even be cognizant. Where other forms of institutional critique might be seen as minimal in design, highly conceptual in framework, and occasionally performative in execution; a queer institutional critique might be all of these things *and* phenomenological. I argue these points throughout the dissertation in how the artists, artworks, exhibitions, and even the curators beckon their audiences to participate in active, not passive, viewing within the museums.

Investigative curating

Throughout the dissertation I use the term "investigative curating," which was Marcia Tucker's—founder of the New Museum—brand of curating.[48] In "Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the end of the Sixties," Italian curator Irene Calderoni cites Tucker's discussion of her investigate approach with regards to the exhibition *Anti-Illusion*: *Procedures/Materials* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, "The investigate model was rarely used because it meant organizing a show in order to learn something, moving full-tilt ahead without really knowing what the end result might be."[49] Investigative curating engenders a working methodology in which the curator is not the "star" and does not eclipse the artists in the exhibition through their own cult-like

[48] I was introduced to this style of curating as a graduate student at CCS Bard when I took a class my first semester with Marcia Tucker.

[49] Irene Calderoni, "Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the end of the Sixties," in *Curating Subjects*, ed. Paul O'Neill (Amsterdam: De Appel, Centre for Contemporary Art, 2007), 70–71.

celebrity status but allows for a collaborative and collective process and flow between curator(s) and artist(s). It also allows for risk taking, which as Tucker points out might lead to unexpected results—this could be read both positively or negatively, by both the institution and the press.

The Chapters

In Chapter 2, I critically examine eight queer exhibitions from 1978 through 2010 as predecessors to the constellation of three exhibition case studies analyzed in Chapters 3 through 5. Four of the exhibitions from the New Museum of Contemporary Art's lineage are analyzed leading up to *Trigger*. The discussion of each exhibition revolves around most importantly the curator(s)' argument(s) for organizing their exhibitions but also in the artists and works selected to illustrate that thesis. By digging into the works presented I reveal each exhibitions' queerness and how specifically the curators and exhibitions begin to queer the exhibition space, even when adhering to sexual and gender binaries of (hetero and homosexual as well as male and female). By situating each exhibition in its specific time period relative to the socio-political landscapes of the decade I show how radical they were for their time, even if now in retrospect they might seem essentialist (particularly for the exhibitions in the 1970s and 1980s, with later exhibitions in the 1990s beginning to open up beyond the binaries). I also compare and contrast these more historical exhibitions in relation to the three case studies to see where they converge and diverge from one another across time and space. Each chapter thereafter argues how specifically the curators and exhibitions queer the mainstream museum in which they are sited.

The third chapter examines curators Johanna Burton's, Sara O'Keeffe's, and Natalie Bell's *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon* (2018) at the New Museum of Contemporary Art. This exhibition argued for a more fluid and intersectional notion of queer (although they do not use that term, I do), particularly in the moment of political upheaval. This chapter focuses primarily on the New Museum itself as the protagonist of the story arguing that the curators of *Trigger* productively failed their own institution in not adhering to the post-89 drive of global contemporary museums that showcase the building as the art itself.[50] Each section begins with a quote from one of the curators, members of the curatorial advisory board, or artists in the exhibition to illuminate the specific queering that took place including *Trigger*'s relationship to the New Museum's founding and history, the collaborative curatorial model, and artworks that highlight collaboration and archives.

The fourth chapter considers Nayland Blake's *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward* (2018) at the ICA, Philadelphia. As the title of the exhibition suggests, Blake's argument rests on the premise of queer utopia through play as offering a way forward. Analyzing the artist-as-curator model—as they were a guest curator and not someone from within the institution—Blake is the protagonist of this chapter. I analyze the mission of the ICA, the artist-as-curator model, and curating as intervention by Blake through the artists they included to argue that the ICA played an active role in a queer institutional critique by inviting Blake, an artist, to curate an exhibition.

[50] Terry Smith discusses this phenomenon primarily in relation to the Guggenheim Bilboa. See Terry Smith, "The Experience Museum: Bilbao and Beyond," in *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 71–92.

Finally, the fifth chapter explores the collectively curated (Margo Cohen Ristorucci, Public Programs Coordinator; Lindsay C. Harris, Teen Programs Manager, Education; Carmen Hermo, Associate Curator, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art; Allie/A.L. Rickard, Curatorial Assistant, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art; and Lauren Argentina Zelaya, Acting Director, Public Programs) exhibition *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years after Stonewall* (2019) at The Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. While the title of the exhibition—the rallying cry of transgender artist/activist Marsha P. Johnson—notes the precarity of LGBTQ+ lives and draws on this queer notion of time as diminishing, it can be argued that the generation born after this era is perhaps more hopeful of future possibilities.[51] This chapter considers the future of curating as I extend the idea of radical care—both self and collective—to the curatorial realm and argue that the care taken in organizing *NPYT* is what queers the Brooklyn Museum particularly through the collaborative efforts of the curators, the inclusion of particular artworks within the section of the show titled "Care Networks," the robust educational and public programming, and the various installation strategies employed.

All of the case study exhibitions are future-oriented in that they do not settle for the current status quo of curatorial work, organizing exhibitions, or working with(in) institutions. They each take curating and their exhibitions to a different time and place (read heterotopia) in the institution setting up momentary sites of queer discourse. The fleeting nature of exhibitions lend themselves to the temporal nature of this work, but

[51] "Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years after Stonewall," Brooklyn Museum, accessed February 23, 2020, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/stonewall.

their archives, now in the past, considered in the present, offer us hope for the future of the field.

CHAPTER 2

A GENEALOGY OF QUEER EXHIBITIONS

Despite the prevalence of queer exhibitions from the late 1970s through today, they remain understudied and have not received enough scholarly attention.[52] Although I present these exhibitions chronologically, I am not writing a history in this chapter, as the exhibitions I analyze are intentionally selected to offer a mere glimpse into the many curators, ideas, and presentations that have preceded the case studies analyzed in the dissertation: *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward* (ICA Philadelphia, 2018); *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon* (The New Museum, 2017); and *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years after Stonewall* (The Brooklyn Museum, 2019).[53] The examination of the past four decades of queer exhibitions demonstrates an evolution of thought regarding queerness in contemporary art and illustrates how early on curators adhered to strict binaries (male/female and gay/lesbian) whereas later exhibitions became more inclusive of identities—such as sex, gender, race, class, disability, among others—in the range of artists and even artistic mediums. I illuminate the *queerness* of each exhibition by arguing that despite their focus on rigid binaries, especially in the earlier

[52] Although not all of the curators of these exhibitions use the term queer, I use it here as an example of a disruption of the normative (Getsy) and as a discursive site (Butler) (see the Terminology section in Chapter 1 Introduction: Anticipatory Illuminations of the Future in this dissertation).

[53] Here I invoke a Foucauldian genealogy and follow Foucault's ideas in *Archaeology of Knowledge*, as he writes, "I shall accept the groupings that history suggests only to subject them at once to interrogation; to break them up and then to see whether they can be legitimately reformed; or whether other groupings should be made; to replace them in a more general space which, while dissipating their apparent familiarity, makes it possible to construct a theory of them." Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 29. I am not arguing for a history of these exhibitions as much as I suggest a lineage between them.

iterations, each in their own way expanded on normative curatorial, exhibition, and institutional paradigms.

I am indebted to the work of several art historians and curators, most particularly Jonathan D. Katz and Maura Reilly. Katz, along with Isabel Hufschmidt and Änne Söll, edited *Queer Curating*, the May 2018 edition of the publication *OnCurating*, which stemmed from a conference at the Museum Folkwang in Essen, Germany from May 19 to 20, 2017. Katz's and Söll's contribution "Editorial: Queer Exhibitions / Queer Curating," outlines three key tenets of queer exhibitions and queer curating: 1. Queer exhibitions and curating insist on an active (rather than passive) viewer demanding participation with/in the exhibition; 2. Queer curating addresses the body and (queer) desires even if the work is non-representational; and 3. Queer curating challenges normative museum structures.[54] While I reference these tenets throughout the dissertation to support my own arguments about how and in what ways curators queer the museum, I also offer additional methods curators employ in queering the museum.

Reilly's contribution "Challenging Hetero-centrism and Lesbo-/Homo-phobia: A History of LGBTQ exhibitions in the U.S.," included in *Queer Curating*, surveys exhibitions that challenge the heteronormative paradigm in mainstream institutions and offers a broad overview of each including *A Lesbian Show* (1978), *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art* (1982), *In a Different Light* (1995), and *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* (2010), among others. Many of the exhibitions she analyzes and traces in this historiography of queer exhibitions are covered more extensively in her publication *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of*

[54] Jonathan Katz and Änne Söll, "Editorial: Queer Exhibitions / Queer Curating," *OnCurating* 37 (May 2018), accessed January 22, 2024, https://www.on-curating.org/issue-37.html.

Curating (2018). In this larger publication, in addition to focusing specifically on queer exhibitions, Reilly posits that curators whose practices concentrate on issues outside the bounds of normative institutional canons (i.e. straight, white, cisgender men from Western Europe and the US) are activists who bring awareness to and critically engage in challenging this marginalization.[55] Throughout the dissertation I deploy Reilly's term to argue for the curators' activism within mainstream institutions.

Art historian Amelia Jones and critical studies and visual culture scholar Erin Silver reference several queer exhibitions in their publication *Otherwise: Imaging Queer Feminist Art Histories* (2016). In a section of their essay "Queer feminist art history an imperfect genealogy" Jones and Silver provide an overview of curatorial practices from the 1980s onward and specifically in relation to the culture wars including mentions of *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (1984), *Extended Sensibilities*, *In a Different Light*, *Hide/Seek*, and *Bad Girls* (1994), among others.[56] I depart from and expand on Reilly's and Jones's and Silver's brief overviews of each exhibition by using digital archives and reviews to dig in and focus on specific sections of the exhibitions and/or artworks to illustrate my argument that these exhibitions are in fact *queer* even if that word was not used in the vocabulary of the exhibitions at the time.

Illuminating Lesbian Art: Harmony Hammond's A Lesbian Show

Artist Harmony Hammond's *A Lesbian Show* at 112 Greene Street Workshop, in New York was on view from January 21 through February 11, 1978 and focused on what

[55] Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2018), 22.

[56] Amelia Jones and Erin Silver, *Otherwise Imagining queer feminist art histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 14–50.

Hammond designated "lesbian art." At the time lesbianism was radical within feminism and therefore Hammond organized this show coming out of second-wave feminism when lesbians were marginalized within that group. Sheila Tobias—an activist during the women's liberation movement—refers to this as "feminist homophobia" and a form of sexism targeted at women by women.[57] As Tobias recounts, Betty Friedan—writer of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and founder of the National Association of Women (NOW)—frowned on any connection with lesbians and NOW because she "feared that before the National Organization for Women had time to properly establish itself, its members would be tarred, as their suffragist foremothers had been, as not just misguided but abnormal."[58] This marginalization of lesbians within the women's liberation movement extended to lesbian artists who were also excluded from the ranks of feminist art and further marginalized within work made by women artists. The lack of intersectionality within the nascent stages of feminism is well-noted, as if "woman" is a monolithic category.

Betsy Damon's work *Ancestors* (1978; Figure 1.1), included in *A Lesbian Show*, gestures towards a more open-ended understanding of both "woman" and "lesbian" queering both in the large-scale installation. The work consists of cast white ceramic figures both nude and clothed, standing, squatting, and sitting around a circle of what appear to be cloth-like bags all clustered together. The standing figure is clothed in these bags that relate to Damon's performance as the *7,000 Year Old Woman* in which the

[57] Sheila Tobias, "Feminism and Sexual Preference Lesbians and Lesbian Rights," in *Faces of Feminism An Activist's Reflections on the Women's Movement* (New York, Routledge, 1997), 157 and 165.

[58] Tobias, "Feminism and Sexual Preference," 158.

artist, wearing these bags, cut them open to reveal colored flour and in the process exposing her mostly nude body underneath.[59] Alex A. Jones describes this figure as reminiscent of "the mysterious Roman cult statue Diana of Ephesus, covered in little sacs like breasts or eggs (or offertory testicles)."[60] With Jones describing this figure as including breasts and eggs, normally associated with female reproduction, and testicles, normally associated with male reproduction, we can think about this as a queering of the body. At the time, the work likely would not have been described as "queer" with the more likely association being described within feminist theory as related to the goddess (to Jones's point about Diana), which was popular at the time among feminist artists to include goddess imagery in their work.[61]

While Damon's work can certainly be reconsidered more expansively within today's queer theory, it also suited the context of 1970s feminism as Damon understood the persona to be "my sister, mother, my grandmothers, my great grandmothers, friends and lovers," as well as an extension of herself.[62] In their introduction to *Otherwise*

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[59] Alex A. Jones, "Betsy Damon: Passages: Rites and Rituals," *The Brooklyn Rail*, accessed January 2, 2024, https://brooklynrail.org/2021/11/artseen/Betsy-Damon-Passages-Rites-and-Rituals-2. Read the artist's description of the performance: Betsy Damon, "The 7000 Year Old Woman," *Heresies* #3 *Lesbian Art and Artists* 1, no. 3 (Fall 1977), *Heresies* PDF Archive, accessed January 23, 2024, http://heresiesfilmproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/heresies3.pdf.

[60] Jones, "Betsy Damon," https://brooklynrail.org/2021/11/artseen/Betsy-Damon-Passages-Rites-and-Rituals-2.

[61] For more on goddess imagery in feminist art history read: Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Recovering Her Story: Feminist Artists Reclaim the Great Goddess," in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard 174–189 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers: 1994); Jane Blocker, "Ana Mendieta and the Politics of the Venus Negra," in *Cultural Studies* 1998, vol. 12 (1): 31–50, doi: 10.1080/095023898335609; and *Heresies* #5 *The Great Goddess*, *Heresies* PDF Archive, accessed January 22, 2024, http://heresiesfilmproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/heresies5.pdf.

[62] Damon, "The 7000 Year Old Woman," http://heresiesfilmproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/heresies3.pdf.

Imagining queer feminist art histories Jones and Silver observe how this era of feminist art discourse was narrowly focused and tended to be essentializing as it related to gender and same-sex preferences.[63] Hammond included only women artists and those who identified as lesbians—as opposed to female-identified women—in *A Lesbian Show*. While seemingly exclusionary by today's standards of more inclusive gender/sexual identities, Hammond was not exclusive in her criteria for what kinds of artwork would be included. In fact, in her statement for the exhibition, but also in various writings she has done on lesbian art and artists, Hammond has maintained the diversity amongst the works by lesbian artists, the need to not strictly limit or define it, and the lack of a single aesthetic or sensibility.[64] At a time when women, lesbians, and feminists were largely marginalized and villainized by mainstream, heteronormative culture curating an exhibition of lesbian artists was a radical, risky, and untraditional move. However, Hammond's project makes sense in the context of the era as American society agitated for change amidst the civil rights, anti-war, and women's movements. Further, as the first exhibition of its kind in the late seventies, Hammond did not just bring visibility to lesbian artists she also created a dialogue for change both in the artworld and feminist cultures.

In *Otherwise*, Jones and Silver host a conversation with Jonathan D. Katz in which they debate the category of lesbianism, and how it intersects with, or does not, a

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[63] Amelia Jones and Erin Silver, eds. "Introduction: sexual differences and *otherwise*," in *Otherwise Imagining queer feminist art histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 3.

[64] See Harmony Hammond's statement in the digital archive for *A Lesbian Show* on White Columns website, accessed July 26, 2023, https://whitecolumns.org/exhibitions/a-lesbian-show/; Harmony Hammond, *Lesbian Art in America* (New York: Rizzoli, 2000); and Harmony Hammond "Lesbian Artists" in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones, 159–160, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010).

queer art history. They consider the usefulness of the category of lesbianism today, when, as Silver says in her discussion with Katz, "it seems like for the most part people seem to be discarding the concept of lesbian art – arguing that there are other concepts that somehow work better, are more inclusive."[65] Katz makes a case for the category in particular as an art historian thinking through art's histories in their specific moments of time and place.[66] One issue of this debate is how we understand the term lesbian within our current culture, which is to say 2024, and the range of terms and vocabulary available to us now.

As an artist, Hammond comes up in the context of this conversation as well because of her book *Lesbian Art in America* (2000), but what Katz posits is that Hammond's own work is queer because it is not overly representational of dominant lesbian tropes (i.e. it is abstract and not embodied).[67] This could also be said of Damon's work. Although certainly not abstract, the inclusion of small cloth sacs that resemble breasts, eggs and testicles queer the body of the figure—blurring the boundaries of bodies destabilizes traditional binaries of male and female—and if anything the title does not specifically point to lesbian ancestors. I would further add that Hammond's continued project of bringing visibility to lesbian art itself is a queer project because, like her work, it resists a singular definition or aesthetic for lesbian art and rather insists on the diversity of the artistic practices.

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[65] Silver, "Our maiden aunt, lesbianism, or the limits of queer," in *Otherwise*, 72.

[66] Katz, "Our maiden aunt, lesbianism, or the limits of queer," in *Otherwise*, 75.

[67] Katz, "Our maiden aunt, lesbianism, or the limits of queer," in *Otherwise*, 75; Harmony Hammond, *Lesbian Art in America* (New York: Rizzoli, 2000). See also my discussion of Hammond's work in the section in this chapter related to *In a Different Light*, as Margo Hobbs Thompson's analysis problematizes this notion of abstraction/embodiment.

In her 1978 *Village Voice* review "Lesbian Art: The Colonized Self," Kay Larson explained the impetus for the exhibition, which grew out of the issue of the feminist journal, *Heresies*, on "Lesbian Art & Artists." In the production of the issue, the editors found a dearth of documentation on the topic and that spurred Hammond (who was a member/editor of the *Heresies* collective) to curate the exhibition.[68] In her statement for *A Lesbian Show*, Hammond wrote that the reason for curating the exhibition was because the lives and works of lesbian artists went unacknowledged in the art world as well as in the lesbian feminist communities.[69] Clearly, even though the Stonewall Uprising happened some nine years before this exhibition took place, being a lesbian in the art world, and even within the feminist movement, meant being silenced. This silencing played an unfortunate part in the planning of the exhibition itself, despite Hammond's attempts to bring visibility to lesbian artists.

Hammond notes in her statement that some artists who were asked to participate in the exhibition declined because of societal pressures (read homophobia). Others were forced to withdraw, but Hammond does not elaborate.[70] Larson, though, details in her review that one artist who was showing in a "south-of-midtown commercial gallery" was told by the two gay men who owned it, that if she participated in *A Lesbian Show*, she

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[68] Kay Larson, "Lesbian Art: The Colonized Self," *Village Voice*, March 6, 1978, 67, from the digital archive for *A Lesbian Show* on White Columns' website, accessed February 26, 2024, https://whitecolumns.org/exhibitions/a-lesbian-show/. See also *Heresies #3 Lesbian Art and Artists* 1, no. 3 (Fall 1977), *Heresies* PDF Archive, accessed July 26, 2023, http://heresiesfilmproject.org/archive/.

[69] See Hammond's Statements by Lesbian Artists in the digital archive for *A Lesbian Show* on White Columns website, accessed July 26, 2023, https://whitecolumns.org/exhibitions/a-lesbian-show/.

[70] Hammond's Statements by Lesbian Artists in the digital archive for *A Lesbian Show* on White Columns website, accessed July 26, 2023, https://whitecolumns.org/exhibitions/a-lesbian-show/.

would no longer be showing at that gallery.[71] This indicates discrimination within the ranks of the gay community, and that when faced with this ultimatum the artists chose economic stability over identifying with a particular community. In all, only 16 artists participated in the exhibition portion (there were others who participated in the performances, seminars, and discussions organized by Damon), which for a group exhibition trying to shine a light on the lesbian artistic community seems rather small, but also underscores how artists feared being out due to the potential consequences to one's career.

Despite the seemingly small number of participating artists, two reviewers (Larson and J.M. Saslow in *Gaysweek*) suggest that Hammond's endeavor with this exhibition was to build a new culture, a new iconography, and a political movement.[72] By offering a space and place to explore a lesbian aesthetic, Hammond gave a voice to those who had previously been voiceless. It was an opportunity for artists to explore their identities within a welcoming alternative art space. Clearly, as one of the first exhibitions to show work by lesbian artists, Hammond indeed began a dialogue.[73] This was much needed at the time due to the overtly heterosexual nature of second-wave feminism, which was on the cusp of a third-wave that would focus much more on intersectionality, and within the art world, explore the fields of gender and sexuality.

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[71] Larson, "Lesbian Art," *Village Voice*, 67.

[72] Larson, "Lesbian Art," *Village Voice*, 67 and J.M. Saslow, "'A Lesbian Show' Catalogues Current Art Trends," *Gaysweek*, February 13, 1978, from the digital archive for *A Lesbian Show* on White Columns' website, accessed February 26, 2024, https://whitecolumns.org/exhibitions/a-lesbian-show/.

[73] The Great American Lesbian Art Show (GALAS) was mounted two years later in 1980 at The Woman's Building in Los Angeles.

As a burgeoning field within contemporary art both women artists and lesbians pursued the possibilities of their identities through their artwork, which is perhaps why both Larson and Saslow noted the rawness of the work. Saslow went so far as to write about some "embarrassingly student-y works" in the exhibition, although he does not say which ones in particular, and also stated that the quality of the work is high but uneven.[74] This is an unfortunate by-product of the Western canonization of art, which is to say that if it is not heralded within major contemporary art institutions and does not have a certain slick, polished appearance then it is somehow not "high art." The point should be experimentation without having your work judged as "student-y" particularly within an exhibition space with the word "workshop" in its title.

While some may argue for an all lesbian/women group show as a ghettoization, there were clear reasons for curating this way particularly at this time.[75] Despite the exhibition's adherence to essentialist categories of identity, *A Lesbian Show* was an early, and much needed, precursor to the dissertation's case studies because it situated gender and sexuality within the realm of the aesthetic and argued for its importance within a variety of discourses as a means of community building, both within and outside of the artworld, queering—which is to say troubling the normative institution—the exhibition space in the process. 112 Greene Street Workshop was a smaller, alternative non-profit and not the larger, more mainstream contemporary art museums I explore in later chapters. However, the likelihood that this exhibition would have been mounted in one at

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[74] Saslow, "'A Lesbian Show,'" *Gaysweek*.

[75] For more on the all-female group show see: Jenni Sorkin, "The Feminist Nomad: The All-Women Group Show" in *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, eds. Cornelia H. Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark, 458–471 (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007).

that time was slim to none, and the alternative art scene (both smaller nonprofits and museums) rose to prominence at this time specifically to address underrepresented and marginalized groups, of which women and lesbians were included.[76]

"Gayness as an Aura": Dan Cameron's Extended Sensibilities

Extended Sensibilities Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art, on view from October 16 through December 30, 1982, was one of several exhibitions presented at the New Museum related to identity particularly around issues of gender and sexuality. It was similar to *A Lesbian Show* in that it considered whether it was possible to identify a homosexual sensibility within contemporary art and if so what that would look like and what it would mean for the artist, artwork and the viewing audience. The accompanying public programs and press coverage sparked heated debate even within the LGBTQ+ community at the time. Much of the debate centered on the fact that before even being able to identify if such a thing existed, the majority culture needed to acknowledge LGBTQ+ artists in the first place and that much of contemporary culture at the time was still quite hostile to folx coming or being out.[77]

Dan Cameron was the guest curator of *Extended Sensibilities*—the use of guest curators is a trend that continues in the case study exhibitions—although he was later hired by the Museum. In her catalogue introduction, Marcia Tucker, director and founder of the museum, notes that Cameron's exhibition was selected from among a range of

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[76] See Julie Ault, ed., *Alternative Art New York 1965–1985* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) for a critical history of the alternative art scene in New York.

[77] Listen to the audio recordings of the public programs "Recent Issues and Perspectives: Homosexual Sensibilities: What is the Impact of Homosexual Sensibility on Contemporary Culture" and "Recent Issues and Perspectives: Homosexual Sensibilities: Is There a Homosexual Aesthetic in Contemporary Art?," New Museum Digital Archive, accessed September 11, 2023, https://archive.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/56.

proposals because his "…immediately provoked a flurry of discussion, argument, excitement, and questions. It is the first museum exhibition in the United States to address an important question: in what way and to what extent has some of the most interesting contemporary art addressed and reflected the concerns of the homosexual community, which has substantially increased in visibility in the past few years."[78] This exhibition, a few years after *A Lesbian Show*, includes both male and female artists and uses the term "homosexual" and "gay" to describe particular identities and practices. These terms adhere to the gender and sexuality binaries of male/female, homosexual/heterosexual, and gay/lesbian. Although they are still widely in use today, the language surrounding gender and sexuality has become increasingly expansive and intersectional.[79]

Tucker was clearly thrilled to host *Extended Sensibilities* knowing that it would spark dialogue and debate, something that many New Museum exhibitions generated. According to her statement in the Museum's online digital archive for the exhibition, "The discourse among us generated by Dan Cameron's proposal has continued, and will undoubtedly expand through public participation now that the exhibition has opened. This kind of dialogue, which often stimulates controversy, is essential to The New Museum and is, we believe, a crucial part of the intellectual and esthetic growth of our community of interest."[80] Not one to shy away from controversy, the museum actively

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[78] Marcia Tucker, "Preface", in *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art* (New York: New Museum, 1982), IV.

[79] Perusing the list of terms available in the international online dictionary Homosaurus gives a good overview of the current and continually expanding vocabulary related to intersectional identities. See "Vocabulary," Homosaurus, accessed September 11, 2023, https://homosaurus.org/v3.

[80] "Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art," New Museum Digital Archive, accessed September 11, 2023, https://archive.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/56.

engaged in public discourse around issues of gender and sexuality, which at the time was likely fraught with the ongoing debates and lack of discussion surrounding the AIDS crisis. The Museum clearly put themselves in the middle of this and at a time when major public art institutions were still relatively conservative in their exhibition programs, not to mention the conservative nature of the U.S. at the time under Reagan, which would only worsen over the decade and culminate in the culture wars at the end of the 1980s.[81]

Perhaps anticipating this moment and the coming controversy, the catalogue for the exhibition announces the title and list of artists in a dayglo green on the outside, while the catalogue's interior is rather staid in comparison. Like many traditional exhibition catalogues, Cameron's essay outlines his argument and describes how the artists and works he has chosen relate to it. Cameron explains how his approach moves past what he refers to as "Homosexual Subject Matter" and "Ghetto Content"—both focused on the consumer and mass consumption by audiences for both straight, as in the first, and gay, as in the second. In the case of "Homosexual Subject Matter" the creator may be straight or gay, but in "Ghetto Content" the creator is also gay. Cameron's "Sensibility Content" synthesizes the two and moves away from targeting specific audiences, and is rather about "work which is created from personal experience of homosexuality which need not have anything to do with sexuality or even lifestyle."[82] Each section of the catalogue thereafter groups artists, 23 in all, according to three thematic sections "The Homosexual

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[81] By major public art institutions I am referring to the largest ones in New York at the time: The Whitney, The Met, and The Brooklyn Museum. This is not to say that there were not edgy and controversial exhibitions being done in other parts of the country and in other types of institutions, because there were. See Jonathan D. Katz, "'The Senators Were Revolted': Homophobia and the Culture Wars" in *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones, 231–248 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd, 2006).

[82] Dan Cameron, "Sensibility as Content," in *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art* (New York: New Museum, 1982), 8.

Self / Part One," "The Homosexual Other / Part Two," and "The Homosexual World / Part Three." The most interesting—and illustrative of his argument—part of the catalogue is the "Scrapbook" section where Cameron asked the artists to contribute an image that was important to them both personally and artistically. As Cameron notes, the works submitted by artists does not pigeon-hole them as evidence of private lives, yet it produces "gayness as an aura" to be passed from the artist to the artwork and on to the larger world.[83] This is perhaps the most intriguing part of Cameron's argument, as he clearly gestures to German philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (1936). Cameron's point shares some affinity to Benjamin's notion of an "aura" surrounding an original work of art that has not been mechanically reproduced, which is "the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place."[84] Extending Benjamin's argument, we can think about how the viewer encounters the objects in this particular place and time (the New Museum) and how just by looking at something a feeling, in this case "gayness," transfers from the artwork to the audience.

As much as Cameron considers "gayness as an aura" in the works presented, it was also up to the viewer to investigate. As discussed in the Introduction, Cameron's curatorial approach to the exhibition was investigative, rather than didactic, and aligned itself with Tucker's brand of curating as she explains to the audience of the public program "Recent Issues and Perspectives: Homosexual Sensibilities: What is the Impact

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[83] Cameron, "Scrapbook," in *Extended Sensibilities*, 40.

[84] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 3 1935–1938*, eds. Howard Eiland Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006): 103.

of Homosexual Sensibility on Contemporary Culture."[85] The works Cameron selected for inclusion extended across the spectrum from representational to abstract and included a range of mediums. While Les Petites Bonbons's *Dayglo Cockprint* (1973; Figure 1.2) is in fact a bouquet of phalluses, other artworks are not nearly as figurative and may only hint at bodily associations, such as Harmony Hammond's *Grasping Affection* (1981–1982; Figure 1.3), an example of her well-known sculptural work, which based on the title resembles a cupped-hand. Whether these works elicit a homosexual sensibility when the viewer looks at them, given the overt figurative representation of Les Petits Bonbons and the more abstract figuration of Hammond, the potential to find an affinity is there through an engagement with the work.

As abstraction, Hammond's sculpture evokes—through texture, materiality, even shape—a sense of the body without directly pointing to it. Of this work, Hammond has said: "[A]bstraction offers the possibility of erotic art that bypasses the problematics of figuration….abstraction opens up time and space, allowing us (other women/lesbians) to feel/respond sexually 'in the body' (versus 'to the figure') to what we see….it can avoid the male gaze and be extended indefinitely."[86] Art historian Margo Hobbs Thompson has argued that these works activate both a lesbian *and* a feminine (read heterosexual and essentialist) sensibility thereby queering vaginal imagery.[87] What is potentially queered

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[85] "Recent Issues and Perspectives: Homosexual Sensibilities: What is the Impact of Homosexual Sensibility on Contemporary Culture" and "Recent Issues and Perspectives: Homosexual Sensibilities: Is There a Homosexual Aesthetic in Contemporary Art?," New Museum Digital Archive, accessed September 11, 2023, https://archive.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/56.

[86] Margo Hobbs Thompson, "'Lesbians are not Women: Feminine and Lesbian Sensibilities in Harmony Hammond's Late-70s Sculpture," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 12, no. 4: 448, doi: 10.1080/10894160802278598.

[87] Thompson, "'Lesbians are not Women," *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 452.

in this context is gender, depending on both the artist's and the viewer's identification. The sculpture complicates gender, or to use Butler's terminology troubles it, as the vaginal association is not merely with a heterosexual, female-identifying woman but has the potential to extend beyond the binary.

Cameron's exhibition does not seek to tell audiences that a homosexual presence in art exists, so much as it investigates whether it is possible and what forms it can take. Overall it sought to extend the dialogue around sexuality through the aesthetic. In his review of the exhibition in *Artforum*, Richard Flood primarily takes issue with *Extended Sensibilities*—much of it with the artwork included and Cameron's "amorphous thesis"—but ends by writing, "In his ambitious attempt to address sexuality as both creative determinant and political strategy, 'Extended Sensibilities' generously engaged in a program of liberation larger than the show which occasioned it."[88] Seemingly then, this project worked to bring light to sexuality both within the artworld, but also the culture at large, sparking much needed debate in the process. Moreover, I suggest that Cameron's "amorphous thesis" and investigative approach was beginning to queer the museum because he challenged the traditionally normative exhibition by focusing on the nonnormative.[89]

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[88] Richard Flood, "'Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art,' The New Museum" *Artforum*, accessed February 26, 2024, https://www.artforum.com/events/extended-sensibilities-homosexual-presence-in-contemporary-art-226772/.

[89] I refer her to Homosaurus's definition of the verb queer: "a term commonly used in academic disciplines to describe actions that address sexual and gender normativity, expose systems of oppression, and attempt to undermine those systems," accessed January 3, 2023, https://homosaurus.org/v3/homoit0001149.

Difference in the Media: Kate Linker's Difference: On Representation and Sexuality

Difference: On Representation and Sexuality guest curated by Kate Linker was presented at the New Museum from December 8, 1984 through February 10, 1985. In the preface to the catalogue, Marcia Tucker states, "Since gender itself is not the subject of the show; it is instead an intellectual as well as visual exploration of how gender distorts 'reality,' as seen through the work of thirty-one artists, both male and female."[90] *Difference* uses gender as a lens through which to interrogate reality through the work of both "male" and "female" artists in the U.S. and Western Europe. The use of the term *difference* here places this exhibition squarely in its historical moment as the show is very much indebted to both French and British feminist psychoanalytic film theory, among others, Laura Mulvey, Peter Wollen, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, which privileges binary notions of gender and sexuality. In fact, many of the texts in the catalogue are laden with theoretical language, therefore addressing an audience assumed to be more academic than general. In 1984, the emergence of "queer theory" was still a few years away in which American philosopher and gender studies scholar Judith Butler would interrogate feminism and the term "woman" in order to expand the binary, specifically critiquing French feminist theory.[91]

One main question that the exhibition centers is how do we understand differences in gender and sexuality through its representation in media (i.e. photography, film, television, video, etc.). Lisa Tickner's essay for the catalogue "Sexuality and/in Representation: Five British Artists" provides a response,

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[90] Marcia Tucker, "Preface," in *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 4.

[91] Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

> We have no unmediated access to the real. It is through representations that we know the world. At the same time we cannot say, in a simple sense, that a representation or an image 'reflects' a reality, 'distorts' a reality, 'stands in the place' of an absent reality, or bears no relation to any reality whatsoever. Relations and events do not 'speak themselves' but are enabled to mean through systems of signs organized into discourses on the world. Reality is a matter of representation, as Stephen Heath puts it, and representation is, in turn, a matter of discourse.[92]

The inclusion of Dara Birnbaum's *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978–79; Figure 1.4) in the exhibition exemplifies how Hollywood in particular has dominated the representation of female archetypes specifically, to use Laura Mulvey's term, through the male gaze.[93] Although Wonder Woman is a heroine who fights crime and saves lives, in the television series which ran from 1975–1979, Hollywood positioned her, and by extension Lynda Carter, as a pin-up sex model. Birnbaum's critique lies in the brilliant technological manipulation of the film medium in which she endlessly loops Wonder Woman's transformation between "real life" Diana Prince and her alter-ego. Caught between reality and fantasy, Wonder Woman is always in a perpetual state of becoming.

A different kind of becoming is explored in Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79; Figure 1.5)—that of both mother and child. Here, Kelly avoids bodily representation of either herself, or her young son who she documents from infancy to grade school age, instead opting for ephemera—used nappies, wool vests, feeding charts, slate boards, and the like. Focusing on the maternal experience of raising her son, Kelly's documentation is eerily clinical and cold with each piece of ephemera neatly framed in

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[92] Lisa Tickner, "Sexuality and/in Representation: Five British Artists," in *Difference*, 19.

[93] See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Feminism–Art–Theory: An Anthology 1968–2014*, Hilarie Robinson, ed., 2nd ed. (Malden and Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 300–309.

Perspex. In short, it lacks warmth, but subverts the male dominated fields of minimalism and conceptualism because of its focus on motherhood.[94] One question to consider in relation to this work and its inclusion in *Difference* is how we understand what motherhood is, especially if we pay attention to how it is defined in the media.

The intersection between media/representation is most explicitly addressed in Barbara Kruger's black and white photograph *We are the objects of your suave entrapments* (1983; Figure 1.6). The closely cropped photograph features a hand bound by rope delivering the title's text to the viewer. In signature Kruger style, the work lays bare the snare people are caught in by the media's trickery in defining how we see/understand ourselves in society. While Kruger's work is most closely associated with feminism, here the word "we" can be read/replaced with "women" and the word "your" can be read/replaced with "men's" particularly if we understand this work through a critique of the male gaze.

Likewise, Kruger critically examines the male gaze in the exhibition's film series. Writing in *Artforum*, she notes that "They [the Museum] should encourage other projects intent on recognizing a female spectator, on welcoming a multiplicity of feminisms. So we hope for the emergence of different kinds of films, whether through the maneuvers of a theoretically derived cinema, from a more artisanal, art world context, or even sneaking between the phantasms of Hollywood."[95] Indeed, this exhibition begins an exploration of gender and sexuality beyond the binary as it considers them through the lenses of

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[94] "Post-Partum Document 1973–79," Mary Kelly, accessed January 23, 2024, https://www.marykellyartist.com/post-partum-document-1973-79.

[95] Barbara Kruger, "'Difference: On Representation and Sexuality,'" *Artforum*, accessed September 30, 2023, https://www.artforum.com/events/difference-on-representation-and-sexuality-224409/. Also note the potential conflict of interest in Kruger writing a review of the very exhibition in which her work is included!

language and society. Kruger's review hints at a queering to come, as she notes "Rather than showing sexuality in an immutable, natural state, the films suggest a socially constructed sexuality, a perpetual shifting of positions, voices, and bodies only biologically fixed to gender."[96] She also writes that in the films, "pronouns are paraded promiscuously."[97] The discussion around pronoun usage would reach an apex in the early to mid 2010s, at least among the general public. It is now widely accepted within the U.S. to state one's pronouns as a marker of identity. Interestingly, even if the basis for the exhibition and the catalogue texts that accompanied it did not hint at a queering, the films and Kruger seem to.

Grace Glueck's exceptionally critical review of the exhibition for *The New York Times* took issue with the overall "look" and "feel" of the exhibition. Focusing on its lack of visual pleasure and instead how it operates as a "semiological seminar that's solemn, dogmatic and dull" she writes,

> The work here not only fails to nourish the vision, in all senses of that word, but also, much of it has little visual meaning without its accompanying texts. Some of it, in fact, is all text - but on the other hand, the text often compounds the cloistral quality of the image.[98]

In fact, taking a swing through the online archive of installation images the exhibition does lack dynamism in its presentation, which partly as Glueck points out, has to do with the work itself, and perhaps by extension the show's theoretical underpinnings in

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[96] Kruger, "Difference" *Artforum*.

[97] Kruger, "Difference" *Artforum*.

[98] Grace Glueck, "Art: 'representation and sexuality' mixed media show at New Museum," *The New York Times*, January 4, 1985, accessed January 23, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/1985/01/04/arts/art-representation-and-sexuality-mixed-media-show-at-new-museum.html.

psychoanalysis. As noted earlier in relation to Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* the individual works and entire show visually reads as cold.

Glueck also attacks the essayists in their use of "semiological babble" noting the exhibition's "readerproof catalogue."[99] Clearly, Glueck found that in reading the catalogue and seeing the show the viewer would be inundated with theory-speak and a visual minefield of works. Glueck's review suggests that the entire exhibition, from installation to catalogue, was off-putting to the viewer and required a degree in theory just to wade through the texts.

Where more recent queer exhibitions have enveloped their audiences—drawing them in through their accessible use of language as well as the fun and interactive installations—*Difference*, according to Glueck, was likely to completely alienate its viewers. A gulf exists in curatorial strategies between the case study exhibitions, analyzed in Chapters 3 through 5, and *Difference* in that the works, installation, and catalogue kept viewers at arm's length. As I will argue in Chapters 3 through 5, the works, the installation, and the catalogues embrace their audiences, offering them hospitality and a place to be themselves.

Community and World Building: William Olander's Homo Video

A few years after the exhibitions *Extended Sensibilities* and *Difference* a young senior curator named William Olander organized the videotape exhibition *HOMO Video: Where We Are Now,* on view from December 12, 1986 through February 15, 1987, as a curatorial rebuttal to the two previous New Museum exhibitions by referring to both as

[99] Glueck, "Art: 'representation and sexuality," https://www.nytimes.com/1985/01/04/arts/art-representation-and-sexuality-mixed-media-show-at-new-museum.html.

"stunning failures."[100] Not one to shy away from provocation—the title alone!—Olander's show was very much a response to the forthcoming culture wars and Reagan-era politics of the late 1980s. Clearly embodying curatorial activism, Olander's exhibition cites the following as social issues, which created untenable situations for not only gay/lesbian subculture, but culture in general: AIDS; the Supreme Court ruling against homosexuals in Hardwick vs. Bowers; and the Meese Commission on Pornography.[101] The brief overview of the exhibition also acknowledges that where earlier liberation movements sought to divide gay and lesbian issues, more recent politics began acknowledging differences and bridging them through a collective "'struggle against patriarchy, discrimination, and repression' and 'whether female or male…to challenge the various ideological apparatuses which continue to harass, contain, and suppress the condition of homosexuality.'"[102] Collectivity is clearly an important strategy at this particular moment, which helped combat the various attacks on LGBTQ+ rights. United together, groups that had once been divided, were better equipped to challenge the conditions of oppression.

Olander put together daily screenings of videotapes that addressed the AIDS crisis, among other issues, and included public service announcements from 1986 that were produced by the AIDS Project, Los Angeles and the Gay Men's Health Crisis, New York. Gregg Bordowitz, whose video *some aspect of a shared lifestyle* (1986; Figure 1.7)

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[100] "Book Launch: DUETS William Olander," New Museum, accessed February 26, 2024, https://www.newmuseum.org/calendar/view/1768/book-launch-duets-william-olander.

[101] "HOMO VIDEO: Where We Are Now," New Museum Digital Archive, accessed February 26, 2024, https://archive.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/141.

[102] "HOMO VIDEO," https://archive.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/141.

was included in the exhibition, was among a number of activists associated with the group AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) that advocated for the rights of folx with HIV/AIDS. His article "Picture a Coalition" (1987) specifically called on video/media activists to use their platforms to raise awareness for the disease as well as finding a treatment and cure.[103] In s*ome aspect of a shared lifestyle*, Bordowitz appears as a talking head reading newspaper headlines and articles about the AIDS crisis. Dressed in a suit and tie, he glares into the camera's lens and seems agitated with his voice rising in anger. In one clip he reads about how once the epidemic reached the general population interest among researchers and the government was suddenly piqued.[104] This is an example of how the concerns of the gay/lesbian community also affect the larger population with Bordowitz "forcefully arguing for the need to confront AIDS as an equal-opportunity threat to all members of society."[105]

In addition to the focus on the AIDS epidemic in *HOMO Video*, Olander was also responsible for inviting ACT UP to display their installation *Let the Record Show…* (1987; Figure 1.8) in the New Museum's windows on Broadway. Olander was also a founder of Visual AIDS, an online database devoted to sustaining a dialogue about the epidemic as well as supporting artists who are HIV+.[106] Sadly, Olander would die from

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[103] Gregg Bordowitz, "Picture a Coalition," *October* 43, AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism (Winter, 1987): 182–196. Nearly thirty years later, Bordowitz's performance-lecture *Some Styles of Masculinity* (2017) was included in the exhibition *Trigger* at the New Museum.

[104] "some aspect of a shared lifestyle," Video Data Bank, accessed February 26, 2024, https://www.vdb.org/titles/some-aspect-shared-lifestyle.

[105] "some aspect of a shared lifestyle," https://www.vdb.org/titles/some-aspect-shared-lifestyle.

[106] "About Us," Visual AIDS, accessed February 26, 2024, https://visualaids.org/about-us.

the illness in 1989 only a couple of years after these exhibitions were presented.[107] Also of note is that the funding for the New Museum's Day Without Art—the first one was held on December 1, 1989 and was started by Visual AIDS to commemorate those lives who have been lost to the epidemic—is provided by The William Olander Memorial Fund, which was established "to further work in the fields of photography, video, performance, installation, and cultural activism."[108] Olander's legacy as an art professional and curator is clear. Through art and activism, he engaged in the dialogue and debates surrounding the queer community as they intersected with society at large. The exhibitions, programs, and organizations he curated, organized, and co-founded continue to exist through their afterlives (as in the case of the exhibitions) or in actuality, supporting various LGBTQ+ communities through the arts.

His legacy is explored in the Visual AIDS publication *DUETS: Julie Ault & David Deitcher in Conversation on William Olander* for which two online panels were convened and co-presented with the New Museum.[109] At the book launch Kyle Croft, now interim director of Visual AIDS, remarked that Olander was "part of a generation that began to reconsider the role of the curator developing a sense of social responsibility

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[107] "William Olander, 38, Art Curator, Is Dead," *The New York Times*, March 21, 1989, accessed February 26, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/21/obituaries/william-olander-38-art-curator-is-dead.html.

[108] "Press release for 'Day Without Art' (1992)," New Museum Digital Archive, accessed February 27, 2024, https://archive.newmuseum.org/print-ephemera/8790. This is an ongoing program at the New Museum, with the most recent iteration taking place on December 1, 2023. "Day With(out) Art 2023: Everyone I Know Is Sick," New Museum Digital Archive, accessed March 15, 2024, https://www.newmuseum.org/calendar/view/1944/day-with-out-art-2023-everyone-i-know-is-sick#:~:text=The%20New%20Museum%20is%20proud,with%20HIV%20across%20the%20world.

[109] Barbara Schröder, Karen Kelly, Kyle Kroft, and Esther McGowan, eds, *DUETS: Julie Ault & David Deitcher in Conversation on William Olander* (New York: Visual AIDS, 2021).

that had traditionally been left to artists."[110] This intersection between curatorial and artistic practice comes up often in this conversation between the panelists as one rooted in institutional critique. Curator Brian Wallis discussed Olander's practice specifically as that of interventionist and working against the grain of the institution particularly as it related to them being citadels of high art.[111] Interestingly, Wallis referred to Olander as a "curator of the future" when Tucker was ambivalent about hiring someone who looked "scruffy."[112]

Olander's practice was one rooted in collaboration and collectivity prompting writer, art historian, and critic David Deitcher to proclaim that he had "no taste for auteurism."[113] In fact, one of the panelists, artist Tom Kalin, recalled an anecdote about Olander reviewing one of his videos for the exhibition when the artist was still a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. While Olander did not include his work in the exhibition he took the untraditional step of corresponding with Kalin to let him know that he enjoyed seeing his work and then referred to him in the catalogue essay.[114] Based

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[110] "Book Launch: DUETS William Olander," https://www.newmuseum.org/calendar/view/1768/book-launch-duets-william-olander.

[111] "Book Launch: DUETS William Olander," https://www.newmuseum.org/calendar/view/1768/book-launch-duets-william-olander.

[112] "Book Launch: DUETS William Olander," https://www.newmuseum.org/calendar/view/1768/book-launch-duets-william-oland

[113] "Book Launch: DUETS William Olander," https://www.newmuseum.org/calendar/view/1768/book-launch-duets-william-olander. For further discussion on the parallels between exhibition curators and film auteurs read Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak, "From museum curator to exhibition auteur Inventing a singular position," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, eds. Bruce W. Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg, and Sandy Nairne, 166–179 (London: Routledge, 1996), doi: 10.4324/9780203991534. Additionally, read Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, "The Rise of the Star Curator," in *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), ProQuest Ebook Central.

[114] "Book Launch: DUETS William Olander," https://www.newmuseum.org/calendar/view/1768/book-launch-duets-william-olander.

on this anecdote, Olander cared, and deeply, for those with whom he interacted. Most senior curators at major museums would not take the time for this level of engagement with a graduate student, which speaks to Olander's generosity and to his interest in community building. The care Olander took in *HOMO VIDEO* foreshadows care as a curatorial methodology within the exhibition *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow* at the Brooklyn Museum, further analyzed in Chapter 5. The panelists also pointed to Olander being open to the critique of his exhibitions, which in the case of *HOMO VIDEO* surrounded the lack of inclusion of both women and artists of color as well as lacking in enough of an aesthetic cross section of video work.[115] Despite this, the panelists noted how *HOMO VIDEO* was an interventionist event because there was not anywhere else to view this kind of work, rather it took Olander organizing it at the Museum in order for people to see it.[116]

In a related panel to the *Duets* publication, Susan Cahan—who overlapped briefly with Olander at the New Museum when she was the Director of Education—argued that Olander transformed the way objects were displayed in the museum, shifting from exhibiting them to the world to bringing the world into the museum and thereby re-contextualizing the object.[117] Although Cahan did not use the term queering to describe this process, I would argue that this is exactly what Olander did. By transforming the way

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[115] "Book Launch: DUETS William Olander," https://www.newmuseum.org/calendar/view/1768/book-launch-duets-william-olander.

[116] "Book Launch: DUETS William Olander," https://www.newmuseum.org/calendar/view/1768/book-launch-duets-william-olander.

[117] "Let the Record Show | William Olander: Curator, Critic, Activist," Visual AIDS, accessed February 27, 2024, https://visualaids.org/events/detail/olander-nyu. Cahan was specifically referring to the window installation of *Let the Record Show…* (1987).

objects are not only displayed but also in thinking about how they function, especially in an activist sense, exhibitions have the potential to *affect* the viewer by heightening the viewer's awareness of (hetero)normative structures in addition to the phenomenological. To Cahan's point about bringing the world into the museum, I interpret this as literally drawing audiences in, beckoning to them.[118] Cahan further notes that Olander played with institutional norms—by using the museum as medium, showing performance at a time when other institutions were not, and opening up the voices of those who had previously been marginalized—and was able to do this precisely because the museum was still in its nascent stages at only 10 years old.[119] In this moment, the Museum was still a relatively grass-roots, alternative art space and had not yet reached its apotheosis as a 21st Century Contemporary Art Museum.[120] Olander clearly pushed boundaries and was able to do so because the museum had not turned toward the "bigger is better" model yet. That would, of course, change when the Museum moved to its current location on the Bowery, sanitizing and gentrifying the neighborhood in the process.

Humor as a Feminist Strategy: Marcia Tucker's Bad Girls

"The spirit may not be friendly but it's hauntingly familiar: one that not only trivializes work by women artists, but signals the death knell of a highly diversified movement that finds itself clumsily packaged and misunderstood all over again," thus reads a portion of one review of *Bad Girl*s, curated by Marcia Tucker, on view from

[118] For more on queer institutional critique see Chapter 4 Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon (2017) in this dissertation, especially in relation to the New Museum and queering.

[119] "Let the Record Show | William Olander: Curator, Critic, Activist," https://visualaids.org/events/detail/olander-nyu.

[120] For more on this, see Chapter 4 Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon (2017) in this dissertation.

January 14 through February 27, 1994 at the New Museum.[121] Jan Avgikos's review is less a typical exhibition "review" and one more focused on remaining critical throughout of the title of the show and its underlying premise which is to view women's artwork—and by extension gender and feminism—through the lens of humor. Likewise, Roberta Smith found the show's title demeaning in her review for *The New York Times*.[122] In fact, the reviews in general found not just the title but its entire premise to be demoralizing, oversimplifying, and lacking in any kind of theoretical feminist framework. In short, the exhibition sought to entertain its audiences by minimizing feminism and women's (and some men's) artwork by lumping it all into a carnivalesque (to use Tucker's term) free-for-all. Susan Dyer's review for *Women's Art Magazine* quotes Tucker as saying, "'We're past the rage and into more of a refined tool for dismantling the master's house,'" to which Dyer responds, "Why replace an articulate, intelligent feminist discourse with a mute-style of Bad Girl taunting?"[123] Where just ten years earlier *Difference* had employed a theoretical framework for the exhibition in the guise of a restrained psychoanalytic feminism, Tucker would approach *Bad Girls* with humor and the carnivalesque instead.

Clearly referring to American poet, essayist, and activist Audre Lorde's "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1979), Tucker invokes an

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[121] Jan Avgikos, "Toot Toot," *Artforum*, accessed February 27, 2024, https://www.artforum.com/features/toot-toot-203061/.

[122] Roberta Smith, "Review/Art; A Raucous Caucus Of Feminists Being Bad," *The New York Times*, January 21, 1994, accessed February 27, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/1994/01/21/arts/review-art-a-raucous-caucus-of-feminists-being-bad.html.

[123] Susan Dyer, "Blowing Down the House," *Women's Art Magazine* 58 (May 1994): 27, Proquest.

influential third wave feminist text which calls for a more inclusive understanding of feminisms especially as it relates to race.[124] In fact, more than any of the other previous New Museum exhibitions related to gender and sexuality, *Bad Girls* expanded beyond them to include issues of class and race. However, Tucker collapsed the artists in *Bad Girls* under the umbrella of humor "ranging from the sardonic to the slapstick."[125] Thus, while Tucker saw humor as a new tool with which to interrogate systems of patriarchy, many others viewed it as dismissive to larger theoretical feminist discourse. The works in the exhibition were installed throughout the entire Museum, including in the spaces known as the main gallery, new work, workspace, and the window on Broadway. Parsing the installation shots of *Bad Girls* the carnivalesque atmosphere, in the form of a playground, can be seen in the layout. Tucker underscored the importance of the carnivalesque in her catalogue essay, "the observer of carnival festivities is also a participant…the relationship between observer and 'performer' is one of exchange and dialogue."[126] The exchange and dialogue happening in the *Bad Girls* installation between viewer and artwork likely occurs when the viewer gets the joke, perhaps even chuckling to themselves in the process. It probably was a really fun show to walk through and experience.[127]

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[124] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *This Bridge Called My Back Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, 40th Anniversary Edition, 94–97 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021)

[125] "Bad Girls," New Museum Digital Archive, accessed February 27, 2024, https://archive.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/2076.

[126] Marcia Tucker, "The Attack of the Giant Ninja Barbies," in *Bad Girls* (New York: New Museum, 1994) exhibition catalog, 24.

[127] See Chapter 4 Trigger Gender as a Tool and a Weapon (2017) in this dissertation for more on the critical reception of Burton's exhibition, which is similar to *Bad Girls*, and my argument about why the chaos, mess, and ooze works as a queering.

In one installation image (Figure 1.9) Renee Cox's black and white photograph *Mother and Child* (1993) depicts the artist nude, except for heels, holding her child. This hangs directly next to Amy Hill's shelf installation of reformatted consumer products—a salad dressing bottle, cans of Goya beans, a jar of gefilte fish, etc. On the adjacent wall, Beverly Semmes *Haze* (1994), lavender drapery extends to the floor in a heap, shimmering in the light, its tactility beckoning the viewer to touch it. On a perpendicular wall hangs Sue Williams's *Try To Be More Accommodating* (1991), a painting of a woman's every facial orifice being penetrated by penises. Next to this is Elizabeth Berdann's cutouts of intimate body parts from breasts to testicles. And finally Maxine Hayt's bulbous, flesh-colored sculpture sits plopped on the floor tied up with rope. From the abstract to the representational, these works clearly confront, critique, and defy stereotypes of domesticity, women's bodies, gender, and sexuality. What does all of this have to do with humor? Clearly, in the cases of these works it is wry and subversive humor as opposed to laugh out loud, outright funny humor.

In a 2018 article for *ArtNews* entitled "'Bad Girls' to the Rescue: An Exhibition of Feminist Art from the 1990s Has Much to Teach Us Today" Maura Reilly glosses over the exhibition, its reviews, and its relationship to the later *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon* (2017), analyzed in Chapter 3, and never quite tells the reader what the exhibition teaches us.[128] Rather, Reilly positions the exhibition within her own book *Curatorial Activism*, only to conclude that it was among exhibitions "resisting masculinism and sexism."[129] Perhaps, Reilly's implicit argument is that despite the

[128] Maura Reilly, "'Bad Girls' to the Rescue: An Exhibitions of Feminist Art from the 1990s Has Much to Teach Us Today," *ARTnews*, May 16, 2018, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/bad-girls-rescue-exhibition-feminist-art-1990s-much-teach-us-today-10326/.

primarily critical reviews of the exhibition, it forged a dialogue, if not a debate, about feminisms—i.e. subversion through humor. While reviewers and academics may have found it lacking in a theoretical framework, perhaps the exhibition did what it was supposed to, which was to attract audiences and speak to a general public. Could this be an example of the high art citadel being knocked off its pedestal? Tucker never shied away from controversy, or bad reviews, in fact she reveled in them, as productive failures.[130]

One striking aspect to this exhibition was the sheer ambition of its programming. In addition to the exhibition taking up the entirety of the Museum it also included a robust series of programs including *Saturday Afternoon Live!* a series of performances and gallery talks with Penny Arcade, Frieda, and Carmelita Tropicana (which alone must have been a riot to experience); *Reno Roast*, a tribute to Reno that included her psychiatrist, friends, and enemies (!); *Opera for the Masses* performed by The Derivative Duo; *GAG: An Evening of Bad Girls Xtra Bad Video*; a film series organized by Cheryl Dunye, and *Bad Girls West*, a sister exhibition, curated by independent curator Marcia Tanner for the UCLA Wight Art Gallery.

In addition the catalogue included essays by Tucker, Tanner, Dunye, and Linda Goode Bryant of Above Midtown Gallery; as well as a list of previous feminist exhibitions (within the last three years) compiled by Daniell Cornell, which was not meant to be comprehensive; and a bibliography, also compiled by Cornell, broken down

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[129] Reilly, "'Bad Girls'," https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/bad-girls-rescue-exhibition-feminist-art-1990s-much-teach-us-today-10326/.

[130] This is anecdotal information, but in the course I took with Tucker at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (CCS Bard) she told the class about cutting out reviews and hanging them around her apartment to live with them. I explore productive failures further in Chapter 3 Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon (2017).

into the following categories: General, Art History, Transgression and Subversion, Humor, Media and Performance, Sexuality, Pornography and Censorship, and Psychoanalysis. As an institution, the museum's catalogues act as extensions as well as documentation of the exhibitions, and despite the lack of access to physical archives within the institution, their online archive and catalogues are useful *as* archives.[131]

Perhaps, Tucker summed it up best in what she was doing not only with *Bad Girls*, but with the New Museum in general:

> Maybe that's what gave the New Museum its edge in the early days, too. We always bit off more than we could chew. We always had our mouths full when we were spoken to. We sometimes choked on the force of our own appetites. We were never altogether sure of what we were doing, which meant that, like the artists who were our lifeblood, we worked without knowing exactly what would emerge from our labors. We wanted it to be good but were never completely sure that it would be. Hope, yes. Effort, absolutely. Practice, patience, support. But we seemed to do everything as though it were the first time. For us, it was.[132]

In that sense, the museum was like an artist's studio or a laboratory. It was not polished, slick, or even consumerist. It was experimental, edgy, out there, and it delighted in disobeying the traditional art establishment. In its productive failure *Bad Girls*, like *Trigger*, was queer indeed.

What Queer Artists and Artworks Do: Lawrence Rinder's and Nayland Blake's In a Different Light

In a Different Light, curated by Lawrence Rinder and Nayland Blake, was presented at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive from January 11 through April 9, 1995. At the time, Rinder was a curator on staff at the museum and invited

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[131] See Chapter 3 Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon (2017) for more discussion on the New Museum's physical archives.

[132] Marcia Tucker, "Fifteen: 1998–2004," in *A Short Life of Trouble: Forty Years in the New York Art World* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2008), 196, EBSCOhost.

Blake, curator and artist, to co-curate the exhibition with him, which explored "the resonance of gay and lesbian experience in twentieth-century American art."[133] It is important to note that Blake was a guest curator on this exhibition, as twenty-three years later in 2018 Blake would be invited to curate *Tag* at the ICA, Philadelphia. Consisting of nine sections including Void; Self; Drag; Other; Couple; Family; Orgy; World; and Utopia, Rinder and Blake sought not to show a queer sensibility—moving beyond the more essentialist gender and sexual binaries of exhibitions such as *A Lesbian Show* and *Extended Sensibilities*—but rather asked themselves "What do queer artists do?"[134] As the basis for their exhibition, this question led the curators to include not only gay and lesbian artists but also queer artists and artworks—including the heterosexual artists Marcel Duchamp and Carolee Schneemann, among others.

Expanding further, it was important to Blake, specifically, that *In a Different Light* not essentialize the artists and artworks in the exhibition by using the terms gay, lesbian, or queer (this was reserved for the catalogue title only) fearing that it would ghettoize them.[135] And where earlier exhibitions had shown a generation of artists working at the time, Blake insisted that *In a Different Light* be multigenerational, which led to a mapping of a conceptual queer lineage in contemporary art beginning with Duchamp in the early part of the twentieth century to Fluxus at mid-century and beyond. Therefore, while earlier exhibitions were groundbreaking in various ways for their times,

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[133] Lawrence Rinder, "In a Different Light," Berkeley Museum and Pacific Film Archive, accessed January 4, 2024, https://bampfa.org/program/different-light-0.

[134] Nayland Blake, "Curating in a Different Light," in *In a Different Light: Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*, eds. Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder, and Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995), 11.

[135] Blake, "Curating in a Different Light," in *In a Different Light*, 10.

In a Different Light did something entirely new by historically contextualizing queer artistic practices through a conceptual lens.

In his catalogue essay, Rinder recontextualizes the older model of relying on an aesthetic "sensibility" in the artists' work as a shift towards the relational. He writes, "History reads both ways, recontextualizing older works in terms of their present resonances, and positing contemporary works in terms of their continuity with historical traditions and sensibilities. The notion of 'sensibility' that we have employed in this exhibition is somewhat idiosyncratic. The groups are not based on aesthetic sensibility, but rather came together and are identified by social sensibility—that is, the various conditions of being in the world in relation to other persons."[136] This queer relationality to which Rinder points suggests collectivity, which in turn is reminiscent of Cuban American queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz's insistence on "queerness as collectivity," arguing for it as "the anticipatory illumination of the utopian."[137] The anticipatory leans towards the future, which is echoed in the assertions of both Rinder and Blake in their catalogue essays; *In a Different Light* is not a definitive statement but rather a conversation starter that they hope will be taken up by future generations.[138] And, their wish came true as later curators would both explore and expand on the ideas put forth by Rinder and Blake (see my analysis of *neoqueer* below).

In this nod to the historical in the present to propose ways forward, Rinder and Blake created a compendium of eight queer exhibitions in the catalogue titled *Curating*

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[136] Lawrence Rinder, "An Introduction to In a Different Light," in *In a Different Light*, 4.

[137] José Esteban Muñoz, "Introduction Feeling Utopia," in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), 11 and 18.

[138] Rinder and Blake, *In a Different Light*, 8 and 42.

Lesbian and Gay Exhibitions since 1978 to "continue to learn from the past and keep queering the discourse."[139] The exhibitions' curators tell their own stories including Harmony Hammond for her exhibition *A Lesbian Show;* along with Terry Wolverton's *The Great American Lesbian Art Show (GALAS*; 1979–80); Dan Cameron's *Extended Sensibilities*; Richard Hawkins's and Dennis Cooper's *Against Nature* (1988); Simon Watson's *Erotophobia* 1989); Pam Gregg's *All but the Obvious* (1990) and *Situation* (1991); and Nicola Tyson's *A Brief History of Trial BALLOON* (1991). Later exhibitions would do the same, particularly *Trigger*, in which the reader could also find a collection of earlier exhibitions to which the curators' paid homage. In this section of the catalogue for *In A Different Light,* Rinder and Blake allowed the curators to speak for themselves rather than analyzing the exhibitions so that the curators' own voices could be heard. Not only did this provide visibility for exhibitions that often remain invisible, it also put the exhibition in conversation with a collective of queer curators and exhibitions.

In her statement included in the catalogue for *In a Different Light* regarding *A Lesbian Show*, Hammond wrote about the opening night attendance by noting, "The collective energy was high."[140] Collectivity and community are key to queer lives, especially as a form of world building outside of heteronormative structures of hyper capitalism. Each in their own way, these queer exhibitions built community through collectivity. Blake makes clear that the exhibition grounded the lived experiences of queer artists and anticipated those that were to come.[141] Many of the exhibitions

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[139] Blake, "Curating In a Different Light," in *In a Different Light,* 43.

[140] Harmony Hammond, "A Lesbian Show," in *In a Different Light,* 48.

[141] Blake, "Curating in a Different Light," in *In a Different Light,* 11.

discussed so far in this chapter made clear that queer artists and their work were invisible partly due to little interest among the art world to show them, but also that many of the artists were not necessarily out to the public. By grounding the exhibition in concrete lived experiences, Rinder and Blake opened up possibilities for ways of being in the world, specifically as an artist and the communities that support them.

Opening the Museum space to queer communities counteracts this invisibility factor within the art world, as Blake noted, "A great thing that curating can do is to help people to really see aspects to works of art that are often sort of shunted aside in official discourse."[142] Getting viewers to see differently and unexpectedly in ways they might not have imagined has the potential to queer the artwork *and* I argue the viewer as well. In a panel called "A Different Light, Revisited - A Panel Discussion" presented at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco in 2017 moderator Richard Meyer, art historian, mused about how the exhibition "understood queer, unlike gay and lesbian, as a relational category rather than an identity, and not least as a way of looking that relied as much on the viewer's sensibility as on the artist's."[143] While I understood Meyer's point as the viewer brings something to the artwork through their viewing and places new meaning on it, the artwork also has the potential to queer the visitor. This viewing exchange that might happen between viewer and artwork could lead the viewer to understand the work differently.

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[142] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021.

[143] Richard Meyer art historian, Stanford University and moderator of "A Different Light, Revisited - A Panel Discussion" presented on May 24, 2017 at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco in conjunction with the monographic exhibition *Cary Leibowitz: Museum Show*, accessed November 25, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Td5GmIUKsl8.

Take for example, Tony Feher's *Improbable Moment* (1993; Figure 1.10) included in the "Utopia" section of exhibition. The work made from jars, marbles, wood, paint and screws might give the viewer pause as to how any of these everyday materials relate to queerness. The collection of materials, close together and sitting atop a rather unusually designed pedestal, is perhaps the point if we read them as bodily surrogates. Huddling together, the jars appear fragile in that they could potentially fall off the thin, spindly pedestal legs and platform on which they stand. The work's title projects doubt, but the "improbable moment" in which the materials find themselves gives way to possibility. United together, they form a collective and are much stronger for it.

Barbara Kruger's well known work *Untitled* (*Your Body is a Battleground*; 1989; Figure 1.11) was part of the exhibition's section titled "World." The photographic silkscreen on vinyl—in the exhibition it appeared on a t-shirt —is typical of Kruger's work in that the title is the text that appears in it, and in this case over the bifurcated face of a woman with one side the negative of the other. The work is most often discussed within the context of feminism, particularly in relation to reproductive rights. Here, the meaning potentially changes to a queer feminist discourse in which the body is understood not only in the context of female-identifying persons, but could also be understood in an expanded context to include other gender and sexual identifications beyond woman/female and/or heterosexual/homosexual. For example, the viewer may consider this work *in a different light* in relation to trans rights, and in the process queers their understanding of the work. Additionally, the viewer might also consider the work with regards to the AIDS crisis at the time in which the U.S. government's refusal to acknowledge the epidemic led to the unnecessary loss of millions of lives. In the context

of *In a Different Light*, the phrase "Your Body is a Battleground" disrupts earlier interpretations by getting viewers to see differently and unexpectedly, à la Blake.

Similarly, Nancy Grossman's *Head* (1968; Figure 1.12) in the section titled "Self" may cause viewers to think beyond the sculpture's immediate association with BDSM culture, as the work is an embellished leather face mask one might wear in that context. As art historian David Getsy argues about Grossman's work in *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender*, "The cross-gender identification that characterized her practice conflicted with the dominant trends of 1970s feminism in a way paralleled by the anxious and often combative attitude that feminism had to transsexuality and transgender positions in that decade….I found that the extrapolation of the transgender affinities of Grossman's work bring to light issues from the archive that had previously gone unrecognized."[144] By extending the discussion of Grossman's work to the expanded field of gender, Getsy analyzes its mutable identities. In a video from the Whitney Museum of American Art, educator Lauren Ridloff discussed how when Grossman first showed a similar sculpture in 1968 viewers were conflicted about the piece feeling both engaged and fearful.[145] This push and pull between attraction and repulsion is discussed in Chapter 3, in the context of queer porn in relation to *Community Action Center* in the *Trigger* exhibition, which is to say that this conflict potentially queers the viewer in unexpected ways.

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[144] David J. Getsy, "Introduction: "New" Genders and Sculpture in the 1960s" in *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 17–18, doi: 10.37862/aaeportal.00005.

[145] "Nancy Grossman, Head 1968 | Video in American Sign Language (ASL)," YouTube, accessed December 2, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxbjW50UibM.

Rather than offer viewers definite answers as to what queer artwork *is*, Rinder and Blake asked their audiences to think about what queer artists and artworks *do*. By flipping the normative script of so many exhibition curators who claim to be experts in their fields and *tell* their audiences what to think about artists and artworks, Rinder and Blake *collaborated* with their audiences by including them in the dialogue. Empowering their viewers to think for themselves and in unexpected ways, Rinder and Blake eschewed the authoritarian voice of the curator and in the process organized an exhibition that is still seen as groundbreaking even now, nearly thirty years later.

What Is Queer Art Today?: David Lloyd Brown's, Craig Houser's, and Maura Reilly's Neoqueer

neoqueer: new visual art by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender artists presented February 18 through March 31, 2004 at The Center on Contemporary Art (CoCA) in Seattle was guest curated—under the auspices of the Queer Caucus for Art, a branch of the College Art Association—by David Lloyd Brown, who was the Coordinator for Graduate and Academic Programs at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston as well as a visual artist, and educator; Craig Houser, who was a Collaborative Programs Research Fellow at the City University of New York, as well as a freelance critic and curator; and Maura Reilly, who was the first ever Feminist Art Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum in New York (which organized the exhibition *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow* analyzed in Chapter 5).

Avoiding the standard exhibition practice of narratives that *tell* the reader/viewer what the exhibition is "about," the curators of *neoqueer* instead asked a series of important questions including, but not limited to, "What does it mean to produce queer

art today? Does the phrase 'queer art' necessitate queer content? If so, who defines what constitutes queer content? If an artist identifies as queer, is his, her, or its work inherently queer?"[146] A large portion of the press release is devoted to asking this series of questions squarely placing this exhibition within an investigative curatorial model, because the curators pose more questions than they offer answers. This model allowed for the forty-three artists—selected from one hundred and twenty submissions by members of the Queer Caucus in addition to others—and their work, across a broad range of mediums and content, to speak for themselves.

According to the press release, the curators also understood *neoqueer* falling within a lineage of contemporary queer exhibitions from *In a Different Light* to *Gender Fucked* (CoCA, 1996). In many ways, *neoqueer* follows in the path of *In a Different Light* in that the curators did not prescribe any particular aesthetic sensibility to the work the way earlier queer exhibitions had attempted. Unlike the tracing of a historical lineage in *In a Different Light*, Brown, Hauser, and Reilly added the preface *neo* to *queer* for the title of the exhibition, emphatically emphasizing the "newness" of the work by focusing on emerging and mid-career artists. They also did not organize the exhibition into sections but rather installed the works so that they comingled with one another.

Further, they also included transgender in the title, which up to this point had not been seen in any of the previously discussed exhibitions. One of the questions the curators asked in the press release included, "How does a queer transgendered body further the issues raised by artists who explored gender deconstruction that was so

[146] "Neoqueer press release," Maura Reilly, accessed February 23, 2020, http://www.maurareilly.com/pdf/exhibitions/2004_NeoQueer_concept.pdf.

prevalent in 1980s and 1990s artistic production?"[147] Their question points to the burgeoning queer theory of the late 1980s as well as to artistic production coming out of feminism and feminist art. As Rinder and fellow panelists discussed in "A Different Light, Revisited - A Panel Discussion," terms like transgender were not widely in use in the mid 90s.[148] Less than a decade later, the term was included in the sub title of the *neoqueer* exhibition.

The exhibition was timed to open right at the same moment the College Art Association (CAA) held its 92nd annual conference that year in Seattle. Special receptions were also held for the School of The Art Institute of Chicago Friends and Alumni as well as for School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Alumni. CoCA even hosted a late-night opening for members of the Queer Caucus for Art and CAA with performances by Carmelita Tropicana and the Toxic Titties. By presenting these special openings targeted to particular alumni groups and association members, the audiences for *neoqueer* extended beyond Seattle to folx coming in from across the globe specifically for the CAA conference. Increasing the regular operating hours of the institution for a late-night reception, from 8pm to midnight, also insured accessibility for folx who might not be able to make it during regular museum hours. Therefore, a broad range of viewers would see the exhibition. By not limiting *neoqueer* to specifically queer audiences the curators and institution did not risk preaching to the choir. Instead they opened up the dialogue to audiences who might otherwise be unfamiliar with queer and trans artists and artworks.

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[147] "Neoqueer press release," Maura Reilly, accessed February 23, 2020, http://www.maurareilly.com/pdf/exhibitions/2004_NeoQueer_concept.pdf.

[148] "A Different Light, Revisited - A Panel Discussion" presented on May 24, 2017 at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco in conjunction with the monographic exhibition *Cary Leibowitz: Museum Show*, YouTube, accessed November 25, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Td5Gm.

The open-endedness of the exhibition's organization in terms of artists, artworks, and themes speaks to queerness's fluidity and flexibility in that there are no predeterminations of what queer artists do, what queer artworks looks like, or even what the artists and artworks address. In a review for *The Seattle Times* Tina Potterf writes about how the work in the exhibition "is difficult to pigeonhole and define" and that there is no overriding theme; she highlights how co-curator Brown notes that viewers should see the show because they might not see it anywhere else.[149] Regina Hackett's review for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* likewise wrote that the show "is eccentrically offbeat and oddly lovable."[150] By describing *neoqueer* as "difficult to pigeonhole and define" and "eccentrically offbeat and oddly lovable" Potterf and Hackett were describing its queerness, which is to say the exhibition is out of step with the normative; bypassing any kind of formality reserved for the echelons of the likes of institutions such as The Met, or even MoMA, whose exhibitions are clean, not messy, in their clinical presentations.

One indication of the exhibition being "eccentrically offbeat" was in the installation of artworks. An example is Alejandro Diaz's *Back in 5 Minutes* (2003; Figure 1.13), a sculpture which was placed on the floor in a corner of one of the galleries indicating its less-than-precious status as an object. This placement queers the space because it did not adhere to the standard museum practice of placing sculpture behind glass. Installing the work in this way communicates the meaning of it. Consisting of a piece of cardboard (with the title painted on it) and a wig thrown haphazardly over the

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[149] Tina Potterf, "Showcase for diversity of contemporary 'queer art,'" *Seattle Times*, February 27, 2004, accessed December 2, 2023, https://archive.seattletimes.com/archive/?date=20040227&slug=visart27.

[150] Regina Hackett, "A Well-worn topic is worth another look at CoCA," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, February 26, 2004, accessed December 2, 2023, http://prod-images.exhibit-e.com/www_alexandergray_com/Hammond_Seattle_Post_Intelligencer_2_26_2004.pdf.

sign, it is reminiscent of signs hung on shop doors to indicate that the proprietor is out but will be back momentarily. Diaz's sign suggests that a performer is out, but will be back shortly, and the wig might be an indication of drag performance, or some other kind of alter ego, in which the person changes back and forth between personas. Placing the work on the floor in the gallery might be an indication that the sign is used on the street.

Another indication of the "offbeat" and "odd" nature of the exhibition was in the way particular artists rearticulated canonical hetero-patriarchal narratives. Kaucyila Brooke's digital print *There Is No Cutesy Way to Say It* (2003; Figure 1.14), part of their *Tit for Twat* series, resembles movie posters—the bottom of the print indicates that it is an ad for "a photomontage novella-roman-cartoon in three expansive chapters"—and reimagines the story of Adam and Eve as Madam and Eve. A photographic fragment of two arms outstretched come together in the middle of the print to hold flowers in a lesbian retelling of the creation of humankind. The collage-like elements of the work—different text colors and fonts and the photographic fragment on a rather bland brown background—do not adhere to the clean lines and color choices of traditional design work. Here these elements interrupt the normative paradigm, both in its content and in its retelling of heterosexual norms imagining a different creation story.

Lyle Ashton Harris's photographic performative self-portrait *Better Days #4* (2002; Figure 1.15)—from the series *Billie, Boxers, Better Days*—uses "layered mise-en-scènes and multiple exposures evoking modernism's ambivalent 'negrophilia.'"[151] Dressed in a skimpy bikini, torn fish nets, high heels, and a statement necklace the figure's face is hidden behind an African mask. A variety of items litter the floor around

[151] "Billie, Boxers, Better Days," Lyle Ashton Harris, accessed December 3, 2023, https://www.lyleashtonharris.com/series/billie-boxers-better-days/.

them including money, what appears to be some kind of technical instrument, and a very large dildo-like object that extends from the floor and up towards the figure's abdomen. The inclusion of the mask and dildo reads as an indictment of the west's—particularly the white, heteropatriarchy's—fascination with and appropriation of African objects. Immediately, Picasso's use of masks in his paintings such as *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907; Figure 1.16) come to mind. So does MoMA's exhibition *Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984), in which that work by Picasso was included, and in which the curators stripped the "non-western" objects of their original significance and function in order to relegate them to mere influences of the modern masters and perpetuate the false narrative of their "discovery."[152]

These works, along with the others in the exhibition, took up space—both within the institution but also perhaps in viewers' minds. The works also engaged with viewers to help them understand how queerness is expansive, open-ended, and intersectional. Above all, the exhibition demonstrated how queer art production is not static or limited to one type of medium, content, or idea but rather that it is vibrant, alive, and always moving towards the horizon. Opening her exhibition review with, "'Neoqueer' is a new cover for an old book, asking us to give a well-worn topic another look" Hackett acknowledged the show's power to draw audiences in and make them think differently about our assumptions related to queerness in mainstream culture.[153] This exhibition is a

[152] Read one of the many critical reviews of the exhibition: Thomas McEvilley "Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief: 'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art'" at The Museum of Modern Art in 1984', *Artforum* 23, no.3 (1984): 54–61, ProQuest.

[153] Hackett, "A Well-worn topic" http://prod-images.exhibit-e.com/www_alexandergray_com/Hammond_Seattle_Post_Intelligencer_2_26_2004.pdf.

reminder that there are many layers to queerness and they are all intentionally offbeat and odd.

Rethinking the Exclusion of LGBTQIA+ Folx from (Art) Histories: Jonathan D. Katz's and David C. Ward's Hide/Seek

Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture, curated by Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward, on view at the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) in Washington, DC from October 30, 2010 through February 13, 2011 purported to be the "first major museum exhibition showing how questions of gender and sexual identity have dramatically shaped the creation of modern American portraiture."[154] As a guest co-curator of the exhibition, Ward was on staff at the time, it took Katz the better part of fifteen years to have any major museum sign on to do a show related to gender and sexual identity and of all places *Hide/Seek* ended up being presented by arguably one of the most conservative institutions in the country, the Smithsonian's NPG. As Katz noted, "There is an inherent drag on anything that might offend."[155] In an article, Ariel Goldberg—writer, curator, and photographer who was also on the curatorial advisory board for *Trigger*—asserted, "The show was curated by Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward, two white men, and presented an overwhelming majority of gay male artists and subjects. In 2010, *Hide/Seek* was not 'new' or historic outside its tenuous government walls and focus on portraiture. It was record-breaking only in terms of how many tax dollars funded it."[156] This was an altogether scathing critique of an exhibition that was

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[154] "The National Portrait Gallery Presents Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture," Smithsonian, accessed April 18, 2020, https://www.si.edu/newsdesk/releases/national-portrait-gallery-presents-hideseek-difference-and-desire-american-portraiture-0.

[155] As told to me in an in-person interview with Jonathan D. Katz on August 18, 2019.

[156] Ariel Goldberg, "Simplicity Craving," *e-flux journal*, September 2016, accessed December 3, 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67164/simplicity-craving. In our interview, Katz told me that he

widely reviewed and discussed within the art world and most certainly because of the controversy surrounding the removal of David Wojnarowicz's video *A Fire in My Belly (Film in Progress)* and *A Fire in My Belly (Excerpt;* 1986–87; Figure 1.17).[157]

Arguably, the exhibition is mostly remembered for this controversy, which eclipsed the exhibition entirely. Beyond this controversy, *Hide/Seek*'s strength as an exhibition in a largely conservative town, is that it opened up a dialogue to others beyond the queer community despite the fact that according to Goldberg it "did not serve an explicit queer community. More than one friend told me that they saw the show with their parents."[158] The fact that people saw the show with their parents was perhaps the goal if queer exhibitions and curating are not meant to preach to the choir, but rather to extend the dialogue to others. Katz absolutely understands his curatorial practice as activist and one of the reasons he became a curator was in order to reach a wider audience.[159] In their queer edition of *OnCurating*, Katz and Söll outlined the following as one of the goals inherent to queer exhibitions and curating, "Queer exhibitions disrupt any notion of a singular, unified, homogenous audience, in favor of a plurality of audiences with a plurality of interests, experiences, and competencies. When conceived as multiple, audiences can register and produce very different kinds of knowledge."[160] Oddly enough,

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raised the money for the exhibition, roughly $850k, through private donations and any additional government funding was for general operating purposes (i.e. security).

[157] For a full timeline of events see "A Fire in My Belly Controversy," The David Wojnarowicz Knowledge Base as part of the *Artist Archives Initiative* at New York University, accessed March 26, 2024, https://artistarchives.hosting.nyu.edu/DavidWojnarowicz/KnowledgeBase/index.php/A_Fire_in_My_Belly_Controversy.html.

[158] Goldberg, "Simplicity Craving," https://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67164/simplicity-craving/.

[159] As told to me in an in-person interview with Jonathan D. Katz on August 18, 2019.

[160] Jonathan Katz and Änne Söll, "Editorial: Queer Exhibitions / Queer Curating," in *OnCurating* 37 (May 2018): 2–3, accessed December 9, 2023, https://www.on-curating.org/issue-37.html.

in many ways *Hide/Seek*'s presentation at the NPG appears radical despite Goldberg's point about the show not being "new," or serving an explicit queer community.

Unfortunately, Goldberg's opinion of the exhibition might have to do with the fact that the work included was by "blue chip" artists, and mostly male-identifying. Katz was insistent on including blue chip artists because *Hide/Seek* was intended for a general audience who had never considered how gender and sexual identity shaped American portraiture.[161] Perhaps Katz's thinking was that by showing viewers artwork by artists with name recognition—Eakins, Brooks, O'Keefe, Hockney, Goldin, Opie, to name only a few—it would get them to understand the argument of how queerness shaped modern American portraiture. This argument is bold. As Katz states in the catalogue, "Our goal is not to challenge the register of great American artists, but rather to underscore how sexuality informed their practice in the ways we routinely accept for straight artists."[162] And while the exhibition certainly leaves a lot to be desired especially with regards to intersectionality, at the very least Katz addresses the lack of inclusivity in his catalogue essay.[163]

Many Museum goers might have been surprised by the inclusion of Georgia O'Keeffe, for example, and the idea of a queering in her work. The materials she collected from the landscape of the southwest proved to be her subject matter however

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[161] As told to me in an in-person interview with Jonathan D. Katz on August 18, 2019.

[162] Jonathan D. Katz, "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture," in *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2010) exhibition catalog, 15.

[163] If anything the inclusivity comes in the form of the work itself with Katz stating, "We have also chosen to understand portraiture in the most expansive sense, as anything from the portrait of an individual to the portrait of a community," Katz, "Hide/Seek," in *Hide/Seek,* 15.

abstracted it was in the work. As Ward explains in the catalogue, O'Keeffe's *Goat's Horn with Red* (1945; Figure 1.18), "the horn…wraps an enveloping, protective bulwark around the lake of blue in the middle. The blue does represent an ideal of the American pastoral, a life-giving sanctuary in the midst of a forbidding landscape. But, considered as the amniotic fluid and the womb, it is also a representation of womanhood, protected from the world of men."[164] Goats are part of a lexicon of gay male iconography found in work from the Renaissance up through Rauschenberg and beyond.[165] Here, the abstracted representation of a goat's horn intertwining with the womb lake queers the landscape of the southwest.

Others might question the inclusion of Warhol's *Camouflage Self-Portrait (Red*; 1986; Figure 1.19) until they understand that the camouflage covering his face serves as a kind of mask, "he hides in plain sight, not camouflaged at all, instantly recognizable yet hidden behind the façade of his own making."[166] Although Ward does not explicitly state this, we can extend the camouflage analogy to the open secret that was Warhol's sexuality, again, hiding in plain sight.[167] With his mouth slightly agape, eyes wide and

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[164] Ward, "Abstraction," in *Hide/Seek,* 142.

[165] For more on the goat's representation in queer art history see: James M. Saslow, "Parmigianino and Giulio Romano: Ganymede's Association with Apollo, Hebe, & Cupid," in *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986): 105; and Simon Wilson, "Rauschenberg and the most Celebrated Goat in Art History," *RA Magazine*, November 30, 2016, accessed January 4, 2024, https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/rauschenberg-goat.

[166] Ward, "Postmodernism," in *Hide/Seek*, 250.

[167] For more on Warhol's sexuality see: Gavin Butt, "Dishing on the Swish, or, the 'inning' of Andy Warhol," in *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005: 106–135, ProQuest Ebook Central, in which Butt theorizes that Warhol's silence was intentional, which allowed others to speak (read gossip) for him, essentially creating his image for him, and that "Warhol makes a decidedly queer move by embracing and renegotiating his alienated and effete image as a defining strategy of his postmodern persona building" 109; and Nicholas de Villiers, "'What do you have to say for yourself?' Warhol's Opacity," in *Opacity and the Closet: Queer Tactics in Foucault, Barthes, and Warhol* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012): 89–116, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttttzs in which de Villiers focuses not on Warhol's

staring directly into the camera, head isolated and floating against a monochromatic, black background, with a red and pink camouflage pattern splattered across his face, the viewer might consider Warhol differently here than they might otherwise. Generally known for his fame and notoriety, even appearing in television shows like *The Love Boat* and commercials for Burger King, in this portrait his vulnerability takes center stage, somehow outing himself behind the façade.

Other works in the exhibition were less abstract in regards to queerness than either O'Keeffe or Warhol. Take Man Ray's portrait of *Rrose Sélavy (Marcel Duchamp*; 1923; Figure 1.20) as an example. Rrose Sélavy was the female alter ego of the proto-conceptualist Duchamp. The alter's name was a play on words, translating from the French "Eros C'est La Vie" to the English "The Erotic is Life" and "was part of Duchamp's project to destabilize the spectator's expectations—what you saw was not what you got—as well as the very premise of art itself."[168] Known for playing with art's conventions—presenting an upside down urinal as *Art*, as he did with *Fountain* (1913; Figure 1.21) or subverting Da Vinci's portrait of Mona Lisa by drawing a mustache on a postcard of her face, as he did with *L.H.O.O.Q.* or *La Jaconde* (1919; Figure 1.22)—Duchamp delighted in disrupting the mainstream. In this portrait, he turns heteronormativity on its head. Posing very seductively Sélavy/Duchamp glances at the camera, hand positioned over her/his breast, fur collared coat wrapped tightly around her/his neck, with a hat to top it all off beckoning the viewer to come closer.

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transparent queerness, but rather his queer opacity, "as a specific discursive tactic not *immediately* linked to questions of invisibility *or* disclosure," 91, emphasis in original.

[168] Ward, "New Geographies/New Identities," in *Hide/Seek*, 98.

The title of the exhibition perhaps offers a clue to what Katz and Ward were attempting to *do* by including these works, among others. For so long, gender and sexuality have remained *hidden* in art's histories and they attempt to *seek* it out as a lens through which to analyze the artists and their works. In the beginning of his exhibition review for *The New York Times*, critic Holland Cotter lamented, "The whole enterprise looked like an exercise in Hall of Fame-building, rather than like an effort to chip away at the very idea of hierarchy and exclusion. We were getting a 'pride' display, an old model, very multicultural 1980s."[169] However, by the end of the review, Cotter acknowledges, "It is way past time for mainstream art history to acknowledge the shaping role of sexual difference in modern art. And 'Hide/Seek,' with its many strengths, begins to do so in a persuasively accessible way."[170] And, maybe this was the point of the exhibition after all, which is to say that Katz knew exactly what he was doing and how he wanted the show to operate. That is, the exhibition undoubtedly made the public, government, and the discipline of art history rethink the exclusion of LGBTQ+ folx from (art) histories.

Conclusion

What becomes clear in the analysis of these queer exhibitions over the past four decades is that the curators were pioneers because of their insistence on making the voices of LGBTQ+ artists heard and their works seen from small-scale institutions to large. They dared to address issues of gender and sexuality that might otherwise have been silenced by art's histories and mainstream institutions that would rather look the

[169] Holland Cotter, "Sexuality in Modernism: The (Partial History)," *The New York Times*, December 10, 2010, accessed December 9, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/11/arts/design/11hide.html.

[170] Cotter, "Sexuality in Modernism," *The New York Times*.

other way than admit that gender and sexuality is a lens through which art and artists can, and should, be analyzed. It took the tireless efforts of these curators, in some cases over a decade, to be able to present their ideas to the public.

Without them, there would be no *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon*, *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward*, or *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years after Stonewall* or the fact that these exhibitions were presented in mainstream institutions with mainstream audiences. Many of these more historical exhibitions foreshadow the ideas found in the case study exhibitions, particularly in the collective, collaborative, and open-ended organizing of the contemporary exhibitions. The curators of the case study exhibitions recognize that they are indebted to their predecessors and they continue to advance the field, as they pay homage to as well as disrupt previous paradigms.

In the following three case study exhibition chapters, I dive into and dig through each exhibition in relation to its institution, curators, artists, and artworks illuminating how each of these exhibitions in their own way queered the museum, the same way these earlier exhibitions began to queer the field. But more importantly, I extend my analysis beyond the exhibitions themselves and into the realm of the curatorial, showing how not just the exhibitions but also the curators queer museums and by extension art history.

CHAPTER 3

TRIGGER: GENDER AS A TOOL AND A WEAPON (2017)

"So We Came Here to Tear Shit Up, You Know? Including Ourselves. We Came to Fail."
–Fred Moten[171]

In her introductory essay for the exhibition *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon*—presented at the New Museum in New York from September 27, 2017 through January 21, 2018—Johanna Burton, then Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement at the New Museum, wrote, "*Trigger* claims to be neither a 'queer' or a 'trans' show; through the questions it engages, it synthesizes channels that take up the instability of gender and the forms that gender might temporarily coalesce into–or refuse altogether."[172] Further, during my discussions with another one of the exhibition's curators I was repeatedly told that *Trigger* was not a "queer" exhibition and that the curators found that term reductive to what they were trying to do.[173] I understand Burton's point that the meaning of the term queer is constantly evolving and that it, and others, "risk becoming denuded of all meaning."[174] However, in this chapter I argue that the exhibition *is* queer, considering its critical function within the larger context of the museum's exhibition history and current museological structures. Here I employ the term queer as a verb, as in to queer something, in this case the museum.[175] I consider how the

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[171] Fred Moten, "The Weight of Words: Legacies and Futures," in *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon*, (New York: New Museum, 2017), exhibition catalog, 275.

[172] Johanna Burton, "Irreconcilable Difference," in *Trigger*, 15.

[173] As told to me in a Zoom Interview with Natalie Bell on August 11, 2022.

[174] Burton, "Irreconcilable Difference," in *Trigger*, 14.

[175] The term queer here means to problematize/trouble and I point to this usage in a recent online discussion of the publication *Queering the Museum* by Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton in which they

exhibition "came to fail," to follow performance studies and literary scholar Fred Moten in the epigraph, or "fails spectacularly" because the curators refused "to acquiesce to a dominant logic of power and discipline" to borrow from queer theorist Jack Halberstam.[176] Queer theorists from Halberstam to José Esteban Muñoz discuss the queer art of failing as one rooted in productivity and one that is potentially utopian.[177]

Alpesh Kantilal Patel expands their analysis further in *Productive failure: Writing queer transnational South Asian art histories* (2017). The productive failure of Patel's project is located in the following quote,

> I approach art history as a performative *doing* rather than understanding it as the creation of stable, inviolable narratives that reveal the truth of the past. Precisely by *not* succeeding in producing conventional art historical narratives, a redefinition and reorientation of what art history can *do* – rather than *be* – is possible.[178]

By reorienting art history towards an active doing rather than its current existence as an already canonized discipline, Patel endeavors to write histories beyond art history's policed borders. In the chapter devoted to the public art project *Mixing It Up: Queering Curry Mile and Currying Canal Street* (2007), which they organized, Patel considers the tangled relationship between art history and the curatorial beyond their segregated boundaries of theory and practice. Dovetailing

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argued for this critical function of the term in relation to providing a critique of normative museum structures that continue to adhere to traditional paradigms. Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton, *Queering the Museum*, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2021).

[176] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 88, doi: 10.1215/9780822394358.

[177] For more on queer/productive failures see Halberstam's, *The Queer Art of Failure* and Muñoz's, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009).

[178] Emphasis in original. Alpesh Kantilal Patel, "Introduction: towards *creolizing* transnational South Asian art histories," in *Productive failure*: *writing queer transnational South Asian art Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 2, EBSCOhost.

with Patel in seeking to understand art history beyond the canon and as an active doing, specifically in the curatorial realm, I look to productive failure throughout the dissertation chapters to argue for exhibitions *as* art history.

Related to their notion of productive failure, in "Thinking Archivally: Curating WOMEN 我們," Patel considers the exhibition not only in the making of art history but also as a "queer feminist curatorial or archival strategy."[179] Patel argues that by "thinking archivally" while curating one is actively considering how the assembled works "might be historicized as part of one's curatorial practice."[180] Invoking Jacques Derrida's notion of the archive, Patel posits that the curator organizes an exhibition "with an eye toward shaping the future during which the past will be historicized: past, present, and future are all blurred."[181] Burton and her collaborators, Sara O'Keeffe, and Natalie Bell were very much aware of, pay homage to, and also expand the New Museum's archive of exhibitions related to gender and sexuality. They do this specifically by referencing the museum's past history, in the present, thereby projecting into the future their argument in *Trigger* of gender as a lens through which to discuss race, class, sexuality, disability, among others.

As an example, the title for the exhibition *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon* invokes American poet, essayist, and activist Audre Lorde's "The

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[179] Alpesh Kantilal Patel, "Thinking Archivally: Curating WOMEN 我們," in *Otherwise: Imagining queer feminist art histories*, eds. Amelia Jones and Erin Silver (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 256.

[180] Patel, "Thinking Archivally" in *Otherwise*, 256.

[181] Patel, "Thinking Archivally" in *Otherwise*, 258. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 33–34.

Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," (1979) a text referenced by Marcia Tucker, founder of the New Museum, in the *Bad Girls* catalogue, analyzed in Chapter 2.[182] Likewise, in her catalogue essay Burton also references Lorde's text, questioning what tools are necessary now and available to us that we can use to interrogate systems of power, patriarchy, and institutions. While Tucker's response to Lorde's text was humor and a muted form of interrogation, Burton's response was much more open-ended and malleable, insisting on dialogue, especially around issues of difference and refused to offer concrete solutions or even an overarching theme to *Trigger*.

In this chapter, through oral interviews and close object analysis, I weave together Halberstam's, Muñoz's and Patel's notions of failure as productive, utopian, and "performative *doing*" to consider how *Trigger* was not only a scathing critique of the New Museum as a 21st Century institution—one rooted in the dominant culture of late capitalism that plagues many art museums—but also how it *acts* as a queer archive of the future. Burton's collaborative curating succeeded precisely because it did not adhere to heteronormative structures and the artwork selected worked outside the confines of capitalist systems of commodity production. *Trigger* was not an easily consumable show, which is what queered the New Museum.

[182] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *This Bridge Called My Back Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, 40th Anniversary Edition, 94–97 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021).

"If You're Going to be Fired It's Great to be Fired for Something That You Believe In."
–Marcia Tucker[183]

These words from Marcia Tucker regarding being fired by the Whitney Museum of American Art for her Richard Tuttle exhibition in 1976 begin with a spectacularly productive failure that led her to found the New Museum amidst the alternative art scene in New York City in 1977.[184] As noted on their website, the New Museum was founded as a space devoted to the art of the present, made within the last ten years, that existed somewhere in the interstices between a traditional museum and an alternative space as contemporary art was still not being shown in more staid institutions.[185] Perhaps implicit in this was the fact that younger, more emerging artists were certainly not being shown at encyclopedic institutions such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Brooklyn Museum, or perhaps even at The Whitney. Many of these institutions rely on the "historical" model, which is to say that the debates, and conundrums, around the field of contemporary art often center on the fact that it is a constantly evolving and unfolding field and therefore cannot be historicized.[186]

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[183] "Marcia Tucker: An Interview (Trailer)," YouTube, accessed August 23, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9mgt1ToGg0&t=275s.

[184] See Julie Ault, ed., *Alternative Art New York 1965–1985* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) for a critical history of the alternative art scene in New York as well as the New Museum's website of their history: "History," New Museum, accessed October 3, 2022, https://www.newmuseum.org/history. Also see Tucker's memoir about this moment after being fired rather unceremoniously from the Whitney: Marcia Tucker, "Eight: 1974–1976," in *A Short Life of Trouble: Forty Years in the New York Art World* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2008), 108–119, EBSCOhost.

[185] "History," accessed October 3, 2022, https://www.newmuseum.org/history.

[186] These debates have been taken up by contemporary art historians such as Alexander Alberro's "Periodising Contemporary Art," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 9, no. 1–2 (2008): 66–73. doi: 10.1080/14434318.2008.11432794; Pamela M. Lee's *Forgetting the Artworld* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012); David Joselit's *American Art since 1945* (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003); Richard Meyer's *What Was Contemporary Art?* (London and Cambridge, MA and: The MIT Press, 2013); and Terry Smith's *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); to name but a few, not to mention the various anthologies devoted to contemporary art and its

In many ways, the New Museum has always been on the cutting edge of presenting contemporary art whether through their focus on discussions around the AIDS crisis, exhibitions of feminist art and art that addresses gender and sexuality, or by presenting new media beyond the traditions of painting, sculpture, and drawing. And yet despite this progressive lens, exhibitions such as *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art* (1982), *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (1984), *HOMO VIDEO: Where We Are Now* (1986–87), and *Bad Girls* (1994) continued to adhere to both gender and sexuality binaries in concept and organization. *Trigger* presented artists and their artworks beyond the binaries and explored how gender intersects with race, class, sexuality, and disability.

While the curators and catalogue contributors acknowledge this historical exhibition lineage in the *Trigger* catalogue in a section called "Looking Back and Working Through: A Brief History of Sexuality and Gender at the New Museum," what they have not done is to critically engage with the exhibitions' archival materials. Rather, Kate Wiener, Education Associate, who culled the material for the section, included snippets of reviews, catalogue essays, and panel discussions. The curatorial advisors for the exhibition including Lia Gangitano, founder and director of PARTICIPANT INC; Ariel Goldberg, writer, curator, and photographer; Jack Halberstam; Fred Moten; and Eric A. Stanley, gender and women's studies scholar, also discuss some of this in the roundtable section of the catalogue, and while I applaud this "self-reflexive gesture," to use Wiener's phrase, the catalogue would have benefited from a historian outside the

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theories after 1989 including Amelia Jones's edited anthology *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006) and Alexander Dumbadze's and Suzanne Hudson's *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) among others.

museum to do this so that they could have provided additional context and the longer historical view.[187] The organization of this section of the catalogue does not do justice to the institution's history of exhibitions focused on gender and sexuality that is so important to *Trigger's* place in the larger dialogue.[188] While it is not surprising that the museum would devote an entire exhibition to debates around gender as a destabilizing force, as in the case of *Trigger*, I attempt in this chapter to situate the 2017 exhibition as an expanded discourse related to their past exhibitions. Even further I argue that *Trigger* productively failed its own institution and became a Foucauldian heterotopia within its walls.[189]

In the museum's founding, Tucker was attempting to do something radical, something that had not been done before, or at least since the beginning of the Second World War, which was to create a museum devoted exclusively to studying the art of the present.[190] Over the years, and after Tucker eventually left the museum in the late 90s, leadership went in an altogether different direction, one that was focused more on building expansion, "blockbuster" exhibitions and star curators than it was on the kind of scrappy, grass roots, democratic functioning the museum had previously relied on.[191] The

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[187] Kate Weiner, "Looking Back and Working Through: A Brief History of Addressing Sexuality and Gender at the New Museum," in *Trigger*, 296–333; and "An Ongoing Conversation," 266–276.

[188] While this chapter is not exclusively devoted to a critical examination of the history of exhibitions related to gender and sexuality at the Museum, I briefly touch on why this history is important in exploring *Trigger*'s relationship to its institutional frameworks. See Chapter 2 A Genealogy of Queer Exhibitions in this dissertation for an institutional lineage of these exhibitions.

[189] Here I refer to Michel Foucault's theory of a utopian counter-site. See "Texts/Contexts: Of Other Spaces," in *Grasping the* World.

[190] "History," New Museum, accessed October 3, 2022, https://www.newmuseum.org/history.

[191] For example, if you type "New Museum" into *The New York Times* search function you will get results not just for exhibition reviews but also for various controversies related to the Museum, including its dispute with unionized workers. Additionally, the Museum courted controversy when it

New Museum was now a capitalist machine, bent on the "Bigger is Better" model of so many contemporary art institutions.[192] Or to Australian art historian Terry Smith's point the museum *is* the destination; it *is* the art. He rather scathingly refers to contemporary art museums at the end of the 20th century and beyond as fun palaces.[193] Museums these days are mini cities unto themselves, you can find bookshops, coffeeshops, restaurants, bars, sculpture gardens, rooftops with expansive views of the city's skyline, and on and on; the possibilities are endless. The New Museum fits this model perfectly and continues to expand and gentrify The Bowery in lower Manhattan in its current location, which opened in 2007.[194]

"Creating an Institution That You Want to Inhabit Not the One That You Do."
–Johanna Burton[195]

By contrast, *Trigger* was not an "entertaining" exhibition. If anything it was designed to disrupt, to agitate, to challenge, to engage, and to make its audience think or rethink its understanding of gender through an intersectional lens. One critic, who clearly

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invited Jeff Koons to curate an exhibition of the Dakis Joannou Collection, in which his work played a major role. See Randy Kennedy, "The Koons Collection," *The New York Times*, February 24, 2010, accessed August 23, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/28/arts/design/28koons.html.

[192] Laura Raicovich, "Rethinking the 'Bigger Is Better' Museum Model," *Hyperallergic*, June 20, 2019, accessed October 4, 2022, https://hyperallergic.com/505945/is-bigger-better/.

[193] See Terry Smith, "The Experience Museum: Bilbao and Beyond," in *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 71–92.

[194] Robin Pogrebin, "A Newer New Museum Is Coming, With Twice as Much Space," *The New York Times*, June 26, 2019, accessed October 10, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/26/arts/design/new-museum-oma-koolhaas-bowery-addition.html; and Rhea Nayyar, "New Yorkers Aren't Thrilled About the New Museum's Expansion," *Hyperallergic*, March 22, 2024, accessed April 14, 2024, https://hyperallergic.com/879696/new-yorkers-arent-thrilled-about-the-new-museum-expansion/.

[195] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Johanna Burton, now the Maurice Marciano Director of The Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA) Los Angeles, and Sara O'Keeffe, now the Senior Curator of the Sculpture & Architecture Park at Art Omi on June 28, 2022.

understood what the curators were doing, noted, "In the end, though, it's a pleasure to experience a large-scale exhibition at a major institution working so forcefully against resolution. 'Trigger' does not so much refuse a narrative as offer any number of possibilities for finding one."[196] *Trigger* was conceived by Burton who at the time was the Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement, which is separate from what I am calling the "traditional" curatorial department led by Massimiliano Gioni, Edlis Neeson Artistic Director.

In fact, in speaking with the three curators of *Trigger* it was difficult to determine exactly how the New Museum is structured, department and staffing-wise. Burton proposed the show to Lisa Philips, the Toby Devan Lewis Director, who gave her the green light to curate the exhibition.[197] With Burton at the helm and Sara O'Keeffe and Natalie Bell at her side, as assistant curators, the show was a collaborative effort.[198] And while generally curatorial staff work on shows together, rarely are the assistant curators or curatorial assistants given much credit or even given major tasks in the curation. Bell edited the catalogue with Burton, and O'Keeffe curated the performance programming. And from my conversations with the curators it sounded as though Burton relinquished a hierarchical model and relied heavily on her assistant curators. This alone bypassed typical museum protocol and gave a platform to others beyond Burton.

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[196] Scott Roben, "'Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon.' NEW YORK-New Museum," *Art in America* 105, no. 11 (2017), 96, EBSCOhost.

[197] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Johanna Burton and Sara O'Keeffe on June 28, 2022. Burton also noted that the person who now holds her position no longer has the title of curator. And my own note is that the person who took over for Burton is not even listed on the Museum's senior management team or program leadership. It is also curious to see that the Museum does not list its junior staff. It has strayed so far from its more democratically organized days.

[198] This collaborative curatorial approach was reiterated to me several times during my Zoom interview with Burton and O'Keeffe on June 28, 2022.

The collaborative working model was extended even further to the artists participating in the exhibition many of whom were commissioned by the museum to create work specifically for *Trigger* and several of whom had residencies onsite. Another departure from the normative standards of exhibition practice for the museum was Burton's insistence on paying the artists fees as well as for their production costs, something that is, *shockingly*, often not done.[199] Terry Smith describes one current strain of curating that involves "curating *with* artists" closely resembling the relationship between a film director and producer referred to as "curator as producer."[200] Smith suggests that these curators work independently and autonomously (even within a museum)

> based on a passion for art itself, an approach that balances respect for the vision of the particular artists against commitment to developing audiences for art and that brings these two together in exhibitions that enable shared insight into the contemporary world–its dark, its dazzling, and even its dulls ways of being.[201]

Working alongside artists rather than fully taking the reins or allowing the artists to dictate, Burton, along with O'Keeffe and Bell, suspended the authorial voice of the single curator in favor of collaboration, which allowed for all voices to be heard within the traditional hierarchical curatorial discourse of the museum exhibition.

Burton further extended the "curator as producer" model by assembling a group of curatorial advisors that convened discussions and roundtables. While it is often common practice of curators to ask their fellow colleagues for assistance, particularly for

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[199] As told to me in a Zoom Interview with Natalie Bell on Thursday August 11, 2022. Bell discussed Burton pushing the budget in supportive ways.

[200] Terry Smith, "Curatorial Practice Now," in *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 2nd ed (New York: Independent Curators International, 2013), 225.

[201] Smith, "Curatorial Practice Now," in *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 227.

recommendations of artists for inclusion in an exhibition, with *Trigger* the institutional curators assembled an actual advisory group that were active beyond email correspondence or a quick phone call. Burton convened a meeting with the group in the form of a public panel discussion called "What's Wrong with Rights?" on December 14, 2017 at the museum. It included mini presentations by each of the curatorial advisors as to what they thought were the current state and stakes of the debates surrounding freedom of speech and expression.[202] Taking a cue from the exhibition's title, the panelists discussed current terminology and the need for new vocabulary. Each panelist was asked to present a case study around the theme of the discussion followed by a larger discussion amongst the group and a Q&A at the end.[203]

Burton's collaborative turn in curatorial practice both upended and extended the historical role of the curator. Art historians Anthony Gardner and Charles Green devoted an entire chapter of their book *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (2016) to the rise of star curator in the 1970s, beginning with Harald Szeemann at the helm of *Documenta5* (1972).[204] Documenta is the contemporary art exhibition that happens every five years in the German city of Kassel. Szeemann expanded not only what it meant to curate but also what an exhibition could be

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[202] "What's Wrong with Rights" New Museum, accessed February 15, 2024, https://archive.newmuseum.org/public-programs/2401.

[203] To watch this panel discussion, visit: "What's Wrong with Rights (December 14, 2017)," New Museum, accessed February 15, 2024, https://archive.newmuseum.org/videos/13573.

[204] Szeemann had been an institutional curator, but after the backlash from his exhibition *Live in your head: When attitudes become form* at the Bern Kunsthalle, he left to pursue independent curating, which up to that point was a relatively new concept. See Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, "The Rise of the Star Curator," in *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 9, ProQuest Ebook Central.

by transforming the platform from its more traditional model of mere presentation of artists and artworks instead elevating it to a space in which artists could create the work and experiment with new forms. Green and Gardner argue that Szeemann's role in *Documenta5* presented a new model for curators in which they, not artists, critics or art historians, "would assume the roles of the primary decision makers in the art world" through not only their curating but also in their editing of the comprehensive exhibition catalogue.[205] While Szeemann managed to eclipse the artists in *Documenta5* as the star of the show, Green and Gardner ultimately assess the enormous impact that he had as a primarily independent curator.[206] While Burton was not an independent curator, per se, it is interesting to note that her role at the New Museum was not housed within the traditional curatorial department, but rather the education department, with her title holding the distinction of both director and curator.

Green and Gardner further note that Szeemann was interested in transforming institutions into utopian sites and experiences, an idea that is echoed by writer and critic David Levi Strauss in his essay "The Bias of the World: Curating after Szeemann and Hopps," in *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating* (2007) in which Szeemann is quoted as saying, "The nice thing about utopias is precisely that they fail. For me failure is a poetic dimension of art."[207] In *Trigger*, the notion of failure is invoked as a radical mode of exhibition making, in which risks are taken precisely because they lend themselves to

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[205] Green and Gardner, "The Rise of the Star Curator," in *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta*, 9.

[206] Green and Gardner, "The Rise of the Star Curator," in *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta*, 9.

[207] David Levi Strauss, "The Bias of the World: Curating after Szeemann & Hopps," in *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating* (New York: apexart, 2007), 24.

experimental practices where outcomes are not predetermined. This is how *Trigger* became a heterotopic space within the walls of the institution, which is to say an "other" space that queered the museum both in its concept and presentation.

After 1989, curatorial discourse and the exhibition model expanded even further with the inclusion of additional locations, platforms such as public and educational programming, talks, symposia, conferences, publications (beyond the exhibition catalogue), among others. I cite Okwui Enwezor's *Documenta11* (2002) as exemplary of this model. Enwezor was the first non-western curator to be appointed to *Documenta*. He assembled a curatorial team that organized 5 platforms: *Platform1 Democracy Unrealized* was a series of conferences and lectures held in Vienna and Berlin and included a wide range of contributors from the disciplines of art history, law, philosophy, media theory, architecture, political theory, among others; *Platform2 Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Process of Truth and Reconciliation* was a conference and film/video program held in New Delhi, India; *Platform3 Créolité and Creolization* was a series of workshops held in St. Lucia, West Indies; *Platform4 Under Siege: Four African Cities – Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos* was a workshop and conference held in Lagos; culminating in the final *Platform5: Exhibition* held in Kassel. Most, if not all platforms, included subsequent publications to accompany them.

In their special issue for the journal *NKA* Journal of Contemporary African Art (of which Enwezor was a founding editor), Alpesh Kantilal Patel and Jane Chin Davidson argue for Enwezor's impact not just in the curatorial realm, but also in the art historical—the two are often at odds with one another, as the curatorial is often categorized within museum or exhibition studies as opposed to art history. As Patel and Chin Davidson

posit, Enwezor was a theorist, critic, *and* curator whose cross disciplinary practices contributed to decolonizing the art world at large. Further, the edition assesses the "Futures of Enwezor," particularly for the ways in which his practices emulated a model of critical constellations, first used by Walter Benjamin "in which individual elements are brought into juxtaposition with each other for mutual illumination."[208] I would argue that Burton also curates using a model of critical constellations because of the way she refuses to adhere to the traditional role of the curator or catalogue essay writer, allowing the artworks, artists, programs, and performances to constellate in the space together, forming relationships amongst themselves, another way in which she queers the normative notion of both exhibition curator and essay writer.[209]

Benjamin's concept of the constellation is further invoked by Claire Bishop in *Radical Museology or, What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (2013). Bishop writes,

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[208] Alpesh Patel and Jane Chin Davidson, "Okwui Enwezor and the Art of Curating," *Nka* Journal of Contemporary African Art 48 (May 2021): 10, EBSCOhost.

[209] So much of the contemporary discourse surrounding curators focuses less on the history of museum curators than it does on the independent curator who belongs to no particular institution but works between many. They also tend to focus on methods of curating as opposed to taking a deep dive into the actual position within a museum structure. I cite Hans Ulrich Obrist's *A Brief History of Curating* (Geneva: JRP | Editions; Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2021), 7 in which Christoph Cherix writes in the preface, "While the history of exhibitions has started, in this last decade, to be examined more in depth, what remains largely unexplored are the ties that interconnected manifestations have created among curators, institutions, and artists." The book's history takes the form of interviews with contemporary curators including Walter Hopps, Pontus Hultén, Harald Szeemann, Anne d'Harnoncourt and Lucy Lippard, among others. What is clear is that these curators moved around because of institutional barriers seeking out opportunities that would allow them to curate the way they wanted to. Interestingly, Kynaston McShine who curated the legendary *Information* (1970) exhibition at MoMA was one of at least two curators approached for this book who refused to participate. See the interview with Lucy Lippard, *A Brief History of Curating* (Geneva: JRP | Editions, 2021), 201. Further, in relation to Obrist's book, Terry Smith notes, "This is very much an enterprise in which curators write—or better speak (for this is a never-ending conversation)—their own history, rather than have it done for them by art or cultural historians, as has been mostly the case to date. See Terry Smith, "Curatorial Practice Now," in *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 188. See also, Hans Ulrich Obrist *Ways of Curating* (New York: Faber and Faber, Inc., 2014), 24–26 in which he gives an extremely brief narrative overview of the profession.

> This approach is, I think, highly suggestive for museums, since the constellation as a politicized rewriting of history is fundamentally curatorial...the task of the contemporary museum opens up to a dynamic rereading of history that pulls into the foreground that which has been sidelined, repressed, and discarded in the eyes of the dominant classes.[210]

With *Trigger*, Burton opens up a dialogue within the institutional history of the New Museum echoing past approaches to curating like Szeemann's and Enwezor's Documentas, bringing the role of the independent curator into the museum.

Enwezor was not the first to adopt a collaborative curatorial approach or even additional platforms, an earlier model includes Gerardo Mosquera's *Third Havana Biennial*, in which famously a bar was a site for more informal discourse.[211] What Enwezor did with *Documenta11* was to expand it beyond the traditional location of Kassel stretching beyond Western borders for a more global outreach *and* to include additional platforms for dialogue and discourse. In her publication *Curatorial Activism* museum director, curator, and art historian Maura Reilly cites Enwezor and specifically *Documenta11* as an example of her definition of curatorial activism because it "was also the first (and last to-date) *Documenta* to employ a postcolonial curatorial strategy."[212] She continues, "The first four platforms also functioned to decenter or deterritorialize *Documenta* from Kassel, it's traditional site of operations."[213] Burton and her team of

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[210] Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology or, What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (London: Koenig Books, 2013), 56.

[211] For a detailed history of the Third Havana Biennial see Rachel Weiss, "A Certain Place and a Certain Time: The Third Bienal de la Habana and the Origins of the Global Exhibition," in *Making Art Global (Part 1) The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (London: Afterall Books, 2011), 14–69.

[212] Maura Reilly, "3. Tackling White Privilege and Western-Centrism," in *Curatorial Activism: Towards and Ethics of Curating* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018), 140.

[213] Maura Reilly, "3. Tackling White Privilege and Western-Centrism," in *Curatorial Activism*, 140.

curators also operate within this realm of curatorial activism.[214] Art does have the ability to transform lives and could potentially lead to direct political action. This was seen particularly in the early years of the AIDS crisis in which collective and collaborative groups—AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), Gran Fury, among others—used activist-based strategies for social and political change. In 1988, the New Museum hosted ACT UP's *Let the Record Show…*(1987) in its windows on Broadway.[215] The collaborative model of exhibition curating that Burton employed decentered and deterritorialized the normative exhibition model and hierarchical ways of working within institutions that worked to queer the museum in perhaps unexpected ways for an institution like the New Museum—the suspension of the authorial voice of the curator and the allowance for artists and their works to lead the conversation.

Through collectivity, collaboration, and activism, Burton eschewed the typical curatorial model often found within institutions, which is why despite her institutional affiliation as both director and curator of the education department, her process aligns more with independent curators who operated primarily within the circuit of biennials, triennials, and Documenta. *Trigger* functioned more in the ways these large-scale exhibitions do, which is to say expansive—both in concept and scale—leading to a utopian outcome. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz posits that queerness is on the horizon and

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[214] I have two points to make about *Trigger* in relation to curatorial activism, one is that it was not included in Reilly's book, despite there being the section "4. Challenging Heterocentrism and Lesbo-Homophobia," 158–213. While the last exhibition included extended into 2017, Reilly's book potentially went to press before *Trigger* opened in the latter quarter of the year. And second, when I asked Burton during our Zoom interview if she considered her curatorial practice to be activist she replied, "political activism is direct action, this is not direct action and it works in the space of this symbolic and which is I think equally important space to work but it's not the same."

[215] For more on this see Douglas Crimp, "AIDS: Cultural analysis/cultural activism," in *AIDS: Cultural analysis/cultural activism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987): 3–16. Also see Chapter 2 A Genealogy of Queer Exhibitions in this dissertation for more on this installation.

belongs to the future precisely because our current world is not hospitable to queer folx. Using critical affect, Muñoz tells us that we can "feel" queerness's warmth and potentiality just beyond reach.[216] In a direct polemical treatise against the strain of pessimism and negativity within queer theory, he argues for an utopian futurity that is not hampered by the political and social quagmire in which we currently find ourselves, or for that matter an adherence to homonormativity.[217] Likewise, Burton's institution may not yet exist, but she is attempting to construct one in the present by expanding beyond the New Museum's past exhibition history that looks toward the future.[218] To Muñoz's point, we can glimpse these future queer worlds in the aesthetic, and for him it was a performative that "frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity."[219] Not only did we see this glimmer of hope in *Trigger* we also felt its warmth. Like a giant enveloping hug, *Trigger* offered a critical intervention into the normative

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[216] Muñoz, "Introduction Feeling Utopia, " in *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

[217] In *Cruising Utopia* Muñoz directly responds to Lee Edelman's anti-relational thesis in *No Future Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

[218] Now director of MoCA, LA it will be interesting to see how Burton is able to transform that institution after years of upheaval, scandal, and lack of leadership. MoCA, LA was bailed out during the economic downturn by Eli Broad who them famously opened a museum of his own collection directly across the street and in seeming competition with it. It is now on its fifth director since 2008, not to mention the artists who quit the board in protest, and the two curators who "left" because they were at odds with their directors. See Mike Boehm, "Eli Broad says there are no strings on his $30-million MOCA bailout offer," *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 2008, accessed February 15, 2024, https://www.latimes.com/archives/blogs/culture-monster-blog/story/2008-12-03/eli-broad-says-there-are-no-strings-on-his-30-million-moca-bailout-offer; Mike Boehm and Jori Finkel, "MOCA: Ed Ruscha joins other artists in resigning from Board," *Los Angeles Times*, accessed February 15, 2024, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-xpm-2012-jul-17-la-et-cm-moca-20120717-story.html; Adam Nagourney and Robin Pogrebin, "After Upheaval, MOCA Bets on Johanna Burton to Bring Stability," *The New York Times*, April 11, 2022, accessed February 15, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/arts/design/moca-los-angeles-johanna-burton.html.

[219] Muñoz, "Introduction," *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

structure of the New Museum—that is a queer institutional critique.[220] This is to suggest that *Trigger* may have had the potential to beckon audiences who had not previously considered the New Museum as not only representative of them but not welcoming to them either.

Burton considers herself an educator—she has held positions as associate director of the Whitney Independent Study Program; director of the graduate program in curatorial studies at Bard College; and more recently director and curator of education at the New Museum—which I think is what makes her unique to the curatorial realm in that she straddles these two fields in ways that other curators do not. Considering her background as an educator and a curator at several high profile institutions as well as her work on *Trigge*r, it is curious that in a recent article in *The New York Times* about her appointment as MoCA, LA's director, journalists Adam Nagourney and Robin Pogrebin questioned, "Whether Burton has the kind of relationships with artists, and the bold exhibition ideas that make for exciting programming, remains to be seen."[221] For whatever reason, the educational and the curatorial are often at odds with one another, particularly within museum structures, and I suspect it was the same at the New Museum despite a history of curatorial projects being initiated by the education department.[222]

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[220] For more on this, see the terminology section in Chapter 1 Introduction: Anticipatory Illuminations of the Future in this dissertation.

[221] Nagourney and Pogrebin, "After Upheaval, MOCA Bets on Johanna Burton to Bring Stability," https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/arts/design/moca-los-angeles-johanna-burton.html.

[222] I say this having worked in the museum field between curatorial and education departments; and while I was not able to get the curators to directly admit to this, Burton did say that traditionally education departments are often relegated to the supplemental in support of the main show, so to speak, which is the exhibition. Clearly, they were attempting a different model with *Trigger*.

Bringing to light Burton's background and training—as both director of the graduate program at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (CCS Bard) as well as working in museum education departments—is to suggest that this was an asset to *Trigger* in thinking about the exhibition's afterlife as well as extending beyond the walls of the museum and out into the larger world. One of the programs associated with *Trigger* was a free professional development seminar for educators, primarily for high school teachers. It opened with a talk by the artist Tuesday Smillie, whose work in the exhibition explored transfeminist politics, and the session was led by educator-in-residence Tiffany Jones.[223] By providing high school teachers with the tools necessary to think about current notions of power, particularly in the classroom, as they relate intersectionally to issues of gender and identity, *Trigger* moved beyond the exhibition platform and into the realm of political and social discourse.

This kind of discourse has the potential to open a space for dialogue in education that Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire theorizes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in which

> the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who himself is taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.[224]

Freire's concept of education also plays out in Burton's own understanding of what she was doing with this exhibition, which was that she thought "about it as a teaching show,

[223] For more on this educational program, visit: "Professional Development Seminar for Educators," New Museum, accessed February 15, 2024, https://archive.newmuseum.org/public-programs/2402.

[224] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York and London: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 1993), 80.

but it wasn't a teaching show towards the people who visited. I felt like I was learning."[225] This self-reflective and investigative approach to curating is a hallmark of New Museum exhibitions, and Tucker in particular, in which the curator hopes to learn more about what they are working on rather than trying to provide concrete answers to audiences. As Burton noted in our interview, the exhibition was led by the artists together.[226] It is rare for institutional curators to relinquish control of an exhibition that they conceive of and yet Burton, O'Keeffe, and Bell did exactly that.

Which is not to say of course that there were not negotiations that happened between curators and artists, because there were. The next section turns towards one of the works in the exhibition where just such a negotiation took place and which in the end the artists' wishes were granted in the way their film was presented in the museum. *Community Action Center* (*CAC*; 2010; Figure 2.1), a collaborative film produced by A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, was actually the oldest work in the show and what Burton referred to as canonical in how the curators were thinking about *Trigger* and what works to include in the exhibition.[227]

"A Spectrum of Desires"
–A.K. Burns[228]

Community Action Center (CAC) is a reimagining of heteronormative pornographic strategies as the artists queer "straight" porn by subverting the tropes often

[225] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Johanna Burton and Sara O'Keeffe on June 28, 2022.

[226] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Johanna Burton and Sara O'Keeffe on June 28, 2022.

[227] "Triple X Feature: Intro and Talkback (January 1, 2018)," New Museum, accessed December 15, 2018, https://archive.newmuseum.org/videos/13936.

[228] "Triple X Feature," New Museum, https://archive.newmuseum.org/videos/13936.

associated with the adult film industry. Moreover, the artists cite the influence of 1960's and 70's feminist video art and porn-romance-liberation films on the work. The imagery, staging, and use of props situate this video within a historical continuum of earlier predecessors, particularly 70s feminism and the "radical eroticism" of Carolee Schneemann. However, while Schneemann unabashedly proclaimed her heterosexual feminist identity *CAC* directly pivots away from the heteronormative by gleefully commingling an intersectionality of bodies, sexualities, genders, and races arguing for representation and visibility in a queer feminist landscape of the erotic.[229] As the oldest (and canonical) work in the exhibition, the intersectionality of *CAC* is echoed in the exhibition concept itself in which gender is the lens to consider other markers of identity.

In considering how to exhibit *CAC* for *Trigger*, it was decided between the artists and curators to keep the *community* of the title; it was screened once for audiences, though this was not only the original intent of the artists but also lessened the potential for voyeuristic viewing.[230] In conversations I have had with both Burns and Burton, originally Burton wanted to screen it in the galleries on a loop. However, through "a long conversation," something Burton mysteriously alludes to in her introduction of the Triple X Feature program at the New Museum, it was decided amongst the artists and the curators that they would only screen the film once and provide a booklet in the gallery space for visitors.[231]

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[229] Rachel Middleman, *Radical Eroticism Women, Art, and Sex in the 1960s* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 145.

[230] This came up in conversations with both A.K. Burns and Johanna Burton.

[231] As told to me in a discussion with Burns in her studio in upstate New York in June 2019 and in a Zoom interview with Burton and O'Keeffe on June 28, 2022.

Outside the gallery exhibition space, the film is not available for individuals to rent or purchase. Rather, as Burns says, it is meant to exist in institutional archives and distribution databanks, clearly locating this work within the art world.[232] In that sense it is not like traditional porn on the commercial market that can be rented, purchased, or even watched online for free.[233] This is something that Burns has mentioned on several occasions including in the New Museum panel insisting that it is not to be owned by private collectors and can only be held in public institutions. She also says that it must be shown in a group screening format as it works against internet porn and viewing within an isolated sexual experience.[234] The experience of viewing it should be more collective—hence the community of the title—as a way to think through porn theaters and how they were traditionally targeted to male audiences, especially since the video offers women non-conforming, trans bodies, and a full range of the gender spectrum.[235] And, while this limited distribution may seem antithetical to the purpose of the film and its community it is in the communal viewing of the video where the "action" of the title is achieved. As Burns has said, anyone can have access to the film, they just have to organize to be able to view it.[236] This kind of community action and organizing is

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[232] "Art This Week-At CentralTrak-Community Action Center-A.L. Steiner and A.K. Burns Interview," YouTube, accessed February 15, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAWyCIau7oY.

[233] Even for the purposes of this research Burns gave me a password protected site to view the video and was very adamant that I not share the entire video with anyone else, therefore closely guarding its circulation.

[234] "Triple X Feature," New Museum, https://archive.newmuseum.org/videos/13936.

[235] "Triple X Feature: Intro and Talkback," New Museum, https://archive.newmuseum.org/videos/13936.

[236] Bradford Nordeen, "Sex Tools: New Queer Narratives as Community Action Cinema," *Afterimage* 40, 5: 15, accessed December 15, 2018, https://akburns.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/03_AfterI_ARTICLE001_sm.pdf.

reminiscent of William Olander's exhibition *HOMO VIDEO* (1986–87) discussed in Chapter 2. Olander's community action and organizing preceded Burns's and Steiner's by twenty-four years and also speaks to Olander's fusing of the artistic and curatorial into one practice.

In *Self/Image Technology Representation and the Contemporary Subject* (2006) art historian Amelia Jones considers the encounter of artwork within a technological framework as a "participation in the spectacle – the way in which all bodies are filtered through screens of imagination and desire, both psychic and technological – is laid bare."[237] This participation in the spectacle, to which Jones refers, occurs in the viewing of *CAC* with others in the room and queers the experience in which one's own imagination and desires, and those of others, are projected onto the screen commingling with the "spectrum of desires" in the film. Here the viewer is no longer beholden to the male gaze of classical cinema and pornography and instead encounters a queer gaze allowing oneself to identify beyond the binaries of gender and sexuality.

The very first opening scene of the film is a queer bacchanalian fantasy. It opens in what appears to be an artist's studio, and enacts a utopian future by continuously borrowing from and blending normative and queer pornography and visual performance art. The camera is statically trained on a sign that reads "Feminine Products," which is positioned above a table of paint brushes, turpentine, and paint tubes. This alone is both humorous and ironic given that painting as a tradition has been so caught up with the white, heterosexual, middle class, cisgender male artist and his ego, particularly in American culture. This scene later invokes Abstract Expressionism in the re-performative

[237] Amelia Jones, *Self/Image Technology Representation and the Contemporary Subject* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), xix.

acts of Jackson Pollock paintings with the smearing, splattering, and dripping of not just paint but also food and other items (Figure 2.2). By re-engaging the past, in the present, the video projects into the future a fantasy of yearning for when societal structures will be radically altered and in which intersectional identities will not be marginalized by heteronormative structures.

The camera quickly cuts to a wrestling match between two people dressed in underclothing and work gloves while other figures surround them as referees. The accompanying soundtrack is of people cheering and clapping, with faint grunts overlapping, as the two bodies choreographically move in unison flopping on the ground in a tangle of limbs. This gives way to a voiceover of singer-songwriter and actor Justin Vivian Bond reciting filmmaker and actor Jack Smith's *Normal Love* while other figures now populate the space. Clay creations of phallic and vulvic forms, recalling that of Hannah Wilke's cunt imagery, emerge (Figure 2.3). Watermelons are feasted upon while gender non-specific bodies are painted, punctured, slapped, and fondled (Figure 2.4). Paint is smeared over bananas and then stabbed violently with brushes, quite literally illustrating the Jack Smith text heard in the voiceover (Figure 2.5).[238]

Burns and Steiner are aware of and make a panoply of references to the art historical lineage of which they are a part in the very first five-minutes of this video. In this first scene the artists re-perform not only Pollock's action painting but also Smith's *Normal Love* (1963; Figure 2.6) and Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy* (1964; Figure 2.7). The artists and those involved in the video perform a process of Muñoz's theory of

[238] For the transcript, see Jack Smith, "Normal Love" in A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, *Cliff's Notes on Community Action Center*, accessed March 19, 2024, 4, https://www.hellomynameissteiner.com/Cliffs-Notes-Community-Action-Center.

disidentification in which they both borrow from and eschew—thereby existing in the interstices—normative culture in order to transform it into something new.[239] Arguably, Schneemann enacts a process of disidentification as well when she subverts the notion of the heterosexual male genius in a re-staging of Pollock's performances. Where *CAC* diverges from Schneemann is in the addition of bodies of all kinds, other types of props, and the very actions themselves; including the stabbing and destruction of objects versus the stabbing and painting of the canvas.

This scene is also an example of visual and critical studies scholar Tirza True Latimer's queer feminism in which the artists pay tribute to the lineage of artistic practices from which they borrow, while at the same time remaining mindful of the chasm between them as a survival strategy for recognition, representation, legitimacy, and visibility within a heteronormative world.[240] *CAC* most certainly acknowledges the 70s feminist art history from which they are borrowing and while it shares some affinity with Schneemann's *Meat Joy* there are some clear distinctions between them. *Meat Joy* is a highly scripted performance also in the form of a bacchanalian fantasy in which men and women dance together and then collapse onto the ground in a free-for-all; squirming and writhing around with not only each other but amidst paint and, as the title of the work suggests, raw meat. Rachel Middleman has characterized the work as problematizing the binaries of gender and heterosexuality with its embrace of polymorphous eroticism, yet *CAC* further queers this beyond the pairing of male- and female-bodied persons in bikinis

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[239] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: queers of color and the performance of politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[240] Tirza True Latimer, "Improper Objects: performing queer/feminist art/history," in *Otherwise Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories*, eds. Amelia Jones and Erin Silver (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2016), 101.

and speedos to include a variety of genders, bodies, races, and sexualities complicating the visuality of what the viewer is seeing beyond the binary of heterosexuality.[241]

CAC and *Meat Joy* both feature bodies rolling around on the floor in orgiastic delight. This phenomenological notion becomes more than the heteronormative sex act of genital contact to include other forms of intimacy, particularly using the senses of sight and touch. However, in *CAC* the ambiguity of bodily identification with gender and sexual binaries opens this work up to an inclusivity and visibility that is not seen in *Meat Joy*. This inclusivity related to bodily identification seen in *CAC* connects to Legacy Russell's notion of *Glitch Feminism*, in which the glitch—a technological term associated with failure and negativity—is productively repurposed to resist heteronormative notions of gender, race, and sexuality.[242] The video specifically illustrates Russell's "Glitch Is Anti-Body," in which the productive glitch is "a mode of resistance against the social, cultural framework of the body."[243] A heteronormative society wants so much to identify a body as either male or female and also wants to dictate what roles those bodies should perform. *CAC* smashes this right into the ground and stomps on it, glitching in the process.

There was no script per se for *CAC*, instead Burns and Steiner collaborated with the actors, performers, and musicians on the project throughout the process.[244] In a conversation after the screening of *CAC* at the New Museum—entitled Triple X

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[241] Middleman, *Radical Eroticism*, 42.

[242] Legacy Russell, "00 – Introduction," in *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2020), 7.

[243] Russell, "07 – Glitch Is Anti-Body," in *Glitch Feminism*, 91.

[244] "Art This Week-At CentralTrak-Community Action Center-A.L. Steiner and A.K. Burns Interview," YouTube, accessed February 15, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAWyCIau7oY.

Feature—Burns discussed how the loose outline of ideas she and Steiner had were taken and run with by the performers. Their energy generated unrehearsed action within the scenes, which also accounted for accidents that occurred like forgetting to turn the sound on and having to dub it in later.[245] Some of the scenes were even conceived by the people in them, which Burns referred to as the "spectrum of desires." This collaborative process is what allowed for a more inclusive and less exclusive process, one in which everyone had a voice and nothing was forced upon anyone in a way that exerted a power dynamic. This was one of the issues the 70s feminists saw as problematic in relation to heterosexual pornography. There exists a parallel here between what Burns and Steiner were doing and what Burton was doing with the exhibition, which is to say relinquishing authority in order to collaborate with her assistant curators and the artists in the presentation of the exhibition.

Burns also told the audience at the New Museum discussion that *CAC* was not necessarily made to turn people on, which is one of the functions of traditional porn. Another parallel exists here with Burton in that *Trigger* was not meant to entertain audiences but rather to trouble gender and engage with the exhibition in ways that might make them entirely uncomfortable. Burns felt that *CAC* should sit somewhere on the edge between attraction and repulsion.[246] The point is not necessarily to get one sexually excited but rather to offer that "spectrum of desires," which can range from the utterly bizarre to the more erotic depending on the viewer's own proclivities.

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[245] "Triple X Feature: Intro and Talkback," https://archive.newmuseum.org/videos/13936.

[246] "Triple X Feature: Intro and Talkback," https://archive.newmuseum.org/videos/13936.

Located on the 3rd floor of the New Museum's exhibition space, Burns and Steiner installed *CAC* as an archive of the larger film. Against a black wall, a single light source on the ground illuminates the film's poster, documentary photographs, and texts from the film. Several small brooms (perhaps the ones used by the character Stevie Lijks in one scene) are propped against the wall on the left-hand side. In the absence of the film on a loop in the gallery the installation is a less interesting surrogate, but nonetheless represents the film within the context of the exhibition, and perhaps even spurred visitors to want to organize their own viewing of the film, which was after all the point of its collective viewing.

"A Place of Other futures."
–Johanna Burton[247]

Positioned next to the *CAC* installation, is Tourmaline's and Sasha Wortzel's short film *Lost in the Music* (2017; Figure 2.1), an excerpt from their longer film, *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* (2018), which imagines a fictional day in the life of Marsha P. Johnson leading up to the events of the Stonewall Uprising on June 28, 1969. Johnson was a black transwoman, artist, and activist who allegedly threw the glass that started Stonewall. Like Burns and Steiner, Tourmaline and Wortzel pay homage to the past in the present to imagine the future. And similarly, Tourmaline and Wortzel collaborated with the community to create a short film celebrating the life and work of Johnson. It makes sense that the curators would install these works next to one another in the exhibition layout. *Lost in the Music* was projected onto one side of a screen with a shattered mirror on the rear projection and suspended from the ceiling by cables (Figure

[247] Johanna Burton, "Irreconcilable Difference," in *Trigger*, 15.

2.8).[248] While a reviewer notes the shattered mirror represents the glass thrown by Johnson at Stonewall, it potentially also represents—along with the projection screen—a suspension in time.[249] If queerness is temporal, and located in the future, then the film *Lost in the Music*—always playing on a loop against a backdrop of shattered glass—acts as a kind of prism, which is to say a refraction of light always extending towards the horizon.

In the opening scene of the longer film *Happy Birthday, Marsha!*, Johnson (played by Mya Taylor) is told by the owner of The Stonewall Inn that she is not allowed to hang out in front of the establishment. As she picks up her things to keep moving we get a glimpse of Christopher Street, the characters who populate it, and Johnson's interactions with them. Cops are paid off to look the other way; the flower vendor gives Johnson a small bouquet of flowers; a sex worker gets invited to Johnson's birthday party; and finally a cop harasses and injures her. The following scene opens onto Johnson's legs in the tub, her injuries from the cop bright red and bruised. But Johnson has her birthday party to prepare for. She finishes her bath, makes a cake, and gets ready. She dons a bright red halter dress and matching hat that resembles a cake atop her head. When no one comes to her party, she decamps to Stonewall instead where a friend has worked out that she can perform on stage. Jumping into the flower vendor's car along with her friends, Johnson heads to the Inn where the stage is set for her performance.

A glittering, shimmering cascade of silver mylar hangs as a backdrop against which Johnson reads a poem to her audience that is a testament to surviving as a black

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[248] Amelia Rina, "Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon," *Elephant*, October 5, 2017, accessed July 14, 2023, https://elephant.art/trigger-gender-as-a-tool-and-a-weapon-2/.

[249] Rina, "Trigger," https://elephant.art/trigger-gender-as-a-tool-and-a-weapon-2/.

transwoman in NYC. After her performance, standing at the bar with her drink, Johnson is again harassed by the cops. This time, she has had enough, and she throws her glass of liquor in the cop's face and then to the ground. The shattering of the glass is what (allegedly) starts the Stonewall Uprising. What follows is actual footage from the evening. Over the years, the narrative of the Stonewall Uprising have erased the trans folx of color who not only participated but were active in starting them. *Lost in the Music* and *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* not only celebrate the life and work of Johnson, but also offer one set of potentialities through a fictional reimagining.

In an interview published in *Artforum*, Tourmaline and Wortzel note that they "were conscientious about making a work about somebody that would be built off of archival research and traces, without reproducing the violent, discerning system of archives. Archives aren't neutral places."[250] By interspersing archival footage with present day actors that reimagine Johnson's day leading up to Stonewall, the filmmakers are injecting something new into the historical record. Of archives they have said, "We're not so much interested in correcting and filling them, as we are in creating entirely new historical documents that are looking to the past in order to imagine what other possibilities could be."[251] These ideas related to the archive echo literary scholar and cultural historian Saidiya Hartman in "Venus in Two Acts" (2008) in which she writes,

> By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to

[250] Alex Fialho, "Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel," *Artforum*, March 20, 2018, accessed February 15, 2024, https://www.artforum.com/interviews/tourmaline-and-sasha-wortzel-talk-about-their-film-happy-birthday-marsha-74735.

[251] Fialho, "Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel," https://www.artforum.com/interviews/tourmaline-and-sasha-wortzel-talk-about-their-film-happy-birthday-marsha-74735.

> displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done.[252]

Through "critical fabulation", to use the term coined by Hartman, Tourmaline and Wortzel create new worlds in which the lives of trans folx of color flourish and are recognized.[253] By engaging the past—many of the characters who populate the film were folx who knew Johnson and participated in Stonewall—in the present, Tourmaline and Wortzel constructed an archive of the future.[254]

The imaginary archive exists because actual archives are not enough to accurately tell the histories of queer folx. Archives in general are contested territories. The question becomes, how can what is collected, written about, and presented, account for gaps in the historical record? One must be critical of who is doing the collecting, writing, and presenting. In the *Art Journal* special edition *Queer Affect and Queer Archives* (2013) edited by Tirza True Latimer, she writes, "More than a repository of objects or texts, the archive is the very process of selecting, ordering, and preserving the past—in short, of making history."[255] Latimer asks what we can do to imagine and invent archival practices and new archives that not only represent those who are often left out of traditional archives—"queers, women, people of color, 'aliens.'—but also "make the invisible visible, render the unthinkable intelligible, and articulate the unspeakable."[256] Therefore,

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[252] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: a Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 2 (2008): 11.

[253] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe*, 11.

[254] For more about Tourmaline's work with archives see Jafari S. Allen, "Archiving the Anthological at the Current Conjuncture," in *There's a disco ball between us a theory of Black gay life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2022), 192–220.

[255] Tirza True Latimer, "Conversations on Queer Affect and Queer Archives," *Art Journal* 72, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 34.

[256] Latimer, "Conversations," *Art Journal*, 34.

Tourmaline's and Wortzel's project is especially important within the historical legacy of our understanding of Stonewall as the beginning of the "gay rights movement."

Tourmaline's and Wortzel's project shares similar concerns with earlier works (not included in *Trigger*) such as Cheryl Dunye's feature-length film *The Watermelon Woman* (1996), which imagines the life of a fictional character named Fae Richards, a black, lesbian actress from the 1930s. Dunye embarked on this film after encountering gaps in the historical archives of Black lesbians and Black women in Hollywood as well as having scant resources, so she invented what she needed in order to make it.[257] Of her practice, Dunye has said that she "purposefully complicates and blurs categories and boundaries…Only then will archives reflect a bit of truthfulness in their content."[258] Inventing what one needs because of a lack of resources as well as representation is a strategy for survival for marginalized folx. When they do not see themselves reflected in historical records, in the workforce, in the media, the academy, the museum, among other institutions, they forge ahead by looking, searching, and dialoguing to create those paths forward.

Similarly, TT Takemoto's experimental video *Looking for Jiro* (2009; Figure 2.9) was inspired by the archival collection of Jiro Onuma a gay, Japanese American man who was imprisoned in the internment camps during WWII. Reminiscent of a music video format, Takemoto imagines what his life was like as a mess hall worker in a Utah camp by (re)mixing US war propaganda footage, Madonna/Abba songs, bodybuilding,

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[257] Julia Bryan-Wilson and Cheryl Dunye, "Imaginary Archives: A Dialogue," *Art Journal* 72, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 83.

[258] Bryan-Wilson and Dunye, "Imaginary," *Art Journal,* 89.

and homoerotic breadmaking.[259] Like, *Lost in the Music* and *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* the juxtaposition between actual historical documentation and imagined scenes using film and video in *Looking for Jiro* is an example of Russell's notion of "glitch is remix." When the original is not enough, the remix is needed to make new records, which Russell likens to an act of self-determination and a technology of survival.[260] Further, Alpesh Kantilal Patel argues in "Artistic Responses to Gaps In LGBTQI Archives: From World War II Asian America to Soviet Estonia," that this formal blurring between different kinds of documentation make it hard to distinguish between fact and fiction and past and present, allowing the viewer to understand Japanese Americans as more than victims of the war but also "as dreamers, American heroes, and even queer."[261] As historical records often lack the information one is seeking, fictionalizing the lives of queer folx of color in the present makes visible that which was rendered invisible in the past, thereby creating a new archive for the future.

Beyond the installation of film, the metaphor of the prism was invoked by Fred Moten in that he saw a curatorial sensibility in which the *Trigger* installation did not propose minimally and sparingly placed and spaced works of art with fences around them so that viewers' could see themselves reflected in the work like a mirror; rather he likened the installation to a series of stained glass windows through which the viewer

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[259] Jennifer González and Tina Takemoto, "Triple threat: queer feminist of color performance art," in *Otherwise: Imagining queer feminist art histories*, eds. Amelia Jones and Erin Silver (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 301.

[260] Legacy Russell, "11 – Glitch Is Remix," in *Glitch Feminism A Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2020), 133.

[261] Alpesh Kantilal Patel, "Artistic Responses to Gaps In LGBTQI Archives: From World War II Asian America to Soviet Estonia," in *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present*, eds. Beáta Hock and Anu Allas (London: Routledge, 2018), 205, doi: 10.4324/9781351187190.

could see differently and not necessarily oneself.[262] This is potentially a response to the critical reception of the show in which the exhibition, according to many critics, was messy and chaotic. One particularly vivid description reads, "Recent works by more than forty artists come together in a mess that oozes over five of the museum's floors. There is no clear beginning or end."[263] The critic makes this point about no clear beginning or end, which is a very traditional and linear way of walking through an exhibition.

Brian O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1986) explored the exhibition space from its earliest beginnings with the hierarchical salon style hanging of artwork in the 19th century up to the then present day in which the wall became a participant rather than a passive support.[264] Which is to say that exhibition space transformed from a disinterested one, devoid of anything beyond its own self-referential nature, to a more active and engaged one by the mid-seventies. This idea is reiterated by Irene Calderoni in her analysis of exhibition aesthetics at the end of the sixties in which the creation, placement, and presentation of artwork becomes an action within the space rather than merely an object of study particularly with the introduction of site-specificity, installation, and various forms of conceptual art, which is to suggest an intervention in the space rather than mere placement of objects.[265] Further, in her analysis of the exhibition *Information* (1979) at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), Mary Anne Staniszewski suggests a paradigmatic shift within exhibition display, in which the

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[262] "What's Wrong with Rights," https://archive.newmuseum.org/videos/13573.

[263] Roben, "Trigger," *Art in America*, 95.

[264] Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery* Space, (Santa Monica and San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986).

[265] Irene Calderoni, "Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the End of the Sixties," in *Curating Subjects*, ed. Paul O'Neill (Amsterdam: de Appel, 2007), 63–79.

institution's and curator's role were minimal, allowing the artists full reign and the artworks to dialogue with the audience.[266] Similar to other historical conceptual exhibitions, the artworks included in *Trigger* not only interacted with the space itself but they also critiqued the conventional forms of display often found within more traditional institutions.

The fact that you could enter or exit *Trigger* on any floor meant that as a viewer one could create their own narrative and not be beholden to one imposed by the institution. This kind of viewing allows the spectator to play within the institution making the exhibition really fun and accessible. Many museum goers, (clearly reviewers among them), like slick, clean, clinical, nicely presented shows with artworks against white walls and on top of polished floors and they like to be told what to think about the art. They expect a certain kind of museological encounter including with the wall texts, which another critic found to be, "jargon-rich text panels."[267] While museum wall labels often leave much to be desired there is also a certain amount of contextualizing a curator needs to do in order to convey their approach. The "oozing," chaos, and messiness to which the critics point might refer more to the works themselves and/or the exhibition concept rather than to the layout of the exhibition. The installation of artworks in many cases were traditionally hung and placed even within the rooms where the walls were painted and multimedia work was involved. This exhibition, like so many others, must balance

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[266] Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998).

[267] Ariella Budick, "Review: 'Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon' at the New Museum." *FT.Com*, Oct 10, 2017, ProQuest.
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the demands of the institution—which exhibitions come before or after it that allow for the time to build and paint walls and/or do something radical to alter the space.

Trigger's installation not only disidentifies with the normative but is also an example of a queer feminist strategy for survival.[268] By both identifying and counter-identifying with the normative, it asks the question of what a queer exhibition should "look like" and whether or not it even needs to be radical in order to be seen as queer. Similar to Blake's *Tag* exhibition at the ICA, Philadelphia, discussed in Chapter 4, the *Trigger* installation appears quite traditional. But, could it be that through odd juxtapositions between works—what critics noted as the ooze, the mess, the chaos—as well as the random and haphazard encounter of the spectator actually be what queers this space, especially if we refer back to my analysis of *Neoqueer* in Chapter 2. In the press coverage for that show, Hackett wrote in her review that it was "eccentrically offbeat and oddly lovable."[269] In Hackett's estimation these qualities made the exhibition endearing to the viewer. Might the same be true for *Trigger*? I argue that these seemingly negative terms of "ooze, mess, and chaos" are actually what makes the exhibition queer.

One of the queerest aspects of the installation was Diamond Stingily's *Kaas 4C* (2017; Figure 2.10), a subtle, synthetic braid intervention that snaked its way up the walls throughout each floor of the exhibition space silently and statically performing a dance. Seemingly easy to miss if you did not look closely enough, it began as a pile on the ground in the lobby, close to the elevator, interacting with The House of Ladosha's

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[268] See Latimer, "Improper Objects," in *Otherwise* and Muñoz's *Disidentifications*.

[269] Hackett, "A Well-worn topic is worth another look at CoCA," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, February 26, 2004, http://prod-images.exhibit-e.com/www_alexandergray_com/Hammond_Seattle_Post_Intelligencer_2_26_2004.pdf.

installation *Untitled (a carry*; 2017; Figure 2.11). At each new floor, still close to the elevator, it also interacted with the exhibition's wall texts, in some cases bisecting them entirely. In the documentation of *Kaas 4C* in the museum's digital archive, Stingily is shown in roughly thirty images brushing and braiding the hair (Figure 2.12). Stingily grew up in Chicago where her aunt owned a salon that her mother worked in and where she also spent time.[270] The maintenance and care for hair, particularly within salons and barbershops, speaks to the Black community. It is more than just a place to get one's hair cut; it is also a space for gathering, discussion, self-care, among other benefits. Which is to say a place that one can be comfortable and supported by their community. In the New Museum installation *Kaas 4C* quietly takes up space in the institution asking for the same comfort, care, and community within its walls.

Stingily has discussed the length of the braid, its snake like quality, and connection to characters as diverse as Medusa and Rapunzel.[271] Hair is a marker of identity across gender, race, class, and sexuality. In a conversation between writer and critical theorist Che Gossett and artist Juliana Huxtable, who is a member of The House of Ladosha, in the publication *Trap Door Transcultural Production and the Politics of Visibility* (2017), Huxtable discusses a poster she had in her room from *DIS* magazine that included a range of haircuts on different models. The accompanying essay explored

[270] "Diamond Stingily talks about her life and work," *Artforum*, August 31, 2017, accessed July 12, 2023, https://www.artforum.com/video/diamond-stingily-talks-about-her-life-and-work-70851.

[271] Watch "ICA Ideas: Rindon Johnson in conversation with Diamond Stingily," ICA Miami, accessed July 13, 2023, https://icamiami.org/video/ica-ideas-rindon-johnson-in-conversation-with-diamond-stingily/; and read Hilarie M. Sheets, "Transcending the Binary," *The New York Times*, September 17, 2017.

"lesbian aesthetics" and how one's haircut can be a "marker of queerness."[272] At varying times in its history the New Museum has devoted a publication program to critical issues in the field, first with Documentary Sources in Contemporary Art in the 1990s, which was relaunched in 2015 as Critical Anthologies in Art and Culture edited by Burton. *Trap Door*, which is part of the Critical Anthologies in Art and Culture series, launched right after *Trigger* opened and was the impetus for the exhibition.

In the New Museum installation, *Kaas 4C* converses with The House of Ladosha installation, which is a vinyl wall text piece. In various parts of the text, hair and accessories (*#Durag as ponytail* reads one) come up in their own remixed and re-presented social media posts—the group also DJs in nightlife culture.[273] This remixing and re-presenting of social media posts in the form of vinyl wall text creates a new archive of The House of Ladosha's digital past in which museum viewers must parse the meaning. The disjointedness of the various posts interspersed throughout the lobby wall text read rather dizzyingly in a variety of different fonts and sizes, perhaps speaking to, as Huxtable points out to Gossett, how mutable identity can be now and how difficult it can be to pin down someone's identity just by looking at them.[274]

Like O'Doherty, Calderoni, and Staniszewski discuss in their respective essays on exhibition design, display, and installation, Stingily's braid and The House of Ladosha's

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[272] Che Gossett and Juliana Huxtable, "Existing in the World: Blackness at the Edge of Trans Visibility," in *Trap Door: Transcultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, eds. Tourmaline, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 46. Note that this publication came out simultaneously as *Trigger*.

[273] Roben, "Trigger," *Art in America*, 95. Also listen to the audio piece about this work: "Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon: House of Ladosha," New Museum Digital Archive, accessed March 19, 2024, https://archive.newmuseum.org/sounds/13452.

[274] Gossett and Huxtable, "Existing," *Trap Door*, 47.

vinyl wall text interact with not only space and time (read disjointedness of posts out of order from the digital archive), but also the viewer. The braid and wall text caress each other in a chiasmic entwining, which breaks with the modernist tradition of the unique art object made by the singular artist.[275] Here, the museum visitor is potentially queered through the viewing of these works because it disrupts a normative experience of time and space in the museum.

"Archives Aren't Neutral Places."
–Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel[276]

What the artworks in *Trigger* have in common is a concern with a past that was not enough—a past that excluded women, queers, and folx of color. In the present, Tourmaline and Wortzel, Burns and Steiner, Stingily, and The House of Ladosha create works that imagine new ways of being in the world. How can we begin to think of *Trigger* as a platform for world building leading to possible futures? For one, the exhibition became a place to be and think, according to Burton, especially because viewers kept coming back to see the number of performances throughout the run of the exhibition.[277] This alone speaks to the sense of community the show created by opening up a space that was welcoming and inclusive, especially if viewers kept wanting to come back to the institution.

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[275] Thomas Baldwin, ed, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 2004). See also Amelia Jones, *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 10.

[276] Fialho, "Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel," https://www.artforum.com/interviews/tourmaline-and-sasha-wortzel-talk-about-their-film-happy-birthday-marsha-74735.

[277] "What's Wrong with Rights," https://archive.newmuseum.org/videos/13573.

Secondly, as an extension of the exhibition, the catalogue serves as not only a document of it but also as an archive of the future in which the past will continue to offer useful tools for a present that will hopefully shape a better world to come both inside and outside the museum's walls.[278] The catalogue is filled with essays, conversations, exhibition histories, artists images and biographies, among other elements, that serve as a record of the exhibition, the artwork, the planning process as well as the thoughts and discussions around gender. The catalogue becomes a resource for scholars (myself included) now and in the future who are doing work around gender and identity, hopefully offering clues and insights that can be built upon for generations to come.

Lastly, the museum's extensive online digital archive documenting the exhibition, including its installation and various programs, is a much needed resource for future researchers. Unfortunately, any physical archives the museum holds were not available to me. [279] One reason might be the mission and vision of the institution itself, which is to say that it is a contemporary art institution that is forward (not backward) thinking.[280] The institution's concern is not necessarily with preserving the past, and if it is it is an afterthought. Although the museum did at one point archive their exhibitions in physical

[278] Here I invoke both Jacques Derrida from *Archive Fever* as well as José Esteban Muñoz from *Cruising Utopia*.

[279] Although I attempted to contact the New Museum several times regarding the existence of a physical archive, I received very little information or assistance from several individuals and departments. This is not an attempt to call out the Museum for their lack of interest in scholarship, but it is also not the first time I have encountered silence from the institution with regard to information related to exhibitions. Emails sent to the archives department were never returned and when I did find a lead for an actual person at the institution there was very little enthusiasm to aid in my research.

[280] I thank John Hatfield formerly Deputy Director of the New Museum and currently Professor of Practice, Arts Management at Tyler School of Art and Architecture for our discussion related to the Museum's archive and for specifically bringing this idea to my attention.

boxes, the information that was included was (in my sense of the archive) limited.[281] One person I corresponded with at the New Museum told me in an email, "Newer shows organized during the digital age have far less material in them then more historic shows, as you can imagine."[282] Although, to me, this is not necessarily a given with exhibitions organized in the digital age. Perhaps I think this because as a curator (who keeps extensive documentation of their own exhibition archive) I want more than just the obvious elements.

I want to see correspondence, the iterations of installation layouts, works that might have been included but were not for one reason or another, loan agreements (I was told by the New Museum when I asked for these related to *Trigger* that due to the fact that they are considered legal documents I would not be allowed to look at them).[283] And while, the online archive of *Trigger* is robust, for which I am grateful, I still think that sharing a physical archive is equally important.[284] Terry Smith discusses the exhibition/curatorial archive briefly in "The Infrastructural" in *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (2012). Beyond the traditional, and digital archive Smith would like to see curators keep extensive records of every stage of their planning, as I have also noted, to

[281] John Hatfield and I discussed the kinds of documents that might be included, really the bare minimum, such as the press release, images documenting the installation, and the catalogue, which would be most representative of the exhibition.

[282] Email correspondence with the New Museum from August 16, 2022.

[283] Email correspondence with the New Museum from August 16, 2022.

[284] When I worked for Alexander and Bonin, a contemporary art gallery in New York City, we not only saved digital copies of all correspondence, but we also printed them out and filed them. A practice I continued with in my career as a curator. What would happen if we did not have access to the digital realm for some unforeseen reason?

show how their exhibitions have evolved from the beginning to ending stages of curation.[285]

In their introduction "Something Queer at the Archive," in *Out of the Closet, into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories* (2015) Amy L. Stone and Jaime Cantrell write, "The archive, much like the closet, exposes various levels of publicness and privateness—recognition, awareness, refusal, impulse, disclosure, framing, silence, cultural intelligibility—each mediated and determined through subjective insider/outsider ways of knowing."[286] They raise some key concerns regarding the construction of archives, particularly queer ones. The question that continually lingers is who gets to decide what is included in the archive, in any archive, and what does that say about those who have the power to create them? Tourmaline and Wortzel are correct that archives are not neutral places. Inclusion and exclusion become obvious when sifting through them. Which is why *Trigger* productively and spectacularly fails as an insistence on inserting gender as a lens through which to discuss race, class, sexuality, disability, among others. While its own institutional archive perhaps fails to deliver in some cases, the exhibition as a counterarchive does not.[287]

Burton's insistence on a collective curatorial methodology that allowed for the voices of many to be heard—curators, artists, and catalogue contributors among them—

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[285] Terry Smith, "The Infrastructural," in *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 2nd ed (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012), 255–256.

[286] Amy L. Stone and Jaime Cantrell, eds., "Something Queer at the Archive," in *Out of the Closet, into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 4.

[287] Stone and Cantrell, "Something Queer at the Archive," 7. Stone and Cantrell note that "LGBT history has queered the archive be creating counterarchives or community-based archives that operate outside of government or academic institutions."

disrupted the normative structure of traditional museum hierarchy, thereby queering it. In traditional museum structures, departments tend to be siloed, and it is rare when departments actively work together instead of against one another. While collective and collaborative curating is not the sole domain of queer curating, it is certainly one of the elements that lends itself to an inclusive model. In Chapter 5, we will see how the curatorial paradigm shifts even further to encompass a curatorial collective who worked cross-departmentally at the Brooklyn Museum of Art on the exhibition *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years after Stonewall* (2019).

CHAPTER 4

TAG: PROPOSALS ON QUEER PLAY AND THE WAYS FORWARD (2018)

Nayland Blake's Curatorial Practice

From Nayland Blake's notable exhibition *In a Different Light* (1995), co-curated with Lawrence Rinder, at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) to *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward* (*Tag*; 2018) at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Philadelphia—on view from February 2 through August 12, 2018—the artist and curator develops exhibitions that map a conceptual queer lineage in contemporary art beginning with Duchamp in the early part of the twentieth century to Fluxus mid-century. *Tag*, like *In a Different Light*, proposed inclusivity and non-essentialism through the use of the term queer, which opened up possibilities beyond rigidly imposed gender and sexual binaries. In their introduction to *Tag* Blake argues for performativity as a critical practice for queer conceptual artists writing, "a new model of identity has arisen, one that is not only performative, but collaborative, based on mutability and intersection."[288] The Duchampian thread of conceptual art in Blake's curating can be read as fundamentally contemporary and a practice based on world building. Australian art historian Terry Smith argues for world building as a contemporary practice, á la Jean Luc-Nancy, in the essay "'Our' Contemporaneity" writing, "having seen a clear set of connections between epochal changes in world-picturing and the interrogatory nature of contemporary art, he [Nancy] retreats toward a set of his core beliefs, above all those concerning art as a fundamental *gesture*, one that

[288] Nayland Blake, essay in *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2018) exhibition catalog, green foldout.

‘puts us in direct communication with the creation of the world.’”[289] In *Tag* the world building that takes place does so in the form of play offering a distinct set of possibilities for queer lives. In the exhibition, the Duchampian gesture of asking “what is art?” might be reread in Blake’s queer curating as “what can art do?”.[290] Or more specifically, the question ultimately at stake here is what can Blake do as a curator within the institution and how can the art and artists they collaborate with build worlds beyond those currently available to them?

While queer artists and curators have fought hard for visibility on the rarefied walls, and in the halls, of the institutions that have historically excluded them, is that enough? Is merely hanging and placing works in a space sufficient, or can the institution partner with artists and curators to build future worlds where queerness exists not as an abstract concept but as a concrete lived experience? Is *Tag* a way forward? To echo Blake, the answer might be yes in that “Play leads us out and through.”[291] Not only do the works perform but so does Blake and it is through this performative play that perhaps we can see beyond the horizon to something better.

Through oral interviews and close object analysis, this chapter analyzes *Tag* as Blake’s queer curatorial endeavor that harnesses the ICA’s mission and vision as a forward-thinking institution to create a collaborative museum space that initiates dialogue

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[289] Emphasis in original. Terry Smith, “‘Our Contemporaneity,’” in *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, eds. Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson, (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 21.

[290] For more on the connection between Duchamp, curating, and exhibitions, see Alison Green, *When Artists Curate: Contemporary Art and the Exhibition as Medium* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2018), 37–43.

[291] Blake’s essay in *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward*, exhibition catalog, green foldout.

for world building. This world building makes the future better for queer lives particularly through Blake's ideas of queer play and intervention within the museum structure. How might we think of this exhibition as a disruption within exhibition-making practices that does not seek merely to present art and artists to a generalized public, but rather one that beckons its audience to enter into a heterotopic space (in the sense of Foucault's definition of "other space") where for a moment they cast off the outside world and play queerly? In this case, I am using "queerly" as an adverb to modify the word "play" but also to think about how queerness can modify (as a verb, as an action) the institution.

Blake's queer curatorial strategy of providing artists with opportunities that they might not otherwise have makes them a curatorial activist defined by museum director, curator, and art historian Maura Reilly in her book as, "a term I use to describe people who have dedicated their curatorial endeavors almost exclusively to visual culture in, of, and from the margins: that is, to artists who are non-white, non-Euro-US, as well as women-, feminist-, and queer-identified."[292] This curatorial activism points to something beyond mere representation and to an insistence on inclusion in meaningful ways that will allow lives to flourish and thrive not just exist. In this chapter, I argue that Blake achieves this flourishing (if only momentarily) in the heterotopic space of the museum where for a temporary period of time queer lives and concerns dominate the discourse.

A (Queer) History of the ICA

It is no mere coincidence that *Tag* was presented at the ICA as opposed to another art institution. The ICA *chose* Blake as the 2018 Katherine (CW'69) and Keith L. Sachs

[292] Maura Reilly, "What is Curatorial Activism," in *Curatorial Activism Towards an Ethics of Curating* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2018), 22.

(W'67) Guest Curator, allowing them free reign over the exhibition concept and programming. Behind the scenes at the ICA, the staff comes up with a list of artists to invite to curate an exhibition under the Sachs Guest Curator Program.[293] Every three to four years, an artist curates an exhibition for the institution through this program and past artists have included Christian Marclay, Virgil Marti, Kara Walker, and Linda Goode Bryant, among others. While this strategy of inviting artists to curate exhibitions is not new to museums, it does allow for a different voice to be in the mix among the curators on staff.

Arguably, since its founding in 1963 by Holmes Perkins, then Dean of the School of Architecture, The Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) Philadelphia has been mixing it up by showcasing what is "new and happening" to the students of the University of Pennsylvania.[294] And perhaps what better way to do this than to invite living artists (as opposed to say curators and/or art historians) to curate. After all, *historically*, curators, art historians, and institutions have presented well-established (read deceased) artists from the canon whose reputations were already cemented in textbooks. Artists have the ability to offer decidedly different approaches to curating than curators and/or art historians who may be grounded in institutional baggage.[295]

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[293] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Kate Kraczon (formerly Laporte Associate Curator at the ICA and now Acting Director and Curator at David Winton Bell Gallery at Brown University) on January 28, 2021.

[294] "About," Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, accessed June 11, 2021, https://icaphila.org/about/.

[295] Take Terry Smith's example of *An Anti-Catalog* (1977) issued by Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, which critiqued The Whitney Museum of American Art's exhibiting the private collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller for one of their Bicentennial exhibitions. Other collective artist groups at this time protested the lack of inclusion of marginalized groups left out of major exhibitions and collections. Or Jean Hubert-Martin's acknowledgment of how artists curating have had an effect on the broader field. Hubert-Martin's response to Joseph Kosuth's installation of the exhibition *The Play of the Unsayable: Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Art of the 20th Century*, is that his hanging of the works from floor to ceiling

This individual who embodies a slippage between artist and curator is one that Celina Jeffery, in her introduction to *The Artist as Curator*, has observed as being rooted in social and political activism, as having the ability to affect audiences through the care taken with regards to the viewer, context, time, and engagement, as well as being used as a "collaborative conduit".[296] Blake as both an artist and a curator brought a unique perspective to the ICA as well as to the *Tag* exhibition. As *Mousse Magazine* notes in their review of the show, Blake's curatorial approach is one that, "draws on their own preoccupation with themes of interracial desire, same-sex love, and racial and sexual bigotry."[297] Because Blake's own work is already grounded in these themes, and they are a working and teaching artist, their connection to and collaboration with the artists and artworks offers a whole range of possibilities where others who organize shows might operate at a distance both personally and professionally.[298]

The Mission & History statement on the ICA's website, specifically argues for art's power to "inform and inspire" as well as its commitment to emerging as well as under-recognized talent. It is perhaps this focus on less recognized artists that categorizes

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made "for imaginative ways of seeing." See Smith's section "Artists as Curators/Curators as Artists" in *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 108–109. See also Green's point related to Maria Lind's idea of a curator as an "'agent' whose signature activities are movement and mediation, which distinguishes him or her from a specialist, who builds disciplines or institutional structures," in her introduction to *When Artists Curate*, 15.

[296] Celina Jeffery, "Introduction," in *The Artist as Curator* (Bristol, UK and Chicago: Intellect Books, LTD., 2015), 11–12, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[297] "'Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward' at ICA, Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia," *Mousse Magazine*, March 8, 2018, accessed December 28, 2021, https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/tag-proposals-queer-play-ways-forward-ica-institute-contemporary-art-university-pennsylvania-philadelphia-2018/.

[298] Blake is represented by Matthew Marks in New York and their work has been included in major group and monographic exhibitions as well as museum collections. Most recently their solo exhibition *No Wrong Holes: Thirty Years of Nayland Blake* was organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art Los Angeles (2019). They currently serve as the chair of the ICP/Bard MFA Program.

what the ICA does as self-proclaimed "risk-taking."[299] Indeed, a mere sampling of exhibitions over time reveals the ICA's profound focus on exhibitions outside of the mainstream (read trendy) discourse of the time, queer exhibitions among them.[300] Given their affiliation with the University of Pennsylvania, the ICA is more committed to an "…artist-centric program…complemented by the intellectual rigor of a premier academic institution."[301] Not only was *Tag* curated by an artist, but the artists Blake included in the exhibition were not easily recognizable even to those in the know in the art world. Blake chooses artists for exhibitions based on the question, "How can I make opportunities for my friends and fellow artists?"[302]

Blake is well aware that the curatorial voice has a certain brand of authority as does the selection of artworks for an exhibition.[303] And for many artists working as curators—and I would also add others who have not gone through certain channels be they academic, institutional, or otherwise—according to Blake, they have life history and taste but no academic background with which to substantiate their choices.[304] Blake sees this as a dilemma for many marginalized groups who are denied entry to the hallowed halls of institutions through gatekeeping and institutional authority.[305] Instead, Blake's

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[299] "About," ICA, https://icaphila.org/about/.

[300] For a robust and explanatory dive into the ICA's archives visit their digital platform "I is for Institute": accessed June 11, 2021, https://iisforinstitute.icaphila.org/.

[301] "About," ICA, https://icaphila.org/about/.

[302] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021.

[303] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021.

[304] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021.

[305] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021.

approach to finding artists for *Tag* was through word of mouth.[306] They also mentioned in our Zoom interview that they saw someone whose work they were interested in while a visiting professor, and/or included someone they had heard about, or heard about through friends of friends on Instagram. For Blake, the criteria for inclusion in the exhibition at its base level was "what looks good to me?", "what do I think is an interesting idea?", and "what sorts of folx are being left out of this?"[307]

Blake's strategy of finding artists for their exhibition complements the ICA's insistence on working with artists from the very start of its founding and would suggest that it was always a forward-thinking institution. Additionally, ICA focuses exclusively on the "art of today and tomorrow, and to that of yesterday only insofar as it points directly towards the future."[308] This is one reason why it is also a non-collecting institution, choosing to focus on the contemporary, as opposed to keeping and showcasing art from the past as many larger, more encyclopedic institutions tend to favor as a model. One particularly eye-opening memo from the archive reads:

> It is expected that the Institute will make mistakes. Contemporary art is not a "safe" field of endeavor, and the Institute welcomes the risks and the excitement essential to a program dedicated to a living, breathing art of this very moment. Only through a commitment to adventure can the future development of art be kept vital and strong.[309]

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[306] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021.

[307] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021. Smith notes that when artists curate it is "in a unique and distinctive way," but also acknowledges that their approaches share commonalities with the way curators approach exhibition making. See Smith, "Artist as Curators/Curators as Artists," in *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 136.

[308] "Draft of ICA's first mission statement, 1964," I is for Institute, ICA, accessed June 11, 2021, https://iisforinstitute.icaphila.org/ica-history/i-is-for-institute-survey-results.

[309] "The Institute of Contemporary Art" (Memo with no stated Author), I is for Institute, ICA, accessed June 11, 2021, https://iisforinstitute.icaphila.org/ica-history/from-the-archive.

Built into the ICA's mission then is the notion of failure, that mistakes will happen, and that contemporary art is not safe because it unfolds in real time and the unknown is part of the deal. However, failure need not be deemed negative, but rather as noted by queer theorists Jack Halberstam, Jose Esteban Muñoz, and Alpesh Kantilal Patel it may actually be productive.[310] The ICA shares a politics of failure with the project of queerness as Muñoz makes clear in *Cruising Utopia* in that they are both utopian in nature because they do not adhere to capitalist, heteronormative protocols and procedures.[311] Despite the Institution's affiliation with an Ivy League university, the ICA works outside of the mainstream notion of a contemporary art museum in which blockbuster exhibitions and artists abound, bigger is better, and roaming through the building's architecture IS the experience.[312] There is nothing particularly fancy or over-the-top about the ICA's building or exhibition spaces, which in some ways works in their favor because the actual exhibitions, artist, and artworks are showcased without anything else to distract one's attention.

The ICA leads with ideas and the visitor experience comes not from roaming aimlessly through the museum marveling at the architecture, but rather through an

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[310] See Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), doi: 10.1215/9780822394358; José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009); and Alpesh Kantilal Patel, *Productive Failure: Writing Queer Transnational South Asian Art Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2017), EBSCOhost.

[311] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 155.

[312] For more on the contemporary art museum in the 21st century read Terry Smith's "The Experience Museum: Bilbao and Beyond," in *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 71–92.

engaged interaction with the exhibitions and artwork on display.[313] While the ICA is not as focused on blockbuster exhibitions and capitalist enterprise, the way other contemporary art institutions of its kind might be, it nonetheless is considered mainstream in that it attracts national and international audiences as well as press and is renowned beyond the Philadelphia region.[314] For example, a selection of the exhibition *Video Art* (1975) was chosen to represent the U.S. at the São Paulo Bienal.[315] The difference perhaps is in its location and affiliation with a university, allowing it to operate more as a laboratory for experimentation as opposed to a museum that is focused more on history. After all, the ICA looks towards the future in its programming and exhibitions. Considering the steep cost of admission at other museums, the ICA has maintained free admission as well as free public programming since its inception, which allows for greater access.[316]

Lastly, the ICA launched its initiative "I is for Institute" in 2015 to think critically about its purpose as to who and what exactly it exists to support. This questioning of its own foundation and future points to the Institute's ability to revisit and rethink its mission

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[313] For a critique of contemporary art museum's architecture-as-feature see Andrea Fraser's video/performance *Little Frank and His Carp* (2001), Vimeo, accessed August 28, 2021, https://vimeo.com/56939001.

[314] As early as the Institute's founding, it was already well-known from coast-to-coast and through major press sources according to a report to the advisory committee of the ICA, accessed July 2, 2021, https://iisforinstitute.icaphila.org/ica-history/from-the-archive.

[315] "University of Pennsylvania Bulletin," The Graduate School of Fine Arts, 1978–79, ICA, accessed July 2, 2021, https://iisforinstitute.icaphila.org/ica-history/i-is-for-institute-survey-results.

[316] "University of Pennsylvania Bulletin," accessed February 5, 2024, https://iisforinstitute.icaphila.org/ica-history/i-is-for-institute-survey-results. A quick online search of other Institutes of Contemporary Art revealed that many, but not all, are free of charge, and are often tied to educational institutions. A quick online search of Museums of Contemporary Art reveal many, but not all, charge admission. The bulletin also states that at the time the ICA was "supported by contributions from members, benefactors, foundations, and the University." *Tag*'s catalogue acknowledges support from the Katherine and Keith Sachs Guest Curator Program (green foldout) and in our Zoom discussion Kraczon told me that no additional fundraising was necessary for the exhibition.

and vision showing that it is an evolving, as opposed to static, institution.[317] Given the ICA's history then, it should come as no surprise that it has hosted a number of queer artists and exhibitions beginning as far back as its founding in the 1960s to today. A small sampling include, *The Other Tradition* (1966); *Queer Voice* (2010); *Unleashing the Archive: A World AIDS Day Event* (2011); *Readykeulous by Ridykeulous: This is What Liberations Feels Like™* (2014); *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward* (2018) as well as solo exhibitions including Nicole Eisenman, Cary Leibowitz, Robert Mapplethorpe, Robert Rauschenberg, Paul Thek, Cy Twombly, Andy Warhol, David Wojnarowicz, among others.[318]

Blake as Artist and Curator

"Because I'm identified primarily as an artist, I can sneak across borders in ways that curators can't."

"I think that's a great thing that curating can do is to like help people to really see."

–Nayland Blake[319]

Blake is an artist who currently lives and works in New York, although they spent fourteen years on the west coast in California, and is currently the Co-Director of the studio arts program at Bard College.[320] They are represented by Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, and as it notes on the gallery's website, Blake's work has been included in

[317] "Introduction," I is for Institute, ICA, accessed July 2, 2021, https://iisforinstitute.icaphila.org/introduction.

[318] This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all of the queer artists, artworks, and exhibitions that the ICA has presented over its history, as this chapter is not a history of the ICA itself, but is rather meant to show the ICA's support of queer artists lives and issues since its founding. A full list of the ICA's current and past exhibitions can be found on their website at: "Exhibitions," ICA, accessed July 2, 2021, https://icaphila.org/exhibitions/.

[319] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021.

[320] "About," Nayland Blake, accessed January 29, 2024, http://www.naylandblake.net/about/.

some of the most important contemporary art exhibitions including, the Whitney Biennial (1991), the Venice Biennial (1993), *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* (1994) at The Whitney Museum of American Art, as well as various surveys of their work the most recent being *Nayland Blake: No Wrong Holes* (2019) at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.[321] As a curator, in addition to *In a Different Light* and *Tag* they have also organized the exhibitions *Something Anything* (2002) at Mathew Marks Gallery, *Situation* with Pam Gregg at New Langton Arts, San Francisco, and *Que Overdose* (1990) at Mincher/Wilcox Gallery, San Francisco. Their interdisciplinary practice ranges from artist to curator to educator, and as it says on their website, "Teach it – Promote it – Create it – you are responsible for the continuation of the culture you love. Keep it alive through your actions."[322] This quote echoes what Blake was doing with *Tag* in creating the exhibition for audiences, teaching them about the ideas encountered in the exhibition, and promoting the artists and their work.

The curator-as-artist model can take many different forms and be located as far back as 1648, as artist Sarah Pierce found, when court appointed artists for Louis XIV requested the creation of a Royal Academy of Painting, which would separate them from local artisans.[323] In his Foreword to *The Artist as Curator*, artist, writer, and curator Nigel Prince offers other such instances of artists deviating from the normative channels of

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[321] "Nayland Blake," Matthew Marks, accessed January 29, 2024, https://matthewmarks.com/artists/nayland-blake.

[322] "Home," Nayland Blake, accessed January 29, 2024, http://www.naylandblake.net/.

[323] Sarah Pierce is an artist based in Dublin and has a PhD from Goldsmith's. In the section "The Artist-Curator," Pierce references Nayland Blake. Sarah Pierce, "With Practicality comes a Practice: the Artist as Curator," Visual Artists Ireland, accessed January 29, 2024, https://visualartists.ie/with-practicality-comes-a-practice-the-artist-as-curator/.

exhibition opportunities in their lifetimes including the Salon de Refusés in 19th Century Paris and the formation of the *Société anonyme des peintres, sculpteurs et graveurs* (the Cooperative Society of Painters, Sculptors and Printmakers) that showcased the first Impressionist works.[324] Of course, this tendency has become much more prevalent in the contemporary period, as artists have had to navigate the few institutional exhibition opportunities available to them and have had to turn to alternate means.[325] Oddly, the very institutions meant to exhibit artists' work did not show emerging artists and relied on showing art from the past.[326] In the 1980s, the National Gallery in London with their "Artist's Eye" series and then later The Museum of Modern Art in New York with their "Artist's Choice" series created opportunities for contemporary artists to reassess the Museums' collections.[327] Other institutions followed suit, but since the ICA is a non-collecting institution its artist-curated exhibitions provide an opportunity for the artists to conceive of exhibitions from the ground up and not rely on the museums' collections.

What separates Blake's earlier endeavors exploring queerness from their approach to *Tag* is their more recent insistence on queer identity and politics: not just as representation but as something much more activist in nature. Blake attempted to avoid the use of the term queer altogether for the exhibition *In a Different Light*. The term did

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[324] Nigel Prince, "Foreword," in *The Artist as Curator,* 1.

[325] From the late 60s through the mid 80s in the U.S. alone, alternative exhibition spaces, many of them started by local artists, popped up across the country from New York to Los Angeles. For more on this "movement" read Julie Ault's *Alternative Art New York* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

[326] See the "Self-Organising" section of Pierce's essay: https://visualartists.ie/with-practicality-comes-a-practice-the-artist-as-curator/.

[327] Prince, ""Foreword," in *The Artist as Curator,* 1.

not make it into the title of the exhibition—it was used in the subtitle for the catalogue: *Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*—because Blake feared it would ghettoize the artists. In our Zoom meeting, I discussed this with Blake and their response was, "Those sorts of questions came up in relationship to *In a Different Light*, but in the subsequent 25 some odd years I feel like that has sort of fallen away. Again a lot of these artists I am working with have either already been out in terms of their career or are not functioning in the places where being seen as representative of a particular marginalized group is then going to be a career liability. There was definitely a lot more of that in the early 90s."[328] In their introduction to the exhibition, Blake writes that they were initially uninterested in curating an exhibition with Rinder at BAMPFA, but after some thought on the matter and conversations between the two, they decided to go ahead with the project as long as it included certain criteria.[329] The first was that the show had to be intergenerational and not just representative of a particular generation of artists; Secondly, the show had to have both queer *and* straight artists; And, the third criterion was that the title of the exhibition should entirely avoid the words gay, lesbian, or queer.[330] It is their insistence on this last point that is perhaps so interesting in light of the exhibition *Tag*. Blake thought using any of those words in the title would immediately essentialize and ghettoize the artists with regards to how the general public might understand the exhibition before even getting in the door.[331]

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[328] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021.

[329] Blake, "Curating In a Different Light," in *In a Different Light*, 9.

[330] Blake, "Curating In a Different Light," in *In a Different Light*, 9–10.

[331] Blake, "Curating In a Different Light," in *In a Different Light*, 10.

However, with twenty-three years between *In a Different Light* and *Tag* identity politics and the art world have changed significantly. Not only does the word queer appear in the title of *Tag* it is repeated throughout Blake's introduction both in terms of identification within contemporary society, but also in terms of how it can function as play. Blake writes, "Rather than framing selfhood in relation to a presumed mainstream discourse, people are warping the pathways of discourse itself, making new selves for and with each other."[332] For Blake, the warping of discourse and performative nature of the work in the show does not essentialize but rather opens up a field of possibilities and ways forward for themselves, the artists, the institution, and the public. The collaborative nature of Blake's curatorial process only adds to this discourse within the institution.

Recent discussions in the art world and academia have not only revolved around the artist-as-curator but also around what queer curating is and how it can function within the institution. Issue 37 (May 2018) of the journal *OnCurating* was devoted to "Queer Curating," in which two of the editors Jonathan D. Katz's and Änne Söll's contribution "Queer Exhibitions / Queer Curating" specifically outlined three basic tenets of queer curating. The third tenet describes how, "…queer curating must necessarily question and challenge the normative structures of the museum itself by addressing questions of the archive, collecting, and education as well as acknowledging and addressing a 'queer' audience. Queer exhibitions disrupt any notion of a singular, unified, homogeneous audience, in favor of a plurality of audiences with a plurality of interests, experiences,

[332] Blake's essay in *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward*, exhibition catalog, green foldout.

and competencies."[333] Although Katz and Söll are not referring specifically to any particular exhibition, Blake, and by extension the ICA, achieved this third tenet in their programming as well as the larger exhibition. However, Blake and the ICA did more than just acknowledge and address a queer audience. They also included them. And this inclusion is perhaps rarer within institutions for whom audience automatically means heteronormative (read straight, white, cisgender, and privileged).[334]

After being selected for the 2018 iteration of the Katherine (CW'69) and Keith L. Sachs (W'67) Guest Curator Program, Blake was paired with Kate Kraczon who, at the time, was the Laporte Associate Curator at the ICA. Together, they worked on the *Tag* exhibition from start to finish—Blake was given less than a year to come up with an idea and a checklist—with Blake conceiving of the exhibition and Kraczon navigating the institutional aspects at the ICA.[335] One upside to this particular project however is that the Sachs Guest Curator Program exhibition comes with its own funding and no outside fundraising is required.[336] Also helpful in this scenario of a shortened timeline to conceive of and mount a major exhibition is that Blake already had the idea and did not

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[333] Jonathan Katz and Änne Söll, "Queer Curating / Queer Exhibitions," *OnCurating* 37 (May 2018): 2–3, accessed August 28, 2021, https://www.on-curating.org/issue-37-reader/editorial-queer-exhibitions-queer-curating.html.

[334] For more on exclusion and inclusion in museums see: Kevin Coffee, "Cultural inclusion, exclusion and the formative roles of museums" *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23, no. 3 (2008): 261–279, doi: 10.1080/09647770802234078.

[335] Blake had less time than was perhaps desirable to mount an exhibition of this magnitude due to delays from a previous artist who had been invited to curate only to see that artist drop out at the last minute because of their own major project. As told to me in a Zoom interview with Kate Kraczon on January 28, 2021.

[336] For more on the funding source for this series of exhibitions see: "Keith and Kathy Sachs' $4 Million Gifts to ICA and History of Art," University of Pennsylvania Almanac, accessed February 2, 2024, https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/volumes/v52/n11/kks.html#:~:text=The%20Sachs%20Guest%20Curator%20Program,catalog%20to%20accompany%20the%20exhibition.

struggle to come up with a concept at the last minute.[337] The downside to this is that some of the artworks under consideration were not able to be included in the exhibition due to the last minute shipping costs and artists on the original checklist were not able to show work in the exhibition as Blake was beyond deadlines.[338]

There was very little pushback regarding the exhibition's concept and this speaks to not only the ICA's reputation as a progressive institution but also to the fact that it is affiliated with a university.[339] When approached to curate an exhibition for the ICA, Blake had already been thinking about ideas of identity and performance particularly around issues of comic and videogame fandom. They had observed queer creators in this mostly online space as one of reaction in a contested social space around definitions that formulated new possibilities for self-identity, which led them to the "play" of the exhibition's title.[340] In 2014 what came to be called #GamerGate broke wide open on the Internet.[341] The gaming community, online and otherwise, is widely known for its sexism and misogyny, and another example of a white, heteronormative, patriarchy in which not

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[337] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Kate Kraczon on January 28, 2021.

[338] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Kate Kraczon on January 28, 2021. It is well-known in the museum field that shipping is one of the largest expenses of any exhibition budget, especially if works are being shipped internationally and require borders and customs clearances which can add to the shipping time frame and cost.

[339] Kraczon discussed the progressive nature of the university museum in our Zoom interview and that there were no negative responses to the exhibition either internally, or otherwise, as far as she was aware. Artists, galleries, among others all eagerly and enthusiastically worked with the ICA on a very short turnaround time. Although, it should be acknowledged that galleries and museums associated with universities do pushback and in some cases cancel exhibitions altogether.

[340] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021.

[341] Kraczon mentioned #GamerGate as an impetus for the exhibition in our Zoom interview. For an overview and critical assessment of this online series of events see: "In the Aftermath *Women's Changing Views on Gaming and Sexism Following #GamerGate*," in Amanda C. Cote's *Gaming Sexism: Gender and Identity in the era of Casual Video Games* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), ProQuest Ebook Central.

only female gamers, but also queer gamers, are notoriously marginalized and ridiculed. It was amidst this environment that a series of events unfolded in which female gamers were endlessly harassed online by trolls threatening to bring them down. #GamerGate brought negative, but also perhaps needed, attention to the gaming community to be more inclusive. In curating *Tag*, Blake not only brought to light a marginalized community of underground gamers by opening up an exhibition space for them to receive recognition and to thrive, but they also offered a queer institutional critique, not of the ICA per se, but of the gaming industry and social media where digital lives play out with sometimes devasting consequences.

By shifting the discourse (with some of it being negative) from the digital realm to that of the museum—using the ICA as not only a platform for an exhibition but also as a social space free from online trolls—one way Blake achieved a queer institutional critique was through programming. They were given carte blanche to create various programs for the exhibition—as curators at the ICA are allowed to generate their own. One such program was a "Furry Party" that included ten to a dozen furries. According to Homosaurus, furries are "individuals who are interested in anthropomorphized animals, as well as fiction and artwork featuring anthropomorphized animals. Many furries identify with anthropomorphized animal versions of themselves, which are called fursonas."[342] Nayland Blake's fursona Gnomen was featured in the performance *Nayland Blake: Crossing Object (inside Gnomen;* Figure 3.1) as part of the New Museum's

[342] "Furry," Homosaurus, accessed January 29, 2024, https://homosaurus.org/search/v3?q=furry.

Trigger exhibition, discussed in Chapter 3.[343] Fittingly, the party entitled "Play DisPlay at the ICA" and dubbed as a queer mixer "with emphasis on visibility and pageantry" took place on Valentine's Day 2018.[344] In thinking about this party, Blake asked, "how do we make these spaces generative for different communities?" and then responding, "it's not by hunting down the artifacts of that community and displaying them in a trophy sense."[345] Instead of putting furries on display, so to speak, within the exhibition the furry party was specifically designed as a public program for the furries to have a space to interact with one another.

Furries were not only included in a public program related to *Tag*, they also featured prominently in the exhibition. Tommy Bruce's—who also hosted Play DisPlay with DJ Knox the Disco Dog—series of seven archival inkjet prints (2013–2016) document the Furry Fandom in various locales engaging in everyday activities at home, at conventions, and at shows. As Bruce himself has noted, furries exist completely outside of big capitalism and capitalist culture, and thus in the space of queerness.[346] A subset of cosplay, furries have the ability to dress up and play both in interior and exterior lives. The photographs document the furries in their living rooms, front porches, on

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[343] Elisa Wouk Almino, "Meet Nayland Blake's 'Fursona' at the New Museum," *Hyperallergic*, October 3, 2017, accessed January 30, 2024, https://hyperallergic.com/403596/nayland-blake-gnomen-performance-new-museum/.

[344] "Play – DisPlay at ICA," ICA Philadelphia, accessed April 14, 2024, https://icaphila.org/events/programs/play-display-at-ica/.

[345] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021.

[346] "The Furry Doc: An Interview with Tommy Bruce," *The Hooded Utilitarian A Pundit in Every Panopticon*, February 17, 2014, accessed September 5, 2021, https://www.hoodedutilitarian.com/2014/02/the-furry-doc-an-interview-with-tommy-bruce/.

motorcycles, and in nature suggesting that the costumes serve as both suits of armor as much as they reveal queer identities in full regalia.

Installed on a wall of the ICA in a gridded pattern—similar to the way family portraits and snapshots hang on the wall of a home—the photographs document queer furry families. In one, *Kris and Mouse* (2016; Figure 3.2) are shown together in a living room setting with one furry seated on a cushioned chair with the other furry perched next to them on the arm. Their pose suggests a comfortability with one another, perhaps a romantic relationship, as their furry hands intertwine. It is reminiscent of the kind of photo one might take for a holiday card. The clashing patterns of the fabric chair, the coat rack, the curtains, and the rug read as an informal, lived-in, banal home interior.

This scene is anything but normative as it relates to the heteronormative family. In relation to family queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick offers, "…that the most productive strategy (intellectually, emotionally) might be, whenever possible, to *dis*articulate them from one from another, to *dis*engage them—the bonds of blood, of law, or habitation, of privacy, of companionship and succor—from the lockstep of their unanimity in the system called 'family.'"[347] Queer folx have to create their own families because they often do not adhere to normative notions of the nuclear family, a heterosexual couple with biological children.

In another photograph, *Football gear photoshoot* (2013; Figure 3.3), furries are shown in competitive play. A furry in a tiger suit, wearing a football jersey with the team name "Predators" and red slashes scrawled through the number 58, is both an ironic and humorous twist on American football as it is an exclusively hetero masculine club. Bruce

[347] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 6.

queers this macho male sports world; here, "play" takes on a very different meaning as this select sport is expanded to the queer community.

As the reviewer Brian Droitcour for *Art in America* observed, "The Museum tends to cordon off social relations (and, often, identities) for aloof contemplation from without. Blake's project is to undermine that distance, and open up the possibility for communal connections again."[348] To Droitcour's point, not only were the furries available for viewing as static, photographic images within the exhibition, they also came alive in the furry party. It was here through interaction, social dynamics, and play that this party at the ICA became a heterotopia in which the museum, normally reserved for static objects of display in a sterile environment, suddenly opened up to the lived experience of queer lives. Kraczon and I spoke about how safe the furries felt at the ICA and well taken care of by the institution. They said it felt like a celebration and not like they were being surveilled by people in attendance. The fact that the furries who attended the party felt safe and welcomed by the ICA and not like objects on display meant that the institution was sensitive to and not dismissive of its constituents.

Queer Curating as Institutional Critique

The "critique" of institutional critique in this case is not a critique of the ICA itself but of the institutional frameworks at play within the (art) world—think market, academia, social media, etc.—that structure our lives. In the chapter "Critically Queer" in *Bodies That Matter On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993) Judith Butler ponders the term queer and its usage, first as a pejorative and then as a reclamation after the Stonewall Uprising. They argue along Althusserian lines that subjecthood is already

[348] Brian Droitcour, "Subcultural Treasures," *Art in America*, May 1, 2018, accessed December 31, 2021, https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/subcultural-treasures-63510/.

formed within a power structure that exists in society.[349] And while Butler's use of the term performative relates primarily to the performance of gender (as a construct), what if we were to redeploy the term "performance" more as an action, and not one specifically related to "I" but as a collaborative? As Butler states, "If the power of discourse to produce that which it names is linked with the question of performativity, then the performative is one domain in which power acts *as* discourse."[350] Butler's example relates specifically to speech acts and those already embedded within culture, particularly from a legal standpoint, such as a judge uttering the phrase, "I pronounce you…" in a marriage ceremony.[351] But what happens if we think about Butler's statement from the vantage point that Blakes's performative act in *Tag names* queer as an operation within the museum structure and they also *perform* a service for the institution? Can we understand this as Blake performing, to borrow French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's and French psychoanalyst Felix Guattari's terms, a "deterritorialization" of power structures within the institution that they "reterritorialize" with a queer, performative discourse?[352]

And, is it also possible that by inviting Blake to curate an exhibition the ICA actively facilitates this queer institutional critique.[353] On this collaborative point between

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[349] Louis Althusser argues this point in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986): 238–250.

[350] Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," in *Bodies That Matter On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 225.

[351] Butler, "Critically Queer," in *Bodies That* Matter, 224–225.

[352] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

[353] For more on the institution's role in institutional critique see: Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2012): 27–28; Green, *When Artists Curate*, 108–110; and Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* 125–126.

artist and institution, Blake makes clear that the institution that hosts an exhibition must be willing to change:

> I think institutions that are able to understand themselves as peers and partners fare much better in that arena. For example, why did I find the [Marina] Abramovic show so problematic? Because it was really clear that MoMA in no way was willing to be changed by the presence of that work, which to my mind, was all about not requiring the authority of a place like MoMA to provide it with validity and about changing the relationship to institutions. The show demonstrated that MoMA had to change nothing to host that work, that in fact it became yet another stamp of approval, which meant very little in the larger picture.[354]

Blake, of course was not the only one to critique Abramovic's 2010 retrospective *The Artist Is Present* at MoMA. But the issue they specifically locate here is whether or not the institution itself was willing to be changed by the presence of that work. The ICA on the other hand *was* willing to be changed by the presence of *Tag* in at least two ways.

One success of the exhibition, according to Blake, was a particular ICA security guard who was stationed in a room with Robert Yang's queer video games *Hurt Me Plenty*, *Stick Shift*, and *Succulent* from the "Radiator 2 Collection" (2017; Figure 3.4). By playing the games, the viewer could take on the position of someone cruising for sex. Here the power dynamics of traditional video games were flipped in which intimacy becomes a core concern over violence.[355] Blake referred to the guard as the MVP of *Tag* because he essentially took ownership over the video and was so enthusiastic that in some ways he ended up as an ambassador for not only the work but the exhibition as a whole. Blake viewed this guard's *affection* for the works as a triumph because so often museum

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[354] Nayland Blake, "NAYLAND BLAKE with Jarrett Earnest," *The Brooklyn Rail*, accessed December 29, 2021, https://brooklynrail.org/2013/04/art/nayland-blake-with-jarrett-earnest.

[355] Robert Yang's playing card in *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2018).

guards are overlooked and denied agency within the institution.[356] While ICA guards in general tend to be welcoming to viewers and engage them in conversation, this guard actively participated in the exhibition encouraging viewers to play. As I recall, the guard literally encouraged visitors to play (as opposed to waiting for them to engage with the work on their own) and showed them how to operate the video games especially if they seemed hesitant to partake.

The connection between the ICA guard's agency and the lack of agency of museum guards in general is palpable particularly with regard to Fred Wilson's *Guarded View* (1991; Figure 3.5), somewhat ironically now in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art. A classic example of institutional critique, *Guarded View* includes four Black, headless mannequins dressed in the distinct uniforms of museum guards at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Jewish Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Generally, guards are expected to protect the art but not interact with the public on a more meaningful level (think seen but not heard), so the fact that the ICA's guard was actively part of the show was something to be celebrated, according to Blake.

Blake told me in our Zoom interview that they felt that if nothing else had happened during the run of the show except for the guard's interaction with the work and the public that would have been enough. What Blake described happening to the guard in relation to the exhibition resonates with what Marsha Meskimmon argues for in her book *Contemporary Art and The Cosmopolitan Imagination* (2011) as the artwork's potential for agency, but here I am extending that argument to encompass the exhibition and how it

[356] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021.

affected the security guard's potential for agency within the institution.[357] Meskimmon argues that this is a shift from what artwork can show us to how it can potentially modify the way we operate in the world around us. Blake's exhibition was not just a mere display of artwork for viewers and museum workers to look at passively. Rather, the works, specifically through their interactive nature, elicited a feeling with radical potential to make change. In this case, the guard having some agency within the museum structure.

Another interesting outcome of the exhibition was an updated gender training for staff who felt that the old model was outdated.[358] This has more to do with the internal workings of the museum than it does the exhibition, but nonetheless proves that the museum was willing to change its own training manual to become up to date with current notions of gender precipitated by its own staff as *Tag* was being developed within the institution. Again to Meskimmon's point, the exhibition's presence within the institution modified the way the staff operates going forward in their understanding of gender in the workplace.

While the ICA changed and updated its gender training policies, the need to acknowledge and actively advocate for nonnormative identities within the workplace, but also within the exhibition, and the larger world is something Blake makes clear in their introduction to the exhibition writing:

> Why Play? Because the current rules are insufficient, because the current ways that bodies and identities are imagined, used, and discussed have brought us to a boiling point of anger and reaction. Play awakens us to the possibilities in ourselves and in others that fear hides from us. In building a space for play, we make a space to come together and reimagine ourselves and our circumstances. Play leads us out and

[357] Marsha Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination* (Abingdon, Oxon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2011), 6, doi: 10.4324/9780203846834.

[358] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Kate Kraczon on January 28, 2021.

> through. Some of the works in this exhibition imagine spaces of queer freedom; others tackle the ways in which we construct ourselves through costume and display. Others still provide new avenues of communication beyond traditional gallery settings.[359]

Here is where Blake's exhibition argument aligns with Muñoz's queer theory. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz argues that the current "quagmire of the present" we find ourselves in does not allow for queer lives to flourish and therefore it is not in the here and now but rather the then and there of queer utopian futurity that promises a way out and forward.[360] Similarly, for Blake, play is the modality that offers a way forward.

It is in the very act of play—that wonderous activity from our childhoods, an imaginary potential that we can bring with us into adulthood—which exists on the horizon of new possibilities and worlds. In fact, play might be used as a metaphor for what Blake is actually *doing* with regards to the exhibition itself. That is, Blake is quite literally playing with the idea of an exhibition by queerly arranging artworks in a space where visitors may then interact, or play, with them.

One example of this interaction and play that happens between the artwork and audience can be found in the costumed installations of Dusty Shoulders, including *Untitled (Masc for Mascara or Man. I Feel Like a Woman*; 2017), *Untitled (Poly Pocket or Hanky Panky*; 2012/2017), and *Untitled (Selfie Toga or I Woke Up Like This*; 2015; Figure 3.6). The clothes are positioned on mannequins—surrogates for actual bodies—as they would be in a department store. As one moves around the installations, they might

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[359] Blake's essay in *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward*, exhibition catalog, green foldout.

[360] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

imagine trying on these different looks to see what suits them best—as I did when I encountered them. The outfits range from the very masculine to the very feminine all in one costume, imagining the possibilities of gender non-conforming dress across the spectrum. Shoulders's installation entails a punk aesthetic vibe. One outfit includes a denim dress number with bandanas serving as the skirt portion. Buttons and pins populate the lapels and sides of the denim jacket and a charm statement necklace pops from the bodice. Draped on the mannequin's wrist is a flamingo purse. Other costumes include elaborate headdresses, capes, and various accessories implying that dressing for oneself is key to survival, and serves as a kind of armor against the straight world, much like Bruce's portraits of furries.

Costuming is also a feature in the works of Cupid Ojala and K8Hardy who playfully re-envision the here and now of current heteronormative institutions from the Boy Scouts of America to the high end fashion world. Ojala's photographic and video work *Kelly the Cub Scout* (2017; Figure 3.7) and K8 Hardy's video *Express Looks (Outfitumentary*; 2016; Figure 3.8) are re-presented as the then and there of queer futurity. In *Kelly the Cub Scout*, Ojala *trans*forms their childhood experience by borrowing a sibling's scout uniform and performing a world in which they could be a Boy Scout. The slow motion video splices together short clips of Kelly the Cub Scout frolicking in a field, creating a daisy chain, playing with a dog, jumping into bed, along with lighting a fire and whittling wood. The accompanying photographs similarly show every day, mundane tasks. The photographs resemble casual snapshots taken in situ documenting what appear to be cub scouting activities. The photographs become a photo

album of sorts, a visual reminder of what could have been, or better yet, what could be to come.

In almost every photograph, Kelly the Cub Scout is seen smiling from ear-to-ear in whatever task they are engaged in from sitting beside a camp fire with other scouts to petting a dog on the ground; from putting together a puzzle with other scouts to sitting in an Adirondack chair in the woods. Kelly the Cub Scout is a reimagining of childhood work, leisure, and play, because this was not afforded Ojala at the time. By engaging the past in the present, Ojala projects a hopeful futurity for other children in which one's gender identity does not deter them in what institutions they are able to participate. Effectively, Ojala queers the Cub Scouts, because until very recently it was a notoriously heteronormative masculine "club."

Conversely, Hardy presents a fast-paced, dizzying fashion show of her outfits over an eleven year period and includes everything from the banal to the fantastic. Shot mainly in interior, private spaces—not on the very public runways of Paris, New York, and Milan—Hardy's fashion show queers the tightly choreographed sashaying of super models by not only compressing eleven years into 16:49 minutes but also by flouting tradition through a DIY, punk aesthetic. In one look, Hardy channels an older woman complete with a gray wig, skull cap, black sunglasses, a pink shapeless dress, mid-length fur coat, plaid scarf, tacky costume jewelry around her neck, and a black handbag big enough to carry the day's purchases. Clutching her coat, she takes on a suspicious air. In another look, Hardy's hair is fashionably cut into a Joan Jett shag and she wears a short white-sleeve blouse tucked into skinny striped pants and taupe colored shoes. With hands on her hips she looks confident and sassy. In yet another, Hardy sports shorter black hair

tucked into a yellow cap, a statement necklace, a tight short long-sleeve orange dress over turquoise tights tucked into white mid-calf snow boots. Here her pose is more relaxed as she drapes an arm over what appears to be some kind of appliance. Hardy's clothing and hair *trans*formations speaks not only to her look evolving over time but also to the fluid nature of gender and how one's style can swing wildly along the spectrum from day to day.

From the inner circles of the boys club to the elite runways of the fashion world, Ojala and Hardy interrogate and queer the normative structures of society, performing a process of Muñoz's theory of disidentification, which exists in the interstices between identification and counteridentification, whereby queer artists do not fully identify with normative structures while at the same time that they do not fully disavow them.[361] Ojala's slow-motion video, along with the compression of time in Hardy's, are considered hallmarks of Halberstam's queer time. Here, in the annals of queer time—slowing down for Ojala and speeding up for Hardy—resistance to "straight time" is where their lives thrive and are on full display.

Clothing, and how one dresses, takes on a different urgency for the artist Buzz Slutsky, whose video *Clothes Feelings* (2016; Figure 3.9) takes on a confessional voiceover while drawings animate the scenes. Slutzky discusses how to feel comfortable in one's own body through the clothes they wear. In the video, they chronicle how they tried on different "looks" from the masculine to the feminine and now wear what they refer to as "the male college professor" look. Throughout the 7:43 minutes, they make fun of the tropes of dressing from the typical "black NYC coat" to the earnestness of

[361] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 97.

hipster culture. At one point they address a new kind of conformity when one labels themselves along the gender spectrum. They reflect on how clothes tend to identify us as one gender or the other—think binary—and question what one does when one identifies as gender non-conforming. Where Hardy's outfitumentary video traffics in confidence and a "fuck you" attitude, Slutsky's video embodies a certain amount of doubt and concern over how their appearance comes off in the "straight world." The questioning narrative of the video is a prime example of how queer folx must constantly negotiate within a normative world, which would give anyone a certain amount of anxiety.

All of these works were installed within the first two rooms of the ICA's galleries and viewing them offer viewers an unlimited potential of identities across the gender spectrum. In considering how might this affect them, it is possible that it might prompt a re-envisioning of the viewers' own wardrobe, giving them the courage to live out their true lives. It is also possible that it could offer hope and reinforcement to how some viewers already dress and the identities they choose to reveal. The playfulness of the artworks in *Tag* invoke the possibilities of future queer lives in which all of these identities will be accepted, and at the same time they reveal the limitations of our current world in which gender non-conforming and non-binary folx still have to consider how to navigate within current heteronormative structures. In this particular selection of artworks, Blake makes clear how fashion plays a determining role in how one is seen in the world. These artists (and potentially viewers) choose another world, one in which their costumes, every day dress, and clothing celebrates their identities as opposed to marginalizing them.

The inclusion of these works serve as an example of Blake's curating as queer institutional critique, which lies in *Tag*'s radical approach to the group survey exhibition by putting queer lives on full display inside of a major, mainstream institution, thereby critiquing it from within. In a mostly positive (if somewhat skeptical) review of *Tag* for the journal *Gulf Coast*, C. Klockner concludes with the following:

> Queer play indicates continuous becoming. Rules shift, bodies shift, boundaries shift. The success of *Tag* lies in its emphasis on functioning through these dynamics rather than about these dynamics. Instead of relying on a more rigidly navigated survey of depictive works in what is already an identity-based exhibition, the modes of engagement between each included artist fluidly transition from situational to propositional to representational to didactic and beyond. It's still a question of how queer exhibitions can function within certain institutions without assimilating, without petrifying living works in order to propose additions to "the" hegemonic canon, but *Tag* proposes ways forward that walk indeterminacy with confidence.[362]

Klockner rightly questions the queer survey's function within institutions and how they also risk being subsumed into the canon, a concern that echoes Andrea Fraser's in "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," in which she seemingly laments how Institutional Critique (IC)—it even being called "IC" is an ick factor for Fraser—was essentially co-opted by the institutions themselves. She argues that artists working with Institutional Critique are different from Peter Bürger's notion of the historical avant-garde because IC artists acknowledge that they are already working within the system.[363]

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[362] C. Klockner, "Playing in the Institute on Tag at ICA Philadelphia," *Gulf Coast A Journal of Literature and Fine Arts*, accessed December 31, 2021, https://gulfcoastmag.org/online/winter/spring-2019/playing-in-the-institue/.

[363] Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists Writings*, Alberro, Alexander and Blake Stimson, eds. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 408–417.

This relates back to Butler's point regarding subject hood as already part of a system of institutions and power that operate long before one has entered the world. Therefore, as the subtitle of Blake's exhibition makes clear, the work they have selected for the exhibition, are proposals for ways forward. As suggested by Klockner, Blake was actively doing something within the institution as the viewer moved around, between, amongst, and against, the works, which potentially imagines and builds toward a better future for queer lives.

In the case of *Tag*, Blake is both artist *and* curator who intervened in the museum's structure by providing a service—the so-called "sneaking across boundaries" becomes apparent here. As such, they were uniquely positioned to bring to the institution a queer exhibition. It is also in the critical discourse of the exhibition where the critique happens, as Blake writes in their catalogue essay, "…this exhibition provides a gathering place and platform for the exploration of queer play."[364] The exhibition did not already have a predetermined outcome and flourished when the collaboration between artist, artwork, and viewer took place. Blake further declared that the artists included in the exhibition "are not afraid of mess or confusion. They take our current problems as the starting point for invention, pleasure, and productive doubt."[365] Where more normative exhibitions might function as slick products, with answers already formed, and packaged neatly with a bow, *Tag* offered a different paradigm in which questions were asked,

[364] Blake's essay in *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward*, exhibition catalog, green foldout.

[365] Blake's essay in *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward*, exhibition catalog, green foldout.

resolutions were not achieved, and in which it was up to the viewer, not the institution, to decide the stakes of the game and rules of play.

Similar to the ways in which the furry party constructed a heterotopia so too does the exhibition platform itself. In Foucault's estimation the museum as heterotopia shares more with Theodor Adorno's notion of the museum, and by extension Douglas Crimp's as well—at least a historical one, as they accumulate a general archive—as that of a mausoleum.[366] Essentially, it is a cemetery where artworks go to die. But in the form of a non-collecting institution, like the ICA, that is engaged in the temporary and evolving nature of artwork, literally in some cases unfolding in real time (as in the case of a live performance), then exhibitions share more with the temporal nature of festivals according to Foucault's fourth principle of heterotopias being "slices in time."[367] Foucault argues, "The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time," and festivals as "time in its most fleeting, transitory, precarious aspect."[368] I would further argue that in Foucault's description of festivals as heterotopias working outside the bounds of normative time in their fleeting, transitory, and precarious ways, they can also be thought of in relation to queer time's disruption of straight time (as in the work of Ojala and Hardy).

Therefore, Blake constructed a queer heterotopia as "a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed,

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[366] See Douglas Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins," in *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1993), 44–64; and Foucault, "Texts/Contexts: Of Other Spaces," in *Grasping the* World, 377.

[367] Foucault, "Texts/Contexts: Of Other Spaces," in *Grasping the* World, 377.

[368] Foucault, "Texts/Contexts: Of Other Spaces," in *Grasping the* World, 377.

and jumbled."[369] It is within the walls of the institution that a space for queer lives to thrive is created. For the duration of the exhibition, however temporary it may be, artists, visitors, and museum workers enter a space in which if just for a moment queer lives are championed and celebrated. In some ways, Blake's exhibition attempts to recover what Crimp claimed was wrong with the museum in the age of postmodernism, that it was "…to be an outmoded institution, no longer having an easy relationship to innovative contemporary art."[370] In the hands of Blake they were uniquely positioned as an artist and curator to transform the museum space into something "other," something queer.

Blake's exhibition at the ICA queerly critiques museum structures further by offering a counterpoint to Crimp's argument of the post-89 commodification of art and culture. Crimp bemoaned the privatization of museums, how they function as public relations machines, and artistic practices within them as a consolidation of power, effectively critiquing neoliberal politics and globalization as the world moved toward privatizing every sphere and subsuming it into the market.[371] Suddenly, everything is for sale, even the museum space. In *Tag* there was no exit through the gift shop. The commodification of artworks did not happen in the sense of creating cheap trinkets out of works for sale to viewers as memorable keepsakes. Much of the artwork on display counteracts these tendencies and exists outside of the bounds of the capitalist market as a form of radical politics.

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[369] Foucault, "Texts/Contexts: Of Other Spaces," in *Grasping the* World, 378.

[370] Crimp, "The Postmodern Museum," in *On the Museum's Ruins*, 282–331.

[371] See Crimp, "The Art of Exhibition," in *On the Museum's Ruins*, 236–281.

Curating as Museum Intervention

If art history, and by extension museums, privilege the act of looking with one's eyes and not touching with one's body, then queer curating offers a counterpoint in its insistence on both an optical *and* physical entwining that takes place in the space between viewer and artwork. In *Queer phenomenology: orientations, objects, others* (2006), feminist writer and independent scholar Sara Ahmed offers two definitions of queer, one to describe nonnormative sexualities and the other has to do with space itself to describe what is "oblique" or "offline."[372] Ahmed describes bodies of color in white spaces which work to disorient others when they encounter them. However, this second definition of queering space might be useful to *Tag* in that the exhibition space slips and slides between normative and nonnormative particularly in its installation. As the curator of the exhibition, who themselves slips and slides between artist and curator, Blake also performs a process of Muñoz's theory of disidentification.

How should a queer exhibition "look"? Should the installation be a radical reimagining of the space? Should it stay within the traditional museological confines (i.e. white walls, wall labels, pedestals, vitrines, and the like)? Blake offered a possible answer to this question with regards to *Tag* in that it had to do with personal taste. For example, Blake is not really one for explanatory wall text and would rather have visitors carry something around with them while viewing the exhibition. Not only is this a tactile approach in that the viewer is literally holding onto an object, but it also reinforces Blake evading the authoritative curatorial voice that so many exhibitions force on viewers. But perhaps more to the point, there just was not enough time for painting, wall building,

[372] Sara Ahmed, "Conclusion," in *Queer phenomenology: orientations, objects, others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 161, doi: 10.1215/9780822388074.

among other alterations to the space.[373] This is what happens when one works within an institutional setting, as a guest curator you are beholden to timelines, installation schedules, and ways of working. Due to the last minute timeline, it was difficult to do anything radical with the installation of the galleries. The ICA did not have any limitations, other than budget and time, on what Blake could have done. In speaking to Kraczon, she wondered what a "Choose your own adventure" installation would have looked like and how that could have operated.[374] Here we can only imagine the possibilities.

However, a radical re-envisioning of the space itself might not necessarily be a queer intervention. For Blake, the installation of the works themselves in conversation with one another addressed the queer play aspect of the exhibition, and their specific example was A.K. Burns's installation as a pivot point (as one had to pass through it on the way to the rest of the exhibition).[375] Burns's three artworks including *Living Room*, *A Skeleton Reclining*, and *Corporeal Soil*, all (2017; Figure 3.10), took up the entirety of a single, large room with two access points from one side of the exhibition to the other. Entering this room meant that a viewer could see artworks in two other sections of the exhibition in relation to the installation while simultaneously being subsumed into the room-sized installation. There was furniture to sit on while watching the video *Living Room*, which mined the depths of queer bodies with a building ecosystem standing in as a surrogate: the living room (psyche), the stairwell (mouth to anus), the bathroom

[373] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021.

[374] Any kind of wall configuration or painting of walls was not doable. It might have been a very different show if the timeline had been extended. As told to me in a Zoom interview with Kate Kraczon on January 28, 2021.

[375] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Nayland Blake on April 1, 2021.

(kidneys), and basement (uterus).[376] The two-channel video was projected onto a wall (left-side) as well as onto propped up unused drywall (right-side).[377] In addition to the video, *Corporeal Soil* is a fragment taken from one of the scenes in the video and *A Skeleton Reclining* is the exposed interior of a glowing couch wrapped in plastic.

Working within the parameters of the ICA, Blake curated an exhibition where the viewer was not only allowed to look at the artwork but also to participate in it. And it is this very interaction where the potential for the artwork to *affect* the viewer took place. Participating in this section of the exhibition meant more than passive viewing. In addition to being able to sit and watch *Living Room*, the viewer also had to visually navigate between both channels, the other elements in the room (through watching the video the viewer could see which scenes *Corporeal Soil* and *A Skeleton Reclining* might have come from), as well as the other viewers walking through the space.

In an institutional setting generally reserved for looking, not touching, Blake took the passivity out of "looking" at artwork and imbued it with the power of play through interaction. Suddenly, more than the viewer's sense of site was activated to include sound (audio) and touch (furniture). This phenomenological aspect of the exhibition echoes Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "chiasm" in which the object and the person perceiving that object are constantly intertwined through the senses of both sight and

[376] "Living Room (NS 00)," A.K. Burns, accessed February 2, 2024, https://akburns.net/negativespace/living-room/.

[377] To view the full video see: "Living Room (2017)," A.K. Burns, Vimeo, accessed February 2, 2024, https://vimeo.com/264339218.

touch.[378] Barriers between the viewer and work are broken down asking the viewer to give oneself over completely to the "feelings" that the work elicits.

In addition to Robert Yang's video game works and A.K. Burns' installation, there were other works in *Tag*, Nica Ross's *noo reality = a gayme* (2016; Figure 3.11) and Sharang Biswas's *Feast* (2017; Figure 3.12), which involved phenomenological aspects beyond sight and touch that also included taste and were played on specific dates at the Museum. Ross's game infuses traditional game playing with the nontraditional as players created queer stories amongst themselves using a deck of playing cards and Ross's own photographs as visual prompts.[379] The game was played at the Museum on May 19, 2018, otherwise what viewers encountered in the space was the game's elements set up in the gallery along with a video.[380] According to the catalogue description, "While the rules are simple, play sessions can take surprisingly emotional turns, as the players strive to complete each other's thoughts."[381] Memory, narrative, and obvious interaction between game members was key to this work and from the catalogue description sounded like play could veer into uncharted territory. Play and games are generally thought of to be fun and lighthearted, but somehow this piece sounded like *work*, especially if one did not know the other players. Of course, depending on the outcome it also sounds possible

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[378] Thomas Baldwin, ed., "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 2004), 247–271, EBSCOhost.

[379] Nica Ross's playing card in *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2018).

[380] To watch documentation of the game being played see: "nooreality," Nica Ross, accessed February 2, 2024, https://nicaross.com/nooreality.

[381] Nica Ross's playing card in *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2018).

that players in this game might have the opportunity to not just interact on a superficial level but to create lasting bonds with one another.

Similarly, Biswas's game requires players to emotionally connect with one another through a potluck dinner.[382] In keeping with Blake's interest in conceptual art practices this work was clearly chosen given that Biswas was inspired by the work of Félix Gonzalez-Torres, among other avant-garde tendencies of the early 20th century Futurist dinner parties among them.[383] Again, this game is communal and asks that "Players use taste and narrative to describe the absent memories of characters that the players devise, but then consume."[384] If somewhat cathartic, "queer" takes a decidedly darker turn here asking players to invest in and then ingest the very characters they create! Perhaps this is a way for players to work *through* their identities with others in a social forum, something that is generally reserved for private moments among individuals. By sharing queerness in a museum setting, players have the opportunity to be changed and to take that experience back out into the world at large.

The experience of not only looking at artwork but having the potential to be transformed by it produces queer affect in the viewer and also affection for the artwork,

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[382] For instructions on how to play the game, as well as documentation of the game being played at the ICA see: "Feast," Sharang Biswas, accessed February 2, 2024, https://sharangbiswas.myportfolio.com/feast. Neither Biswas's website nor the ICA's gives the exact date(s) this game was played.

[383] Many of Félix Gonzalez-Torres's (FGT) works require the viewer to ingest something, many times a candy or other sweet treat. *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (1991) simultaneously memorializes and regenerates FGT's late partner Ross who died from AIDS: "Untitled: (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)" The Art Institute of Chicago, accessed March 21, 2024, https://www.artic.edu/artworks/152961/untitled-portrait-of-ross-in-l-a. For more on the Futurist's take on the cookbook, food, and dinner parties see: Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Edible Art," *Artforum*, accessed February 5, 2024, https://www.artforum.com/columns/edible-art-205346/.

[384] Sharang Biswas's playing card in *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2018).

which is something art historian David J. Getsy describes as an "adjectival disruption" and comes into play in the way the artwork makes the viewer feel.[385] Instead of alienating a viewer by asking them not to touch an artwork, by not presenting them behind Plexiglas, and by not using tape on the floor beyond which the viewer cannot step, queer artworks beckon and envelop their audiences.

In a normative exhibition, the viewer is expected to strictly adhere to museum guidelines for viewing artworks. Which is to say, that barriers are often put in place to detract the viewer from touching or getting too close to the artwork. And while this is understandable from a conservation standpoint, this limiting of the viewers autonomy in the exhibition space can do much to repel them. Take as an example my own recent visit to The Drawing Center in New York City that hosted the exhibition *David Hammons: Body Prints 1968–1979* (2021). As I was walking through the show I could hear the security guard yelling at people not to step too close to the artwork or it would set off an alarm. Inevitably, visitors stepped too close and the alarm sounded throughout the galleries in a blaring siren effect. It was, to say the least, deafening and bothersome. I wondered why the alarm was necessary when the guard was stationed right there. It occurred to me that this was not only inhospitable, treating visitors like criminals, but that it also might make visitors stay away from the space altogether. It certainly made me think twice. I also had a similar experience while viewing the exhibition *Gordon Matta-Clark: "You Are the Measure"* (2007) at the Whitney Museum of American Art, but this time it was me who was yelled at by a security guard for putting a toe across silver

[385] David J. Getsy, ed., "Introduction," *Queer Documents of Contemporary Art*. (London: Whitechapel and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press: 2016), 15–16.

gaffers tape on the floor. I recognized the irony immediately having worked in museums myself.

In *Tag* Blake, and the ICA, makes the viewer feel welcome and wanted through the interactive nature of the artworks on display, play after all is the theme. Ahmed likens this feeling of being welcome and wanted to queer phenomenology "by attending to how the bodily direction 'toward' such objects affects how bodies inhabit spaces and how spaces inhabit bodies."[386] In this case, the viewer feels like they are at home in the space and that they can stretch out and be themselves and are therefore able to inhabit spaces.[387] By being able to interact and play with artworks in the museum space, it is possible that viewers might, for a moment, forget that they are in a space not always welcoming to them, for example getting lost in playing one of Yang's videos. Additionally, Ahmed says that "When objects come to life they leave their impressions."[388] Imagine being a visitor for whom a work in the exhibition leaves its impression and is carried with them outside the museum walls into the world beyond.

The fact that the exhibition was presented at the ICA, already known for presenting ground-breaking exhibitions, including past queer exhibitions, should not be overlooked. While it is technically a university museum, because of its affiliation with the University of Pennsylvania, the institution has the ability to take on a show like this, whereas an institution like MoMA might not.[389] And yet, it still operates as a relatively

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[386] Ahmed, *Queer phenomenology*, 11.

[387] Ahmed, *Queer phenomenology*, 11.

[388] Ahmed, *Queer phenomenology*, 163.

[389] For more on the university art museum and its relationship to traditional museum practices see: Natasha S. Reid, "The University Art Museum and Institutional Critique: A Platform for Contemporary Art

mainstream institution that has a broad appeal to national and international audiences and exhibits a variety of contemporary artwork and practices. This means that *Tag* was available for mainstream audiences—as opposed to a more niche queer-only audience—to see, interact with, and take part in by not only viewing the artwork but also in the discourse surrounding it. Overall, the exhibition was well-received by the press with national and international coverage in *Art in America*, *Whitewall*, *Hyperallergic*, *Artforum*, and *Mousse*.[390] A plethora of programs including lectures, walk-throughs, exhibition guides, conversations, and panels allowed the public to interact with and participate in the exhibition's discourse.

Further developing a queer discourse is *Tag*'s catalogue (Figure 3.13), which departs from the traditional catalogue as source material and documentation revamping the tired tomes of exhibitions past. In keeping with the theme of their exhibition, Blake created a non-traditional catalogue in the form of a deck of playing cards. The curator's essay literally unfolds into viewers' hands and each artist is given a series of cards as the platform for text and images of their work(s). Even the fonts used are mismatched with one in particular resembling the Disney font. This is a much more tactile response to the traditional publication support of exhibition catalogues and adds an element of play and fun into the exhibition's archive. The catalogue is not precious in the way others might be preserved on shelves behind dust jackets. It was meant to be touched and played with, a

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Practices," *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum* 9, no. 4 (2016): 1–15, doi: 10.18848/1835-2014/CGP/v09i04/1-15.

[390] Jill Katz, Director of Marketing & Communications, ICA Philadelphia, email message to author, July 14, 2021. Katz also noted that the ICA, "…did reach out specifically to academic departments, such as Penn's Alice Paul Center for Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies, along with Penn Fine Arts, and History of Art, as well as specific professors in these departments and at other area colleges such as Tyler, Moore, Drexel, and MICA. Outreach to LGBTQIA student groups and organizations, such as Galaei, William Way LGBT Community Center, and Attic Youth Center were also a focus of our outreach."

very queer notion indeed. Once taken home, the owner of the catalogue could theoretically re-create the exhibition themselves by shuffling the cards around. In this way, new juxtapositions between artworks would emerge beyond the physical installation, extending the life, so to speak, of the exhibition itself and keeping in line with future world building.

Because of the collaborative nature of the catalogue, in which the artists were involved, it took the museum at least another year after the exhibition had closed to release the catalogue to the public. I remember being excited to see it on the shop shelves of the ICA not even sure at the time of the exhibition whether there would even be one.[391] Normally, institutions try their best to release catalogues by the date the exhibition opens to the public, or even before for press purposes. In larger museums, there are whole departments devoted just to publications, but in smaller museums like the ICA other departments take on these tasks, often curatorial and/or PR, Marketing, and Communications. Perhaps it is not surprising given the sped up timeline of the exhibition that the catalogue would then take an extra-long time. Fittingly, this is an example of Halberstam's queer time. Blake's collaboration with the artists and the ICA on the catalogue did not fit within the normative time strictures of standard museum protocol, but rather took the time it needed in order to complete the project. It was well worth the wait. My own copy of the catalogue has been handled so many times it is starting to fall apart at the seams.

[391] The ICA does not have a "gift shop" in the traditional sense of the term. What it does have is a series of plain, unassuming book shelves that look more like a library and less like a shop. Located in the lobby of the ICA, most (if not all) of their exhibition catalogues are "on view" and available for not only perusal with a "museum copy" but also copies available for purchase.

Conclusion: "Tag, You're It!"

In a section of *When Artists Curate* (2018) titled "Playing Seriously," art historian, critic, and curator Alison Green quotes the French literary critic Roger Caillois and his work *Man, Play, and Games* (1958), "Play is not exercise….Play is an end in itself."[392] While Green's example relates to trickery and hoax in the co-organizing of the 6th Caribbean Biennial by Jens Hoffman and Maurizio Cattelan, more broadly in Blake's curating it can be thought of as "playing queerly" as a way to create space within the museum for artists to build worlds. Returning to the quote referenced in "Blake as Artist and Curator," Blake creates, teaches, and promotes through play. In *Tag*, the childhood game is reimagined within the confines of an institution (i.e. museum) that does not always advocate for audiences to play (think inside voices, no touching of artwork, thinking not doing, etc.).

In the game of tag when a participant is "tagged" it essentially means they are "it" and must find someone else to tag. In the case of this particular exhibition, tagging someone as "it" invokes a collaborative effort where everyone involved must "play the game", so to speak, so that all participants including the institution, the curator, the artists, and the viewers are tagged and must play. By actively participating in this conceptual game of tag, each player has the ability to affect the outcome on both an individual as well as group level.

In their catalogue introduction, Blake states that the rules of the current game are insufficient and that a new game must be envisioned in order to move forward.[393] Blake

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[392] Green, *When Artists Curate*, 80.

[393] Blake's essay in *Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward*, exhibition catalog, green foldout.

and the artists propose alternatives—to living, to dressing, to communicating, among others. Some artworks insist on “doing” while others might just offer a glimpse. But it is up to each participant to decide how to use those works in the exhibition to their advantage. After all, these are proposals for living and being and doing. What the participant decides to do within this game of tag is up to them.

CHAPTER 5

NOBODY PROMISED YOU TOMORROW: ART 50 YEARS AFTER STONEWALL (2019)

Curating with Care

The Stonewall Uprising, which unfolded on the night of June 28, 1969, is a major historical event in the timeline of LGBTQ+ rights in the United States. It is well-noted that the events were often credited to white, gay, cisgender men, but recently there is a push to acknowledge the outsize role that transgender women of color played.[394] The curators of the exhibition *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall* (*NPYT*), on view in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum from May 3 through December 8, 2019, rooted the title of their exhibition in the rallying cry of Marsha P. Johnson, a Black transgender woman. Johnson, if belatedly, is known for her primary role in starting the uprising as well as her important legacy among the queer and trans communities post-Stonewall. As previously discussed in Chapter 3 the film *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* by Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel reimagines a day in the life of Johnson preceding the uprising. The continuing impact of Johnson is highlighted by the inclusion of the film in both the New Museum's exhibition *Trigger* (as an excerpt) and in *NPYT* within the section titled "Revolt." The film features a scene in which Johnson takes care of herself in the bathtub by washing her wounds after being battered by a cop. The final scenes show her reciting poetry to her supportive community of friends. In this chapter, through oral interviews and close object analysis, I extend the

[394] Lauren A. Zelaya and Carmen Hermo, "Revolt," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall* (Fresno: The Press at California State University, 2021), 25. The catalogue was produced in collaboration with and for the west coast iteration of the exhibition in the Phebe Conley Art Gallery at California State University, Fresno August 19–October 31, 2021.

idea of radical care—both self and collective—to the curatorial realm and will argue that the care taken in organizing *NPYT* is what queers the Brooklyn Museum particularly through the collaborative efforts of the curators, the inclusion of particular artworks, and the various installation strategies employed. *NPYT* transformed the Center for Feminist Art into a heterotopic space—here Foucault's notion of "other" or "different" space is transformed into a safe one—within the Brooklyn Museum and offered its audiences a moment of respite.

In connecting the radical politics of self-care to queerness, I follow the argument of feminist disability studies and queer-of-color critique scholar Jina B. Kim and gender and women's study scholar Sami Schalk in their article "Reclaiming the Radical Politics of Self-Care: A Crip-of-Color Critique" (2021). Kim and Schalk ground their argument in American poet, essayist, and activist Audre Lorde's *A Burst of Light: Essays* (1988) in which she wrote in the epilogue, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."[395] Kim and Schalk point out that various "authors argue that the concept of self-care as Lorde theorized it is deeply political, based in experiences of racialization, womanhood, and/or queerness."[396] Further, in thinking about the effect of Lorde's politics on the future Kim and Schalk understand her politics of self-care *as* care work because taking care of oneself is not a selfish endeavor, but rather allows one to then carry on their activist work through community and care networks.[397] Although Kim and Schalk specifically argue for self-

[395] Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light: Essays* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1988), 131.

[396] Jina B. Kim and Sami Schalk, "Reclaiming the Radical Politics of Self-Care: A Crip-of-Color Critique," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (April 2021): 326.

[397] Kim and Schalk, "Reclaiming the Radical Politics of Self-Care," 338–339.

care in relation to Crip-of-Color identities, here I think about self-care and its potential to queer the museum by harnessing the notion of care through collaboration and community networks. I argue that the care taken by the curators lead to a disruption in the traditionally normative, fast-paced museum structure in which curators are expected to churn out exhibitions, like products for consumption, one after the other.

In her PhD dissertation "Curating in Context: Slow Curating as A Reflective Practice" Megan Johnston theorizes a form of curating she calls Slow Curating, which is a socially engaged curatorial practice that involves taking the time to connect to the context of one's site from working with local experts to investigating issues that affect particular communities.[398] It also involves working collaboratively with artists *and* the community and directly connects to radical pedagogy in that it does not create a division between curatorial and educational departments.[399] This applies to the collective curating of *NPYT* as the curators, who at the time, held positions across the museum: Margo Cohen Ristorucci, Public Programs Coordinator; Lindsay C. Harris, Teen Programs Manager, Education; Carmen Hermo, Associate Curator, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art; Allie/A.L. Rickard, Curatorial Assistant, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art; and Lauren Argentina Zelaya, Acting Director, Public Programs. The curators engaged their intended audience and thus opened the process beyond the museum staff. They convened roundtables with Stonewall veterans and LGBTQ+ groups to discuss the exhibition and asked what they would like to see. They also diversified

[398] Megan Johnston, "Curating in Context: Slow Curating as A Reflective Practice," PhD diss., Ulster University, 2021, 157.

[399] Johnston, "Curating in Context," 157–158.

who spoke with the press so that it was many voices being heard not just one authorial voice speaking on behalf of all the curators.[400]

In the introduction to their book *Curating with Care*, cultural theorist, curator, urbanist and author, Elke Krasny, and visual culture scholar, Lara Perry, point to the contemporary crisis of curating "as perfected and glossy selectionism, taste-making, and the overall commodification and commercialization of culture for consumption and culture as spectacle," which they argue leads to exhaustion and depletion that "fails to replenish, regenerate, or practically support all those who might benefit most from such provision of care."[401] The curators of *NPYT* did not engage in "care-washing," or what Krasny and Perry contend is the capitalization on the museum's part to appear as though they care.[402] Instead, the curators of *NPYT* took the time (i.e. slow curating) to collectively organize an informed, thoughtful, and inclusive exhibition and in the process cared for not just themselves, but also their larger community. Paying homage to Marsha P. Johnson, and the community who supported and cared for her as the events of Stonewall unfolded, the curators queered the hierarchical systems of power of traditional museum structures that favor star curators and blockbuster exhibitions.[403]

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[400] As told to me by Margo Cohen Ristorucci in a conversation at the Brooklyn Museum on November 15, 2023.

[401] Elke Krasny and Lara Perry, eds., "Introduction," in *Curating with Care* (London: Routledge, 2023), doi: 10.4324/9781003204923.

[402] Krasny and Perry, "Introduction," in *Curating with Care*, 2–3.

[403] Krasny and Perry, "Introduction," in *Curating with Care*, 2.

Collaboration

The collective began the curatorial process with a series of questions—expanding upon the investigative curatorial model of earlier queer exhibitions *In a Different Light* and *Neoqueer*— including,

> What does it mean for queer and trans people who grew up after 1969's watershed moment to reap some of its benefits but frustratingly face many of the same challenges? What would an exhibition that acknowledged that look like? How can Stonewall's legacy be understood as both a political and aesthetic revolution and as an emblem of a past that is ever-present?[404]

This method of questioning, seen in earlier queer exhibitions, seeks not to tell a specific narrative but rather leaves the storytelling open to the artists in the exhibition. Keeping in mind the last question regarding Stonewall's legacy as a past that is ever-present, the curators wondered how a generation of artists born after the uprising think about it currently *and* in the future. In their introduction to *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies Subcultural Lives* (2005), queer theorist Jack Halberstam offers a theory of queer time as non-linear, disjointed, out of step with straight time, and rooted in the AIDS crisis where queer people's mortality is forever diminishing but never vanishing.[405] While the title of the exhibition notes the precarity of LGBTQ+ lives and draws on this queer notion of time as diminishing, the curators queried the artists specifically about the future and what they argued could be a more hopeful future of possibilities.[406]

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[404] Hermo, "The Process," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 19.

[405] Jack Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), ProQuest Ebook Central.

[406] "Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years after Stonewall," Brooklyn Museum, accessed February 23, 2020, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/stonewall.

While the curators conceived the exhibition's theme it was also important to include the artists in the dialogue surrounding Stonewall and its legacy. They asked the artists "What are your dreams for liberation 100 years after Stonewall?" Chicome Itzcuintli Amatlapalli responded,

> I like to imagine that in a hundred years, the current fluorescence of creativity and understanding surrounding the subjects of gender and sexuality will come to seem so normal, so utterly natural, that the oppressive world in which the brave women and men who fought injustice at Stonewall will seem as alien and barbaric as the cultures which burned witches or kept slaves.[407]

Note the emphasis on the word imagine. For queer folx, this imagining, this hopefulness, is all they have when the current world is not enough.[408] In fact, the word "imagine" appears frequently, as does the word "dream" in the various responses. Amatlapalli hopes and yearns for a future where queer lives are normalized instead of demonized. Echoing the themes of the exhibition and the working methodologies of the curators several artists also speak to the collective nature of queer and trans lives. Lukaza Branfman-Verissimo invokes a quote from Sylvia Rivera, one of the transwomen of color who participated in the uprising, "Liberation is a collective process."[409] Likewise, Amaryllis R. Flowers responded, "I want collective liberation and collective generosity that flourishes farther into the future than we could ever trace."[410] What is perhaps most interesting is that all of

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[407] Chicome Itzcuintli Amatlapalli, "Artist Responses to the Legacy of the Stonewall Uprising," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 41.

[408] Here I invoke José Esteban Muñoz's theory of queer futurity with queerness always being something on the horizon. See "Introduction: Feeling Utopia" in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009).

[409] Lukaza Branfman-Verissimo, "Artist Responses to the Legacy of the Stonewall Uprising," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 42.

[410] Amaryllis R. Flowers, "Artist Responses to the Legacy of the Stonewall Uprising," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 42.

the responses are hopeful and filled with joy at the possibilities for a world only imaginable in this present moment. But, the point is, they are hopeful.

Beyond the artists, the curators also wanted to include both the local and LGBTQ+ communities in conversation with the exhibition and convened a roundtable over lunch at the museum in January 2019. As Hermo recalls in the catalogue,

> Representatives from the Audre Lorde Project; Caribbean Pride; Lesbian Herstory Archives; The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center; NYC Mayor's Office of Community Affairs, LGBTQ Division; Queerocracy; SAGE Center; Sylvia Rivera Law Project; Visual AIDS; and filmmaker Sekiya Dorssett, poet Timothy DuWhite, and Stonewall veteran and activist Jay Toole shared perspectives that helped to sharpen our focus around issues like gentrification, incarceration, and policing.[411]

As Hermo notes, the outcome of this roundtable led to direct changes in museum policy regarding the steep admission costs, the staging of security guards, as well as showcasing each organization in *Our House*, the exhibition's reading room implementing change and allowing the voices and concerns of constituents to be heard in the museum, among other changes.[412] Effecting actual change in museum structures and policies is what Krasny and Perry point to as "Curating with Care," otherwise, the efforts resort to the care-washing mentioned earlier.[413] By truly listening and engaging with their public and enacting change within the normative museum structure and policy, the curators of *NPYT* took care of their community following in the footsteps of Stonewall.

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[411] Hermo, "The Process," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 21.

[412] Hermo, "The Process," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 21.

[413] Krasny and Perry, "Introduction," in *Curating with Care*, 3.

Hermo's essay in the *NPYT* catalogue clearly addresses various institutions' capitalizing on, corporatizing, and commercializing of the 50th anniversary of Stonewall, writing,

> As the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising approached, it seemed to us, the five members of the curatorial collective, that many commemorations in New York City were veering into corporatized and uncritical celebrations. This was alarming because the abuses and issues that ignited the nights and days of riots and protests—from police brutality, to transphobia, lack of access to healthcare, and safe housing—remain endemic in the United States and globally. This is particularly the case for Black and brown queer and trans people.[414]

Therefore, the curatorial collective, made up primarily of queer and trans folx, set out to *critically* examine and curate an exhibition that would center and celebrate a generation of artists born after 1969 focused on a future-oriented consideration of Stonewall as opposed to a strictly historical moment.[415] Hermo further outlines the collective's working method in her essay "The Process" highlighting several key factors which turn away from the typical, hierarchical way of working in museums. What Hermo outlines as a collective working methodology was echoed in the conversations I had with several of the curators.

The collectivity surrounding the entire project, from the artists' work to the curatorial methodology was grounded in the communal spirit of Stonewall as noted by Hermo and which ultimately led the curators to find

> consensus for most of its decisions, from the checklist of included artists and artworks, to marketing images, program decisions, and dividing presentations into shared platforms. We dispersed 'point person' duties in order to share labor and spread knowledge equitably. We made a point to

[414] Hermo, "The Process," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 19.

[415] Hermo, "The Process," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 19.

> keep each other informed with regular check-ins and a rollicking group text.[416]

Throughout my own process of interviewing the curators I was continually struck by the pervasive happiness and joyfulness they conveyed to me about their working methodology. Having taken part in a group curating effort in my Master's program, and seeing how not only my group but the others worked as well, I was not prepared for the sheer positivity surrounding this project. Many group curatorial efforts can turn ugly with people always jockeying for position or trying to take the reins entirely.[417] What seems to have worked in this case, is that the curators set ground rules in advance, and followed through on them to the very end. Further, as Hermo notes in the catalogue, the five curators are part of a network at the museum of "politically engaged staff leveraging their positions of relative power to advocate for their communities."[418]

Additionally, by including the voices of their community in the exhibition itself, the *NPYT* curators employed what Australian art historian Terry Smith refers to as "Engaged, Activist Curating," by foregrounding the role of the spectator. As Smith describes it, "As artists and curators reach for Utopia, seek to survive, or in most instances, search together to understand the perplexities of contemporary being, consumers of art become participant producers ('prosumers') and audiences become co-curators."[419] One example, includes the story of a Stonewall veteran who was triggered

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[416] Hermo, "The Process," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 20.

[417] Here I cite my own personal experience at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (CCS Bard) where our first year curatorial groups were chosen for us, and working collectively in that case was not nearly as smooth a process.

[418] Hermo, "The Process," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 19.

[419] Smith, "Curatorial Practice Now," in *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 2nd ed. (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012), 236–237.

by the presence of security guards at the museum that brought back a flood of memories of abuse by the NYPD, which led to them feeling unwelcome in the museum; after learning this at the roundtable members of the curatorial collective would personally welcome viewers to the museum/exhibition to ward off any threats of surveillance.[420] This example stands in stark contrast to the story of the security guard at the ICA, Philadelphia, discussed in Chapter 4, who became the MVP of *Tag* because of his *affection* for the work in the show and his enthusiasm for the exhibition overall. Arguably, the two institutions are drastically different in size and scale, as well as in the number of staff and departments. At the ICA, the staff is small whereas the Brooklyn Museum's staff is much larger and the divisions between departments likely much greater. The ICA, Philadelphia audiences are not greeted by guards and security surveillance, but rather docents and staff.[421]

Perhaps this comes as no surprise given the history of the Brooklyn Museum, a large, encyclopedic institution. The structure itself is an imposing complex that sits on Eastern Parkway adjacent to Prospect Park. Although the museum building has undergone a series of renovations over the years, its presence recalls an old, staid, traditional museum, and certainly not one that is contemporary.[422] And while their mission, vision, and values suggest a forward-thinking institution the museum has at

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[420] Hermo, "The Process," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 21.

[421] I can personally attest to the friendliness, as well as knowledge, of the ICA, Philadelphia security guards. On a recent visit I was engaged by a guard and in the course of the conversation learned that we had both at one time lived in New York and personally knew the artist on view—David Antonio Cruz, whose work is also in *NPYT*. By contrast, on a recent visit to the Brooklyn Museum, one of the guards was puzzled by my question on which floor the Center for Feminist Art was located.

[422] For more on the Brooklyn Museum's building history, see: "Brooklyn Museum Building," Brooklyn Museum, accessed December 26, 2023, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/features/building.

various times come under fire for a variety of inconsistencies.[423] Of course, despite the many controversies the museum has weathered, its public programs department is well known for the work they do, particularly with artists, the local community, and the queer and trans communities.[424] For example, their First Saturdays are legendary with sometimes thousands of people attending the evenings' free entertainment line-up.[425] This is why Hermo was keen to involve the department in the curatorial collective for the exhibition because she views public programs as a pillar of the museum.[426]

The Brooklyn Museum's education department is on the forefront of most major museums in that they devote several programs specifically to teens. One program called InterseXtions: Gender and Sexuality (Figure 4.1) is a paid internship specifically for LGBTQ+ teens, ages 14–19, in the New York City metropolitan area.[427] This program

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[423]For information about the museum, see: "About the Museum," Brooklyn Museum, accessed December 26, 2023, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/about. For more on the controversy surrounding calls to decolonize the Museum, see: Alex Greenberger, "'Brooklyn Is Not For Sale': Decolonize This Place Leads Protest at Brooklyn Museum," *ARTnews*, April 30, 2018, accessed, December 26, 2023, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/brooklyn-not-sale-decolonize-place-leads-protest-brooklyn-museum-10230/; several other controversies are mentioned in this review of Hannah Gadsby's exhibition *It's Pablo-matic*, which was widely panned by critics. For one example see: Robin Pogrebin, "Hannah Gadsby's Picasso Show Was Meant to Ignite Debate. And It Did," *The New York Times*, June 9, 2023, accessed December 26, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/09/arts/design/hannah-gadsby-picasso-brooklyn-museum-debate.html#:~:text=The%20Brooklyn%20Museum%20is%20no,the%20museum's%20%E2%80%9CSensation%E2%80%9D%20show.

[424] As told to me in a Zoom Interview with Carmen Hermo on December 28, 2023.

[425] For more on the museum's First Saturdays read: Kalia Richardson, "Brooklyn Museum Celebrates 25 Years of First Saturdays," *The New York Times*, February 3, 2023, accessed January 15, 2024: https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/03/arts/design/brooklyn-museum-first-saturdays.html.

[426] As told to me in a Zoom Interview with Carmen Hermo on December 28, 2023. For more on the public programs department at the museum and the inclusion in the curatorial collective, read Hermo's essay "The Process," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 19.

[427] For more on the program, see: "Brooklyn Museum: InterseXtions: Gender and Sexuality," Brooklyn Museum, accessed January 17, 2024, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/education/teens/lgbtq. For more on the program's founding, see: Becky Alemán, Cheri E. Erlich, and Lindsay C. Harris, "Looking Back and Forward: Reflections on Starting LGBTQ+ Teen Programming at the Brooklyn Museum (2011–2018)," *Medium*, accessed February 19, 2024, https://medium.com/viewfinder-reflecting-on-museum-

was co-founded by Lindsay C. Harris, one of the members of the curatorial collective. In an interview with *White Hot Magazine*, Harris had this to say about the museum's education department, "Brooklyn Museum is a leader in anti-racist museum education and advancing inclusion and equity within major art museums of its kind, due to many staff–Black femme leadership within Education, in particular–pushing boundaries over the decades."[428] As part of the mission of this program is for the teens to "explore gender and sexuality in art through an activist lens, and work collaboratively to organize programs for other queer and trans youth," they were included in the programming for *NPYT*. The teens organized the reading room called *Our House* (Figure 4.2) led by Levi Narine, Teen Programs Assistant and alum of Teen Programs.

Our House was a place meant for "hanging out" that featured artist recommended books, reviewed by InterseXtions teen members; a moveable table; community handouts; low, comfortable chairs; charging stations; and a couch all which supported the community and underscored comfort.[429] An interactive response wall included the following prompts, "What elders do you honor? What tomorrow do you hope for? Use this space to pay tribute to LGBTQ+ foreparents and envision collective liberation in the future." Visitors were encouraged to record their responses on note cards, which were rotated by staff every four to six weeks.[430] The purpose of *NPYT* is summed up in this

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education/looking-back-and-forward-reflections-on-starting-lgbtq-teen-programming-at-the-brooklyn-museum-531a46e8d183.

[428] Nina Mdivani, "Interview with Lindsay Catherine Harris, New Co-Director of Recess Art, Brooklyn," *White Hot Magazine*, June 2023, accessed January 17, 2024, https://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/co-director-recess-art-brooklyn/5863.

[429] As told to me in a Zoom Interview with Carmen Hermo on December 28, 2023.

[430] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Lindsay C. Harris on January 30, 2024.

interactive installation that both pays homage to the past at the same time that it thinks towards the future.

The inclusion of teens' voices in the mix of this exhibition also stresses the future-oriented legacy of Stonewall in thinking about the next generation. The reviews they wrote were featured prominently in the space. One review by Darren Dasne, 17, InterseXtions teen staff member, of the book *10,000 Dresses* by Marcus Ewert (author) and Rex Ray (illustrator), reads,

> This story is about dreaming of your best self. Every night Bailey dreams about a different dress, but when she awakes and asks to wear one, she is told 'no' by everyone because they say, 'boys don't wear dresses,' even though Bailey didn't feel like a boy. Nevertheless, Bailey persists! I, like Bailey, have been able to find acceptance within myself as a genderqueer person, because of good people who think the best of me. Overall this story is one that everyone needs to read because Bailey's hopes and dreams will encourage you to find your true self—despite society bringing you down.[431]

I highlight this particular review, because what is so striking is that Dasne not only finds a connection with the character but also recognizes society's complicity in policing gender.

Another review (Figure 4.3) by Ashley Cervantes, 16, of the book *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*, reads,

> 'Gay liberation but transgender nothing!' - Sylvia Rivera. In this zine, revolutionary trans women of color Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera teach us about the struggles they've faced in order to survive, their own activism for their community, and the truths of how the white cis gay community often out-casted trans people from the liberation movement. Reading this, I was frustrated, questioning why trans people are often forgotten within LGBTQ+ activism, and it has urged me to be an

[431] These book reviews by the museum's InterseXtions teen staff members were featured in *Our House* and are also part of the exhibition's archive.

> advocate. These are the stories that deserve to be talked about during Pride Month![432]

Here, the mantle is clearly taken up by Cervantes, among the next generation of activists who, through reading this zine, was propelled to action. In an interview with *Teen Vogue* Cervantes said this about InterseXtions, "I grew up with the connotation that museums are spaces for white or rich people….To be in an internship with kids of color from Brooklyn, the Bronx, was really empowering."[433] By engaging teens not only through the InterseXtions internship but also by actively involving them in *NPYT*, the curatorial collective ensured that future generations of LGBTQ+ people would know and understand their history, how it has been marginalized, and how art plays a role in telling those stories that have been lost.

Care Networks as Community

In *Curating with Care*, Krasny and Perry note the origin of the word curator as coming from the Latin *curare* meaning "to treat, to cure, to look after, to edit, or to organize."[434] While curators often look after and take care of collections, this idea can also encompass the care curators take of the artists and colleagues they work with, the artworks in the exhibition (literally in the way they are handled, installed, written about, and discussed), the organizing of programs, among others. The notion of care surrounded the entire *NPYT* exhibition from the collective working method and division of labor to the section of the exhibition titled "Care Networks." In fact, when corresponding with the

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[432] Featured in *Our House* and part of the exhibition's archive.

[433] Claire Voon, "Teen Art Councils Are Pushing for Change in Prestigious Museums," *Teen Vogue*, September 3, 2020, accessed February 19, 2024, https://www.teenvogue.com/story/teen-art-councils-are-pushing-for-change-in-prestigious-museums.

[434] Krasny and Perry, "Introduction," in *Curating with Care*, 4.

curatorial collective, they would often begin emails with or sign off with various forms of care—"thank you kindly for your patience," "with care," "I hope you are taking care," "gratefully," among others. The care the collective took in curating and working with one another clearly extended beyond the exhibition and into the work they do and the lives they live. The sense I got from these brief emails and from meeting with the collective is that they genuinely care for and about their communities.

"Care Networks" was one of several thematic sections the curators used to organize the exhibition; the others included "Revolt," "Heritage," and "Desire." In her catalogue essay, Hermo writes about the decision to organize the exhibition this way,

> Our process was bolstered by and reflected in the collective work undertaken by many of the artists in the exhibition. That refracted back to the spirit of the Uprising itself, and the movement and organizing work before, since, and still coming. This later took shape in the circuitous, overlapping themes of the exhibition itself—Revolt, Heritage, Desire, and Care Networks.[435]

"Care Networks" included the work of seven individual artists, one collective of six artists, and one duo. As Hermo notes in her essay, the sections overlap and some of the artists included in "Care Networks" also appear in other sections, which engenders an expansive understanding of artists' work and does not limit them to just one category or another.

Constantina Zavitsanos, one of the artists in "Care Networks" as well as "Heritage," and "Desire," discussed the legacy of care dating back to the uprising, as Cohen Ristorucci, Public Programs Coordinator, writes, "Stonewall itself was an act of care, Constantina Zavitsanos told us in an early studio visit, at once enabled by the

[435] Hermo, "The Process," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 20.

lattices of support between protestors and passed on as a legacy to future generations of queer and trans people."[436] As noted earlier, this care network was clearly visible in the film *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* from the self-care Johnson took to the community who rallied around her. This section directly illustrates what the curators were doing with the exhibition and how they were doing it through the artworks selected. Here in the exhibition, care networks were emphasized as both an homage to Stonewall *and* as a future-oriented legacy for queer and trans lives.

Jeffery Gibson's mixed media work *BECAUSE ONCE YOU ENTER MY HOUSE IT BECOMES OUR HOUSE* (2018; Figure 4.4), made of acrylic on canvas, glass beads, and artificial sinew inset into wood frame, was large enough to hold an entire wall by itself in the installation. Its size and scale commanded space to be seen and distance to be read. The color palette, made up of dayglo neon, the psychedelic background patterning, and giant capitalized words all outlined in beadwork from the artist's Choctaw-Cherokee heritage make for a dizzying read. The use of all caps suggests shouting, but also demanding to be heard and seen. The words 'my house" in the first part of the sentence *trans*form from singular into plural with "our house" suggesting collectivity and support. The aesthetic choices made by Gibson clearly draw on underground club-culture as the title of the work comes from Rhythm Controll's "My House" (1987). Also, as Cohen Ristorucci points outs, "The lyric recalls the clubs the artist frequented in his adolescence, which provided powerful—and for many queer and trans people, rare—sites for catharsis and communion."[437] Underground clubs offer queer and trans folx a breather

[436] Margo Cohen Ristorucci, "Care Networks," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 31.

[437] Cohen Ristorucci, "Care Networks," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 32.

from an outside world that can be cruel and unwelcoming. In the safe haven of a club atmosphere, queer and trans clubgoers are free to become and sustain their identities. Here, they can wear what they want, act as they want, and revel in themselves just as they are.

Artist Juliana Huxtable—also in *NPYT* in the section "Revolt"—discusses this part of her identity with writer and critical theorist Che Gossett in a conversation noting the possibilities that nightlife offers her as "a pretty sustainable way to have an outlet for experimentation and to be able to support myself."[438] In addition to underground nightlife, queer and trans folx also find community support in online forums (á la the basis for curator and writer Legacy Russell's book *Glitch Feminism*) as well as in gaming culture.[439] The commonality between these spaces is that they allow for experimentation without judgment and a freedom for queer and trans folx to explore identities, by literally trying them on, to see what fits. In *There's a disco ball between us a theory of Black gay life* anthropologist Jafari S. Allen underscores that despite the limitations of the club/disco/bar—they aren't "perfect model[s] of accessibility and democracy"—they were nonetheless the "central meeting space of what folx thought of as a community."[440] Here again we are reminded of how "My House" transforms to "Our House" in the title

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[438] Che Gossett and Juliana Huxtable, "Existing in the World: Blackness at the Edge of Trans Visibility," in *Trap Door: Transcultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, Tourmaline, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton, eds. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 52.

[439] Zachary Small, "Video Games Let Them Choose a Role. Their Transgender Identities Flourished," *The New York Times*, December 27, 2023, accessed December 28, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/27/arts/transgender-nonbinary-gamers.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare.

[440] Jafari S. Allen, *There's a disco ball between us a theory of Black gay life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2022), 132.

of Jeffrey Gibson's work, as a collective becoming for the folx who participate in nightlife culture.

While queer nightlife is often expressed as a safe and utopian space for queer and trans folx it can also be a place of violence, physical and otherwise: indeed, this is what happened at the Stonewall Inn, as an example. In the introduction to *Queer Nightlife* the editors, interdisciplinary scholar and educator Kemi Adeyemi; educator, scholar, and performer Kareem Khubchandani; and interdisciplinary scholar and educator Ramon H. Rivera-Servera argue, "for all of the ways that queer nightlife spaces can provide refuge and play, they can also be sites of alienation that are circumscribed by normative modes of exclusion."[441] The essays and interviews contained in the volume push back against the idea that "queer nightlife or queer subject positions are inherently or necessarily utopian formations."[442] In connecting queer nightlife to radical care, the move away from understanding care as inherently hopeful merges with a recent issue of the journal *Social Text*. In their introduction the editors, interdisciplinary scholar and educator Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart, and researcher Tamara Kneese write, "While radical care is often connected to positive political change by providing spaces of hope in dark times, the articles in this collection simultaneously acknowledge the negative affects associated with care."[443] The negative affects associated with care to which the authors refer include coercion of subjects and the positioning of some groups against others, and

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[441] Kemi Adeyemi, Kareem Khubchandani, and Ramon H. Rivera-Servera, eds., "Introduction," in *Queer Nightlife* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021), 2, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[442] Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera, eds., "Introduction," in *Queer Nightlife*, 2.

[443] Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese, "Radical Care Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times," *Social Text* 38, no.1 (2020): 2.

they discuss how care can also be packaged into consumer products (i.e. the boom in the "self-care" market).[444] Despite the negative aspects related to care, there are moments in queer nightlife where the care taken by individuals and communities merge to offer glimmers of hope.

In *Feels Right: Black Queer Women and the Politics of Partying in Chicago* (2022) Kemi Adeyemi explores the party "Slo 'Mo: Slow Jams for Homos and Their Fans" on the North Side of the city and uses slowness as a method to examine the relationship between black queer women "entangled with the imperatives of accumulation and acceleration that are characteristic of neoliberal governance, and that are at odds with how they seek to secure black queer communality."[445] Adeyemi focuses on a change in venue for the party from The Whistler to Slippery Slope, and how even though they were only a block apart the new venue came with a change in demographics; and therefore a change in the tempo of the music and also limiting the enjoyment for the majority black queer partygoers who were harassed by the hetero, white, male clientele.[446]

While Adeyemi argues that this act is a critique of and a refusal to participate in the changes brought on by venue and tempo and does not necessarily use the term care, I extend the argument to posit that the black queer woman who insisted on clearing a space for and slowing the pace in this place became a radical act of collective care for a

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[444] Hobart and Kneese, "Radical Care Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times," *Social Text*, 2.

[445] Kemi Adeyemi, "Slo 'Mo and the Pace of Black Queer Life," in *Feels Right: Black Queer Women and the Politics of Partying in Chicago* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 41, doi: 10.1215/9781478023319.

[446] Adeyemi, "Slo 'Mo," in *Feels Right*, 40.

community which was effectively being pushed out.[447] While in this case, Adeyemi focuses on the space of queer nightlife and dancing, this argument bears some resemblance to Megan Johnson's notion of Slow Curating. Just like the curatorial collective of *NPYT*, in each case, community is centered and cared for by taking the time to slow down and eschew the hyper capitalist tendency toward speed and a race to the finish. Deliberate and methodical, slowness is embraced to enhance the joy and pleasure one can partake in, even when surrounded by forces that work against their communities—museums and queer nightlife.

There is an aura of slowness as a form of intimacy and isolation that surrounds Elle Pérez's black-and-white photography, which is also featured in the "Care Networks" section of *NPYT*. Taken between 2013 and 2019, all *Untitled* with an additional word or name in parentheses, the photographs feature "local feast day festivities for patron saints in Hatillo, Puerto Rico; underground wrestling rings in the Bronx; and queer dance clubs in the Bronx, New Haven, and Baltimore."[448] Very different aesthetically from Gibson's mixed media work, Pérez's photographs capture candid shots of LGBTQ+ folx. *Untitled (Kirsten*; 2015/2019; Figure 4.5) captures two people dancing in a close embrace with one of their faces looking directly into the camera, the other's tucked away. The close up shot reveals a few people mingling in the background, but what is clear is that these two are locked together as if they are the only two who exist in the world. Only the fact that one of them looks directly into the camera provides evidence of an acknowledgment of existence beyond their world.

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[447] Adeyemi, "Slo 'Mo," in *Feels Right*, 44–45.

[448] Cohen Ristorucci, "Care Networks," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 32.

Untitled (Lineysha; 2014; Figure 4.6) catches a performer in the wings offstage either right before making a grand entrance or after having finished. Costumed in a glittering leotard, fantastic headdress and wig, trailing cape, and fishnet stockings, the performer's face is barely visible to the camera with their eyes cast downward. Frozen in time, the photograph is anything but static as the anticipation of their performance, either about to begin or just over, is heightened by their contemplative gaze and clutching of the curtain. The only figure in this photograph, the performer appears isolated but not necessarily lonely. There is a lot this photograph does not convey, but rather it is the "anticipatory illumination of the utopian" that is most intriguing.[449] It is what we do not see in this photograph that piques our interest as viewers, just thinking about the potential of the figure as a performer and what that act has to offer them, an audience yes, but also potentially a supportive community of other queer performers. As Pérez says about the medium in which they work, "Something can live there in photography and not be definitive."[450] It is this ambiguity that allows the viewer to imagine possible worlds for the performer.

Community was also at the heart of Morgan Bassichis's, Anna Betbeze's, TM Davy's, DonChristian Jones's, Michi Ilona Osato's, and Una Aya Osato's installation *Lavender Hill Historical Society* (2019; Figure 4.7), also included in the "Care Networks" section. This collective of artists was commissioned by the museum to create this work, both a real and imaginary archive of Lavender Hill (a commune located in

[449] Muñoz, "Introduction: Feeling Utopia," in *Cruising Utopia*, 18.

[450] "Elle Pérez Works Between the Frame," Art21, accessed March 8, 2024, https://art21.org/watch/new-york-close-up/elle-perez-works-between-the-frame/.

Ithaca, NY in the late 1960s). It operates as an homage to the commune based on the book *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* (1977).[451] The artists included original archival material such as drawings, photographs, and ephemera as well as their own imagined ephemera and a wooden vitrine taken from museum storage.[452] Repurposing the vitrine from museum storage, the artists play with museological elements in the work by inserting their own narrative into an already existing archive and calling into question the truth around museum displays.[453] Here, the installation is an example of Getsy's "queer adjectival disruption," discussed in the Introduction—that is the institutional critique which *trans*forms a traditional museum archive into a queer archive, particularly through the reuse of an already existing vitrine.

The installation plays on the look of these displays, elevating what would normally be a sober remembrance into something much more fun and enjoyable to look at. The layout of frames above the vitrine evokes a familiar "family room hanging", clustered together like those containing photographs of a cisgender family, but in this case it is one bound outside of bloodlines. The museum vitrine beneath is crammed to the edges with photographs, book pages, and drawings, all mingling together. One photograph clearly nods to AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and the AIDS crisis with documentation from what appears to be a march or protest with a banner exclaiming "Let the Record Show," discussed in both Chapter's 2 and 3. This installation is not static though, the way many archival vitrines might be. The addition of headphones

[451] Cohen Ristorucci, "Care Networks," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 32.

[452] Cohen Ristorucci, "Care Networks," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 32.

[453] Cohen Ristorucci, "Care Networks," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 32.

that allowed listeners to hear "audio from when the artists and communards first met: a three-hour, unedited recording of them singing while tripping on mushrooms" inserts an interactive element into more traditional archival displays.[454] Also, a decorative rope with floral bouquets at either end connects one wall of the installation to a column next to it as one might decorate for a festive holiday. One end of the rope hangs just above a set of headphones and what appear to be pillows, most likely meant for visitors to take a seat on the floor while listening to the audio. Furthering the objective of care, several of the artists in this collective took direct action and organized for their communities, particularly after the COVID lockdown when so many were isolated from the physical aspect of queer collectivity.[455] The queer institutional critique in this work is evident in the installation, which is a much messier and less clean and orderly display associated with documentation in archives, where content does not spill beyond the borders of the vitrine.

Directly across from this installation was LJ Roberts's *The Queer Houses of Brooklyn in the Three Towns of Breukelen, Boswyck, and Midwout during the 41st Year of the Stonewall Era (based on a 2010 drawing by Daniel Rosza Lang/Levitsky with 24 illustrations by Buzz Slutzky on printed pin-back buttons*; 2011; Figure 4.8), the title alone a sign of collectivity (Buzz Slutzky's work was featured in the ICA Philadelphia's exhibition *Tag*, discussed in Chapter 4).[456] A special wall and low platform were built for

[454] Cohen Ristorucci, "Care Networks," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 32.

[455] Cohen Ristorucci, "Care Networks," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 32.

[456] This work is now in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, see: "The Queer Houses of Brooklyn in the Three Towns of Breukelen, Boswyck, and Midwout during the 41st Year of the Stonewall Era (based on a 2010 drawing by Daniel Rosza Lang/Levitsky with 24 illustrations by Buzz Slutzky on printed pin-back buttons," SAAM, accessed December 26, 2023,

this work, which tumbles onto the ground in a mess of Poly-fill, acrylic, rayon, Lurex, wool, polyester, cotton, lamé, sequins, and blended fabrics with printed pin-back buttons. According to the artist, "the knitted, quilted and stitched map of these queer collective houses, each with their characteristic name and symbol, references and subverts the iconography of coats-of-arms and heraldic devices usually associated with royalty, corporations, and the state."[457] Another form of institutional critique, this work, like *Lavender Hill Historical Society* places at the forefront chosen families that are an important aspect to queer and trans lives (think the Houses associated with Ball Culture in 1970s/80s upper Manhattan), which can often be more supportive and caring for their members than the actual families into which they were born.

Roberts discusses the work as "a living and active archival memento of radical Do-It-Yourself/Do-It-Together/punk craft practice and spirit that includes one-inch pins printed with the name of each house and its representative illustration, free for any viewer to take."[458] This DIY/Punk aesthetic eschews the formality of heteronormative paradigms in favor of scrappy, messy, and informal networks of community and creation. The intertwining, overlapping, and meandering nature of the various materials in this work create a patchwork of past, present, and future that converge in a celebratory installation where viewers can take a piece of history with them to create legacies of their own.

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https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/queer-houses-brooklyn-three-towns-breukelen-boswyck-and-midwout-during-41st-year-stonewall.

[457] "The Queer Houses of Brooklyn," LJ Roberts, accessed December 26, 2023, https://www.ljroberts.net/the-queer-houses-of-brooklyn.

[458] "The Queer Houses of Brooklyn," LJ Roberts, https://www.ljroberts.net/the-queer-houses-of-brooklyn.

Creating one's own legacy is clear in Kiyan Williams's response to the question posed by the curators "What are your dreams for liberation 100 years after Stonewall?":

> In June of 2069 I will be barbecuing on my farm co-op in Bed-Stuy, which is once again a predominately Black hood, surrounded by trans siblings and children, celebrating decades of sisterhood and solidarity, eating a fried fish sandwich, dancing with my trans grandchildren, reminiscing about the days I used to vogue down in the club and insisting that I, in fact, still got it! Laughter and love will abound. And the living will be easy.[459]

The "Care Networks" section of *NPYT* features community, care, and collectivity and emphasizes they are not only part of the past, or even the present, but rather something to look forward to in the future.

Installation Strategies—NPYT in Conversation with The Dinner Party

NPYT was installed in the galleries surrounding Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974–79; Figure 4.9), a monumental work of feminist art and the reason the Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum exists.[460] The installation's sheer size and amount of materials included made it difficult for the artist to store, and it finally found a permanent home at the Brooklyn Museum, where it will remain on view in perpetuity.[461] One major issue with the work is the accusation that it focuses solely on an essentialist notion of woman, which can largely be credited to second-wave feminism (i.e. white, heteronormative, cis-gendered, and privileged) of the 1970s when it was created. The

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[459] Kiyan Williams, "Artist Responses to the Legacy of the Stonewall Uprising," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 43.

[460] As told to me in a Zoom Interview with Carmen Hermo on December 28, 2023.

[461] For more on the work's controversies as well as traveling history see: Michael G. Kammen, *Visual Shock: A History of Art Controversies in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 2006): 317–325. For more on the founding of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum see: "About," Elizabeth A. Sacker Center for Feminist Art, accessed December 30, 2023, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/about.

most notorious aspect of the work is the dinner plates that resemble vulvar-like floral arrangements that rise from flat to three-dimensional as you move around the table. Chicago conceived of the installation as bringing women to the table, so to speak, and imagined a matriarchal retelling of history. Grand in both concept and design it is still considered emblematic of feminist art today. It is impossible to analyze the installation strategies of *NPYT* without taking into account their juxtaposition to *The Dinner Party*. Therefore, the visual and conceptual conversations between *The Dinner Party* (literally in the Center of the space) and *NPYT*, which surrounds it, opens up new and future-oriented narratives of what feminism can be.[462]

Feminism, and by extension feminist art, can take many forms, political agendas, and respond to many issues, policies, and practices; and that is why it is important to keep in mind its plurality (i.e. feminisms). The working methodology in Chicago's *The Dinner Party*—which was cooperative rather than collaborative and is discussed later in this section—and that of the curatorial collective and installation of *NPYT* is crucial to consider. Hermo told me that the curatorial collective considered the following in how to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of Stonewall,

> The Feminist Center, as we continue to exist and will exist in the future, we, of course, want a platform, multiple expansive narratives of what a feminist world could look like and what feminist methodologies in exhibition making could look like.[463]

If we think of feminisms' pasts, presents, and futures then we can begin to think about what *The Dinner Party* did for feminist art history in the 1970s and what *NPYT* did for

[462] As told to me in a Zoom Interview with Carmen Hermo on December 28, 2023.

[463] As told to me in a Zoom Interview with Carmen Hermo on December 28, 2023.

queer feminist art history in 2019 and beyond. How *The Dinner Party* and *NPYT* interact, together, in the Center for Feminist Art both physically and conceptually tells us something about how these past and present feminisms build toward queer, trans, feminist futures. Here, I think about how "Care speaks insistently of the potential to use infrastructures and institutions differently; to produce emancipatory social and ecological imaginaries through arts and culture and to decolonize minds and bodies and their support systems,"[464] which is to say how the curatorial collective of *NPYT* uses the Center for Feminist Art, positioned around Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, to expand the understanding of what feminist art, feminist methodologies, and feminist curating can be.

Since its creation there have been many and varied critical responses to *The Dinner Party* ranging from its populism to its essentialism, its lack of feminist collaboration to the ways it marginalized women of color, and whether or not it is an emblem of feminist art history. In her publication *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (1996), coinciding with an exhibition at UCLA's Hammer Museum, art historian Amelia Jones critically examines and unravels the various debates around the work to uncover the myriad forms of "celebration and excoriation" resituating it "within the broader context of feminist art practice and theory."[465] In her essay for the publication, Jones cautions the reader of (and by extension viewer of) *The Dinner Party* not to dismiss it outright. Rather, Jones calls for a careful re-reading of the work and does this primarily through the reviews and the critical responses by writers,

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[464] Krasny and Perry, "Introduction," in *Curating with Care*, 5.

[465] Amelia Jones, "Sexual Politics: Feminist Strategies, Feminist Conflicts, Feminist Histories," in *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, University of California, Los Angeles), exhibition catalog, 22–23.

scholars, and artists. Jones argues that *The Dinner Party* is in fact a very complicated and complex work in both theory and design that deserves to be read/viewed from all angles.

Jones pays careful attention to allegations of the work's essentialism, particularly from poststructuralist feminist theorists who favored moving away from direct representation of the female body and also the male gaze.[466] Jones's cites literary, film, and feminist scholar Diana Fuss's argument that essentialism's political or strategic value is determined by who practiced it, and Jones extends this further to also include when, where and how it is practiced.[467] Ultimately, Jones decides that Chicago's and other artists' essentialism "was a crucial component of 1970s identity politics: it enabled the development of a feminist politics of art and art history."[468] In light of what Chicago was doing with *The Dinner Party* it is imperative that there be a seat at the table for all sides of these fierce feminist debates to not only be heard but acknowledged and worked through within the movement.

The basis for essentialism within *The Dinner Party* resides in the work's central core or "cunt" imagery, as it is often referred to, and was utilized by Chicago and others in the 1970s. In "Female Imagery," (1973) Chicago and Miriam Schapiro—who co-directed the Feminist Art Program at California Institute of the Arts (1971–1974) and organized the important installation *Womanhouse* (1972; Figure 4.10) together—write the following about core imagery, "The woman artist, seeing herself as loathed, takes that very mark of her otherness and by asserting it as the hallmark of her iconography,

[466] Jones, "Sexual Politics," in *Sexual Politics*, 98.

[467] Jones, "Sexual Politics," in *Sexual Politics*, 99.

[468] Jones, "Sexual Politics," in *Sexual Politics*, 99.

establishes a vehicle by which to state the truth and beauty of her identity."[469] By marking their difference through this imagery woman artists were demanding their work be read through another lens and one outside of art history's male canon. Although Chicago and Schapiro do not mention Hannah Wilke in their essay as one of the artists to use this imagery, her artwork is another example in the abstracted vaginal gum forms seen stuck to Wilke's face, bare torso, and back in *S.O.S. Starification Object Series* (1974–82; Figure 4.11). This photographic work also operates within a 70s feminist paradigm because of Wilke's insistence on performing her female heterosexual identity for the camera. As her archive states, Wilke proclaimed herself as the author and subject of her own work, and was quite aware of her sexuality within the structure of the patriarchal male gaze at the same time insisting on her agency as a maker.[470] Alone, and partially nude in front of the camera, Wilke strikes sensual poses acknowledging her power as a woman. While the commonality between these works is the cunt imagery, their concerns are quite different. *The Dinner Party* is a conversation throughout time on the history of women's achievements and features women from a variety of different backgrounds and identities; whereas Wilke specifically focuses on herself and her own identity. Despite these differences, they both use essentialism strategically as a reclamation of women within the patriarchy.

These 1970s artists and artworks continue to be a source of inspiration for younger generations of artists as they work through and make contemporary the issues

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[469] Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, "Female Imagery," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 56.

[470] "Photographic Work," Hannah Wilke, accessed March 8, 2024, http://www.hannahwilke.com/id5.html.

addressed in second-wave feminist art. As an example, although it was not included in *NPYT*, A.K. Burns's and A.L. Steiner's queer porn video *Community Action Center (CAC)*—featured in the discussion of artworks in the *Trigger* exhibition in Chapter 3—queered the works of Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke, Ana Mendieta, among others. Burns and Steiner turn the gaze from male to queer through their intersectional lens of inclusivity and identities beyond the binaries. As an example, in *CAC*, Wilke's vaginal gum forms are repurposed as a vessel to metaphorically birth a fully formed person through a malleable clay mold, which may speak to one's rebirth with regards to gender and sexual identification beyond those to which they were assigned at birth. Rather than dismiss these artists and artworks wholesale, younger generations appropriate and update them to acknowledge the lineage and histories from which they come.

These contemporary concerns of younger generations of artists become clear through the juxtapositions between *NPYT* and *The Dinner Party*. Elektra KB's *Protest Sign IV* (2017; Figure 4.12) takes the form of a banner showing a large figure filling the top of the frame stabbing smaller hooded KKK members underneath the text "I Was Never Yours." Hermo discussed how the work was about eradicating fascism and the control of women's bodies, but in the context of *NPYT* could also be read conceptually as the stabbing out of essentialism in *The Dinner Party*.[471] In this dialogue between the two, we might consider the control of not just women's bodies but also the stabbing out of control of queer, trans, and people of color's bodies. Indeed, the curatorial collective noted the urgency of organizing this show around the latter group.[472] These folx are not

[471] As told to me in a Zoom Interview with Carmen Hermo on December 28, 2023.

[472] Hermo, "The Process," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 19.

only marginalized, but they are also demonized, pathologized, and their rights are effectively being stripped away with the onslaught of legislation in the U.S.[473] By foregrounding Black and brown and queer and trans people within the space of The Center for Feminist Art and also in juxtaposition to *The Dinner Party* the curators assert their right to not only exist but also to make audiences aware of their sacrifices and contributions to LGBTQ+ histories, to art histories, and to the history and legacy of Stonewall.

Critics have lambasted Chicago for her lack of representation of women of color and more specifically on how she represents them in *The Dinner Party*. Of the thirty-nine place settings at the table, only one was devoted to a Black woman—Sojourner Truth (Figure 4.13). Chicago was called out by writer Alice Walker for her representation of Truth through three faces, as opposed to the vulvar-like floral imagery of the other plates, leaving Walker to question if white women understand that Black women also have vaginas.[474] It does seem a strange choice for Chicago to have made with regards to Truth when almost all of the other plates represent the woman at the table with the vulvar-like floral imagery.[475] Also taking issue with representation, upon viewing the work, Estelle Chacon, a member of the Hispanic Women of the National Women's Political Caucus noticed that while several Hispanic women's names appear on the nine hundred and ninety-nine names on the porcelain floor beneath the table, there are no heroines from the

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[473] As referenced in Chapter 1 Introduction: Anticipatory Illuminations of the Future in this dissertation see: Cullen Peele, "Roundup of Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation Advancing in States across the Country," Human Rights Campaign, May 23, 2023, accessed January 11, 2024, https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/roundup-of-anti-lgbtq-legislation-advancing-in-states-across-the-country.

[474] Jones, "Sexual Politics," in *Sexual Politics*, 101.

[475] Although, Ethel Smyth's plate takes the shape of a three-dimensional piano, as she was a British composer.

"pre-conquest New World" at the table itself.[476] Most of the women at the table do not represent the diversity of women globally and thereby further underscoring the work as representational of white Western European and American feminism. Groups such as The Combahee River Collective and Third World Women Artists would expand the narrative around feminism. Their contributions were featured in the exhibition and sourcebook *We Wanted a Revolution Black Radical Women 1965–85* (2017) for the ten year anniversary of the founding of the Center for Feminist Art. That exhibition, like *NPYT*, reframes the narrative of feminist art history in relation to *The Dinner Party* because of its focus on marginalized groups within the feminist movement.

Another juxtaposition between *NPYT* and *The Dinner Party* was Kiyan Williams's work *Reflections* (2019; Figure 4.14). In this video, Williams's highlights and brings to life Jesse Harris, a gender-nonconforming artist, whose footage in Marlon Riggs's iconic *Tongues Untied* (1989) was only briefly featured after being cut from the final film.[477] An experimental documentary shown on PBS, Riggs's *Tongues Untied* featured the lives of Black gay men during the AIDS epidemic. By unearthing this documentation in Riggs's archives at Stanford University and including it in *Reflections*, Williams expanded on the identities of the men featured in the film by foregrounding other subjectivities, such as a gender non-conforming artist.[478] The installation in *NPYT* consists of a round video projection and mirror fragments, which reflect the scenes of the

[476] Jones, "Sexual Politics," in *Sexual Politics*, 100.

[477] "Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years after Stonewall," Brooklyn Museum, accessed January 24, 2024, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/stonewall; and "Reflections in BlaQ," Kiyan Williams, accessed January 24, 2024: https://www.kiyanwilliams.com/reflections.

[478] "Nobody Promised You Tomorrow," Brooklyn Museum, accessed January 24, 2024, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/stonewall.

video as well as the viewers who look at it.[479] Of his work, Williams has said, "as artists we get to participate in creating new meaning, of imagining otherwise futures. We mine and make tangible the voices and presences that exist beyond, below, or between hegemony."[480] This reflective intertwining between the video installation and the viewer created new meaning and imagined futures for lives erased and left out of earlier histories, such as the life of a gender-nonconforming artist of color. In their review of the exhibition Keijaun Thomas wrote, "While watching the film, I find myself listening and looking at the other works of art in the periphery through the fragmented pieces of mirror."[481] The potential was there for a viewer to see *The Dinner Party* refracted through the lens (both literally and figuratively) of Williams's *Reflections*, leading them to reflect on and think about the subjectivities excluded from Chicago's work.

We can read the viewer's place between the installations of *NPYT* and *The Dinner Party* through the lens of Halberstam's "transgender look," which is a crossing of boundaries between both space and time and the histories, social relations, and religions that collide between viewer and artwork.[482] Here the term transgender is used to explain how the viewer approaches a queer artwork both in terms of the non-linear, disjointed use of time, but also in the physical space the viewer must negotiate while viewing it. Suspended between the two installations, the viewer must navigate the distance between

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[479] Lindsay C. Harris, "Heritage," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 28.

[480] "Conclusion: Haunting the Future—Amaryllis R. Flowers and Kiyan Williams in Conversation," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 51.

[481] Keijaun Thomas and Egon Suds, "I Don't Want to Leave the Sand, but I Want to Leave the Island: Reflecting on *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years after Stonewall*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY," *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 6, no. 3 (2019): 238.

[482] Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies Subcultural Lives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 171–173, ProQuest Ebook Central.

the works with a literal wall between them, but also the distance of history and time understood in the context of essentialist, second-wave feminism and a contemporary, future-oriented and utopian queer and trans feminism.

Another crucial point to consider is whether or not *The Dinner Party* was effective "feminist" collaboration in design and execution. Often, when the work is discussed and written about, Chicago receives the credit, despite the hundreds of collaborators that helped to realize the project. Jones devotes an entire section of her essay to this conundrum, writing, "As all of the participants in the project have stressed (including Chicago herself), she controlled the studio, determined the design of the runners and banners, and designed and painted the plates," but Chicago also carefully noted the contributors to each part of the project and recognized them in both the work and in the book about *The Dinner Party*.[483] Chicago "controlled" the entire process from start to finish and thus her name is most obviously emblazoned on the work as its creator. Jones however takes the approach that this is not critical of Chicago because feminism does not necessarily mean letting go of the authorial voice, as Chicago saw the structure of her studio as "cooperative" rather than "collaborative.[484] While it is easy in hindsight to point fingers and claim wrongdoing on the part of Chicago for her seemingly less-than-collaborative efforts at the time, it is also important to consider Chicago's point of view. Feminism is many things and does not adhere to a specific structure, ideology, or set of concerns, making it rather ironic that *The Dinner Party*'s critics (feminists among them)

[483] Jones, "Sexual Politics," in *Sexual Politics*, 105.

[484] Jones, "Sexual Politics," in *Sexual Politics*, 105–106.

want to pigeon-hole the work according to what they think feminism is or ought to be and how a work like this should or should not operate.

Nonetheless, and in contrast to Chicago's singular authority over the design and execution of *The Dinner Party*, the curatorial collective of *NPYT* made every effort to collaborate with one another and relinquish any kind of hierarchy between them. However, as Hermo noted in some cases not every aspect of organizing could be equally shared. As an example, it did not make sense for staff in departments outside the traditional "curatorial" staff (i.e. Hermo and Rickard) to learn how to use The Museum System (TMS), which is collections database software, or to deal with the registrars regarding loan forms. However, Hermo did say that a "bonus" person would be copied on all correspondence to learn the process and also provide checks and balances.[485] Therefore, they made decisions that were inclusive but also mindful of efficiency within the museum structure. They were also attentive to the workload of staff outside the curatorial department, as those staff members, Cohen Ristorucci, Harris, and Zelaya still had to do their regular work plus the work of the collective.[486] As noted earlier, the curatorial collective also worked by consensus, including which artists were selected and why in order to fit within the four thematic sections of the exhibition including where works would be installed in the space.

While the installation (read layout) of *The Dinner Party* is often discussed, its curatorial context is not. Artist, curator, and writer, Sally Brown explores this aspect of Chicago's practice in her article "Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* The Curatorial

[485] As told to me in a Zoom Interview with Carmen Hermo on December 28, 2023.

[486] As told to me in a Zoom Interview with Carmen Hermo on December 28, 2023.

Context" (2020). Brown conducted extensive research on the work including the review of the original exhibition manual, which emphasized the importance of the viewer's experience, particularly accessibility and interactivity, as Chicago was already attuned to wheelchair access for viewers' long before the American Disabilities Act (1990).[487] Brown writes in detail about how every aspect of the installation was overseen by Chicago—with the manual consulted every time it was shown or it would not be shown in a space that could not accommodate the requirements—including the placement of banners, so that viewers walked through them from the outside world to the space inside; how the angle of every light was diagramed so as to emphasize the place settings on the table; texts were to be translated in places where English was not the majority language; among other considerations.[488] We can understand from Brown's descriptions of the installation manual that Chicago paid careful attention to the viewer and their specific experiences with the work, taking care in the thoughtful presentation of it so that each individual had a positive experience with it.

According to Brown, Chicago designed her own plans for a permanent installation of the work, not all of which ended up in the Sackler Center, and offers the following description from the architect Susan Rodriguez,

> The open corners at the vertices allow glimpses into the space from the changing exhibits that envelop the gallery, provoking consideration of contemporary feminist art in the context of the movement's legacy. These glimpses actively challenge preconceptions established by the Museum's adjacent period rooms.[489]

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[487] Sally Brown, "Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* The Curatorial Context," *Woman's Art Journal*, 41, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2020): 21–22.

[488] Brown, "Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*," *Woman's Art Journal*, 22.

[489] Brown, "Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*," *Woman's Art Journal*, 25.

To this I would also add not just the museum's surrounding period rooms, but also the rotating, temporary exhibitions in the Sackler Center itself, such as *NPYT*. As Hermo told me, one of the delightful things about installing *NPYT* in the Center for Feminist Art galleries was the conversation that took place between it and *The Dinner Party*. In addition to the works in *NPYT* viewable from inside the installation, there were others of course on the surrounding walls that were still in dialogue. The group of paintings by David Antonio Cruz (Figure 4.15) in the "Heritage" section stand out in that they too are an homage—to transwomen of color who were murdered in 2017 and 2018.[490] As Lindsay C. Harris writes in the introduction to the section,

> The artists in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow* are both history-keepers and history-makers, who through speculative visioning, aesthetic conjuring, and monumental display, call into being ancestors–or transcestors–that paved the way for us today, sometimes at the cost of their lives.[491]

Cruz honors these women in lush portraits staging them in nonspecific rooms with chandeliers and other decorative patterns as their backdrops. Some of the women lounge on settees dressed in opulent furs, statement necklaces, and cascading skirts. Others sit upright or are only seen from the waist up. The blue shades of hands, arms, and a face seen in the work play with the language often leveled at people of color (i.e. "alien") and are here subverted to show the beauty, strength, and fierceness of these women.[492] The woman honored in the painting *iwanttobeseeningreen,wouldn'tbecaughtdeadinred* (2018; Figure 4.16) pops from a bright pink background her elegantly clasped hands framing her

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[490] Lindsay C. Harris, "Heritage," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 29.

[491] Harris, "Heritage," in *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow*, 27.

[492] "David Antonio Cruz: When the Children Come Home," ICA Philadelphia, accessed January 19, 2024, https://icaphila.org/exhibitions/david-antonio-cruz-when-the-children-come-home/.

face, her fur tightly hugging her neck. Her eyes look distant, almost cold, perhaps she is lost in thought. *runlittlewhitegirl* (2016–17; Figure 4.17) features three women against a color block of white and light blue, all posing together, clinging to one another. Given Cruz's recent monographic exhibition at the ICA Philadelphia whose works focus on chosen family, the tight grouping of six works in *NPYT* hung at varying levels are also reminiscent of family portraits and stand as a testament to the Black transwomen whose lives have been lost to violence. Their inclusion looks towards the future of feminism as one that incorporates trans stories and voices.

Installing the works also gave the curators a moment to focus on the furniture that would be utilized by viewers. Museum furniture can often be stiff, aesthetically uninteresting, and a rarity in galleries.[493] The curatorial collective not only commissioned the furniture for *NPYT* they also made it a direct focus. Hermo talked about how they were obsessed with the color schemes for the show, with lavender being the highlight color of the furniture, and despite not having a large budget for the exhibition made the furniture a priority especially in the community gallery *Our House*, which included a couch.[494]

In centering the viewer in the space, the curatorial collective not only cared for their audience by offering them a space to rest and reflect, but they also incorporated the furniture directly into the installation making it not ancillary to but rather an active part of the exhibition. Here we can think about Halberstam's notion of "Queer space" which

[493] One of the very first things I remember learning at CCS Bard was from Marcia Tucker regarding seating in galleries, especially for video works. She recalled sitting on the floor to watch a video and not being able to get back up having her partner and daughter help her to her feet.

[494] As told to me in a Zoom Interview with Carmen Hermo on December 28, 2023.

"refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics."[495] More specifically, *NPYT*'s use of space within the Center for Feminist Art, emphasizes queer and trans lives in the midst of a Center that was founded for a work created during second-wave feminism known for excluding those particular identities.

After all, as Hermo said of the busy installation, "I felt like in the space it really gave that sense of like things are on the ceiling. Things are on the floor. Things are in a corner, and so like that just riotous kind of approach."[496] Stonewall's legacy breathed new life into the Center for Feminist Art as the riotous approach of the installation mimicked the uprising itself.

Conclusion

The curators of *NPYT* enacted Cuban American queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz's utopian futurity through their political engagement, advocacy for their community, and collaborative efforts. In asking themselves, and the artists, to look beyond the *here* and *now* and instead to a *then* and *there*, they offered an example of Muñoz's "flight plan for a collective political becoming" born out of their "shared critical dissatisfaction" at the current state of the corporatization of Stonewall 50 years later.[497] What they enacted was a forward-thinking, critical, curatorial methodology that advances the field far beyond star curators and blockbuster exhibitions to a much more

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[495] Halberstam, "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies," in *A Queer Time and Place*, 20.

[496] As told to me in a Zoom Interview with Carmen Hermo on December 28, 2023.

[497] Muñoz, "Conclusion: 'Take Ecstasy with Me,'" in *Cruising Utopia*, 189.

collectively-focused endeavor that favors collaboration and artist-driven projects. By situating *NPYT* in the future, and not the past, or even the present, and standing in opposition to the corporatizing of Stonewall, the curators are part of a curatorial legacy that, in the words of Smith, "commits curating to continuing its long, and radical process of *unconcealing* art precisely by making public, in exhibitions, the concealments that commercial, official and institutional contemporaneity imposes upon it—the demands of globalized consumption, social conformity, and identitarian fundamentalism."[498] Even further, by grounding their exhibition specifically in the rallying cry of a black, transgender woman the curators reveal the whitewashing of Stonewall's history by positioning the diminishing tomorrow of Johnson's phrase into a future of possibilities for queer and trans lives.

[498] Emphasis in original. Smith, "Curatorial Practice Now," in *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, 245.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: OTHER SPACES, OTHER PLACES

To invoke artist and curator Nayland Blake in their catalogue essay for the exhibition *In a Different Light* (1995), *Queering the Museum: Utopian Futurity in Contemporary Exhibitions* is not an end point, but rather a beginning.[499] In addition to being a starting point for future research and thought, hopefully this dissertation is also a *doing*, as Cuban American queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz argues for in *Cruising Utopia*: *The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) and art historian, curator, and critic Alpesh Kantilal Patel posits in *Productive Failure: Writing Queer Transnational South Asian Art Histories* (2017).[500] The emphasis, as Patel points out, is on the plural, *histories*, or in this dissertation not histories per se but rather constellations.[501] Throughout, I have questioned how queer curating and queer exhibition strategies in mainstream institutions either work outside dominant modes of production or align with them; how these strategies are either productive and/or present limitations; and how they interrogate or reinforce traditional paradigms within an institutional setting. These questions have led to more questions and likely further inquiry beyond the limitations of this project.

The doing of this project also lies in its future, which is always on the horizon and something to reach towards. Those glimmers of hope we see in the case study exhibitions

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[499] Nayland Blake, "Curating *In A Different Light*," in *In A Different Light Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*, eds. Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder, and Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995), exhibition catalog, 42.

[500] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), 1; and Alpesh Kantilal Patel, *Productive failure: writing queer transnational South Asian art histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 2, EBSCOhost.

[501] Patel, *Productive failure:* 1.

are queer architectures to build on as a way forward. As political philosopher and educator Richard Noble draws our attention to in "Introduction//The Utopian Impulse in Contemporary Art," (2009) the idea of utopia, "suggests through a pun on the ancient Greek words for 'no place', a place imagined but not realized, the 'shining city on the hill' that illuminates the limitations of the world in which we actually live, the telescope that allows us to grasp the 'nearest nearness'."[502] Here, Noble invokes German philosopher Ernst Bloch from *Principles of Hope* (1954–59), quoted at the beginning of the text, who was also Muñoz's interlocuter in *Cruising Utopia*. *Trigger*, *Tag*, and *NPYT* are those telescopes that allow us to imagine the closeness of a world in which LGBTQ+ lives flourish. Each exhibition is a peek into another world, one different from our own, but nonetheless alive and well, if only for a brief moment. For a moment, the utopian 'no place' exists in real time in those museums as heterotopias, other spaces, other places. We feel their warmth, their touch, their illumination of a future place that does not yet exist, but which we can only imagine one day will. The curators, artists, and institutions are not just waiting for it but are actively in that moment doing something toward a future.

Ultimately, what these exhibitions *do* is create community for the artists in the exhibitions and to the publics who come to see them. By foregrounding and engaging their audiences, the curators of *Trigger*, *Tag*, and *NPYT* provide a place for gathering, looking, and playing in institutions that have not always welcomed, or felt welcoming to, LGBTQ+ folx or people of color. It is a testament to the curators that they create spaces for furries who feel safe within the walls of the ICA, audiences who keep coming back to

[502] Richard Noble, ed. "Introduction//The Utopian Impulse in Contemporary Art," in *Utopias* (London: Whitechapel and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 2009), 12.

the New Museum for *Trigger*'s performance programs, and a change in museum policy that allow a Stonewall veteran to feel welcome coming through the doors of the Brooklyn Museum. In every case study exhibition at least one, if not more, institutional policies changed, either temporarily or permanently, because of the exhibitions. It is perhaps easy now to dismiss institutional critique as passé because of its canonization within institutions, but these exhibitions prove that a radical edge still exists to create change within them.

Highlighting these three exhibitions in New York and Philadelphia speaks to the network of artists and curators across the region who work together to make the (art) world a better place. The overlaps between them are apparent—Nayland Blake curated *Tag* but their work as an artist was also included in the exhibition *Trigger*; A.K. Burns's work was included in *Tag* and also, along with A.L. Steiner, in *Trigger*; and Tourmaline's and Sasha Wortzel's film was included in both *Trigger*, as an excerpt, and *NPYT*; to name only a few connections between the exhibitions. As Margo Cohen Ristorucci told me in relation to *NPYT*, "The artists kept on coming up to us and saying I'm in a show with all my friends…many of these artists had been in queer community with each other for decades and then were showing work engaging similar themes."[503] In a queer time and place, to invoke queer theorist Jack Halberstam, these three exhibitions were in conversation with one another both temporally and spatially.[504]

[503] As told to me in a Zoom interview with Margo Cohen Ristorucci and Lauren A. Zelaya on August 31, 2023.

[504] Jack Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), ProQuest Ebook Central.

In her essay, "Beyond the Era of the Object Towards an Aesthetics of Anti-Commodification," aesthetic and literary scholar and philosopher Cecilia Sjöholm argues,

> If art objects are to impinge on our apprehension, if they are to add to our sense of community and solidarity, they must be displayed in a way that allows for these possibilities to come forward. Certainly, the unstoppable forces of commodification and fetishization may undermine every attempt of art to appear as critical or political. On the other hand, a critical, intelligent and engaged mode of display may very well undo the commodity and hand us back the art.[505]

Extending Sjöholm's argument, I posit that through a "critical, intelligent, and engaged mode of display" *Tag*, *Trigger*, and *NPYT* "add to our sense of community and solidarity" by reframing institutional critique through a queer phenomenological lens. In doing so, the exhibitions and artworks avoid the very commodification and fetishization of the art object that is so prevalent in museums (particularly through giftshops). As a collective whole, the artworks in these exhibitions beckon viewers towards them asking to be read closely and slowly. By slowing down and engaging with the objects (for example through Halberstam's "transgender look"), viewers circumvent the normal channels through which art is often consumed—through the lens of one's phone, mindlessly scrolling through digital images, etc.[506]

The hope of this dissertation is that I have illuminated for the reader queer curatorial strategies for exhibitions that do not rely on the status quo, but rather push their institutions above and beyond. As museum director, curator, and educator Johanna

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[505] Cecilia Sjöholm, "Beyond the Era of the Object Towards and Aesthetics of Anti-Commodification," in *Curating and Politics Beyond the Curator: Initial Reflections*, eds. Heidi Bale Amundsen and Gerd Elise Mörland (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2015), 107–108.

[506] Jack Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), ProQuest Ebook Central.ie

Burton pointed out to me it is about "creating an institution that you want to inhabit not the one that you do."[507] And as Nayland Blake told me, "I think that's a great thing that curating can do is to like help people to really see."[508] And, Margo Cohen Ristorucci of *NPYT* noted, "I think we also achieved a lot because of that, because we were dreaming and having fun like the joy was really integral into the process, like, I think we were able to do things."[509] While there is a seriousness to curating, it is also about having fun and playing, especially with(in) the institution. Creating, helping people to see, and dreaming queerly makes a great recipe for an exhibition.

[507] As told to me in a Zoom interview on June 28, 2022.

[508] As told to me in a Zoom interview on April 1, 2021.

[509] As told to me in a Zoom interview on August 31, 2023.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS FOR CURATORS

1. Can you talk about how the idea for the exhibition came together?
    a. How long was the process from start to finish?
    b. Were there any roadblocks?
        i. Securing of loans, etc.
2. What was it like working with(in) the museum?
    a. Any highlights, issues, roadblocks, etc. that you don't mind sharing.
3. How did you select the artists for inclusion in the exhibition?
    a. What was the criteria?
    b. Were any of the works commissioned?
    c. Were any of the works acquired for the collection?
4. Can you talk a little bit about the installation of the exhibition?
    a. Were you limited in what you could do in the space (rearranging/painting walls, placement of works, etc.)
    b. As my dissertation revolves around the idea of queer curating how do you think space and installation relate to this (I'm thinking about this in relation to Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*).
    c. How can/does a queer exhibition operate differently from a normative one, especially in relation to its installation?
5. Can you talk a little bit about the programming – both educational and public related to this exhibition?
    a. Were there any programs you wanted to do and couldn't?

6. Can you talk a little bit about how the exhibition was funded?
    a. What kind of funding did you apply for?
7. Can you discuss the PR/Marketing aspects?
    a. How and to whom was the show marketed?
    b. What was the press coverage like in comparisons to other shows at the Museum?
    c. Overall, how was the exhibition received by both the press and the public?
8. What was the overall attendance for the show?

APPENDIX B

FIGURES

Figure 1.1 Betsy Damon, installation view of *Ancestors*, 1978. Installation/performance, dimensions variable. Courtesy of https://whitecolumns.org.

Figure 1.2 Les Petites Bonbons, *Dayglo Cockprint*, 1973. Tempera and stickers on cardboard, 7 x 11 in. Courtesy of https://archive.newmuseum.org.

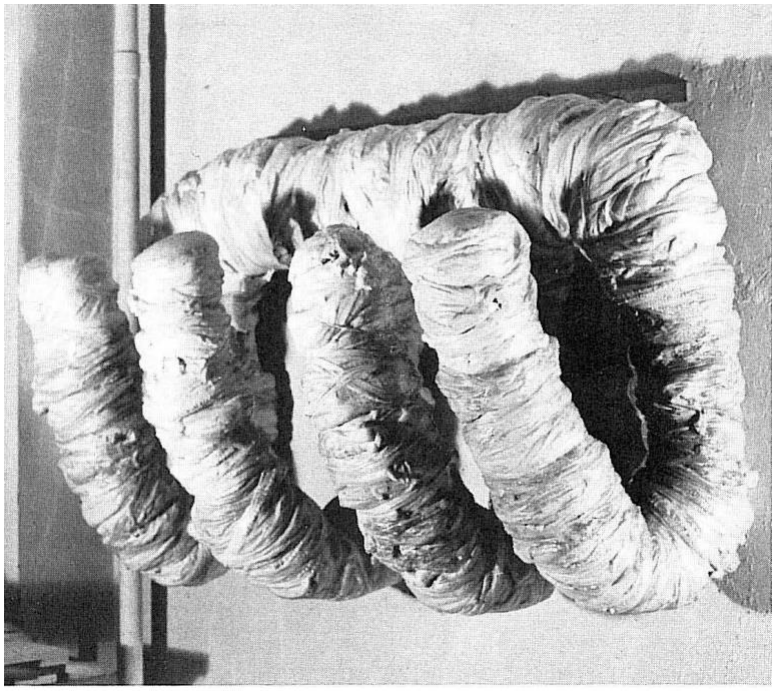

Figure 1.3 Harmony Hammond, *Grasping Affection*, 1981–1982. Cloth, wood, foam rubber, gesso, latex rubber, rhoplex, and acrylic, 42 x 72 x 30 in. Courtesy of *Extended Sensibilities* catalogue.

Figure 1.4 Dara Birnbaum, still from *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*, 1978–79. Video, color sound, 5:50 minutes. Courtesy of https://www.moma.org.

Figure 1.5 Mary Kelly, installation views of *Post-Partum Document*, 1973–1979. Mixed media, dimensions variable, Courtesy of http://www.x-traonline.org

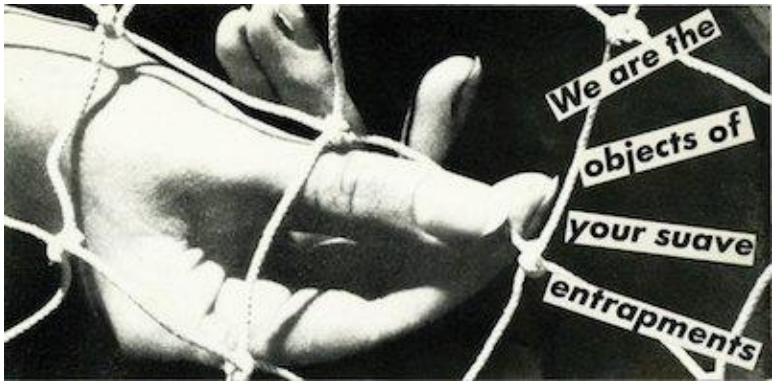

Figure 1.6 Barbara Kruger, *We are the objects of your suave entrapments*, 1983. Photograph and type on paper, 4 ½ x 1 9/16 in. Courtesy of https://lesoeuvres.pinaultcollection.com.

Figure 1.7 Gregg Bordowitz, still from *some aspect of a shared lifestyle*, 1986. Video, color, sound, 22:23 min. Courtesy of https://whitehotmagazine.com.

Figure 1.8 ACT UP, installation view of *Let the Record Show…*, 1987. New Museum of Contemporary Art. November 20, 1987–January 24, 1988. Courtesy of https://archive.newmuseum.org.

Figure 1.9 Installation view of *Bad* Girls. New Museum of Contemporary Art. January 14–February 27, 1994. Courtesy of https://archive.newmuseum.org.

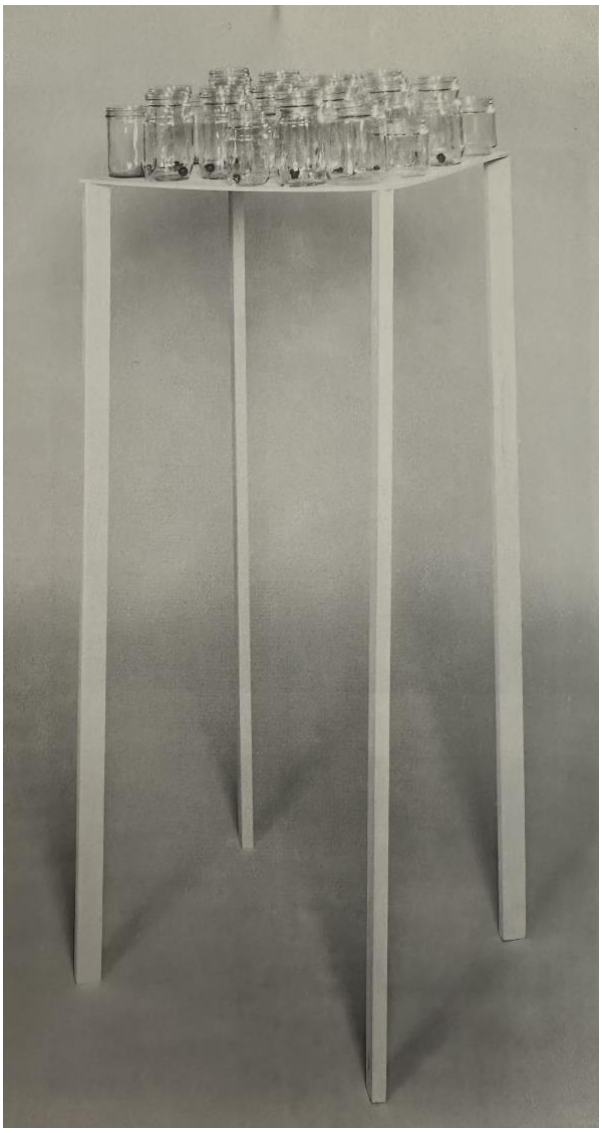

Figure 1.10 Tony Feher, *Improbable Moment*, 1993. Jars, marbles, wood, paint, screws, 53 ½ x 25 x 25 in. Courtesy of *In a Different Light* catalogue.

Figure 1.11 Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)*, 1989. Photographic silkscreen on vinyl, 112 x 112 in. Courtesy of https://www.thebroad.org.

Figure 1.12 Nancy Grossman, *Head*, 1968. Carved wood, leather, 17 ¼ in.
Courtesy of https://collection.bampfa.berkeley.edu.

Figure 1.13 Alejandro Diaz, *Back in 5 Minutes*, 2003. Cardboard and wig, 24 x 24 in. Courtesy of https://www.maurareilly.com.

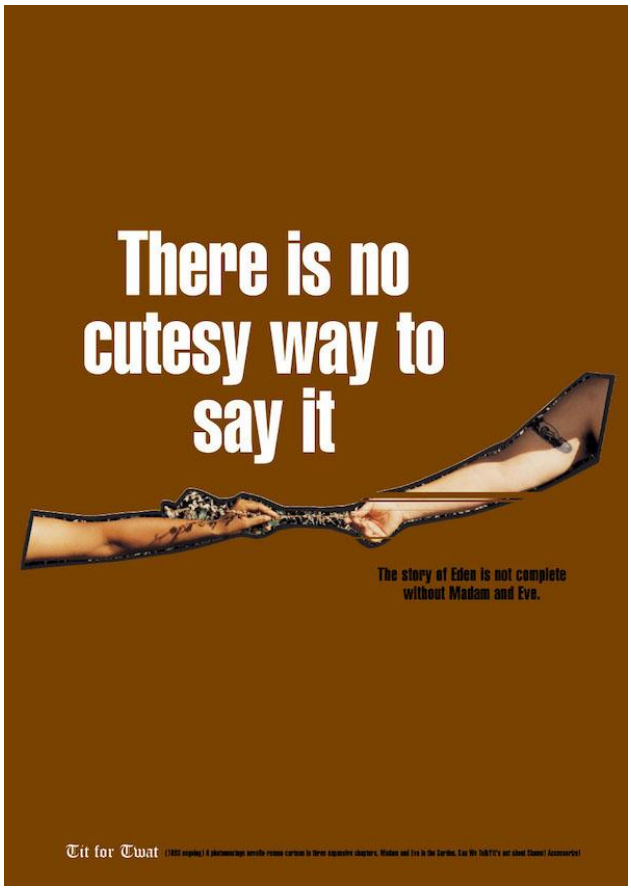

Figure 1.14 Kaucyila Brooke, *There Is No Cutesy Way to Say It* from the *Tit for Twat* series, 2003. Digital print, 34 x 23 in. Courtesy of https://www.maurareilly.com.

Figure 1.15 Lyle Ashton Harris, *Better Days #4*, 2002. Unique cross-process Polaroid, 33 x 21 ½ in. Courtesy of https://www.maurareilly.com.

Figure 1.16 Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 8 ft. x 7 ft. 8 in. Courtesy of https://www.moma.org.

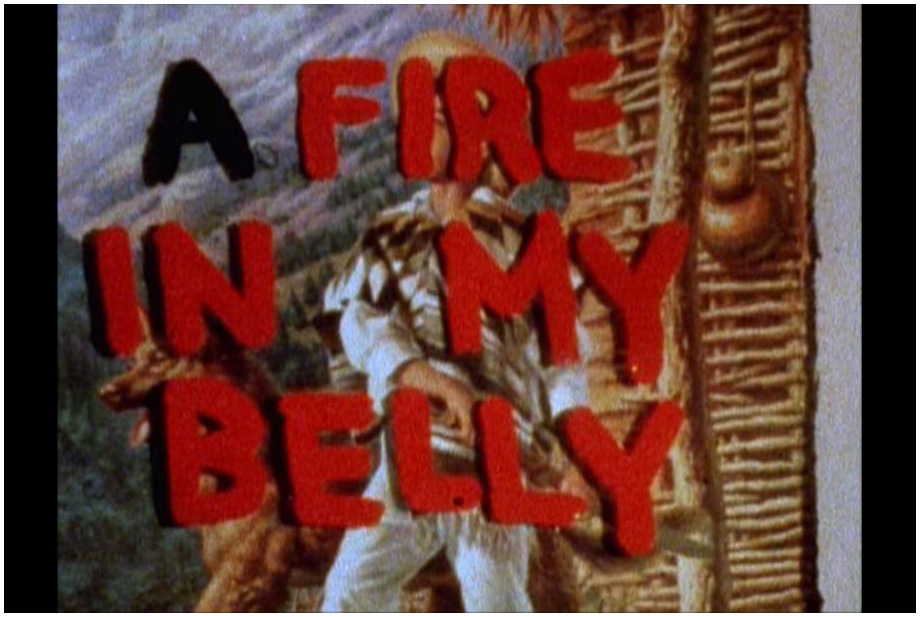

Figure 1.17 David Wojnarowicz, still from *A Fire in My Belly (Film in Progress)* and *A Fire in My Belly (Excerpt)*, 1986–87. Super 8mm film, black-and-white and color, silent, 13:06 min. and 7 min., transferred to video. Courtesy of https://whitney.org.

Figure 1.18 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Goat's Horn with Red*, 1945. Pastel on paperboard, 27 7/8 x 31 11/16 in. Courtesy of https://www.si.edu.

Figure 1.19 Andy Warhol, *Camouflage Self-Portrait (Red)*, 1986. Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen on canvas, 80 ½ x 76 in. Courtesy of https://philamuseum.org.

Figure 1.20 Man Ray, *Rrose Sélavy (Marcel Duchamp)*, 1923. Gelatin silver print, 8 11/16 x 6 15/16 in. Courtesy of https://www.artsy.net.

Figure 1.21 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1913. Porcelain urinal, 12 × 15 × 18 in. Courtesy of https://philamuseum.org.

1.22 Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.* or *La Jaconde*, 1919. Colored reproduction, heightened with pencil and white gouache, 4 x 7 in. Courtesy of https://www.nortonsimon.org.

Figure 2.1 A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, installation view of *Community Action Center*, 2010–2017, installation with mixed mediums, dimensions variable (left), and Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel, installation view of *Lost in the Music*, 2017, HD video installation, sound, color, 4:20 minutes (right). Courtesy of https://archive.newmuseum.org/.

Figure 2.2 A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, still from *Community Action Center*, 2010. SD single-channel video, 71:00 min. Courtesy of *Trigger* catalogue.

Figure 2.3 Hannah Wilke, *Early Box and Six Phallic and Excremental Sculptures*, 1960-63. Ceramic and plaster of Paris, dimensions variable. Courtesy of https://whitehotmagazine.com/.

Figure 2.4 A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, still from *Community Action Center*, 2010. SD single-channel video, 71:00 min. Courtesy of https://art.uga.edu/

Figure 2.5 A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner, still from *Community Action Center*, 2010. SD single-channel video, 71:00 min. Courtesy of https://akburns.net/.

Figure 2.6 Jack Smith, still from *Normal Love*, 1963–1965, 16mm film (color), 80:00 min. Courtesy of https://walkerart.org/.

Figure 2.7 Carolee Schneemann, still from *Meat* Joy, 1964. 16mm film, color, sound, 10:35 min. Courtesy of https://moma.org.

Figure 2.8 Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel, installation view of *Lost in the Music*, 2017. HD video installation, sound, color, 4:20 min. Courtesy of https://archive.newmuseum.org/.

Figure 2.9 TT Takemoto, still from *Looking for Jiro*, 2011. Digital video, single-channel, sound, 5:45 min. Courtesy of https://ttakemoto.com/.

Figure 2.10 Diamond Stingily, installation view of *Kaas 4C*, 2017. Kanekalon hair and barrettes, dimensions variable. Courtesy of https://archive.newmuseum.org/.

Figure 2.11 The House of Ladosha, installation view of *Untitled (a carry)*, 2017. Vinyl, dimensions variable. Courtesy of https://archive.newmuseum.org/.

Figure 2.12 Diamond Stingily, documentation of *Kaas 4C*, 2017. Kanekalon hair and barrettes, dimensions variable. Courtesy of https://archive.newmuseum.org/.

Figure 3.1 Documentation of *Nayland Blake: Crossing Object (inside Gnomen)*, 2017. Performance. Courtesy of https://archive.newmuseum.org.

Figure 3.2 Tommy Bruce, *Kris & Mouse*, 2016. Archival inkjet print, 36 x 30 in. Courtesy of https://ellsworthgallery.com.

Figure 3.3 Tommy Bruce, *Football gear photoshoot*, 2013. Archival inkjet print, 20 x 30 in. Courtesy of https://ellsworthgallery.com.

Figure 3.4 Robert Yang, installation view of “Radiator 2 Collection,” 2017 (left). Video games, PC, and monitor. Courtesy of https://icaphila.org.

Figure 3.5 Fred Wilson, *Guarded View*, 1991. Wood, paint, steel, and fabric, dimensions variable. Courtesy of https://whitney.org.

Figure 3.6 Dusty Shoulders, installation view of *Untitled (Masc for Mascara or Man. I Feel Like a Woman)*, 2017. Foraged textile, promotional attire, papier-mâché, and chain, dimensions variable. *Untitled (Poly Pocket or Hanky Panky)*, 2012/2017. Recycled denim, hankies, disco detritus, kindling, and costume jewelry, dimensions variable. *Untitled (Selfie Toga or I Woke Up Like This)*, 2015. Photo printed fabric, costume jewelry, and feathered felt hat, dimensions variable. Courtesy of https://icaphila.org.

Figure 3.7 Cupid Ojala, installation view of *Kelly the Cub Scout*, 2017. Twenty-one C-print photographs, video, color, sound, 2:26 min. Courtesy of https://iacphila.org.

Figure 3.8 K8 Hardy, still from *Express Looks (Outfitumentary)*, 2016. HD video, color, sound, 16:49 min. edition 1/5. Courtesy of https://artforum.com.

Figure 3.9 Buzz Slutsky, still from *Clothes Feelings*, 2016. Video, color, sound, 7:43 min. Courtesy of https://www.buzzslutzky.com/.

Figure 3.10 A.K. Burns, installation view of *Living Room*, 2017. Synced two-channel HD video, 5.1 sound, color, 36:00 min. *A Skeleton Reclining*, 2017. Wood, metal coils, plastic, webbing, underglow, topping soil, foil-wrapped hard candy, and resin, 37 x 54 ¼ x 35 in. *Corporeal Soil*, 2017. Topping soil, foil-wrapped hard candy, and resin, four parts each, 8 x 15 x 15 in. Courtesy of https://icaphila.org.

Figure 3.11 Nica Ross, installation view of *noo reality = a gayme*, 2016. Playable gayme installation, video, color, sound, 10:07 min. Courtesy of https://icaphila.org.

Figure 3.12 Sharang Biswas (Game Design), Sewta Mohapatra (Visuals), documentation of *Feast*, 2017. Playable game. Courtesy of https://sharangbiswas.myportfolio.com.

Figure 3.13 Contents of *Tag* catalogue. Courtesy of the author.

Figure 4.1 Lindsay C. Harris (front row far left in green jumpsuit) with the Brooklyn Museum's InterseXtions teens. Courtesy of https://www.teenvogue.com.

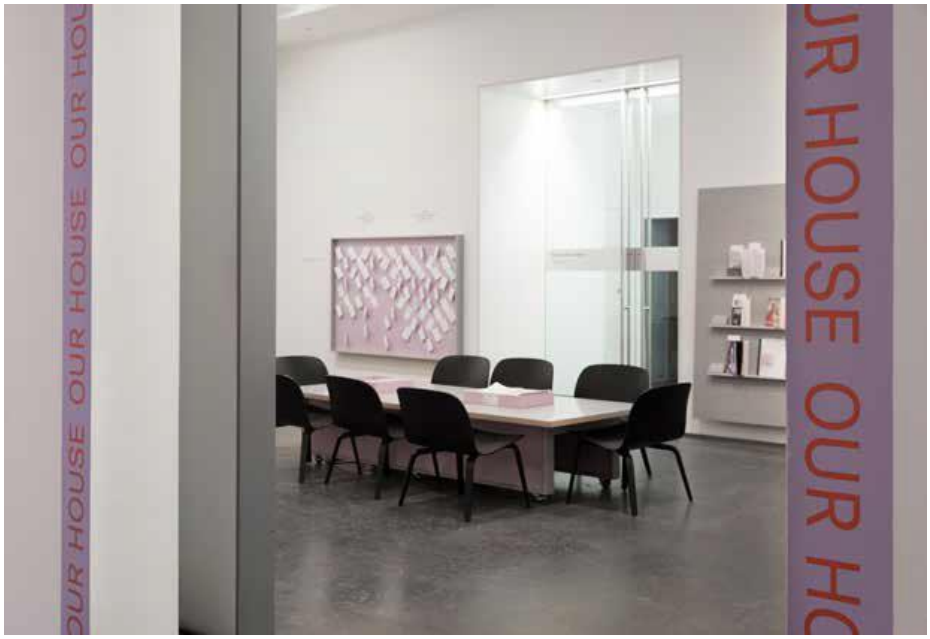

Figure 4.2 Installation view of *Our House. Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall.* Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum. May 3—December 8, 2019. Courtesy of *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow* catalogue.

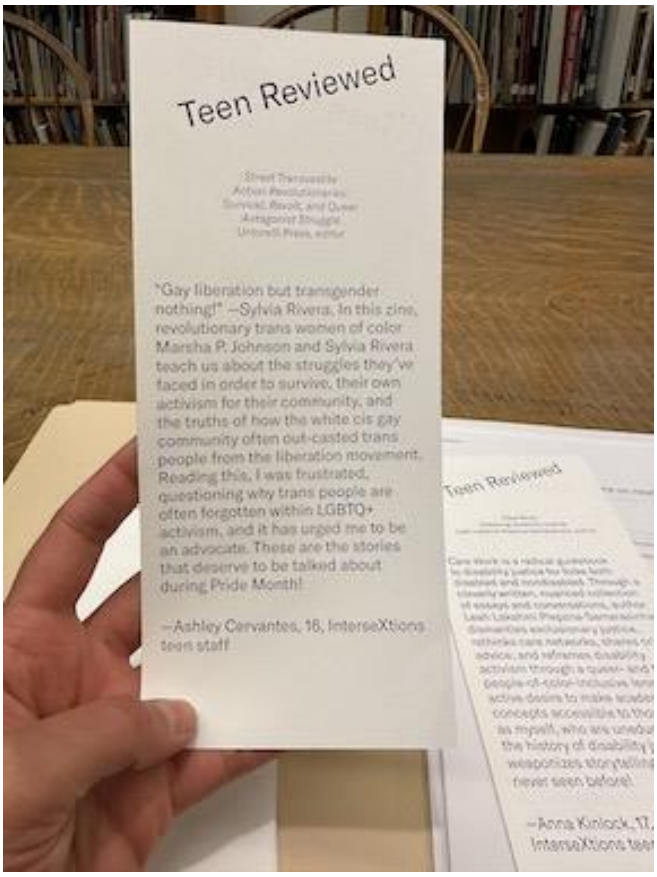

Figure 4.3 Documentation of InterseXtions teen book review of *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*. Image taken by the author in the Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives.

Figure 4.4 Jeffery Gibson, *BECAUSE ONCE YOU ENTER MY HOUSE IT BECOMES OUR HOUSE*, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, glass beads, and artificial sinew inset into wood frame, 82 x 74 x 2 ½ in. Courtesy of https://www.brooklynmuseum.org.

Figure 4.5 Elle Pérez, *Untitled (Kirsten)*, 2015/2019. Archival pigment print, 32 x 40 in. Courtesy of https://www.brooklynmuseum.org.

Figure 4.6 Elle Pérez, *Untitled (Lineysha)*, 2014. Archival pigment print, 20 x 25 in. Courtesy of *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow* catalogue.

Figure 4.7 Morgan Bassichis, Anna Betbeze, TM Davy, DonChristian Jones, Michi Ilona Osato, and Una Aya Osato, installation view of *Lavender Hill Historical Society*, 2019. Mixed media, dimensions variable. Courtesy of *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow* catalogue.

Figure 4.8 LJ Roberts, *The Queer Houses of Brooklyn in the Three Towns of Breukelen, Boswyck, and Midwout during the 41st Year of the Stonewall Era (based on a 2010 drawing by Daniel Rosza Lang/Levitsky with 24 illustrations by Buzz Slutzky on printed pin-back buttons)*, 2011. Poly-fill, acrylic, rayon, Lurex, wool, polyester, cotton, lamé, sequins, and blended fabrics with printed pin-back buttons, 13 x 114 x 108 in. Courtesy of *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow* catalogue.

Figure 4.9 Judy Chicago, *The Dinner* Party, 1974–79. Ceramic, porcelain, textile, 576 × 576 in. Courtesy of https://www.brooklynmuseum.org.

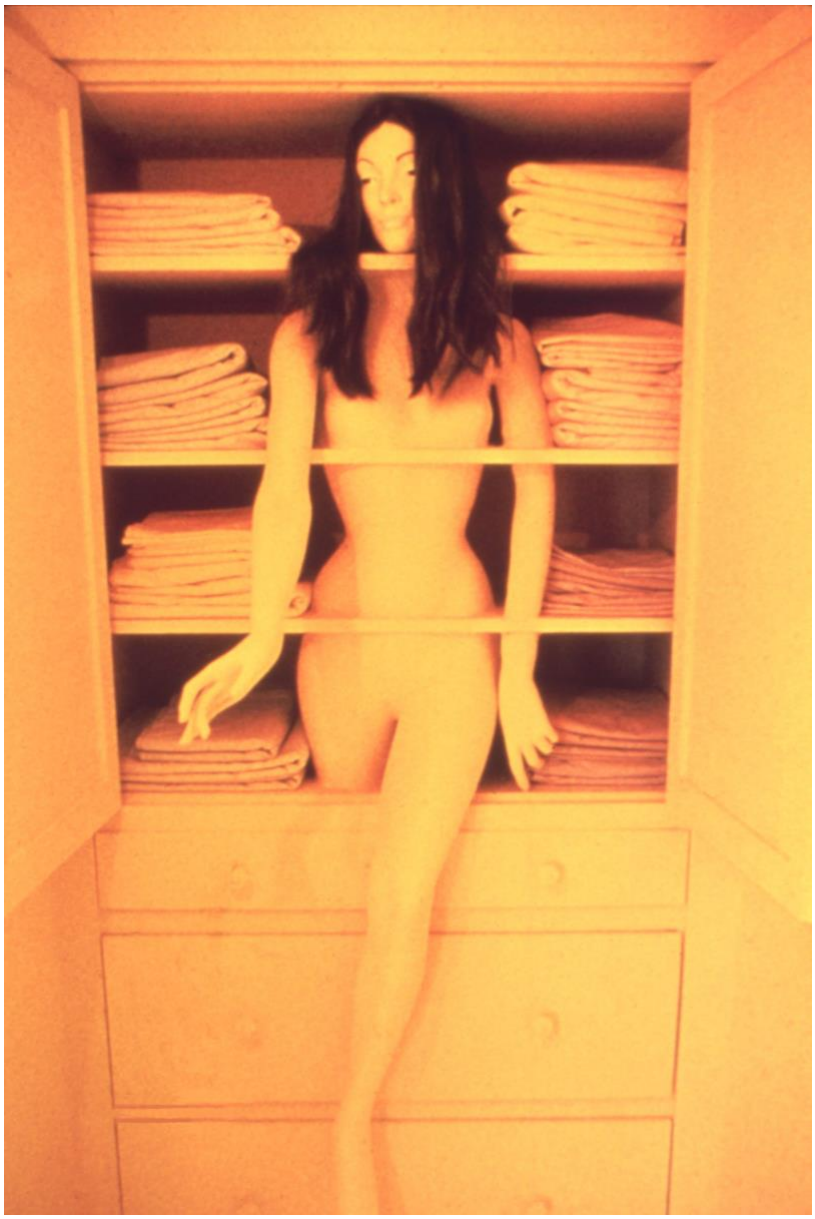

Figure 4.10 Installation image of Sandra Orgel, *Linen Closet* from *Womanhouse*, 1972. Courtesy of https://judychicago.com.

Figure 4.11 Hannah Wilke, *S.O.S. Starification Object Series*, 1974–82. Gelatin silver prints with chewing gum sculptures, 40 x 58 ½ x 2 ¼ in. Courtesy of https://www.moma.org.

Figure 4.12 Elektra KB, *Protest Sign IV*, 2017. Textile, felt, thread, 103 x 62 in. Courtesy of *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow* catalogue.

Figure 4.13 Judy Chicago, installation view of Wing Three, featuring Sojourner Truth and Susan B. Anthony place settings from *The Dinner Party*, 1979. Courtesy of https://judychicago.com.

Figure 4.14 Kiyan Williams, still from *Reflections*, 2019. Video, color, sound, mirrors, 15:06 min. Courtesy of *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow* catalogue.

Figure 4.15 David Antonio Cruz, installation view of (left to right / top to bottom): *thenightbeneathusacrystalofpain*, 2018. 30 x 20 in. *iwanttobeseeningreen,wouldn'tbecaughtdeadinred*, 2018. 20 x 16 in. *youdidntlearnyourlessonsandyouhavereturned*, 2018. 20 x 16 in. *wegivesomuch,andgivenothingatall*, 2018. 24 x 18 in. *youarehereandiamherewithyou*, 2018. 20 x 16 in. *runlittlewhitegir*l, 2016–17. 30 x 40 in. Oil and latex on wood panel, each. Courtesy of https://www.brooklynmuseum.org.

Figure 4.16 David Antonio Cruz, *iwanttobeseeningreen,wouldn'tbecaughtdeadinred*, 2018. Oil and latex on wood panel, 20 x 16 in. Courtesy of *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow* catalogue.

Figure 4.17 David Antonio Cruz, *runlittlewhitegirl*, 2016–17. Oil and latex on wood panel, 30 x 40 in. Courtesy of *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow* catalogue.