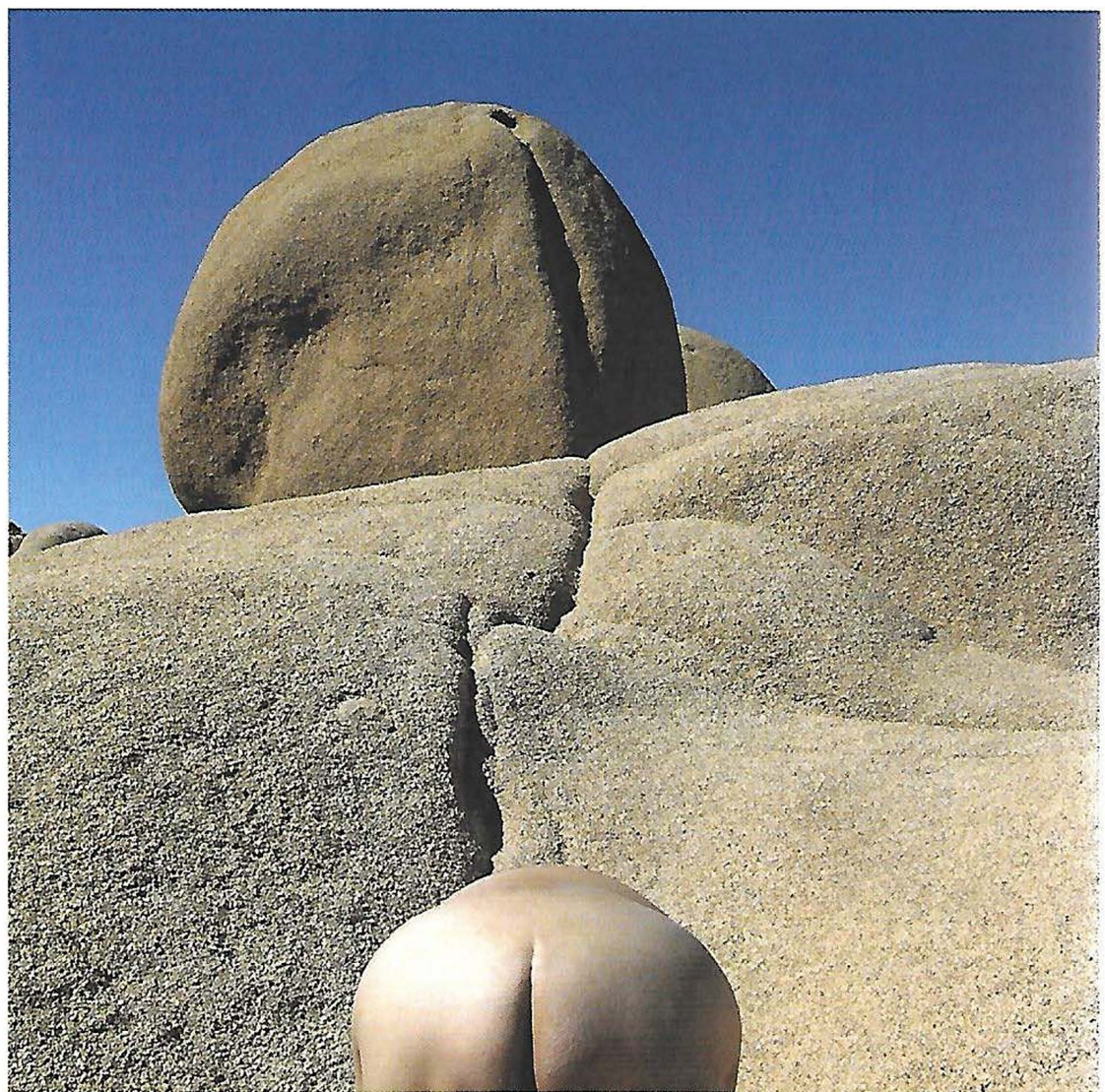


rethinking  
art's histories

# Otherwise

Imagining queer feminist art histories

**Edited by Amelia Jones and Erin Silver**



# Improper objects: performing queer/feminist art/history

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*Tirza True Latimer*

Feminist scholars and queer scholars grapple with improper objects – historical subjects whose bodies, achievements, and/or bonds are not the stuff of official histories. This engagement with historical invisibility sometimes calls for the mobilization of techniques frowned on by ‘proper historians,’ as Hayden White refers to those who seek to ‘explain what happened in the past by providing a precise and accurate reconstruction of the events reported in the documents.’<sup>1</sup> What if there are no documents, or the documents have been expurgated, sealed, or destroyed? Contending with historical erasure places special demands on feminist and queer researchers. They must view gaps, absences, and apparitions as historically consequential.

Although feminist studies and queer studies are not measurable by the same standards, and sometimes work at cross-purposes, they clearly grapple with many of the same problems. Both domains define themselves in critical relation to hegemonic formations and enable analysis of institutionalized power dynamics whose differentials include race, class, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, as well as gender. They share political commitments outside the academy. Yet during the 1990s, with the ascent of theories questioning the material bases of gender and sexuality, misunderstandings divided academic allegiances along feminist and queer lines.

Elizabeth Weed, founding director of the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women at Brown University, edited a collection of essays and interviews airing these debates. In the introduction to *Feminism Meets Queer Theory*, Weed argues that ‘the feminism against which queer theory defines itself, is a feminism reduced almost to caricature: a feminism tied to a concern for gender, bound to a regressive and monotonous binary opposition.’<sup>2</sup> Any such reduction of feminist critique calls for analysis, Weed rightly insists. Among the misgivings feminists expressed concerning queer theory, grievances about the erasure of women stand out with particular poignancy: queer theory, some feminists alleged, appropriated critical strategies honed within feminism without sufficiently acknowledging the debt, while dismissing gender as a critical axis of historical analysis. In contrast to materialist feminism, queer

theory seemed to suggest that the category ‘women’ did not really exist, or existed uniquely as a function of discourse. The historical rifts between queer studies and feminist studies have sometimes upstaged the ethical agendas they share and the generative potential of the tensions between them.

The contemporary philosopher most commonly associated with queer theory, Judith Butler, works in the interstices between feminist and queer domains to vigorously resist any simplistic allocation of each field’s ‘proper objects.’<sup>3</sup> Butler has repeatedly decried the allocation of gender to feminist theory and sex to queer theory. ‘What is incisive and valuable in feminist work,’ Butler writes, ‘is precisely the kind of thinking that calls into question the settled grounds of analysis. And even the recourse to sexual difference within feminist theory is at its most productive when it is taken not as a ground, foundation, or methodology, but as a *question* posed but not resolved.’<sup>4</sup> Butler affirms this resistance to resolution, a defining characteristic of queerness, as a source of vitality for feminist critical theory. Yet Butler’s use of the word ‘even’ in the phrase ‘even the recourse to sexual difference within feminist theory’ flags essentialism and binary thinking as theoretical sticking points for queer-identified feminists.

Proposing a work-around, Amelia Jones coined the third term ‘para-feminism.’ The concept encompasses work informed by feminist theory that expands the scope of critical engagement beyond the parameters of gender/sexual difference. ‘Parafeminism,’ Jones writes,

rejects the isolation of gender as a separate identity category, offering instead a theory and practice pivoting around gender/sexual *identifications* as ongoing, in process, and interrelated to racial, class and other identifications. Parafeminism is non-prescriptive, open to a multiplicity of cultural expressions and behaviors, and focused on excavating power differentials.

Parafeminism is bent, Jones adds, ‘on messing up (rather than, per earlier feminisms, attempting to critique or reverse) binary structures of difference.’<sup>5</sup> The implied generalization that second wave feminists were preoccupied (whether through critique or reversal) with male–female binaries and isolated gender from other, interlocking, asymmetrical power structures has a solid historical basis. This said, exceptions to this rule include a number of influential theorists, including Gloria Anzaldúa, Angela Davis, Cherrie Moraga, and Mary Louise Pratt, to name only a few. It is necessary to consider second wave feminism and its investments within the full historical spectrum, which includes many theoretical positions that are both feminist and queer.

Since queer theory could be described in precisely the same terms that define parafeminism (‘pivoting around gender/sexual *identifications* as ongoing, in process, and interrelated to racial, class and other identifications’ with the objective of ‘messing up ... binary structures of difference’) why



adopt a neologism? Because 'parafeminism' has one distinct advantage: the term avows feminist origins. Semantically, 'Parafeminism' refuses to engage in stalemated debates between certain feminist and queer factions within academic studies.

Why not, rather than resolving this theoretical dilemma, harness its dynamism instead? Feminist studies and queer studies offer one another platforms for internal critique as well as vantage points that can only expand both schools of thought. On the one hand, feminist critical analysis enables us to consider history as a field of contestation and to valorize unwritten, or otherwise written, histories. Feminism, because it responds to the embodied conditions of women's oppression, also provides transferable critical tools for the analysis of asymmetrical power relations and their operations through and on bodies. On the other hand, queer theory, because it rejects subjective fixity, enables movement and identification across embodied positions. Within both queer and feminist studies, scholars face the challenges of studying subjects who have been 'disappeared' from, or appear only apparitionally in, official accounts of the past – including the Western art historical canon. As a result, feminists and queers alike have learned to speculate and invent. The problems accompanying lacunae in visual archives are particularly critical because of all that the claim 'I see' implies about verifying, believing, and knowing. The primacy of sight in Western societies makes the development of experimental methods in visual history all the more urgent – especially practices that take invisibility into account.

Historically invisible majorities (women) and invisible minorities (sexual dissidents) occupy ambivalent positions within dominant regimes of vision. The achievement of visibility has proven effective as a political strategy; it has also proven a liability. This ambivalent history has sharpened the critical edges of feminist and queer visual analysis. Terms introduced by feminists – from the 'male gaze' to 'scopophilia' – are central to the vocabulary of visual scholarship and coinages by queers about visibility/invisibility ('closeted,' 'decoding,' 'gaydar'...) have crossed over into popular parlance. Yet, while feminists and queers have separately developed sophisticated ways of understanding the visual world, 'a visible and influential queer feminist art history (including as well a curatorial practice, art criticism, and visual theory) remains elusive.'<sup>6</sup> Or such is the premise of the volume to which this essay contributes.

Queer/feminist visual artists – who, since the 1980s, have claimed art history as a field of radical intervention – are the exceptions to this rule. Their initiatives both draw on and contribute to what might be called 'a visible and influential queer feminist art history.' Artists have opportunities to evolve professionally outside of academic disciplinary structures that absorb feminist scholars into women's history, women's studies or gender studies departments and queers into critical theory, comparative literature, or rhetoric depart-

ments. Because the queer/feminist artistic community is, in a manner of speaking, academically undisciplined (less constrained by academic imperatives or disciplinary boundaries), they are free to approach history experimentally. Schooled in theories of alterity and strategies of political action, queer/feminist artists treat historical data as a plastic medium that can be molded to produce dissident meanings. Like art, historical narration has the potential to effect both psychic and social transformation. Using their crafts to advance feminist agendas through queer leaps of imagination, queer/feminist artists dismantle the boundaries between studio practice art and related vocations: art historian, curator, critic, visual theorist.

Millie Wilson, for example, has occupied all of these positions. In 1989 she organized a retrospective exhibition for a genderqueer artist of her own invention, Peter. For the installation *Fauve Semblant: Peter, A Young English Girl*, Wilson deployed a whole repertoire of queer/feminist strategies, including creative embodiment, historical fabrication, and the use of photography against its documentary grain. She based her protagonist on a painting by Romaine Brooks, *Peter, A Young English Girl* (1923). Here, Brooks pictures the English artist Gluck (née Hannah Gluckstein) as she presented herself for the portrait sitting – hair cropped and decked out in attire acquired at a London haberdashery. The portrait's title grants Gluck's assumed name, Peter, pride of place, while evoking, with the word 'girl,' Gluck's gender mobility.

Brooks and Gluck enjoyed successful careers in London and Paris before the Second World War. Prior to their retrieval by feminists and lesbians in the 1970s, however, they had both receded from historical view. This disappearance occurred despite concerted efforts on the part of Brooks to assure her own legacy and preserve the memory of a whole cohort of culturally active lesbians. To this end, Brooks painted a pantheon of portraits – including *Peter, A Young English Girl* – and bequeathed this oeuvre to the Smithsonian Institution.<sup>7</sup> Wilson offered the doubly fictive Peter the retrospective neither Gluck nor Brooks enjoyed during their lifetimes.

Taking cues from Brooks, the wordplay of Wilson's title provokes disorientation. The title phrase *Fauve Semblant* plays on the French idiom *faux semblant* (false resemblance), replacing the word *faux* with the expressionist epithet *fauve* (literally, wild jungle animal). A sense of the 'false' survives in the quasi-homonymous *fauve* of *Fauve Semblant* to broadly hint at Peter's inauthenticity (as an historical personage, artist, and man) while also referencing Gluck's wildness as a gender renegade and sexual dissident. As if to compensate for these aspersions, Wilson invested her tribute to Gluck's queer alter ego with all the hallmarks of institutional authenticity: dramatic lighting, eye-catching signage, didactic wall text, a smattering of personal accoutrements. A handsome, larger than life black-and-white portrait of Wilson impersonating Peter set the show's tone right at the entrance. The drag portrait, at

once self-serious and self-mocking, introduces cross-gender presentation as a leitmotif and, at the same time, highlights the necessity to 'be' a man in order to achieve the kind of institutional visibility that comes with retrospective exhibitions.

Wilson organized her display chronologically, aligning at eye level various fabrications: childhood cabinet portraits of Peter, photographic reproductions of Peter's works (locations described as 'unknown'), full-scale photographs of such paraphernalia as Peter's smoking jacket and Peter's palette, one 'surviving' oil painting preserved in a Plexiglas box. This familiar museological strategy renders equivalent biography and artistic résumé, collapsing the artist's body into his/her body of work. In this way, Wilson brings feminist-schooled critical acuity, queer irony, and artistic license to bear on the institutional conventions of display that simultaneously construct and authenticate genius. Conceptually, *Fauve Semblant* interrogates the institutional production and consolidation of Western cultural value – while simultaneously elaborating a queer/feminist mythology initiated by the historical personages, Brooks and Gluck, who haunt the installation.

As the influence of queer theories crescendoed in the 1990s, Deborah Kass relied similarly on artistic impersonation to make a point about who is, and who is not, the focus of museum retrospectives, monographs, celebrity interviews – and why. Throughout the decade, Kass re-performed Andy Warhol. She used Warhol's formal language to infuse his quintessentially queer oeuvre with Jewish lesbian content. She substituted her own pantheon for Warhol's icons (Elvises, Marilyn's, Lizas, and Jackies). Linda Nochlin, writing about the Warhol Project, describes the strategy as 'appropriation with a difference,' noting that Kass's photos and screen paintings signify through their painstaking formal faithfulness to Warholian sources combined with their unfaithfulness to his iconography.<sup>8</sup> The Warhol Project located Kass within Warhol's queer lineage while reworking his artistic legacy to raise feminist questions about gender politics, standards of beauty, models of success, and popular culture's role in normalizing visual systems.

With the installation *My Andy: A Retrospective* (1995), Kass affirmed (under Warhol's cover) her Jewish, lesbian, feminist art historical perspective.<sup>9</sup> Two key images greeted viewers at the entrance. *Altered Image #1* pictures Kass restaging an iconic photograph of Warhol in mixed drag (Figure 4.1).<sup>10</sup> From the neck down, Warhol's costume is preppy and masculine (button-down collar shirt, plaid tie, faded jeans). His mismatching face is made up like a movie queen. He sports a Marilyn-like blond wig and vamps seductively for the camera. Kass, by re-performing Warhol's slippery drag personae, claims for herself what Catherine Lord describes as 'the privileged space of white male gender play.'<sup>11</sup> The motif of drag recurs in the second work displayed beneath the exhibition's title: a portrait of Barbra Streisand costumed for her



Deborah Kass, *Altered Image #2*, 1994–1995. A variant of the image at the entrance to Kass's exhibition *My Andy: A Retrospective* (1995).

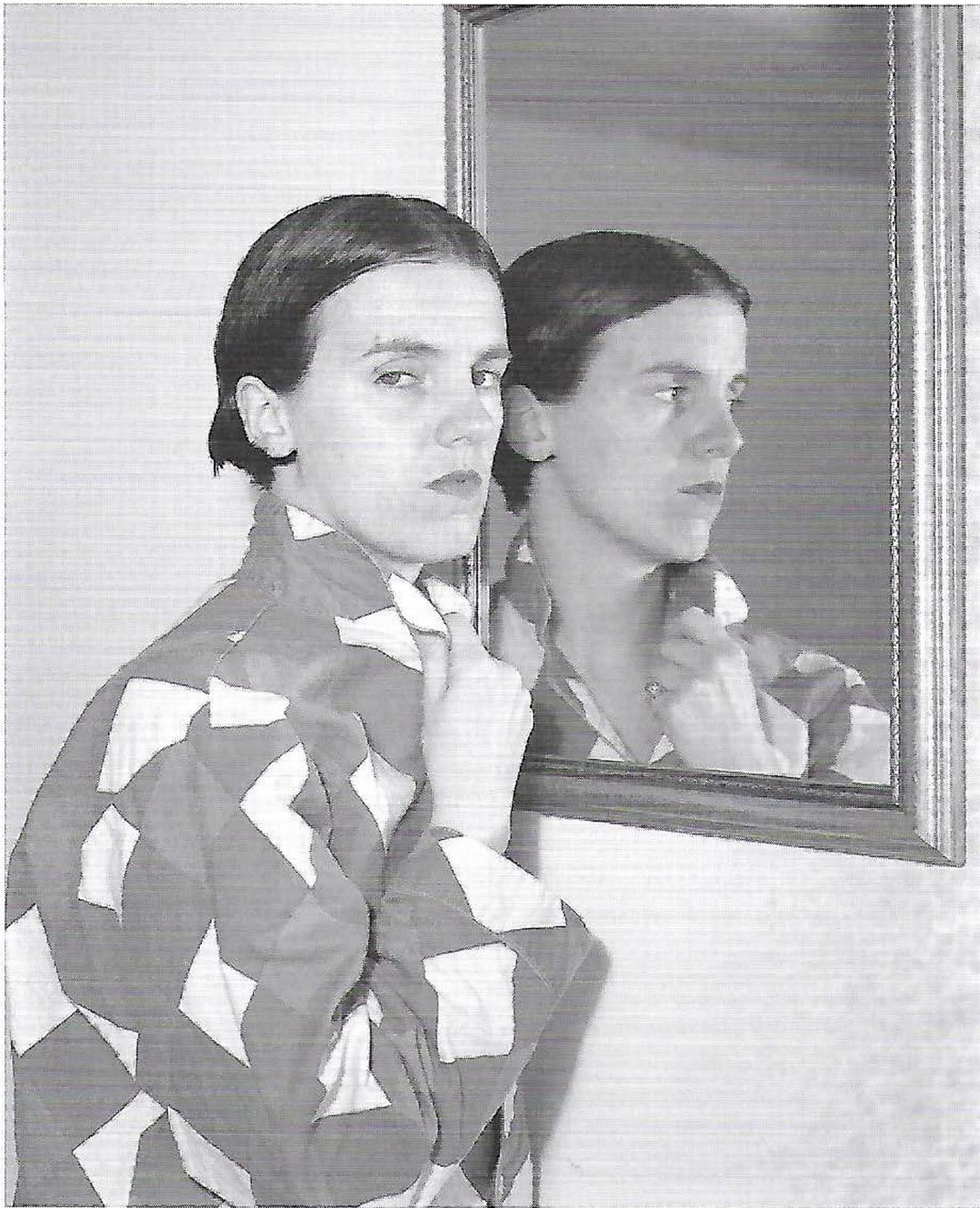
famous travesty role, Yentl. This life-scale rendition (screen-printed on a 'scrap' from Warhol's studio) relates to Kass's series *Yentl (My Elvis)*, a refashioning of Warhol's famous *Elvis* paintings from the early 1960s.<sup>12</sup> Warhol's homoerotic multiples (*Double Elvis*, *Triple Elvis*, *Eight Elvises*, etc.) feature screen prints of Elvis Presley, big as life, costumed for a starring role in the B-Western *Flaming Star* (1960).<sup>13</sup> Tricked out in gunslinger drag, Presley squares off, pistol drawn, and aims straight at the viewer. Kass's substitution of Streisand, who brandishes a tome of scripture, not a six-shooter, establishes the twin conceits of *My Andy: A Retrospective*: strategically failed repetition and drag.

The installation, and Kass's Warhol Project more generally, engages with ideas about the performativity of gender elaborated during the same period by Judith Butler. It is through repetition (performance and re-performance), Butler emphasizes, that norms of gender are discursively constructed and enforced. Repetition serves as the primary mechanism through which patriarchy naturalizes heterosexual power relations and creates effects of gender coherence. At the same time, repetition exposes the anxiousness of those propositions. 'If heterosexuality is compelled to *repeat itself* in order to establish the illusion of its own uniformity and identity,' Butler asks, 'then this is an identity permanently at risk, for what if it fails to repeat, or if the very exercise of repetition is redeployed for a very different performative purpose?'<sup>14</sup> By occupying Warhol as a Jewish lesbian, Kass made visible the norms that Warhol left intact: gender hierarchies, ethnic prejudices, and white gay male privilege. *My Andy: A Retrospective* pays homage to Warhol's iconoclastic oeuvre while disavowing, nonetheless, deeply embedded biases.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the conceptual photographer Tammy Rae Carland pursued a parallel line of investigation about lineage and canon formation. Looking back to the early twentieth century, she took as her research focus photographers who had created new tropes of female self-representation. *Portrait of the Artist as the Artist Claude Cahun* (1999) (Figure 4.2), one of a series of restaged photographs, recasts Cahun's 1929 remake of an art historical trope: the woman before her looking glass.<sup>15</sup> Mirroring Cahun's pose, Carland stands cheek-to-cheek against her own mirror image. She enters Cahun's photographic *mise-en-scène* as if it were a scripted performance to be 're-performed and re-staged much like a play.'<sup>16</sup> As the overstatement of the work's title intimates, Carland's reprise exceeds rather than derives from Cahun's 'original' image. *Portrait of the Artist as the Artist Claude Cahun* in effect re-re-stages and modifies a script of narcissistic femininity that Cahun had critically revised two generations earlier.

While Cahun's performance addresses oppressive stereotypes of women and standards of feminine beauty, Carland layers the script with another critical register: class privilege. The independently wealthy Cahun could afford to devote herself freely to experimentation in photography, literature, theater,





4.2

Tammy Rae Carland, *Portrait of the Artist as the Artist Claude Cahun*, 1999.

and politics. She identified male aesthetes, female intellectuals, and members of Paris's cosmopolitan *haute homosexualité* as her role models.<sup>17</sup> Carland, who shares none of Cahun's economic advantages, reifies a less entitled perspective. Carland uses a man's checkered bathrobe to approximate the sartorial effect of Cahun's classier smoking jacket. In comparison to Cahun's razor short haircut and platinum dye job, Carland's bobby-pinned coiffure looks inelegantly slapdash. Finally, while Cahun's gaze, in the source photograph, meets the

viewer's with steady (indeed challenging) confidence, Carland's regard, in the restaged version, has a shifty quality. It is as if she were stealing the scene of representation that Cahun was given (and rejected) as a bourgeois birthright. By putting herself in Cahun's shoes, Carland expresses an empathic bond and posits a feminist pedigree; yet she deviates from the visual source sufficiently to mark her critical distance. As if of two minds, she pays tribute, on the one hand and, on the other, deconstructs her own homage. The will to award and achieve recognition, to survive in histories, exists in tension and in tandem with the desire to render transparent the representational politics of historical visibility (thus, legitimacy).

Double-mindedness is a quality shared widely by queers/feminists schooled in deconstructive critical theory. Carland refers only half-jokingly to this compulsion to double-think as 1990s 'postmodern damage.'<sup>18</sup> What kinds of relationships to history can survive the passionate push-pull of feminist identification and queer disidentification? 'Disidentification,' which puts the root word 'identification' as well as its disavowal into play, is a concept introduced by José Esteban Muñoz in his analysis of specific 'survival strategies the minority subject practices.'<sup>19</sup> These practices include identifying simultaneously with and against cultural stereotypes to rework them in critical ways. The ambivalence of the term makes it useful in relation to queer/feminist historical practices approaching the archive as both a source of information about the past and a deformation of the past requiring transformative intervention. 'When I go to an archive,' the queer/feminist artist Ulrike Müller writes, 'I am looking for something beyond information. Mine is a search for one's body, one's place in the world, and for one's politics. This is not an easy process; it's difficult to arrive at a formulation of self, and then it's painful to let go.'<sup>20</sup> In the twenty-first century, queer/feminist artists continue to draw inspiration from the inherited historical record and from the ambivalence of their own critical reactions to it.

Between 2001 and 2007, for instance, Emily Roysdon orchestrated the re-performance of David Wojnarowicz's 1970s tribute to the nineteenth-century French decadent poet Arthur Rimbaud (Figure 4.3). In this way, she inscribed herself into an art history of queer resistance against 'society's hatred of diversity and loathing of homosexuals,' just as the radical queer activist and artist Wojnarowicz set out, thirty years earlier, to 'contest state-supported forms of "history"' by making images of and about those whose stories would otherwise go unrecorded.<sup>21</sup> For *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978–79), Wojnarowicz disguised collaborators in paper masks replicating the poet's face (as pictured in a well-known photograph of Rimbaud by Etienne Carjat). He then posed his Rimbaud surrogates along the Hudson River piers, notorious cruising sites for sexual outlaws, and analogous locations where runaways, sex workers, queers, drug users, and other outcasts congregated. Using a borrowed camera, Wojnarowicz documented Rimbaud's ghostly perambulations in the

New World to create an imaginary bridge of solidarity across time and space.

Reimagining this scenario, Roysdon mobilized collaborators wearing Wojnarowicz masks to represent such queer historical sites as the piers in ways that challenge 'both the idea that there were no women there as well as the idea that most of the people there were white.'<sup>22</sup> The history of the piers, like the larger histories of queer culture, is not just a history of 'white men with their pants around their ankles,' Roysdon insists.<sup>23</sup> Yet the Wojnarowicz project relates Roysdon to a white male lineage. 'So I am attracted to David,' Roysdon admits. While she identifies as a woman, lesbian, and feminist, she did not set out to 'lesbianize' Wojnarowicz. Rather, with these queer acts of re-embodiment, she aimed to move gender fluidity to the forefront of queer visibility politics. 'So beyond the historical gay/lesbian divide in community and also in the history of HIV/AIDS, this project takes for granted, or jumps from the hope, that we have collapsed many of these [gender] boundaries and distinctions already and have strengthened our communities.'<sup>24</sup> Roysdon's desire to 'work with David, stitch myself into bed with him, turn myself into a fag' has broadened the spectrum of queer/feminist engagement to make art that is 'also a call to queer trans politics.'<sup>25</sup> Roysdon's restagings of Wojnarowicz/Rimbaud sporting a dildo or injecting T (testosterone) into their veins invests the mechanisms of gender identification with greater complexity. A dyke performing as a fag, after all, is not precisely a woman performing as a man. One of the issues trans theorists have raised in relation to both feminist and queer theory relates to the deconstruction of gender, gender being foundational to trans self-understanding. The question Roysdon's work raises is whether gender – not accepted by queers as a stable category and viewed by most feminists as socially constructed – can be theoretically conceived in less binary ways to align feminist, queer, and trans identified people against common oppressors. Roysdon acts *as if* we had collapsed the boundaries and distinctions that separate us – from each other and from our histories as women, feminists, lesbians, gay men, queers, and trans people – to forge alliances against the hatred that continues to ravage our communities both from within and without. Revitalizing Wojnarowicz's impulse, she constructs a personal history (a love story, really) that is also a collective political history, indeed a political call to action. By culling both the visible and invisible past, Roysdon contends, 'we perform our future.'<sup>26</sup>

She is not alone in calling for future-oriented historical thinking, as collaborative projects realized by other members of her cohort dramatize. Such incubators as Redykeulous (A.L. Steiner and Nicole Eisenman) and LTTR have exponentially expanded the horizons of queer/feminist collective possibility. LTTR (acronym for various things, including 'Lesbians To The Rescue') was founded in 2001 by K8 Hardy, Emily Roysdon, and Ginger Brooks Takahashi. Ulrike Müller joined the editorial collective soon thereafter.<sup>27</sup> Müller's work





Emily Roysdon, *untitled* (David Wojnarowicz project), 2001–2007.



in and on Brooklyn's Lesbian Herstory Archives captures the spirit of the collaborative initiatives that have become the hallmark of this peer group. Her project *Herstory Inventory: 100 Feminist Drawings by 100 Artists* stands out for its visionary approach to the past as well as the scope of queer/feminist participation. Her LTTR colleague Ginger Brooks Takahashi posed the central research question: 'how does a culture that doesn't reproduce, reproduce itself?'<sup>28</sup> This paradox, because of its unresolvable nature, has proven particularly generative. It is pivotal to Müller's evolution as an artist, curator, activist, and experimental historian.

With *Herstory Inventory: 100 Feminist Drawings by 100 Artists* Müller conceived of a framework for non-reproductive cultural reproduction. In 2007 she culled descriptive texts from an inventory of 1970s feminist T-shirts and distributed the vignettes to a broad network of queer/feminist colleagues, including A.L. Steiner, Nicole Eisenman, K8 Hardy, Ginger Brooks Takahashi, and Emily Roysdon. In all, she invited 100 artists, who did not have visual access to the T-shirt designs, to translate the descriptive texts into drawings. In 2012 the installation *Herstory Inventory: 100 Feminist Drawings by 100 Artists* traveled from Kunsthau Bregenz to the Brooklyn Museum, displaying the collaborative reinvention of lesbian visual 'herstory' in shifting configurations.<sup>29</sup> Müller's emphasis on translation, as opposed to rote repetition, pays respect to inherited cultural resources while representing cultural history as a continuously unfolding, dialogical process.

About her role as a queer/feminist artist/curator, Müller reflects,

*Herstory Inventory* takes root not in a way of working that I have developed but, rather, in the much larger communal ethics and spirit of collaboration that exists within our artistic scene. Our way of doing things reconfigures conventional ways of being in the world, which includes being an artist and putting together a museum show.<sup>30</sup>

Müller's inclusive methodology takes very much to heart the emotional and political complexities that passing on queer/feminist historical knowledge entails. 'What is our relationship to the history of lesbian feminism?' she asks. 'How can one both revere and criticise the archive, or, how can one be appreciative while simultaneously making room for ambivalence and the desire for change?'<sup>31</sup> *Herstory Inventory* proposes an operational strategy: it opens a space of historical dialogue by broadly redistributing fragments of the lesbian feminist past for repurposing and resituating in the present. The shifting pattern that results from this process, shaped by 'communal ethics,' accommodates both lived and living histories.

Like Roysdon and Müller, Patricia Cronin imagines history as a platform for dialogue, collaboration, and world-making. Foundational queer/feminist questions reverberate in Cronin's 2007 initiative *Harriet Hosmer: Lost and*



Patricia Cronin, *Queen of Naples*, 2007.

4.4

*Found, A Catalogue Raisonné.* How does one organize a retrospective or compile a catalogue raisonné for an oeuvre that has largely disappeared? In some ways the historical subject at the heart of Cronin's Harriet Hosmer project is no less fictional than Wilson's Peter of *Fauve Semblant*. Reconstructing Hosmer's

life and oeuvre demanded a comparable amount of speculation, even though Hosmer was one of the most famous woman sculptors of the late nineteenth century (and infamous for her lesbian affairs).<sup>32</sup>

Many of Hosmer's neo-classical marble sculptures represent powerful women. These include mythological figures such as Medusa, Hesper, and Daphne; historical female sovereigns Zenobia and Queen Isabella; as well as figures commissioned by such aristocratic patronesses as the Queen of Naples. Among Hosmer's achievements, her marble *Tomb of Judith Falconnet* was the first sculpture by an American (let alone a non-Catholic, lesbian American) to be installed in a Roman church, Sant'Andrea delle Fratte. Cronin combined her own understanding as a sculptor of marble with her sure-handed techniques as a painter to body forth Hosmer's life work. She created a catalogue of evanescent watercolor illustrations based on archival documents picturing the statuary. The project accounts for Hosmer's entire output during a career in Rome that spanned four decades, from 1852 to 1893. Cronin's research uncovered a number of references to pieces that were never documented photographically. Cronin found a creative solution to this representational problem. She produced for each missing work 'an apparition, a ghost of a lost sculpture and a lost career'<sup>33</sup> (Figure 4.4). Her ethereal abstractions dissolve the classical contours of figuration to serve as placeholders for statues that may still exist, but whose historical trail and physical outlines have vanished. Cronin's catalogue raisonné presents sixty-four sculptures (both extant and missing) organized chronologically. Meticulously researched catalogue entries accompany the watercolor figures. These texts furnish all the expected data: title, date, medium, dimensions, provenance, collection and exhibition history. The word 'unknown' appears repeatedly. By queering the conventions of the catalogue raisonné genre in these ways, Cronin presents Hosmer as paradigmatic of gender-based historical erasure and, more specifically, the erasure of lesbians.

During a fellowship year in Rome at the American Academy in 2007, Cronin reintroduced Hosmer to the public arena.<sup>34</sup> For her own capstone exhibition, *An American in Rome*, Cronin displayed a selection of the Hosmer watercolors without wall text or explanation. Hosmer's ghostly but dramatic presence, left unexplained, opened questions about the referent of the exhibition title. Which American? When? In effect, the installation collapsed Cronin and Hosmer into one another to more broadly signify women/lesbians who produce culture and their historical precarity. With the catalogue raisonné and related exhibitions, Cronin monumentalized a missing body of work by a forgotten artist to concurrently correct historical memory and reproach its omissions.

The constellation of queer/feminist artistic practices sketched out in this essay illuminates the experimental potential of historical narration (especially art historical narration). The scenarios of the past queer/feminist artists stage

alter their contexts of reception in the present to open new vistas on both history and the future. Feminist concerns about the persistence of patriarchal paradigms, including the erasure of women from traditional accounts of the past, are central to their enterprises. At the same time, keeping faith with the performative tenets of queer theory, they reclaim the radical indeterminacy of social, historical, psychic, and sexual subjectivity. Rather than attempting to differentiate queer and feminist positions, queer/feminist artists take galvanic leaps of imagination across the gaps between them. They hold incongruities at odds to exploit ambivalence as a transformative resource. Scholars of visual culture affiliated with a spectrum of academic disciplines have much to learn from their example. The histories of improper objects queer/feminist artists create have the potential to radically reshape the representational programs that regulate our relationships, cultures, and futures.

## Notes

- 32 Since the 1960s, Hosmer has been the subject of multiple dissertations, exhibitions, biographies, and even a play. The most recent writings include two biographies (Dolly Sherwood's in 1991, Kate Culkin's in 2010) and Carole Oles's poetic 'inventions on the life' (2006), in addition to Cronin's catalogue raisonné. All point to the exceptional level of recognition Hosmer received during her lifetime (and to her relative obscurity today).
- 33 Patricia Cronin, quoted by Ludovico Pratesi, 'Machines, Gods, and ... Ghosts: The Reasons for an Exhibition,' in *Patricia Cronin: Machines, Gods and Ghosts* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2013), 35.
- 34 Cronin also exhibited the Hosmer watercolors in a solo exhibition at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum, 5 June 2009–24 January 2010.