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## **View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture.**

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## Queer Images

Although a seemingly harmless object, the knitted pink balaclava hits the viewer right between the eyes. The clenched teeth and hostile gaze seem to be attacking more forcefully than the weapon whose shape blurs in the artist's overexposed fist. Whom is this attack aimed at? Surely, the onlooker – at first ready to duck a blow. Of course, also at the attacker himself – undoubtedly, the artist is holding the camera, actuating the shutter. He's shooting the viewer and he's shooting himself a picture. The artist places himself on both sides of the camera (and the gun).



The cover of this issue of **View** comes from Karol Radziszewski's *Fag Fighters* – a mock-documentation of the endeavors of a gay guerrilla whose main source of entertainment is abusing straight men kidnapped from streets of Eastern Europe. The guerrilla appropriates the violence usually aimed at a minority group by staging a fantasy of the minority's revenge. Radziszewski negates certain elements of the stereotypical image of gay men while hyperbolizing others. On the one hand, the stereotype of weak and effeminate gay men is transformed into the image of a guerrilla of muscular, aggressive villains. On the other, the stereotypical gay fixation on sex is confirmed and exaggerated, enforcing straight men's fear of lustful gazes of omnipresent (albeit, as in a locker room, often invisible) homosexuals.

However, *Self-portrait as a Fag Fighter* opens this issue of **View** not only because it presents a situation of queering hetero-normative identities, but also because it is a queer representation itself – or at least it fits our understanding of such images. Contrary to some images of non-normative identities, a queer image is not only about the artist's identity (as in the category of a “queer artist”), or about the task of the representation of sexual minorities. A queer image emerges in a social field in which the battle over identity involves, amongst other things, images; in which the reproduction of social roles is also performed through the reproduction of images.

A queer image is a self-reflective image, one that offers a meta-reflection on itself as well as on the social functioning of images, their relations to other (dominant, majoritarian) images, on the means of their circulation and on their form, quality, position, and materiality.

*Fag Fighters* can be considered a queer image because it negotiates stereotypical images. The artist does not simply expose them as false, nor does he correct them in order to render them realistic or probable. Rather, he "poaches" them, engaging in a visual speculation. Radziszewski turns towards low-quality, suspicious images; what he exhibits in galleries is nothing more than a documentation of the guerilla's fictitious actions; images recorded with amateur cameras, cell phones and Polaroids. These images are out of focus and blurry; their frames are ill-composed, accidental and incomplete. Their quasi-documentary character is not supposed to convince the viewers of their truthfulness, but rather to fit the status of the represented subjects in the gay guerrilla narrative, and to capture a form of minoritarian fantasy. Queer images offer new modes of existence in the field of social visibility – they suggest a possible way out of the obvious opposition between visibility and invisibility. Radziszewski's pink balaclavas stand out – the fags that wear them are not trying to hide, even though their faces remain invisible. At the same time, the pink balaclavas, woven by the artist's grandmother, are a sign of the collective's unity.

A queer image might use a mask – both a knitted mask and a mask that emerges in nature, like protective camouflage. In *Queering Utopia* (a chapter of which we publish, translated into Polish, and which is also quoted by a number of our authors), the recently deceased and extremely inspiring queer theoretician José Esteban Muñoz calls for the creation of a social utopia, one that could be built upon an aesthetic utopia. The conditions for such a model are that both images and social critique start moving beyond the tactics of solely exposing deep social structures, and towards engaging them through play as well as negation. This might result in the unselfish act of revealing the hidden value of mistakes, failures and losses – one of the least tolerated experiences and events in late capitalist societies. Creatively following the lead of Herbert Marcuse, Muñoz calls for the abandonment of efficiency and a return to the pleasure principle. Let our guides on this path, he writes, be two seemingly defeated and punished heroes – Narcissus and Orpheus.

Ornament and camouflage constitute two different aesthetics described by the author of *Queering Utopia*. Magda Szcześniak powerfully places them in the field of political visibility, and analyzes the limits of struggles concentrated solely on demanding representational equality. In her article, she suggests the necessity of calling into question the economy of visibility and representation as such. A queer aesthetics undermines dominant cultural norms and their seemingly "natural" character. A queer image constantly moves and circulates. Maurycy Gomulicki, whose work is presented in this issue, rejects the label queer, thus avoiding associations with political activism of any kind. It seems, however, that his works transgress the heteronorm – sexual reproduction is substituted by pleasure, excess, and an ecstasy of visibility and color. On the other hand, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, one of the most important theorists of the queer, calls for a pinch of reason in the face of paranoia and insists on the possibility of and need for reparative readings.

Much like our interpretation of the issue's pink cover, the articles presented combine the analysis of tactical tools, which enable balancing between visibility and invisibility, hyper-visibility and disappearance, with the examination of the material forms of images, as well as the language used to speak about them. The authors of the issue write about the poetics of denaturation (Katarzyna Czacot) and the poetics of poor quality (Justyna Jaworska). They point to the possibility of disappearing behind images and using them as alibis (Hito Steyerl on image spam) – a tactic employed not with the goal of escaping from the field of visibility forever, but rather in order to elude being converted into a smiling HD image. The paths proposed by our authors range from identification with a JPEG file (Łukasz Zaremba on the category of weakness in image theory), a GIF (Iwona Kurz), an anomalous image (Angela Bennett Segler on a queer image from a Middle English manuscript, *Miracle of the Virgin*) or a glamour image (Marcin Bogucki on Eurovision). What interests us are the formal qualities of the image, its condition and status, its resolution, its position among other images. These are the elements that allow for the formulation of a new visual language and new tools of visual disobedience, opacity and subversity. This new toolbox allows us to formulate a utopian tactic – a tactic of using crappy images to fight for a less crappy world.

## Editorial Team

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