

Notions of the Collaborative in the Work of David Wojnarowicz

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Abstract

Drawing on the recent Semiotext(e) publication *David Wojnarowicz: A Definitive History of Five or Six Years on the Lower East Side*, edited by Sylvère Lotringer, this article explores various notions of collaborative art practice in Wojnarowicz's work. It draws attention to his numerous collaborative projects in order to explore the role of an interactive subjectivity in his art and in the community of the East Village art scene of the late 1970s and early 1980s more generally. Beginning with a focus on downtown living conditions, the problem of gentrification and its complex relationship with artistic communities in the East Village, I explore Wojnarowicz's early fascination with drug culture and criminality and their representation in his early work: the 'acid jam' painting sessions led by Carlo McCormick, Wojnarowicz's work at Civilian Warfare gallery, and the Ward Line Pier Project (1983), a major collaboration with painter Mike Bidlo. Drawing on this socio-economic analysis, the focus then shifts to explore collaboration in Wojnarowicz's work as a form of 'citational grafting'; a means of exploring ideas of queer history, genealogy and identity in 'multigenerational' collaborations with queer writers that fits with processes of collaboration in Wojnarowicz's work as a whole. Jacques Derrida's writings on 'hauntology' frame the discussion of works like the photographic series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-9), and xeroxed collages of Jean Genet, which concludes with Wojnarowicz's death bed portraits of Peter Hujar, and explores the impact of HIV/AIDS on this queer collaborative practice.

In his seminal text on downtown New York literature in the 1980s, Robert Siegle looks specifically to the artistic communities of the East Village to foreground the significance of collaborative, communal practice for the artists and writers living and working in the city. Citing a review by Jeffrey Deitch of the 1980 'Times Square Show' in *Suburban Ambush*, Siegle sought to assert the communality of downtown creative practice without reducing its diversity to a monolithic 'scene,' quoting Deitch as he mused upon 'that elusive process by which artists with a certain affinity somehow band together to form an unstructured but synergistic association which might almost be called a movement.'¹ Siegle's conception of literature from this demographic as 'a fiction of insurgency' is an almost dialectical approach to downtown creative output that prioritises community and collaboration without trapping these practices within hegemonic, normative registers of cultural production, so as not to lose this sense of 'unstructured' process. The importance of collaboration for artists and writers living and working in downtown New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s cannot be underestimated and, as Siegle is acutely aware, must be carefully historicised so as not to tip the delicate balance of individuality and community evident there. As Carlo McCormick noted when discussing David Wojnarowicz 'part of the way you define yourself is by finding your compatriots, your fellow revolutionaries ... it wasn't the collective, but more like a group of fellow transgressors.'²



Poet, painter, photographer, film-maker, musician, David Wojnarowicz was a key figure in the so-called East Village arts scene of the late 1970s and 1980s, and an outspoken AIDS activist in the later 1980s, working with Gran Fury and ACT-UP until his death in 1992. Felix Guattari, who contributed an article on Wojnarowicz to a 1990 issue of the journal *Rethinking Marxism*, considered the artist's practice in general as 'concretely reinstat[ing] a principle of singularisation in a universe that has too much of a tendency to give in to universalist comfort.'³ Reading this in conjunction with Guattari's other writings, it becomes clear that the writer's view of the 'singularity' of Wojnarowicz's practice is not a notion of isolated individuality that could be considered as perpetuating modernist myths of authorship, of 'maintaining the ... illusion of the ONE TRIBE NATION [sic]' that Wojnarowicz so fervently rejected.⁴ If it is an individuality of any kind we find in this work, it is that to which Robert Siegle makes reference when he writes of 'a desire to use art in *refabricating* a basis for individuality in the face of our sharpened sense of the structural determination of our lives.'⁵ What is suspended in Wojnarowicz's collaborative practice is the double-edged nature of downtown creative production; the simultaneously disquieting and empowering meeting of alienation and community on the Lower East Side, 'an impoverished and increasingly alienated population.'⁶ Wojnarowicz's journals expose a mind continuously fixated upon this tension, upon the parameters of the personal and the universal, what Carlo McCormick might have alluded to in his description of the artistic 'vernacular of Downtown' as a 'disjunctive language of profound ambivalence.'⁷ By rendering both unresolved in perpetuity, this analysis of the duality of individuality and community looks to evade homogenous conceptions of community, not to depict the lifestyle and output of artistic communities 'as an unequivocal good, an indicator of a high quality of life, a life of human understanding, caring, selflessness, belonging,' akin to the 'Republican family values rhetoric' that Miranda Joseph has warned against, but to explore the reciprocal creative and ethical concerns at play in Wojnarowicz's practice of artistic collaborations in the late 1970s and 1980s.⁸

Studying the legacy of collaboration in Wojnarowicz's work, in this period and its subsequent historicisation, is made more complex as a consequence of the untimely death of Wojnarowicz from AIDS in July 1992. Pamela M. Lee's monographic study of Gordon Matta-Clark, who died from pancreatic cancer at 35, provides many helpful insights into navigating the difficult terrain of writing about artists who are deceased yet remain distinctly part of 'our recent historical horizon,' and of 'how to make use of testimonials from their friends and close colleagues.'⁹ For Lee, 'all testimonials possess some degree of truth value, but they do not so much consolidate a seamless gestalt of the artist as they amount to a historiographic incoherence.'¹⁰ She continues: 'What [these testimonials] articulate is how personal memory and sometime melancholy are at work in the most basic writings of history. Pastness and presentness collide so that nostalgic longing and historical distance refuse any easy distinctions.'¹¹ In writing on Wojnarowicz, it is precisely this 'historiographic incoherence' that



is most useful, since it indicates the importance of straying from the normative, of keeping fragmented and diverse the mythologies that were created both by him and of him. In taking apart the myth of a 'seamless gestalt of the artist,' collaboration can be highlighted as an essential component of Wojnarowicz's practice and to the ways in which that practice is documented, historicised and understood.

Collaboration and Community

Lamenting the demise of the downtown New York arts scene in her 1992 article 'The Bohemian Diaspora,' Cindy Carr wonders 'is there such a thing anymore as an artist with a community?'¹² Centring upon what she considers to be the 'dematerialization of the artist's milieu' in the late twentieth century, Carr traces a bohemian trajectory from New York Dada in 1916 through Beat culture in the fifties to Jack Smith in the sixties, marking the 'shifts and schisms' of vanguard New York art practice as reflective of a 'tug-of-war going on throughout the world: the trend towards globalization versus the trend towards community ... the pressure to assimilate versus the urge to segregate,' positing the artistic avant-garde of the 1980s as an exemplary moment of creative communality, sensitive to its margins without exclusivity.¹³ Through analysis of the nature of the rapidly developing new gallery network in the downtown New York area and the development of artists' collectives during the period, coupled with a discussion of the socio-economic nature of the area and the propensity of many of its artistic residents towards drug and criminal cultures, it becomes evident that the artistic milieu in which Wojnarowicz found himself in the early 1980s not only facilitated collaboration but actively encouraged it.

An engagement with these themes of collaboration in the East Village art scene must be prefaced by acknowledging the criticisms of Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, who, in their 1984 article 'The Fine Art of Gentrification,' critiqued the construction of the Lower East Side arts scene of the early 1980s as a realm of imagined artistic and subjective potential, with artists approaching the neighbourhood 'consciously or unconsciously ... with dominating and possessive attitudes that *transform it into an imaginary site*,' while ignoring the often negative economic impact of their presence in the area.¹⁴ Such criticisms are important ones, not least for the way in which the detailed socio-economic research of the authors drew attention away from the hyperbolic praise of East Village commentators such as Nicolas Moufarrege and Rene Ricard, which, however eloquent, could be seen to rupture a genuine critical engagement with the work and its environment. The detailed socio-economic research of Deutsche and Ryan's piece highlighted the neglect of political considerations in much of the celebratory writing on East Village art: '[a]lthough they give the neighbourhood a central role in their promotion of the scene, Moufarrege and Ricard never mention the word gentrification.'¹⁵ The authors singled out Moufarrege's misguided fusion of the self-defined and self-titled 'East Village' scene with the geographically specific



Lower East Side in an article from September 1982, when he asserted that, '[o]ne must realize that the *East Village or the Lower East Side* is more than a geographical location – it is a state of mind.'¹⁶ As an exploration of the gallery networks at play in Wojnarowicz's practice demonstrates, 'community' need not be figured as purely negative and dominating, but rather as a theoretical point of departure that seeks ultimately to avoid and negate lingering modernist fictions of personal artistic freedom and individual liberation. The economic hardships of the non-artistic residents of the Lower East Side and the problem of gentrification need not be disputed, and can instead be incorporated into a wider reaction to neo-conservative economic policy and its impact on the art (and real estate) markets of the period.¹⁷

In his text *Biographical Dateline* (1990), Wojnarowicz recalled some of his earliest collaborative endeavours, which followed his entry into this downtown scene, playing shows with his band 3 Teens Kill 4 and tagging downtown buildings with the recognisable tag of a burning house; attacking what he saw as complacency within the New York art world through collective artistic action:

[D]id plan a series of 'action installations' with band member Julie Hair – these were illegal actions that were an attempt to shake up the notions of 'art' and 'culture' that most galleries intentionally ignored. One successful one was stenciling [sic] an empty plate, knife and fork on the wall of leo castelli's [sic] staircase and also stenciling a bomber plane and a burning house and recoiling figure and then dumping a couple hundred pounds of bloody cow bones from the 14th street meatpacking district into the stairwell. This was accomplished at 1.00 on a busy saturday [sic] afternoon.¹⁸

The 'action installation' came to be known as *Hunger*, and along with his solo guerrilla project at the Long Island P.S.1 *Beast Show* in 1982 – dropping numerous 'cock-a-bunnies' (cockroaches with paper rabbit ears and tails attached) into the space after being excluded from the exhibition – earned Wojnarowicz a certain reputation for transgressive, quasi-violent attacks on the New York art world, something which he was to develop throughout his career. Julie Hair was, along with Wojnarowicz, a member of no wave band 3 Teens Kill 4, playing frequently in clubs such as Danceteria and the Peppermint Lounge. The proclivity of East Village artists in this period for forming musical groups – Jean-Michel Basquiat, Alan Vega and Nancy Arlen, among others – is suggestive of the interdisciplinary practice of many of these artists and the importance of a nightclub network in establishing an environment and arts space in which to see and be seen, both drawing from and adding to an interactive downtown language of anti-hegemonic activity and experience.

Nightclub art shows at the Mudd Club, such as the *Xeroxes* show curated by Keith Haring in September 1980, and others at Club 57 in the very early 1980s, provided another means for Wojnarowicz to get his artworks seen, at a time when he was working as a club busboy to make a living. As Sylvère Lotringer notes, these East Village nightclub exhibitions



represented a new attitude towards exhibition space, a 'crossover ... the first transgression of the conceptual ethic and territory,' and asserts that while the artists featured may have been loosely involved with collectives such as Colab (Collaborative Projects Incorporated) and Group Material, the underlying motivation was a punk-led attitude of spontaneity, inextricably linked to the drug culture and (sometimes) illicit activity of the clubs themselves.¹⁹ Colab was established in 1978 by a group of New York-based artists who 'banded together as a *union* ... to raise funds, organize exhibitions, and share equipment,' seeking to tap into the new availability of state and federal grants for arts organisations through the National Endowment for the Arts, money that was simply not available to individuals.²⁰ Brian Wallis has argued that 'the emergence of alternative spaces in the mid-to-late sixties was part of a radical utopian effort to circumvent the common gallery system,' offering artists 'a new basis for forming collectives to discuss and understand their role as workers within an economically and politically regulated system.'²¹

These concerns continued to be visible in the alternative arts spaces of the early 1980s, such as ABC No Rio, created following the closure by city authorities of Colab's *Real Estate Show*, an action mounted by a group of Tribeca artists in a long abandoned building on Delancy Street near the Williamsburg Bridge in 1980. Colab member Alan Moore argued that,

[t]he intention of this action [was] to show that artists are willing and able to place themselves and their work in a context which shows solidarity with oppressed people, a recognition that mercantile and institutional structures oppress and distort artists' lives and works, and a recognition that artists, living and working in depressed communities, are compradors in the revaluation of property and the 'whitening' of neighbourhoods.²²

The savvy co-ordination of exhibitions like the *Real Estate Show*, however, regardless of its diverse content and politicised tone, was indicative of an organisational prowess and cohesiveness that simply did not interest many of the younger East Village artists, for whom the notion of the collective carried a more disruptive ideological weight than that of the accessing of federal funds. As Dan Cameron wrote of downtown performance space the Limbo Lounge: 'like many other East Village performance spaces, [it] seemed to arise from the spontaneous combustion of cheap, available space and creative people with time on their hands,' the clubgoers themselves acting in another collaborative dimension, that of receptive audience providing 'support for interdisciplinary experimentation.'²³ While the artists of Colab 'cohered for pragmatic ends and the desire for a peer group social scene rather than because of aesthetic affinity,' disarray and disorder compelled the younger artists exhibiting within the club circuit, their notions of the collective more clearly demonstrated in the acid-fuelled collaborative painting 'jam' sessions that Wojnarowicz participated in on numerous occasions in the early 1980s, such as the *Acid Paintings* show at performance space the Limbo Lounge with Luis Frangella in 1983 and *Acid Night* at James Romberger and Marguerite van Cook's



gallery Ground Zero in 1985.²⁴ The temporary works produced at these collaborative sessions were violent and confrontational, manipulating a brutal idiom of urban political references and cartoon-like figures in vehement bright colours. Carlo McCormick described the acid 'installation' he led at the Virginia Museum of Fine Art in 1984 as 'a total "fuck you" ... We all showed up and destroyed this beautiful space, painting all over, even on the beautiful wooden floors. It probably took them three weeks to get rid of what we did there.'²⁵

In early 1982, Dean Savard opened his Lower East Side studio apartment up as 'Civilian Warfare,' a gallery that sought to 'cultivate exactly the angst-ridden ambience that its name implies.'²⁶ Taking that name from the terrorised cries of a local bag lady – 'There's civilian warfare on the streets!' – the gallery, run with Alan Barrows, promoted a gritty, yet tongue-in-cheek, rhetoric of combative sexualities, identities and themes, showing New York-based artists such as Luis Frangella, Judy Glantzman and Greer Lankton. Wojnarowicz began exhibiting his work at the gallery not long after its inception, with solo exhibitions there in 1983 and 1984. Savard and Barrows looked to establish a gallery that would reflect the urban environment in which the artists were creating the works of art to be shown there. As graffiti pioneer Fred 'Fab Five Freddy' Braithwaite noted of the earlier downtown FUN Gallery: 'They wanted a gallery that was like the work itself.'²⁷ Wojnarowicz's works from the 1982 to 1984 period in which he was closely associated with Civilian Warfare – garbage can lids spray-painted with animal heads and appropriated advertising posters – reference the detritus of the modern city, a multifarious language of consumer waste and urban marginality, similar concerns to those explored at the Ward Line pier project of 1983, that will be discussed later.²⁸ Later exhibitions at Civilian Warfare showcased Wojnarowicz's sculptural works. An advertisement for the gallery, shot by Peter Hujar in 1984, shows a topless Wojnarowicz, his head out of view, holding a reptilian head sculpture, brightly painted and with a globe in its teeth, up to the potential visitor. Interestingly, however, while the violent ambience of Civilian Warfare and the *community* of the gallery network of which it was a part was undoubtedly of significance as Wojnarowicz's work advanced, his genuinely *collaborative* works were not created here, but rather developed from the friendships and experiences facilitated by the East Village network.

As earlier references to the acid-fuelled painting 'jams' of the mid-80s suggest, drugs played a major role in the Lower East Side arts scene of the period and Wojnarowicz's work was no exception. Carlo McCormick was dealing acid at the time and filmmakers Richard Kern and Tommy Turner, with whom Wojnarowicz collaborated in the mid-1980s on films including *You Killed Me First* (1985) and *Where Evil Dwells* (1985), were selling cannabis and taking heroin. In an interview with Lotringer, Kern spoke of Wojnarowicz's involvement in the drug scene at the time: 'Let's be honest here: he was way into speed! And he did heroin with me a few times. He was just like everybody else: he'd try anything.'²⁹ Kern's comments are suggestive of the double-edged nature of drug use for Wojnarowicz; the



communal pull of ‘everybody else’ combined with the alienating effects of such substances. In 1979, Wojnarowicz worked on a film documenting his friends’ heroin use ‘in the abandoned warehouses and shipping lines of the Hudson river. Film was about HEROIN – made it using friends who were flirting with I. V. drug use in the mistaken hopes that it would get them to reconsider the directions they were moving in.’³⁰ It is interesting that even within the collaborative framework of creative production and inclusivity explored earlier in this article and the inclination of many artists towards LSD, heroin use acted as a separating, divisive force that facilitated a close artistic connection with fellow users like Kern and Turner, but alienated Wojnarowicz from others.³¹ As Kern explains, ‘David had two sets of friends: there was the art scene and then there was the scene that I was in.’³² Another artist friend of Wojnarowicz’s at this point, Steve Doughton, confirms the artist’s fondness for speed and notes that ‘David tended to compartmentalize his relationships with friends and seemed to choose his drugs according to whom he was hanging out with.’³³ The diversity of social groups implied in the testimonies of his contemporaries resounds with Wojnarowicz’s mythic understanding of himself as having ‘erased [his] own borders,’ suggesting an interesting tension in Wojnarowicz’s collaborative sensibility and varied friendships wherein drug use both emerged from a shifting and multiplicitous sense of identity and intimated some segregation.³⁴

In early 1983, Wojnarowicz and fellow artist Mike Bidlo invited artists such as Luis Frangella, Keith Davis, Rhonda Zwillinger, Judy Glantzman, and John Feckner to join them in staging an (illegal) artistic repossession of a dilapidated warehouse on Pier 34, a popular cruising spot on the Lower West Side. Its vast space was filled with painted murals, stencil graffiti, and sculptures, before being claimed by police after less than a year and pulled down. Bidlo recalled that he and Wojnarowicz were ‘co-curators, supposedly,’ of what became known as the Ward Line pier project, ‘[b]ut it wasn’t a curated show ... It was just something we told people about and got people excited about: the ultimate alternative space, where anybody could come and do almost anything they wanted, if they had the time, the energy, and the effort.’³⁵ The works created in the warehouse interacted with the layout and rundown quality of the space; the space was interpreted not as a canvas but as a participatory element in the work’s execution, far exceeding the possibilities permitted in the small storefront galleries of the Lower East Side. Wojnarowicz even spread grass seed through some of the rooms, the ‘disintegrated plaster that had fallen out of the ceiling’ providing sustenance for them to grow ‘in the confines of the building,’ rendering the rooms fields in an ‘industrial meadow’ and a peculiarly multi-authored artwork: ‘[t]hose are some of the gestures that I loved the most and got the least attention because they were the most anonymous – you can’t sign a blade of grass that says Wojnarowicz.’³⁶

The project was one of the most profoundly collaborative works of Wojnarowicz’s career, one that appealed to the artist’s ongoing romance with the criminal and the sub-



cultural, the 'lawlessness and anonymity simultaneously' that he so desired.³⁷ Perhaps more pertinently, this guerrilla takeover represented a desire not simply to overrule the gallery network of the East Village as it became increasingly mainstream, but to provide variety within it. A 1983 photograph of Wojnarowicz by Andreas Sterzing, recently published in Lotringer's collection of interviews, shows the artist painting a broken window at the pier which reads: 'Artists: stay in control of your hearts and minds,' the opening letter drawn as the symbol of anarchy. Above, the image of a hanged man is labelled as a 'Victim of Hype.' Peter Hujar was one of a number of photographers who documented the 'installations' and his images of Wojnarowicz's work there show paintings that relate very closely to the work the artist was showing contemporaneously at Civilian Warfare and Gracie Mansion Gallery; images of pterodactyls and agonised cowheads, along with eloquent graffiti musings. The large-scale murals, which Wojnarowicz termed 'frescoes,' made use of the vast space of the warehouse and interacted with its layout and rundown state, the due sense of fear and traces of anonymous sexual activity, of the empty warehouses as cruising space, adding to the illicit undercurrents of the images themselves.³⁸

This reconfiguration of abandoned urban space was not a purely aesthetic gesture but also intimately linked to Wojnarowicz's broader interest in the parameters of the personal and the universal, both socially and aesthetically, closely connected to his fascination with the collaborative:

exploring art as a record of the times we live in as well as a vehicle of communication between members of certain social structures and minorities: trusting one's own vision ... [finding] increasing hope in my differences and the gradual simultaneous split from the implemented and enforced and legislated social structure.³⁹

As popular locations for frequent anonymous yet intimate sexual encounters, the mythology of the piers as sexual 'hunting ground' itself embodies this resituating of the boundaries of the personal and the universal; a secret place that connected Wojnarowicz to a resolute sense of homosexual self at large.⁴⁰ Melissa Jacques considers the act and experience of cruising at the piers paramount to an understanding of Wojnarowicz's work, reading his oeuvre as 'a fragmented performance of resistance' that 'rather than seek to establish new boundaries or new models of inclusiveness ... represents a world characterised by change, always in flux, always in motion.'⁴¹ For Wojnarowicz, it was the nameless sexual encounters in the Hudson River piers and the possibility of combining this environment with his close friendships through the Ward Line project that formed the ideal antidote to the singularity of the modernist artist figure and challenge to the 'Tony Shafrazi ... Mary Boone' gallery framework he held in such contempt. There lingered 'the endless forms of chance and possibility as an alternative to construction, the free floating in time/space/image ... the possibility inherent in



impossibility,⁴² perhaps an Althusserian 'materialism of encounter' in its most anonymous sense.⁴³

Collaboration and Subjectivity

No being-with the Other, no socius without this with that makes being-with in general more enigmatic than ever for us. And this being-with spectres would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations.⁴⁴

While the anonymous and the collaborative may seem to conflict, both represent a firm challenge to the authorial logic of hegemonic subjectivation. The collaborative, like the nameless, 'knows there is no outside' and in its firm eschewal of such formulations represents what Robert Siegle describes as the 'implosion of the disciplinary forces that determine individuality in postindustrial society.'⁴⁵ Wojnarowicz's experiences of the piers in his early artistic career were heavily informed by his readings of the work of queer writers such as Jean Genet, William Burroughs and Arthur Rimbaud, residents of somewhat different times and places. Wojnarowicz's own written accounts of his sexual encounters at the piers present an idiolect of shadows, spectres and ghostly presences that through its rhetorical manipulation of notions of presence and absence and historicisation, suggests for these counter-culture figures an almost physical manifestation within the locales of urban male homosexuality in late twentieth century New York. The performance artist and playwright Penny Arcade, reviewing Wojnarowicz's *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* (1991), described the artist as having 'gorged himself on a diet of Jean Genet and Bill Burroughs while trying to unravel ... and make sense of the decisions of his young adulthood.'⁴⁶ Drawing on theories of performativity, citation and spectral presence, the appropriative play on notions of role models and genealogies in Wojnarowicz's work represents a kind of multiplicitous subjectivity and 'meta-identity,'⁴⁷ in its turn functioning as a form of 'multigenerational' collaboration.⁴⁸

These concerns were evident in Wojnarowicz's testimony as plaintiff in a lawsuit in June 1990 against Reverend Donald E. Wildmon and the American Family Association, following the defendants' publication of 'a pamphlet of fourteen homoerotic images lifted out of context from [Wojnarowicz's] artworks in an attempt to discredit the National Endowment for the Arts,' and successful efforts to remove NEA funding from the Artists' Space HIV/AIDS-related exhibition *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing* the previous year.⁴⁹ Describing his 1979 collage work *Untitled (Genet)*, Wojnarowicz spoke of the 'sense of alienation' that overwhelmed him as he 'got off the street' in the mid-1970s. He notes: 'I felt the weight of my experiences and that there was very little chance I could transcend them, or *turn them into something useful* with the social structure I was living in or outlive those experiences.'⁵⁰ Genet's work itself draws upon similar notions of transcendence. In *The Thief's Journal* (1949), he inverts traditional stereotypes of thief and judge and renders the supposed



deviance of theft quasi-religious by invoking in the act of stealing a 'nervousness provoked by fear, and sometimes by anxiety, [that] *makes for a state akin to religious moods.*'⁵¹

The *Rimbaud in New York* series, produced between 1978 and 1979, represents one of Wojnarowicz's first forays in the practice of what I have termed 'metahistorical collaboration.' The sequence of black and white photographs shows Wojnarowicz with, most likely, three of his friends, wearing a life-size mask of the French writer, in various locations around New York City, sites associated with the city's gay subculture and places that Wojnarowicz himself frequented: warehouses on the Hudson River piers, dive coffee shops, Times Square; 'playing with,' he wrote, 'ideas of compression of "historical time and activity" and fusing the French poet's identity with modern new york [sic] urban activities mostly illegal in nature.'⁵² (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1: David Wojnarowicz, *Rimbaud Masturbating* (from 'Arthur Rimbaud in New York'), 1978-9. Source: Barry Blinderman, ed. *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame*, New York, Distributed Art, 1989, 26.

Wojnarowicz's invocation of the 'poete maudit' was part of a wider dynamic reemergence of Rimbaud's work and image in the late 1970s New York punk scene, led by writer-musicians like Patti Smith, Richard Hell and Jim Carroll, following the example of earlier Rimbaud adherents such as William Burroughs and Henry Miller.



Wojnarowicz's series was first published in Dennis Cooper's 'zine *Little Caesar* in 1978, after poet Tim Dlugos recommended Wojnarowicz's work to Cooper, having seen an earlier issue of the 'zine entirely dedicated to work on Rimbaud by downtown writers, and later in the *Soho Weekly News* in 1980. An unpublished note for a *Rimbaud in New York* film, recently uncovered in Wojnarowicz's archive at New York University, details his plan for shots of 'rimbaud [sic] along lower west side ... inside piers and in dusk in hallways with milling groups of cruisers.'⁵³ Wojnarowicz's (mis)use of Etienne Carjat's famous image of the young Rimbaud was an appropriative gesture that sought to facilitate the presence of queer history and literature in dissolute urban spaces and in doing so, to create a sense of a homosexual genealogy, the self-conscious production of a gay legacy that functioned as a multi-faceted study of the nature and process of becoming self as well as of preserving an anti-hegemonic identity. The work looked to reclaim a known homosexual figure from historical stasis at the same time as it created a new form of identity by presenting Rimbaud within contemporary contexts. This radicalizes the strict logic of the historically specific, interpellated subject through rupture and reclaims queer identity from the repressive law of futurity. The perpetually delayed political fantasy of 'reproductive futurism' is critiqued by Lee Edelman in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) as a means of 'preserving ... the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations.'⁵⁴

Judith Butler's conception of heterosexual identity as constructed through a performative set of repetitive gestures that seek to affirm it as the 'original' is of relevance here.⁵⁵ For Butler, repetitious selfhood implies an identity constituted from a fragmentary relationship to the past, in which 'a reinforced repetition of the same' functions to quell a 'perpetual threat of a disruption.'⁵⁶ In the context of Wojnarowicz and the *Rimbaud in New York* series, it becomes clear that his appropriation is not a simple repetition of a familiar homosexual stereotype where the historical distance of the appropriated figure can provide a distance that renders the sexuality of the subject somewhat more palatable within a heterosexual matrix. What the combination of past and present in *Rimbaud in New York* sets up is a re-radicalising of Rimbaud's legacy that consciously deviates from accepted labels of gay identity and plays with the negative stereotyping of drug use and cruising. Just as the Ward Line project represented a politicised reclamation of a disappearing subcultural space, Wojnarowicz's *Rimbaud in New York* series

revealed creative strategies for... 'transcend[ing] society's hatred of diversity and loathing of homosexuals' ... demonstrating the value of preserving records of personal experience ... the necessity for ... actively constructing a personal history against the many ways that silence may be imposed.⁵⁷



As Mysoon Rizk has noted, the medium of collage functioned for Wojnarowicz as a superior means of 'synthesizing his own life and the lives of others' in order to achieve resonance for his subjects and themes.⁵⁸ The concept brings to mind Frederic Jameson's desire to 'rewrite the individual text, the individual cultural artefact, in terms of the antagonistic dialogue of class voices,' through which 'the individual text will be refocused as a parole, or individual utterance, of [a] vaster system, or langue ...'⁵⁹ For Wojnarowicz, this was figured in terms of what Felix Guattari described as the artist's proclivity for 'connecting his singular fantasies to a historical scheme.'⁶⁰

In Wojnarowicz's practice, collage, as a methodology of plurality and appropriation, represented the potential for collaboratively constructed histories, that could go beyond hegemonic conceptions of origin and legacy, bearing affinity to Lacanian notions of the future anterior: 'What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what it was, since it is no more, or the present perfect of what it has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming.'⁶¹ In a journal entry from 1980, Wojnarowicz suggests this overlapping, cyclical historicity is present in the *Rimbaud in New York* series as he recalls a meeting with the *Soho Weekly News* prior to the paper's publication of the work: 'I explained that it was a vision of Rimbaud with what was known of his sensibilities, only here in New York at this time and place in history. What he'd get into, what areas he'd be drawn to.'⁶² As Wojnarowicz wrote in an early prose poem entitled 'Reading a little Rimbaud in a Second Avenue coffee shop': 'the worlds [sic] going on outside the shop just rushing by in waves of sound & I can't do anything about it. It could be nineteen twenty or eighteen sixty or now & it wouldn't make a difference except maybe I wouldn't be reading what I'm reading where I am.'⁶³

Wojnarowicz's fascination with Rimbaud and Genet was consolidated during his time living in France in the late 1970s.⁶⁴ The artist's journals from this period contain numerous musings on the relationship of the Paris of his artistic mentors and that which Wojnarowicz himself experienced some decades later. Journal entries are combined with photographs of Wojnarowicz, their carefully staged iconography suggesting a desire to conflate the two locations through his own presence there, 'playing with the idea of compression of historical time and activity.'⁶⁵ The impulse to place the masked figure of 'Rimbaud' in New York rather than Paris also points to Wojnarowicz's sense of disappointment at the Paris of the 1970s and his desire to connect his own experiences with those of the French writers he admired: 'the bare animal need to experience and react within environments that have contact or construction within the past – the areas that one searches for personal history and understanding – these places are not found in Paris – so far as I've seen.'⁶⁶ This appears to have reasserted for Wojnarowicz a sense of the need for personal histories as a means of penetrating a discourse of 'state-supported forms of history' and maintaining a collaborative identity with these figures through art and writing.⁶⁷ As



Wojnarowicz later wrote in the same journal: 'Brassai, Genet, Cocteau. *They* wrote of the Paris that I subtly carried in my heart ... the split sequence of un chant d'amour [sic] that grew grey and quiet in the small theatre in S.F. The A.R. vision of side streets and crazed men with the spark of guns beneath their coats.'⁶⁸

The complex psychogeography of the piers and the practice of cruising – and his earlier hustling experiences in Times Square – formed a crucial element of Wojnarowicz's ideology of fragmented selfhood and non-linear history. For Genet, who was incarcerated in the Penitentiary Colony of Mettray between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, prison occupied a similarly prominent place in the psyche, this link helping to facilitate the sense of meta-identity and multigenerational communality present in Wojnarowicz's collage practice, where the artist could literally conflate these multiple locations and outlooks. As Jeremy Reed has written, the Colony was 'a remorselessly punitive reformatory with a history of abuse and suicide,' where incidences of violence and brutal sex occurred nightly, providing 'not only the template for Genet's subsequent fiction, but a deviant starting point for his whole emotional conditioning.'⁶⁹ Genet's film *Un Chant d'amour* (1950), which Wojnarowicz first saw in San Francisco in 1974, is set in a French jail and centres upon the erotic relationships amongst those held there, most notably a prison guard who takes voyeuristic pleasure from observing the inmates masturbating. Reed considers Genet to have 'delighted' in the cruelty and severity he experienced at Mettray, a position somewhat comparable to Wojnarowicz's romanticised and sexualised vision of the criminal activity which haunted the West Side piers and the pitiless Times Square of his hustling youth. A journal entry from early 1980 points to the aesthetic appeal of these visions, the sight of a muscular convict multiplying erotically for Wojnarowicz into thousands of desired bodies, 'like the bleak lit evolution of a Muybridge series.'⁷⁰ The multiplicity of the vision can be seen to correlate to Roland Barthes's discussion of the collaborative erotics of self-disidentification in the work of nineteenth-century French writer Stendhal, where Barthes locates what he terms 'the amorous plural,' a pleasure 'analogous to that enjoyed today by someone "cruising",' involving an 'irregular discontinuity ... simultaneously aesthetic, psychological and metaphysical.'⁷¹

The 1983 work *Jean Genet Masturbating in Mettray Prison* follows the form of a number of Wojnarowicz's collage works from the early 1980s period; stencilled images superimposed on mass-produced poster advertisements, often connected with the sale of meat or fish, like *Tuna* (1983). The date of the work coincides with the peak of Wojnarowicz's activity at the Hudson River warehouses and the Ward Line pier project. The stencilled image depicts two naked male figures masturbating in a prison cell, indicated clearly by the barred window in the top right corner of the image, boldly executed in block shading that highlights the languid pose of the foremost figure and the delineation of his penis (Fig. 2). Iconographically, the work bears relation to Wojnarowicz's *Memory Drawings* series from 1981, published posthumously in September 1992 in the collection *Memories That Smell Like*



Gasoline, in which the artist recalls from memory his own earliest sexual encounters, which are likewise depicted in stark black and white ink.⁷² Genet's face, well known to Wojnarowicz through widely disseminated portraits by Brassai and others, is entirely obscured from the viewer and, save for the descriptive title, implicates both Wojnarowicz and the viewer in the position of the masturbating figure. The absence of the face plays up to notions of the 'demolition' of the self often conceived of as present in gay sex, 'the self-shattering and solipsistic jouissance that is sexuality itself,' as Leo Bersani has described it.⁷³ Most importantly, the absence functions to suggest the figure as a referential body for any number of sexual desires and longings, permitting Wojnarowicz to fantasise a collaborative idiom of erotic pleasure and physical oppression that links his own experiences to those of Jean Genet, conflating the two locations by way of the contemporary American poster; a 'linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present: "now," future present)' as Jacques Derrida has termed it.⁷⁴ A multigenerational exchange of selves, a collaboration, which through the rhetoric of the 'promiscuous encounter' enacts 'the possibility of a simultaneous identification and disidentification, which, may then involve a reidentification – ceasing to be the fixed, tyrannised subject.'⁷⁵



Fig. 2: David Wojnarowicz, *Jean Genet Masturbating at Mettray Prison*, 1983
34" x 25". Photograph: Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York.



An earlier work, produced around the same time as the *Rimbaud in New York* series, suggests a rather different image of Jean Genet but one that likewise plays upon conceptions of multiplicitous subjectivity and collaboration. *Untitled (Genet)* from 1979 is a Xeroxed collage showing the figure of Genet, appropriated from a well-known 1947 photograph by Brassai, standing haloed within a World War II image of soldiers in a ravaged church interior, flanked by armed angels from a fifteenth-century Flemish image and a muscular comic-book figure with a crossbow (Fig. 3). Behind this peculiar scene lies a reconfigured altarpiece where Wojnarowicz has depicted Christ, as Jerry D. Meyer has noted, 'as the suffering Man of Sorrows transformed into a drug addict complete with syringe and makeshift tourniquet.'⁷⁶



Fig. 3: David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (Genet)*, 1979, Xeroxed collage, 8 ½" x 11". Source: Sylvère Lotringer, *David Wojnarowicz: A Definitive History of Five or Six Years on the Lower East Side*, New York; Los Angeles; Semiotext(e); Cambridge, MA; London, The MIT Press, 2006, 216.

The double presence of sainthood and messianic suffering draws upon Wojnarowicz's conceptions of the imaginative and artistic potential he considered to be present within the act and process of human anguish, as well as reiterating what Mysoon Rizk has observed in the *Rimbaud in New York* series, that is, 'the value of preserving records of personal experience.'⁷⁷ For Wojnarowicz, as he argued in his testimony against Wildmon and the American Family Association, the Christian notion of Jesus having taken on 'all the suffering of all people in the world' represented a mandate for updating this iconic figure within the streets of the Lower East Side: 'I wanted to make a symbol that would show that he would



take on the suffering of the vast amounts of addiction that I saw on the streets.'⁷⁸ The symbol of Christ acts again as a referential body within which is contained the 'ability of the autobiographical act to mirror communal concerns,' perhaps the ultimate symbol of the potential for singular experience to connect with a collaborative, social sensibility.⁷⁹ In this sense, Wojnarowicz's practice of 'multi-historical' collaboration functions to loosen the grip of 'state-supported forms of history'⁸⁰ and the repression of the thus interpellated individual subject, establishing a psychic and aesthetic space where, paraphrasing from Rimbaud's famous letter to Paul Demeny in 1871, Guattari argues that 'I is an other, a multiplicity of others, embodied at the intersection of partial components of enunciation, breaching on all sides individuated identity and the organised body.'⁸¹

Genet's defiant claims of heterogeneous selfhood – 'I am a vagrant, not a revolutionary. *How can you expect me to define myself?*' – resound in the image of the writer represented in this work.⁸² The halo around the figure's head establishes Genet as 'saint,' which Wojnarowicz confirmed in his discussion of this image as part of his testimony during the trial against Reverend Wildmon in 1990: 'I wanted to nominate Jean Genet as a patron saint for people like myself who had brutal experiences living on the street and who were also homosexual and felt alienated.'⁸³ The labelling of sainthood is indeed also an ironic one that plays upon the title of Jean-Paul Sartre's biography, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, first published in English in 1963. Loren Ringer has observed the depersonalisation of the figure of Genet as rife in Sartre's study: 'in a sense, he is frozen in time; with the methodologies of that period, Sartre captures Genet in a portrait as a social pariah.'⁸⁴ Wojnarowicz's act of appropriation and his collage method is one that seeks to reactivate the historicised subjectivity of figures, like Genet and Rimbaud, whom he considered as role models, a desire that connects to Guattari's notion of the diverse subject espoused in *Chaosmosis*, where 'the important thing is not the final result but the fact that the multicomponential cartographic method can co-exist with the process of subjectivation, and that a reappropriation, an autopoiesis, of the means of production of subjectivity can be made possible.'⁸⁵

A comparable method of subjective reappropriation can be traced in Wojnarowicz's collaborative work, and is explored very directly in the painting *Peter Hujar Dreaming/Yukio Mishima: St. Sebastian* (1982), which takes an image of a close friend and occasional lover, the photographer Peter Hujar sleeping and integrates it into a triad of figures that function as visual signifiers of homosexual persecution (Fig. 4). The incorporation of Hujar's image is indicative of the intellectual exchange that took place between the artist and the photographer. Above the sleeping Hujar, upon a glowing pink stencil of the penetrated figure of Saint Sebastian, Wojnarowicz has superimposed an image of twentieth-century Japanese writer Yukio Mishima masturbating. The connection with earlier images of the masked Rimbaud figure, also depicted masturbating, is clear: Mishima's novel *Confessions of a Mask* (1948) is a semi-autobiographical work about a young Japanese homosexual who must hide



behind a mask in order to fit into society. Like Rimbaud, the story and image of Saint Sebastian had gained a particular homoerotic currency in 1970s queer culture, notably in Derek Jarman's controversial film *Sebastiane* (1976). The dreaming figure of Hujar is further externalized by his position in regard to the viewer forming the lower left axis of the compositional arrangement, implicating both within this iconic triad of homosexual identity, viewing him as Wojnarowicz may have done, as 'mentor' and guide through this network.⁸⁶



Fig. 4: David Wojnarowicz, *Peter Hujar Dreaming/Yukio Mishima: St. Sebastian*, 1982, Spray paint on masonite, 48" x 48". Source: Barry Blinderman, ed. *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame*, New York, Distributed Art, 1989, 7.

The sleeping Hujar thus appears, as the title suggests, to be dreaming of the two iconic homosexual figures simultaneously, the composite vision intimating a historically transcendent sense of communal awareness that links the identities present in the image, similar in this to many of Wojnarowicz's other collage-style works and their construction of multiplicitous identities. It is worth considering here Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's queer notion of anti-Oedipal selfhood, that of an 'orphan' that 'produces itself within the identity of nature and man.'⁸⁷ Deleuze and Guattari orphaned the self as means of rejecting the logic of the family and its paramount position in psychoanalytic discourse. For them, the family functioned as 'the agent delegated to psychic repression,' and as such it seems strange that discourses of paternity have performed such an important symbolic role in analyses of



Wojnarowicz and Hujar's relationship, regardless of the twenty-year age gap between them.⁸⁸ The triadic composition of *Peter Hujar Dreaming*, the intellectual fantasy that the images of dreaming and masturbation invoke, abandons the teleological, narrowly procreative logic of heteronormative genealogy and, as Lee Edelman has argued of the queer more generally, looks to '[traverse] the collective fantasy that invests the social order with meaning by way of reproductive futurism.'⁸⁹

The acceleration of HIV/AIDS under a negligent neo-conservative political administration prompted a resurgence of the rhetoric of the heterosexual family in political, and even medical, dialogue.⁹⁰ In his seminal activist piece *When I Put My Hands on Your Body* (1990) – produced while Wojnarowicz was himself dying from AIDS – a superimposed text upon an image of skeletons in shallow graves invokes the language of normative genealogies in a kind of Foucauldian reclamation, to create for Wojnarowicz and his dying friends a new model for collective history that would serve as witness to their experiences:

When I put my hands on your body on your flesh I feel the history of that body. Not just the beginning of its forming in that distant lake but all the way beyond its ending ... I see the organs gradually fade into transparency leaving a gloaming skeleton gleaming like ivory that slowly revolves until it becomes dust ... It makes me weep to feel the history of your flesh beneath my hands in a time of so much loss. It makes me weep to feel the movement of your flesh beneath my palms as you twist and turn over to one side to create a series of gestures to reach up around my neck to draw me nearer. All these memories will be lost in time like tears in the rain.⁹¹

Both Wojnarowicz and Hujar were remembered in patches of the NAMES project memorial quilt, as was Keith Davis, with whom Wojnarowicz worked on the Ward Line pier project. As Lee Edelman has observed in *Homographesis*,

AIDS ... can be figured as a crisis in – and hence as an opportunity for – the social shaping or articulation of subjectivities because, in part, the historical context within which AIDS in the West achieved its 'identity' allowed it to be positioned as a syndrome distinctively engaging identity as an issue.⁹²

An interesting reference point for the changing nature of Wojnarowicz and Hujar's relationship as a consequence of HIV/AIDS is Paul Monette's *Eighteen Elegies for Rog*, published in 1989 after the death of his partner Roger Horwitz from AIDS complications:

I had a self once
But he died when do we leave the mirror
and lie down in front of the tanks.⁹³

For Monette, a changing communal subjectivity is figured as essential to both the process of grieving those suffering from AIDS within the political climate of the late 1980s and to the activism that emerged in reaction to it. Wojnarowicz's strong sense of the ethical imperative of AIDS activism is made clear in the essay 'Postcards from America: X-Rays from Hell' from



Close to the Knives. As an HIV-positive friend contemplates suicide, Wojnarowicz asks him "If tomorrow you could take a pill that would let you die quickly and quietly, would you do it?" "No," he said, "not yet." "There's too much work to do," I said.⁹⁴ Similarly for Monette, as Edelman writes, 'in the aftermath of Roger's death, the survival through transference of ego erotics invested by Monette in that shared identity prompts his rejection of 'self'-regard in favour of the political activism of a newly constituted *communal* self.'⁹⁵

A queer logic of the communal, re-appropriating the discourse of the family, is explored in Hocquenghem's proposition of the importance of 'socialising' homosexuality and its symbolism, avoiding its analysis as 'an individual problem.' Hocquenghem argued in the polemical *Homosexual Desire* (1972) that,

to deal with homosexuality as an individual problem, as the individual problem, is the surest way to subject it to the Oedipus complex. Homosexual desire is a group desire; it groups the anus by restoring its function as a desiring bond, and by collectively reinvesting it against a society which has reduced it to the state of a shameful little secret.⁹⁶

This concept is developed further in Bersani's article 'Is The Rectum a Grave?' (1987) in which he argues that, 'AIDS has reinforced the heterosexual association of anal sex with a self-annihilation originally and primarily identified with ... an insatiable female sexuality.'⁹⁷ Bersani's argument overlaps with Hocquenghem's premise of 'group desire' as he quotes from Simon Watney's description of urban manifestations of late twentieth century gay identity as 'constructed through multiple encounters, shifts of sexual identification, acting out ... and a *plurality of opportunity* (at least in large urban areas)' in order to 'desubliminate the inherited sexual guilt of a grotesquely homophobic society.'⁹⁸

Wojnarowicz returned to the image of Hujar in one of his final pieces of a collaborative nature: portraits of Hujar on his deathbed, taken immediately following his death, which Wojnarowicz described elsewhere in *Close to the Knives* as extending from a desire to capture 'portraits of his amazing feet, his head, that open eye.'⁹⁹ These were appropriated later as fragments in a vitriolic political painting that explored this process of seeking and producing a historiographical methodology that could represent both individual and collective experience. Like Hujar's own portraits, which he conceived of as existing 'in Life and Death,' Wojnarowicz's photographs of the artist's body 'commemorate Hujar's practice by reiterating its own logic,' capturing it within the images as if part of a shared, hereditary nature, a visual legacy, while also functioning as a 'literalised, photographic act of mourning.' (Fig. 5)¹⁰⁰





Fig. 5: David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled* (triptych), 1989, Gelatin-silver prints, 10" x 14" each. Source: Sylvère Lotringer, *David Wojnarowicz: A Definitive History of Five or Six Years on the Lower East Side*, New York; Los Angeles; Semiotext(e); Cambridge, MA; London, The MIT Press, 2006. 180.

The principle of paternity imagined in accounts of Wojnarowicz and Hujar's relationship, and in images like *When I Put My Hands on Your Body*, might instead be figured in terms of a rhetoric of excess, not simply in Leo Bersani's terms of the excess of the non-procreative sexual act, but more significantly in the sense that its nature goes beyond the 'Oedipal yoke' of the psychoanalytic familial triad, embodying its various roles simultaneously and Wojnarowicz's elegiac description of the immediate aftermath of Hujar's passing points to this:

... a nun rushed in babbling about how he'd accepted the church and I look at this guy on the bed with his outstretched arm and I think: but he's beyond that. He's more than the words coming from her containing these images of spirituality – I mean just the essence of death; the fears and joys of it the flight it contains this body of my friend on this bed this body of *my brother my father my emotional link to the world* this body I don't know this pure and cutting air just all the thoughts and



sensations this death this event produces in bystanders contains more spirituality than any words we can manufacture.¹⁰¹

An analysis of the rhetoric of paternity is thus bound by the same tension between the parameters of the individual and the universal that was of such great importance to Wojnarowicz's understanding of himself as an East Village artist, framing his creative activity throughout his lifetime. A study of collaboration in Wojnarowicz's practice allows the downtown New York milieu in which he was working to be explored in a manner that, like the delicate suspension of self and society in the artist's own work, goes beyond hegemonic discourses of singular artistic identity, that 'seamless gestalt of the artist' that Pamela Lee rejected in her study of Gordon Matta-Clark, to assert a *collective* history that speaks to both the personal and universal simultaneously, without compromising the significance of either.

¹ Robert Siegle, *Suburban Ambush: Downtown Writing and the Fiction of Insurgency*, Baltimore; London, Johns Hopkins University Press, c1989, 11. Emphasis added.

² Sylvère Lotringer, *David Wojnarowicz: A Definitive History of Five or Six Years on the Lower East Side*, New York; Los Angeles; Semiotext(e); Cambridge, MA; London, The MIT Press, 2006, 12.

³ Felix Guattari, 'David Wojnarowicz,' *Rethinking Marxism*, Spring 1990.

⁴ David Wojnarowicz, 'Postcards from America: X-Rays from Hell,' in *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame*, ed. Barry Blinderman, New York, Distributed Art, 1989, 108. See also Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethicoaesthetic Paradigm*, Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1995.

⁵ Siegle, *Suburban Ambush*, 10. Emphasis added.

⁶ Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, 'The Fine Art of Gentrification,' *October*, Vol. 31, Winter, 1984, 93.

⁷ Carlo McCormick, 'A Crack in Time,' in *The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene 1974 - 1984*, ed. Marvin Taylor, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2006, 69.

⁸ Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002, vii-viii.

⁹ Pamela M. Lee, *Object to be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark*, Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 1999, 210.



¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹² C. Carr, 'The Bohemian Diaspora,' in *On Edge: Performance at the End of the Twentieth Century*, Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University Press, 1993, 299.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁴ Deutsche and Ryan, 'The Fine Art of Gentrification,' 93.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Deutsche and Ryan's article draws from Craig Owen's trenchant critique of the East Village scene in 'The Problem with Puerilism,' *Art in America*, Vol. 72, No. 6, Summer 1984.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

¹⁷ The work of the art activist group PAD/D (Political Art Distribution/ Documentation) specifically engaged artists' concerns about gentrification, for example, in their 1983-1984 show *Not for Sale: A project against displacement* at the El Bohio community centre on East Ninth Street on the Lower East Side. This was set up and run by Charas, 'the politicised Puerto Rican youth gang turned community service group,' in which neighbourhood artists were asked to produce anti-gentrification posters. See: Julie Ault, ed., *Alternative Art, New York, 1965-1985: A Cultural Politics Book for the Social Text Collective*, Minneapolis; London, University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

¹⁸ David Wojnarowicz, 'Biographical Dateline,' *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame*, 118.

¹⁹ Lotringer, *David Wojnarowicz*, 12.

²⁰ <http://www.abcnorio.org> Emphasis added.

²¹ Julie Ault, *Alternative Art*, 164. Emphasis added.

²² Siegle, *Suburban Ambush*, 14.

²³ Dan Cameron et al., *East Village USA*, New York, New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004, 86.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Lotringer, *David Wojnarowicz*, 14.

²⁶ Cameron et al., *East Village USA*, 51.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁸ Wojnarowicz's own notes for an exhibition of his work in 1988 provide a very succinct analysis of these aspects of his art: 'Printed matter from daily life is used as collage, sometimes in the shape of creatures, and sometimes buried in layers to suggest memory or things considered while viewing associations of information. Food posters which have an encoded meaning of consumption are used as backdrops for information dealing with consumption on a psychic or moral level,' David Wojnarowicz, *In The Shadow of the*



American Dream: The Diaries of David Wojnarowicz, ed. Amy Scholder, New York, Grove Press, 1999, 205.

²⁹ Lotringer, *David Wojnarowicz*, 66.

³⁰ David Wojnarowicz, 'Biographical Dateline,' *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame*, 118.

³¹ Peter Hujar is probably the most notable example of those friends opposed to Wojnarowicz's drug use at this point. Stephen Koch has noted that 'when Peter became aware that David was being drawn into the frequent use of hard drugs, his reaction was immediate, firm ... Either David must stop using hard drugs completely and immediately, or Peter would read him out of his life for good,' Correspondence with the author – e-mail, 6th June 2007, and Richard Kern observed, 'David quit [drugs] so that Peter would talk to him again,' Lotringer, *David Wojnarowicz*, 66.

³² *Ibid.*, 71.

³³ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁴ Letter to French publisher, October 1978; The David Wojnarowicz Papers: Series I, Box 1, Folder 7; The David Wojnarowicz Papers: Series I, Box 1, Folder 7; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

³⁵ Lotringer *David Wojnarowicz*, 29.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Wojnarowicz, *In The Shadow of the American Dream*, 128.

³⁸ David Wojnarowicz, 'Losing the Form in Darkness,' in *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*, New York, Vintage Books, 1991, 14.

³⁹ David Wojnarowicz, 'Biographical Dateline,' *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame*, 118.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Melissa Jacques, 'Making Cruising Dwelling: motion as shelter in the work of David Wojnarowicz' (abstract), *Performance Research*, Vol. 10, No. 4. Abstract.

⁴² Wojnarowicz, *In The Shadow of the American Dream*, 128-9.

⁴³ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon: Presses du réel, 2002, 18.

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, New York; London, Routledge, 1994, xvii.

⁴⁵ Siegle, *Suburban Ambush*, 391.

⁴⁶ Penny Arcade, 'On David Wojnarowicz's In The Shadow of the American Dream,' in Cameron et al, *East Village USA*, 109.

⁴⁷ Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 189.



⁴⁸ Phrase borrowed from Penny Arcade 'On David Wojnarowicz's in *The Shadow of the American Dream*, 110: 'The bohemian ritual of finding one's place in the food chain of art history and of apprenticeship at the hip of one's role models are rarely seen today. Multigenerationalism, the backbone of bohemia, has been replaced by what can only be called a monogenerational scene.'

⁴⁹ Lotringer, *David Wojnarowicz*, 216. Wojnarowicz was successful and received one dollar in compensation, which he insisted on receiving by cheque so that he could incorporate it into a painting.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

⁵¹ Jean Genet, *The Thief's Journal*, trans. by B. Frechtman, New York, Grove Press, 1964, 29. Emphasis added.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ David Wojnarowicz Papers: Series I, Box 1, Folder 11: 'Journals NYC, 1979.'

⁵⁴ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2004, 2.

⁵⁵ Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination,' in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss, New York; London, Routledge, 1991, 13. In her footnotes to 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination,' Butler cites Derrida's 'The Double Session' from his *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981, where he argues that the mime 'does not imitate or copy some prior phenomenon, idea or figure, but constitutes – some might say *performatively* – the phantasm of the original in and through the mime,' 30. This is interesting in the context of a problematizing of gender and identity binarism and Butler quotes Derrida thus: 'He represents nothing, imitates nothing, does not have to conform to any prior referent with the aim of achieving adequation or verisimilitude ... There is no simple reference, this speculum reflects no reality: it produces mere "reality effects" ... It is a difference without reference, or rather reference without a referent, without any first or last unit, a *ghost that is the phantom of no flesh.*'

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁷ Mysoon Rizk, 'Reinventing the Pre-invented World,' in *Fever: The Art of David Wojnarowicz*, Dan Cameron et al, New York, Rizzoli, 1999, 48.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁹ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, London, Methuen, 1981, 85.

⁶⁰ Guattari, 'David Wojnarowicz,' 12

⁶¹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, London, Tavistock Publications, 1977, 86.

⁶² Journal entry, 1980, no month given; The David Wojnarowicz Papers: Series I, Box 1, Folder 4; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.



⁶³ David Wojnarowicz Papers: Series 3, Subseries A, Box 4, Folder 94; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

⁶⁴ The artist's first exposure to Genet was in San Francisco in 1974: 'Saw Genet's *un chant d'amour* and it confirmed for me that one could transcend society's hatred of diversity and loathing of homosexuals,' David Wojnarowicz, 'Biographical Dateline,' in *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame* 117.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Journal entry, September 15 1978; The David Wojnarowicz Papers: Series I, Box 1, Folder 7; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

⁶⁷ David Wojnarowicz, 'Biographical Dateline,' *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame*, 118.

⁶⁸ Journal entry, September 16 1978; The David Wojnarowicz Papers: Series I, Box 1, Folder 7; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries. Emphasis added.

⁶⁹ Jeremy Reed, *Jean Genet: Born to Lose*, New York, Creation Books, 2005, 18.

⁷⁰ Journal entry, February 16 1980; The David Wojnarowicz Papers: Series I, Box 1, Folder 13; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

⁷¹ Roland Barthes, quoted in Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, London, The Penguin Press, 1998, 324-5.

⁷² David Wojnarowicz, *Memories That Smell Like Gasoline*, New York, Serpent's Tail, 1992.

⁷³ Leo Bersani, quoted in Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory*, New York; London, Routledge, 1994, 107.

⁷⁴ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, xix.

⁷⁵ Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, 326.

⁷⁶ Jerry D. Meyer, 'Profane and Sacred: Religious and Prophetic Expression in Postmodern Art,' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 65, No. 1, Spring, 1997, 40.

⁷⁷ Mysoon Rizk, 'Reinventing the Pre-invented World,' 48.

⁷⁸ Lotringer, *David Wojnarowicz*, 217.

⁷⁹ G. Thomas Couser and Joseph Fichtelberg, eds., *True Relations: Essays on Autobiography and the Postmodern*, London, Greenwood Press, 1998, 8.

⁸⁰ David Wojnarowicz, 'Biographical Dateline,' 118.

⁸¹ Guattari, 'David Wojnarowicz,' 83.



⁸² Untitled article on Jean Genet's involvement with the Black Panthers; The David Wojnarowicz Papers: Series 3, Box 7, Folder 305; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

⁸³ Lotringer, *David Wojnarowicz*, 217.

⁸⁴ Loren Ringer, *Saint Genet Decanonized: The Ludic Body in Querelle*, Amsterdam; London, Rodopi, 2001, 13.

⁸⁵ Felix Guattari, 'David Wojnarowicz,' 12.

⁸⁶ Correspondence with the author – e-mail, April 30 2007.

⁸⁷ Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London, Athlone, 1984, 48.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Edelman, *No Future*, 28.

⁹⁰ Leo Bersani's comments on the role of the family in the media at this time are of relevance here: 'TV doesn't make the family, but it makes the family mean in a certain way. That is, it makes an exceptionally sharp distinction between the family as a biological unit and as a cultural identity ... the family produced on American television is much more likely to include your dog than your homosexual brother or sister,' Leo Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' *October* Vol. 43, Winter 1987, 203.

⁹¹ The same text also featured in the posthumously and collaboratively produced graphic novel *Seven Miles a Second*: David Wojnarowicz and James Romberger, *Seven Miles a Second*, New York, DC Comics, 1996.

⁹² Edelman, *No Future*, 96. Emphasis added.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁹⁴ Wojnarowicz, 'Losing the Form in Darkness,' 117.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁹⁶ Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, London, Allison and Busby, 1978, 97.

⁹⁷ Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' 222.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 218. Emphasis added.

⁹⁹ Wojnarowicz, 'Losing the Form in Darkness,' 102.

¹⁰⁰ David Deitcher, 'Ideas and Emotions,' *Artforum*, May 1989, 126.

¹⁰¹ Wojnarowicz, 'Losing the Form in Darkness,' 103. Emphasis added.



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