

Queering Methodology

Queer Zen: Unyoking Genealogy in Asian American Art History

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My interest in exploring Asian American art history through a queer methodological framework has surprisingly led me to abstract works from the 1960s by an artist who is not of Asian descent—Cy Twombly (1928–2011)—and his interlocutors, especially Roland Barthes (1915–1980).¹ Given that much work remains to make visible the artworks of US-based artists of Asian descent—lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, questioning, queer, and intersexual (LGBTQI) identified or not—my approach appears at best peculiar and naïve and at worst flippant and irresponsible.² This chapter, stripped from the context of this volume, could indeed lean toward the latter and be construed as a hyperbolic provocation that masks its shortcoming. However, I want to underscore that my essay should be read *relationally* with and through the other interviews, artist statements, and scholarly essays in this book, which do make visible the work of artists of Asian descent that are LGBTQI identified. Moreover, this chapter challenges how one might approach visibility and inclusion, especially in the context of LGBTQI-identified artists of Asian descent and their artworks, which are largely absent from narratives of mid-twentieth-century American abstraction. I suggest that what counts as evidence in art history has to be rethought—a point to which I will return later in this essay—and that Asian American art history has to be recast as *not* only tied to genealogy.

Indeed, binding or yoking Asian American art history to genealogy is what has led to the occlusion of artworks exploring LGBTQI themes and created by LGBTQI-identified artists of Asian descent in the first place. Sexuality is at best a secondary area of interest for this subdiscipline of art history. For instance, the 2008 publication of *Asian American Art: A History, 1850–1970* was a watershed moment for making visible the contributions of a broad range of artists of Asian descent. The volume includes 150 artist biographies and

400 reproductions. However, a quick glance at the book's index reveals that words such as *gay*, *lesbian*, *queer*, *bisexual*, *transgender*, *gender*, and *sexuality* are missing. Supplementing art history is an important but always already fraught exercise. Jacques Derrida's writings on the supplement are instructive in this regard. As he writes, "[The supplement] adds itself [and] is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude. . . . But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace." Supplementing art history is a frustrating task that can "never fully . . . deliver on its promise of inclusivity."³

I suggest that we shift attention from authorship or "roots and routes," around which my discussion above pivots, to an equally valid (and flawed) subject, namely Asian American art history as a category of discursive knowledge that may or may not involve artists of Asian descent.⁴ The latter is along the lines of how Kandice Chuh suggests we should approach Asian American studies in *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique*. Chuh is concerned with literature rather than artworks, but her point is transferable to Asian American art history. She writes that rather than evincing a "desire for subjectivity," the field of Asian American studies should be "subjectless."⁵ She notes that a "strategic *anti-essentialism*," rather than bounded notions of identity, is what coheres Asian American studies.⁶ Indeed, it is ironic that despite postmodernism's troubling of the author as the repository of meaning, as crystallized in Barthes's proclamation of the "death of the author," the author still remains quite important in art's histories.⁷

Thus I precariously linger at the edges of a more specifically *queer*, or troubled, Asian American art history. *Queer* signals the importance of sexuality to my analysis. Indeed, as I intimated earlier, Asian American art historical scholarship has hardly focused on themes of sexuality. Moreover, a decidedly Asian American framework ensures this discussion of sexuality is transnational.⁸ Scholars such as Margo Machida have already laid the groundwork for the importance of thinking beyond the frame of nationality, and that transnationality—and by extension transregionality—is embedded in an Asian American framework.⁹ In addition, I mobilize *queer* as not just a noun but a verb: it is a destabilizing force that cuts across various categories of identification but still in relation to Asian American sexualities and sexual identification broadly construed. A *queer* and *Asian American* framework for my investigation demands that we think about nationality, sexuality, and genealogy as slippery pivot points rather than fixed categories.¹⁰

I make one more important digression before explaining how Twombly's artworks and the writings about them became central to this project. I briefly explore discourses of identity in artistic meaning in the post-2000 period to further ground and situate my points above in the context of the art world. A good place to begin is Thelma Golden's use of the phrase *post-black* to describe her 2001 *Freestyle* exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem. For Golden, the term was used to refer to work of artists of the African diaspora. More specifically, it primarily served as a generational and formal marker that distinguished

the work of artists who came of age in the heyday of identity politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s from those who came of age in the late 1990s and early 2000 period.¹¹ For *New Yorker* critic Peter Schjeldahl, however, the term signaled the end of an era in which identity was important in the art world. Ironically, he relegates identity to the past as a historical formation and reintroduces the importance of disembodied "form" as crucial to artistic taste.¹² In other words, a curious—though not conscious—alliance formed between Golden, who is sympathetic to identity politics, and Schjeldahl, who has always been suspicious of artistic meaning being tied to any notion of identity.

Both agree that we are in a "post-identity" era: Golden does so to distinguish between different waves of artistic production concerned with primarily racial, gendered, and sexual difference, but seems to fall back on conceptualizing identity as positional or fixed; while Schjeldahl suggests that we are post or over identity, but only to return artistic value back to a disembodied art object.¹³ What follows is an attempt to avoid both of these positions while not removing the activism that underpins the production of Asian American art histories. I will proffer a model for exploring identity (broadly construed) through Zen Buddhism, or more specifically, *queer Zen Buddhism*.¹⁴

QUEER ZEN

This approach is inspired by art historian and queer studies scholar Jonathan Katz's groundbreaking work in which he theorizes that the abstract works of Agnes Martin from the 1960s can be read as expressions of a queer-inflected Zen Buddhism.¹⁵ I was first introduced to Katz's work on Martin through a YouTube video of a lecture he gave on this topic as part of a symposium connected to an exhibition he co-curated with David C. Ward at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC, in 2010, *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*.¹⁶ I think highly of Katz's scholarship; however, my immediate reaction was skepticism. I thought it was a stretch to discuss sexuality in the context of Martin and her work, given that she never publicly identified as a lesbian, and especially considering the nonrepresentational character of her artistic practice. Katz, though, was careful not to focus on authorial details as "truths." As Katz perspicaciously notes in his article on Martin, sexuality does not necessarily come in forms that are legible: "Where would we be if we made acknowledgement the truth test of art-historical knowledge?"¹⁷ Moreover, Martin's works have often been linked to Zen Buddhism, which was important to a number of American artists not of Asian descent whose works emerged in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁸ Alexandra Munroe's 2009 groundbreaking exhibition *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City explores this topic in some detail.¹⁹ Katz makes convincing parallels between the nondualistic conception of identity often associated with Zen and queer as an unstable signifier of sexual identity. Through Martin's work, he radically reworks her negation of

identification as a lesbian into an expression of identity that uncannily prefigures queer understandings of sexual identity.

Expanding upon Katz's brilliant work, if sexuality is a referent for queer, then I suggest that the region could be one for Zen since the East and Asia are frequently associated or conflated with it. Moreover, this opens an avenue to mobilize queer Zen to explore similarly pared-down artworks by artists of Asian descent. In the same way that Martin's abstract yet embodied artworks prefigure theories of sexuality as queer or unstable, can the latter foreshadow contemporary theories of Asian American identity as transnational, or blurred across regions or nations? My initial approach to this essay was to explore abstract artworks by artists of Asian descent to answer this question, but then I came across the writings of Roland Barthes on the works of Cy Twombly.²⁰ They were intriguing for two reasons. Firstly, Barthes is not known for his writing on artworks, so why did Twombly seek him out as he did to write about his artworks?²¹ What did Twombly's work *do* that compelled Barthes to accept his invitation? Secondly, Twombly had attended lectures of the Buddhist monk D. T. Suzuki at Columbia University in New York City in 1951 and a number of Cage's legendary performances in the summer of 1952 at Black Mountain College.²² In contradistinction to Cage, whose indebtedness to Zen Buddhism and Suzuki is explicit, however, how these lectures affected Twombly's artistic practice is unclear. So, why did Barthes turn to Zen when writing about his artworks?

I will argue first that Barthes's writing and Twombly's artworks suggest a queer understanding of sexuality that is integral to answering the questions I have posed. I am not interested in "outing" Twombly and Barthes or gauging intentionality (which, of course, is mediated, too). What I am interested in, though, is how Barthes's writing and Twombly's work might suggest a queer approach to sexuality, just as Katz argued that Martin's work did. Secondly, I reread Barthes's writing to suggest that it prefigures (if implicitly) Katz's writings on queer Zen in ways that move beyond discussions of sexuality as unfixed. That is, I argue that Barthes's writings indicate that Twombly's works gesture toward the notions of regionality and nationality as always already queer, or unstable.²³ Therefore, Twombly's work and Barthes's writing can help think through queer notions of nationality, as well as sexuality, that are important for the construction of a queer Asian American art history.

TWOMBLY'S *FERRAGOSTO* SERIES

To further animate my points above, I begin by exploring the five works that compose Twombly's *Ferragosto* series from 1961, and then filter my findings through Barthes's writing as well as other interlocutors of Twombly's larger body of work. Each canvas of the *Ferragosto* series is roughly the same size (5½ by 6½ feet) and constructed of the same materials—oil paint, lead pencil, and wax crayon. The corporeal body is evoked in several ways. Body

parts—penises, ass cheeks, and breasts—hover somewhere between representation and abstraction throughout the entire series. Intense colors such as pink, red, and brown are suggestive of flesh, blood, and excrement, respectively.²⁴ (Art historian Elisabeth J. Trapp even suggests that “one can smell the decay” of trash rotting in the summer months of August during which Twombly made these works.)²⁵ Also, Twombly’s handprints are visible—such as in *Ferragosto IV* (plate 18)—indexing a trace of the artist’s body on the canvas. By *Ferragosto V*, he begins to work over the entire canvas with smears of paint, and there is more evidence of the artist’s direct use of his fingers rather than brushes to paint. Finally, while there is an economy of paint early in the series, such as in *Ferragosto II* (see plate 19), by *Ferragosto V* the generous amounts of thickly applied paint give the works a tactile quality. Claire Daigle’s description of *Ferragosto V* captures the work’s dynamism and corporeality: “A thickly encrusted palette of brown, pink and red takes on a viscerality paired in the work with a body parcelled into pictograms: pendulous breasts, erupting penises, scatological posteriors.”²⁶ Perhaps more than the tactility, though, I argue that Twombly’s complex smudging, smearing, and scratching onto his large canvases beckon the viewer.

The artworks’ size and materiality coupled with the semi-abstracted body parts rendered in colors evoking the body blur the boundaries between viewer and artwork. Given that male and female sexual organs (albeit abstracted) populate each of the canvases of the series in varying degrees, this intertwining can be considered erotically charged, even if ambiguously so. Of course, it cannot be so easily coded as heteroerotic or homoerotic, especially given that I am arguing the works elicit an embodied relationship with a contingent viewer.

Barthes writes that “whatever is scribbled it [the work] comes as an enigmatic supplement.”²⁷ At least implicitly, Barthes is invoking Derrida’s aforementioned supplement: Twombly’s works in his estimation effectively act as supplements: meaning is never complete. For Barthes, Twombly’s works produce a gap between sign and signified—and this space is one in which connections can be made and unmade. Following Barthes’s description of Twombly’s painting as producing gaps, the *Ferragosto* works could be said to engender a productive space of possibility for reworking norms of sexual identity as queer.

This reading gains more traction when Barthes writes the titles of Twombly’s paintings. The often semilegible inscriptions found on them function as citations. That is, their meanings are identified through the very act of naming. Art historian Rosalind Krauss expands upon Barthes’s thinking by invoking J. L. Austin’s notion of the performative, in which to say something is also to do something.²⁸ The classic example of the performative is the utterance “I now pronounce you man and wife” in a marriage ceremony, which “hails or interpellates” the two individuals as a married couple.²⁹ In other words, speech acts simultaneously do what they say. Krauss writes that “it is thus a linguistic operation in which reference is suspended in favor of action.”³⁰ Barthes, too, notes that Twombly’s work “does not derive from a

concept (*mark*) but rather an activity (*marking*).³¹ Trace is the record of a gesture, and “line is visible action.”³² Thus, the title *Ferragosto* does not illustrate the content of the work but refers to the action of naming it as such.³³ Krauss’s essay appears in the September 1994 issue of *Artforum*, a little less than a year after Judith Butler’s “Critically Queer” appeared in *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*. Whether or not Krauss was aware of the latter is unclear, but given that performativity—and its productive misfires—is the bedrock of queer theory, it seems that extending the discussion above to gender and sexuality is appropriate.

For Barthes, though, deconstruction was not enough to describe Twombly’s works. He turned to Zen. For instance, Barthes observes that Twombly’s mark-making is similar to the Japanese Zen notion of *satori*: “A sudden (and sometimes very tenuous) break in our causal logic.”³⁴ Interestingly, this has parallels with Butler’s theorization of the break in a performative that can redirect norms. Of more importance is that, for Barthes, the works engendered an affect that he felt was possible only outside the West: “If we required some reference for this [Twombly’s] art, we could go looking for it only very far away. . . . outside the West.”³⁵ Therefore, we can argue that Barthes via Twombly’s work does not so much contain Zen to the East as position it as neither Eastern nor Western: it is effectively transregional. His essay suggests a queer relation not only to sexuality but also to regionality.

BRIEF NOTES ON QUEER METHODS

As intimated at the beginning of this essay, a queer exploration of sexuality and regionality would necessarily involve exploring silences and literally what is not said. That is, it is important to note that my investigation requires methods beyond a formal analysis of Twombly’s works or a recontextualizing of the writing about them that I do above. These methods can only be described as queer or unusual for art history. I utilize evidence that is often anecdotal or not written, said, or known. For instance, Barthes had the perfect moment to “out” himself when he wrote the preface to Renaud Camus’s sexually explicit *Tricks*, but he refused the call to do so. In his preface he writes: “Ultimately, the attribute is of no importance; what society will not tolerate is that I should be . . . *nothing*, or more precisely, that the *something* that I am should be openly expressed as provisional, revocable, insignificant, inessential, in a word irrelevant.”³⁶ I will return to Barthes’s poignant entreaty to a specifically activist “society,” but for the moment what is of interest is the refusal to identify or to be “interpellated” per Louis Althusser as anything but “*nothing*.”

In a related manner, hardly anything exists regarding Twombly’s sexuality. However, what does exist is innuendo or gossip, especially regarding a romantic relationship with the artist Robert Rauschenberg.³⁷ Irit Rogoff notes how exploring gossip in visual studies can be productive: “In Foucauldian terms it [gossip] serves the purpose through negative differentiation, of constituting a

lable narratives."³⁸ Rogoff compellingly argues that a consideration of gossip can be useful in reassessing the mechanisms that bound and define certain knowledge as "true" or "acceptable." Drawing on Rogoff, Gavin Butt uses gossip to reexamine art world practices in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in relation to homosexuality.³⁹

My point here is that innuendo is all the evidence that may be available given that any discussion of Twombly's sexuality would have understandably fallen outside of Cold War-era America as a (drawing on Rogoff) "category of respectable knowledge." The intellectual history regarding the links among the Cold War, sexuality, and artistic practice can be traced back to a prescient article written by Moira Roth in 1977.⁴⁰ What is important to note is that this category of respectable knowledge was consolidated through not only an active homophobia but also xenophobia. Indeed, "homosexuals and Communism were quickly conflated" by McCarthyism, as the State Department's own archives now readily admit.⁴¹ Moreover, the Japanese internment camps were still fresh in the minds of many Americans of Asian descent.

TWOMBLY'S DOUBLE GESTURES: TOWARD BARTHES'S TRANSNATIONAL ZEN

More recently, Jonathan Katz has expanded on Roth's groundbreaking work to explore the activist potential of silence.⁴² This is important as I shift my focus to what Twombly has said about his artworks, or rather what he has not said. That is to say, Twombly was largely reticent about his work. Katz writes that silence can be "performative" by removing "claims to meaning which are usually recognised and solidified through language and speech acts. Silence therefore allows us to reflect upon the ways in which we create and construct meanings and possibilities, and this reflective process involves the recognition that our socio-cultural constructions are always situated, conditional and partial."⁴³ In this way, I will consider what Twombly says as "partial" and take his performative silence as an opportunity to extrapolate a range of different possible meanings.

Twombly gave only two interviews during his lifetime, one conducted by David Sylvester in 2000 and the other by Nicholas Serota in 2007.⁴⁴ Indeed, when Nicholas Serota writes about the "rare opportunity" he had to interview Twombly, he is referring to Twombly's long-standing refusal to speak about his work; however, the subtext is the importance of getting Twombly to speak—as if his words would complete the meaning of his works.⁴⁵ At the end of his interview with Twombly, Serota says, "Cy, I think we've got plenty," to which Twombly replies: "You've got enough. And if there's something I didn't say, you could make it up."⁴⁶ Twombly's response could be read as indifference, cynicism, or a defensive posture regarding art historical writing and

criticism in general. Given the manner in which his works had been excoriated both within the art world (consider the vitriolic response to his 1964 Castelli Gallery exhibition)⁴⁷ and without the art world (the characterization of his artistic practice as akin to the scribbles of a child),⁴⁸ this is certainly reasonable. However, his statement could also be considered evidence of the artist downplaying the weight of his spoken words in his works' meaning. Then again, he does not necessarily completely negate the importance of his words either, which could just as well signal to Serota that he should not "make it up."

More to the point, Twombly's response produces a chain of meanings, which mirrors the functioning of his *Ferragosto* works, as I explore in the next section. Twombly manages to deflect attention from himself and his work to his interviewer. That is, though he literally gets the last word, he does so in a manner that delays it from ever arriving. This double gesture of the artist—providing insight into his practice and simultaneously erasing its potential influence on the meaning of his works—produces a Derridean supplement that "is in reality *différance*," the simultaneous process of difference and deferral, which prevents the definitive closure of the meaning of Twombly's work.⁴⁹

Again, it is important to underscore that for Barthes, deconstruction was not enough to characterize Twombly's works. He turned to Zen. For instance, Barthes ends both of his essays on Twombly's work with the following quotation from the Tao Tē Ching, which seems to resonate with the double gesture I have just outlined:

*He produces without taking for himself;
He acts without expectation;
His work done, he is not attached to it;
and since he is not attached to it,
his work will remain.*⁵⁰

In so doing, a queer relation not only to sexuality but also to the region—specifically the East or Asia, the referents for Zen—becomes possible. To be sure, Barthes's writings on Zen at first glance veer toward orientalism, the most egregious example of which is as follows: "If we required some reference for this [Twombly's] art, we could go looking for it only very far away, outside painting, outside the West, outside the historical period, at the very limit of meaning."⁵¹ The West/non-West dualism is simplistic and reductive, as is the implicit signification of the non-West as geographically ("very far away"), temporally ("outside the historical period"), and discursively ("outside painting" and therefore art history) distinct from the West. The characterization of the non-West as being outside of "meaning" suggests the non-West is where rationality dissolves. The West is rational and the non-West is not.

Rather than accusing Barthes of orientalism, it is perhaps more appropriate to write that his xenophilia is what is problematic. At the same time, viewing the above through the lens of his preface to Camus's *Tricks* could

yield a more sympathetic, nuanced reading. Barthes was often seen as a traitor to the gay rights movement because he refused to identify as gay; in this way, this text can be seen as a defense against activists who wanted him to identify as something (rather than nothing). Meanwhile, academia often undercut the seriousness of his scholarship because he was nonetheless coded as gay. Harvard scholar and poet Helen Vedler, for instance, notes that she was once chastised for liking Barthes, who she writes was referred to as “that silly homosexual” by an otherwise esteemed colleague of hers.⁵² In this way, it is not surprising that he would not want to be in the West, where he is identified in categories. Indeed, Nicholas de Villiers provocatively writes that Barthes has been closeted rather than that he was closeted. He recasts Barthes’s silence as a queer tactic of “opacity” in which his relationship to the closet is a productive inscrutability.⁵³

Per de Villiers, Barthes’s philosophy of identity was effectively queer and at odds with his lived reality. When Twombly invited him to write an essay for the catalog accompanying his retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art exhibition in 1979, it seems that Barthes might have found an analogue for his more nuanced approach to identity in Twombly’s work. One imagines his artwork evoked an affect that resonated with the queer way Barthes lived and that he could describe only through Zen. His mention of Zen as being “at the very limit of meaning” might be not where rationality dissolves—as I previously suggested—but perhaps where meanings do not cohere into recognizable entities. That is, Twombly’s works blurred East and West so that Barthes—at least while experiencing the paintings—need not go to the East. The works effectively brought a Zen-like affect to the West, thereby decoupling Zen from a stable, regional referent.

The majority of Twombly’s works do not reference the East. However, Claire Daigle suggests that Twombly’s references to the classic polytheistic tradition can be linked to the East through what Barthes’s says about the signifiers of Japan: “They are empty because they do not refer to an ultimate signified, as our [the West’s] signs do, hypostatized in the name of the God, science, reason, law, and so forth.”⁵⁴ Twombly could be said to do the latter, but through the polytheistic tradition of the West, which also had no singular “ultimate signified.”

Twombly’s work can be read as explicating a mode of identity that is effectively queer, and his interlocutors’ reliance on performativity and Zen add a specific traction by gesturing toward a queering of both sexuality and the region or nation, both core concerns for this book. This, of course, only became possible by shifting attention away from an essentialized understanding of Asian American art history. Perhaps more provocatively, by recalibrating the lens through which one views the hegemonic canon or archive of art history—the one that includes Twombly and Barthes and Krauss—it becomes clear that retrospectively art history has always been concerned with queer notions of sexuality and the region.

To conclude, I consider Alex Juhasz's conceptualization of "queer archive activism," a term she coined to describe her practice of editing her AIDS video archive so that it maintains "an indexical trace of the past but creates the possibility for an anticipated trace of the future."⁵⁵ Similarly, I contend that both Twombly's artworks and Barthes's writing as "trace[s] of the past," per Juhasz, contain the seeds of the "trace of the [queer] future." Their works portend the limits of conventional identity politics and suggest that it remains more important than ever to look backward to look forward. Drawing on Juhasz, Anne Cvetkovich notes that the "radical potential" of LGBT archives can be activated by taking "an activist relation to the archive that remains alert to its absences and that uses it to create new kinds of knowledge and new kinds of collectivities."⁵⁶ My approach to the extant archive of art history aims "to create new kinds of knowledge" that radically rethink hegemonic mid-twentieth-century art history.

The following by Barthes on the work of Twombly (whom he refers to as "TW") indicates how I believe art historians should approach Asian American art history: "Of writing, TW retains the gesture, not the product. . . . [E]ven if TW's productions link up with (they cannot escape) a History and a Theory of Art, what is *shown* is a gesture. What is a gesture? . . . [I]t seeks only to provoke an object, a result."⁵⁷ My hope is that my writing (by focusing on absence, invisibility, and the performativity of silence) still manages to retain the activism (as a kind of "gesture") that underpins the field rather than (only) the conventional goal ("product") of such activism: inclusion. At its best, the history I write is a provocation of my objects of study: Asian American art history and art history more generally. "Queer" is crucial in this regard in that it redirects our attention to what Asian American art history "does" rather than what it "is."

- and identity has influenced on Songco's artistic trajectory and nurtured Songco's understanding about the multiple markers of identity, including but not limited to race.
- 15 Sarita See has argued that the deployment of jokes, including puns, by Filipino American artists, performers, and Filipino audiences is a means by which "Filipino American expressive culture has organized its own semiotics and aesthetic of violence," which in itself is imbued with "textual ambivalence" (with regard to textual ambivalence, I refer specifically to See's read of *lengua*, meaning both "tongue" and "language," in the title of Manuel Ocampo's painting *Heridas de la lengua*, 1991). See, *The Decolonized Eye*, xvii, 24. Similarly, Songco's play on *party* in the *Guilty Party* is exemplary of the textual ambivalence described by See and its decolonizing potential. I would also add that Songco's use of the pun also gestures at the affective ambivalence, or what I have called the affective oscillations throughout the chapter, to being Filipino and queer in suburban American spaces.
 - 16 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 65.
 - 17 The first season was produced in 2013, only a year prior to the creation of the *Guilty Party*; given Songco's strong interest in television culture, the reference to the *Orange Is the New Black* would not be surprising.
 - 18 In *Confessional*, for example, the text adjacent to the image of the reality TV housewife character reads: "She's a hot mess. You know what I had to tell her? 'Keep your hands off my man.'"
 - 19 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 11.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, 18.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, 13.
 - 22 *Ibid.*, 20.

AN INTERVIEW WITH KENNETH TAM

- 1 Bataille, *Eroticism*, 65.
- 2 At this point in the interview, Tam starts *The Compression Is Not Subservient to the Explosion* on his laptop as we continue to discuss his work.
- 3 By this point the video has ended.

Notes to Chapter 4: Queering Methodology

- 1 I delivered an early version of this chapter at the College Art Association's annual conference in 2014 for the panel "Abstraction and Difference," cochaired by David J. Getsy and Tirza T. Latimer. The paper was titled "Queer Zen and the Networked Body: Abstraction and Identity in the 1950s and 1960s." My thanks to the coeditors of this volume

for their feedback on drafts of this essay. I am particularly grateful to my colleagues at Manchester University Press, *Productive Failure: Writing Queer Transnational South Asian Art Histories* (2017), I engaged on this issue by exploring the work of Derrida in tandem with that of New York City-based, Indian-born Navar Bhattar.

For an excellent discussion of the writing about Derrida's work in relation to his practice, see Sushk, "On Derrida."

- 2 I do not mean to elide the vestigial, differential power dynamics among these categorical identifications that my fundamental listing of them might signify. Also, I do not mean to minimize the importance of other identifications, such as two-spirit identity, when I use LGBTQIA Indians; this is the endgame that I am trying to move away from in this chapter to explore identity that both moves beyond and yet still references these categories.
- 3 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 144–45.
- 4 I am invoking British sociologist Paul Gilroy's alternative to diaspora that privileges "roots" (where one is from) at the expense of "routes" (where one has been). Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 133.
- 5 Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise*, 151. I thank Laura Kina for informing me of this important book.
- 6 Ibid., 10. Emphasis in original.
- 7 Barthes, "Death of the Author."
- 8 *Transnational* is used in favor of *diaspora*, given the less than desirable implications of the classical notion of the latter, which Paul Gilroy notes assumes an "obsession with origins, purity and invariant sameness." See Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora," 63. At the same time, it is not my goal here to set up a Manichean debate between *diaspora* and *transnational*. The genealogy of the latter is already deeply intertwined with that of the former. Other scholars have also theorized diaspora in a manner that addresses the implications of fixed origins and destinations, which Gilroy references. For instance, British cultural theorist Stuart Hall defines *diaspora experience* as determined not through "return" and "not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference." See Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 235.
- 9 Machida, "Reframing Asian America." See also the journal *Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas* (ADVA)—launched in 2015 and edited by Alexandra Chang and Alice Ming Wai Jim—which focuses on the transnational or more specifically hemispheric: North, Central and South America, as well as the Pacific Islands and the Caribbean. See www.brill.com/products/journal/asian-diasporic-visual-cultures-and-americas, accessed May 7, 2015.
- 10 As queer theorist and gender studies scholar Jasbir K. Puar notes, queer and transnational do not necessarily "sustain a more perfect union or,

in this case, a more perfect oppositionality." See Puar, "Transnational Sexualities," 409.

11 Golden et al., *Freestyle*, 14; Finkel, "A Reluctant Fraternity, Thinking Post-Black."

12 Schjeldahl, "Breaking Away."

13 I certainly do not mean to create an equivalence between Golden's usage of the term *post-identity* and Schjeldahl's. The former is of course one that aims to complicate thinking about identity (particularly blackness) in art criticism and art history that had largely become stagnant or shoved aside important concerns. For an expanded discussion of this topic, see Jones, *Seeing Differently*, especially chapter 4, "Multiculturalism, Intersectionality, and Post-identity."

14 Recently, art historian Majella Munroe has explored in her analysis of the work of Mira Schendel how Zen can be a useful intellectual framework to explore transnationalism. See Munroe, "Zen as a Transnational Current in Post-War Art."

15 See Katz, "Agnes Martin." Also, he has done much of the work of reimagining the works of a number of important peers of Martin—such as John Cage, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg—through a queer framework. See Katz, "John Cage's Queer Silence." This is reprinted alongside many of his other essays that are germane to this topic on the Queer Cultural Center website, www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/KatzPages/KatzIntro.html, accessed May 8, 2015.

16 See Katz, presentation on Agnes Martin for "Hide/Seek" Exhibition Symposium, www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbFLur5zdAI&feature=youtuve_gdata_player, accessed May 7, 2015.

17 Katz, "Agnes Martin," 173.

18 See, for example, Pearlman, *Nothing and Everything*. I thank Hrag Vartanian for referring me to this book.

19 Munroe, "Buddhism and the Neo-Avant-Garde."

20 Artists whose works I plan to explore include Leo Amino, Chen Chi, Genichiro Inokuma, Seong Moy, Win Ng, Kenzo Okada, Ansei Uchima, and Natvar Bhavsar. For a catalog exploring abstraction in works by artists of Asian descent in the United States, see Wechsler, *Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions*. I am referring to two of Barthes's essays: "Cy Twombly: Works on Paper," originally written in 1976 and titled "Non Multa Sed Multum," though not published until 1979 in volume 6 of Yvon Lambert's *Catalogue Raisonné of Works on Paper* [Milan: Multhipla, 1979], 7–13); and "The Wisdom of Art." Originally published in *Cy Twombly, paintings and drawings, 1954–1977: Whitney Museum of American Art, April 10–June 10, 1979* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 1979), 9–22].

21 This is noted by Daigle, "Cy Twombly," full article available at www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/lingering-threshold-between-word

- and-image, accessed May 7, 2015. However, there is also evidence that Yvon Lambert had approached Barthes after having been turned down by Michel Foucault: see Leeman, "Roland Barthes et Cy Twombly," 61n1.
- 22 This information is based on information provided by Twombly to Achim Hochdörfer. Hochdörfer, "Blue Goes Out, B Comes In," 22, 39n13.
- 23 It is worth noting that Twombly, too, is a transnational artist. He lived primarily in Italy after 1957. Claire Daigle, "Biography," *Cy Twombly*. Accessed May 7, 2015. www.cytwombly.info.
- 24 Under the biography section of Cy Twombly's official website, Claire Daigle notes that in the upper third portion of *Untitled*, 1962 (not illustrated, unfortunately), there is a veritable legend of sorts for Twombly's color scheme/graphite marks: a white circle swirled with pink is labeled "blood" and an aggressive red X reads as "flesh," for instance. The fixity of these meanings seems discordant with how I will describe Twombly's work in this chapter; I offer this information merely as an interesting counterpoint to my argument.
- 25 Trapp, "Cy Twombly's Ferragosto Series," 39.
- 26 Daigle, "Cy Twombly."
- 27 Barthes, "Non Multa Sed Multum," 32. This is the only place where I do not draw on Richard Howard's translation of the original essay. Instead of "enigmatic supplement," Howard refers to an "enigmatic surplus." See Barthes, "Cy Twombly," 176.
- 28 Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*; Krauss, "Cy Was Here."
- 29 Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."
- 30 Krauss, "Cy Was Here."
- 31 Barthes, "Cy Twombly," 173. Emphasis in original.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 170.
- 33 Interestingly, embedded within the genealogy of the word *Ferragosto* is an illustration of how performativity as well as history and power operate. Originally a day to honor Diana, the goddess of fertility, it has become transformed ironically to honor the assumption of the Virgin Mary. The pagan-turned-Roman-Catholic holiday illustrates how (as Krauss notes via Michel Foucault) "sequestered within every seemingly neutral historical narrative was the discursive axis of the performative's relations of authority." Moreover, Krauss's reading of Barthes via Twombly's works differs in that Krauss argues that the present tense of the performative gives way to the unequivocal "past tense of the index." Krauss, "Cy Was Here." Barthes, however, suggests that the "*past tense* of the stroke can also be defined as its *future*." He further notes that "TW's work seems to be conjugated in the past tense or in the future, never really in the present." Barthes, "Cy Twombly," 167. Emphasis in original.
- 34 Barthes, "Cy Twombly," 161.
- 35 Krauss, "Cy Was Here."
- 36 Barthes, "Preface to Renauld Camus's *Tricks*," 291–92. Emphasis in original.

- 37 See Katz, "Committing the Perfect Crime," 390n1. Also available from www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/KatzPages/KatzIntro.html. Katz "recovers" via poet and art critic John Yau a series of letters between poets Charles Olson and Robert Creeley that indicate "matter of factly" that Twombly was in a romantic relationship with Robert Rauschenberg. Twombly and Rauschenberg attended Black Mountain College when Olson was the director.
- 38 Rogoff, "Gossip as Testimony," 272.
- 39 Butt, *Between You and Me*.
- 40 See Roth, "The Aesthetic of Indifference." This has been reprinted in Roth and Katz, *Difference/Indifference*.
- 41 Department of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security of the United States Department of State, "History of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security of the United States Department of State," 128 (see figure 7 caption).
- 42 See Jonathan D. Katz, "Passive Resistance: On the Critical and Commercial Success of Queer Artists in Cold War American Art," *Queer Cultural Center*, accessed May 7, 2015, www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/KatzPages/KatzLimage.html. Originally published in *Limage*, no. 3 (Winter 1996).
- 43 Katz, "Performative Silence and the Politics of Passivity," 101.
- 44 Sylvester, "Cy Twombly (2000)"; Serota, "History behind the Thought."
- 45 Serota, "Interview."
- 46 Serota, "History behind the Thought," 53.
- 47 Kennedy, "Cy Twombly, Idiosyncratic Painter, Dies at 83." He notes that even "artist and writer Donald Judd, who was hostile toward painting in general, was especially damning even so, calling the show a fiasco. 'There are a few drips and splatters and an occasional pencil line,' he wrote in a review. 'There isn't anything to these paintings.'"
- 48 By the time Twombly had his retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, his reputation had certainly been cemented. Even so, the exhibition curator's title of an article for the museum's bulletin is telling. See Varnedoe, "Your Kid Could Not Do This, and Other Reflections on Cy Twombly." Art historian Jon Bird notes that Twombly's work turned Barthes the critic into an artist—well, at least for a brief moment, in which he discovers that mark-making is less straightforward than he might have thought. See Bird, "Indeterminacy and (Dis)order in the Work of Cy Twombly," 487. He further writes that "the critic turns artist in the forlorn attempt to comprehend what his critical tools have failed to provide—an interpretation adequate to its object."
- 49 Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 88; see also p. xliii.
- 50 Barthes, "Cy Twombly," 176; Barthes, "The Wisdom of Art," 194 (in italics in the original).
- 51 Barthes, "Cy Twombly: Works on Paper," 175.
- 52 Vendler, "The Medley Is the Message."

- 53 Villiers, *Opacity and the Closet*, 118. See especially chapter 4. "Unseen Warhol/Seeing Barthes."
- 54 Barthes, "L'Express" talks with Roland Barthes." 98, quoted in Daigle, "Reading Barthes/Writing Twombly," 225.
- 55 Juhasz, "Video Remains," 126. Derrida also notes that the archive is as much about the past as it is the present and future. (Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 29.
- 56 Cvetkovich, "Queer Art of the Counterarchive," 32. Cvetkovich is referring to the absence of lesbian paraphernalia in archives dedicated to [LGB]QI subjects, whereas I am referring to a very different kind of archive. My aim is similar to hers: not to create a new fixed meaning but to maintain a connection to the activist potential of Asian American art history.
- 57 Emphasis in original. Barthes, "Cy Twombly," 160.

AN INTERVIEW WITH BLIZA BARRIOS

- 1 The Mail Order Brides/M.O.B. describe themselves on Jenifer Wufford's website <http://wafflehouse.com/mob/> as a trio of Filipina-American artists engaged in an ongoing conversation with culture and gender. While other mail order brides are conventionally perceived as ideal obedient domestics, it has not escaped this trio's attention that, acronymically speaking, "Mail Order Brides" abbreviates down to a more sinister acronym that informs the darker subtext of their operations.

Taking matters into their own well-manicured hands, the Brides deploy their innate charm, guile, and fine fashion sense to gently pry open the eyes of the closed-minded. Enforced enlightenment has arrived in the form of karaoke videos and museum makeovers, in photographic psychodramas and parade performances, in bridesmaid entrepreneurships and corporate dominations.

- 2 For more information on *Mananangoogle* project, see <http://mananangoogle.com>.

AN INTERVIEW WITH KIM ANNO

- 1 *Dogtown and Z-boys* is a 2001 documentary film by Stacy Peralta. It profiled the infamous Skate and Surf team on the Westside of Los Angeles and Santa Monica.
- 2 Saito, "The Aesthetics of Unscenic Nature."

Notes to Chapter 5: Queering Subjectivity

- 1 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 10-11.
- 2 Michael Warner, quoted in "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?," ed. Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz, 3.
- 3 Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas"; Eleana Kim, "Human Capital"; Pate, "Genealogies of Korean Adoption," 205-49.
- 4 Eleana Kim, "Human Capital," 317.

PLATES



18. Cy Twombly

Ferragosto IV, 1961

Oil paint, wax crayon and lead pencil on canvas

65 1/4 x 78 7/8 inches (165.5 x 200.4 cm)

© Cy Twombly Foundation. Image courtesy Gagosian Gallery



19. Cy Twombly
***Ferragosto II*, 1961** Oil paint, wax crayon, and lead pencil on canvas
65 x 78.7 inches
Credit line © Cy Twombly Foundation.
