



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

**title:**

Douglas Crimp: A Farewell

**source:**

Widok. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture 24 (2019)

**URL:**

<https://www.pismowidok.org/en/archive/2019/24-de-formations/douglas-crimp-a-farewell>

**doi:**

<https://doi.org/10.36854/widok/2019.24.1962>

**publisher:**

Widok. Foundation for Visual Culture

**affiliation:**

SWPS University

University of Warsaw

**keywords:**

Douglas Crimp

**abstract:**

A farewell to Douglas Crimp.

-

## Douglas Crimp: A Farewell

### Liking Things with Douglas Crimp

In the fall semester of 2010, while on a Fulbright scholarship, I was a happy (yet somewhat giddy) participant of the VCS Colloquium, an introductory course for first-year graduate students of the Visual and Cultural Studies Graduate Program at the University of Rochester. Though almost a decade has passed, so many things still resonate in my memories and work from that formative class led by Rachel Haidu. One of the wonderful experiences was a deep dive into Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's difficult, sometimes frustrating, but eye-opening essay *Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You* (which I subsequently translated into Polish for *View* and which I now dive into with my students). Drawn to grad school as a safe space for critical thinking, a space where pleasure is derived predominantly from poking at and dismantling various ideological machines, we felt challenged by Sedgwick's essay, and also somewhat relieved that the author herself (as she admits) falls into at least a couple of paranoid traps in her critique of this predominant school of thinking. I remember Rachel asking us whether we could think of any writer (within the rigid academic system) who lives up to the standards of reparative writing. We came up with just one name. Luckily for us, we were all enrolled in his classes, experiencing Douglas Crimp's reparative thinking on a daily basis.



Douglas Crimp at Foksal Gallery Foundation, May 2008

Of course, Douglas wasn't always a reparative writer, and we all knew who his adversaries were (shhh...). But the polemical spirit that animates, or at least sparks, so much of the work in the humanities wasn't the crux of his practice. Instead, at the heart of Douglas's teaching and writing was attentive affection, perhaps the kind of "liking" that Jonathan Flatley ascribed to Andy Warhol. In our class on 1970's New York, instead of focusing too much energy on the processes of the capitalist interception of public space, gentrification, rampant homophobia, and sexism, we swiftly moved on to the non-conformist spirit which animated so much of the art that Douglas liked. In our class on Andy Warhol's films – copies of which Douglas secured from MoMA, so we could watch them together in the wonderful Dryden Theatre at George Eastman House – we all got the "Warhol that we deserved," a Warhol who came up with new ways of "misfitting together," occupying a common space and engaging in similar practices, and yet not striving to be exactly alike. It always seemed to me that Douglas not only held this attitude but was also eager to share it with so many people, regardless of what they might have had in common. It was hard not to like the things that Douglas liked, and not to participate in liking together with him. And there wasn't really a reason to refuse. Apart from all the still and moving images in his classes, here are some of the things that I remember liking together with Douglas in the few moments we spent together: the organ at Christ Church, Rochester (and I don't know anything about organ music); a whole big box of vegan chocolate sorbet from the Hedonist ice cream store in Rochester (much too big of a portion for two people); strolling Warsaw and New York's uninteresting neighborhoods and finding interesting things to talk about in them; Charles James's *Clover* gown at the *Beyond Fashion* exhibition at the Met (to which I arrived – with the intense encouragement of Douglas – short of breath, 90 minutes before the exhibition was permanently closed); and his amazing 70th-birthday celebrations in Berlin, full of the people, images,

and things he loved (including a Daniel Buren cake and Louise Lawler *Birdcall* napkins).

As any reader of Douglas's writing knows, the affective, tender attention he exhibited towards his objects – most recently, dance – was far from being “disinterested” or dissolved from the political. He was an intensely political writer – if our vision of politics includes not only strife and pain, but also ways of flourishing within oppressive systems and situations (heteronormativity; the art and academic worlds; the AIDS crisis; capitalism). Often swept up by hopelessness, so often fueled by criticism – that's the spirit I find myself returning to again and again.

Magda Szcześniak

## Coming Together

Douglas Crimp stayed in Warsaw for a couple of days in May of 2008 and ran an unforgettable series of seminars concentrated on questions of subjectivity, memory, history, and identity politics. The point of departure for these discussions, as well as for his public lecture (in the former Paradiso cinema, which for one evening became a paradise for many of us) *Action around the Edges*, were fragments of the two books he was working on at the time: *Before Pictures* (published in 2016), which tells the breathtaking story of Crimp's life and work as a young queer man and art critic in New York City, as well as of the city itself. The twin biographies, beautifully interwoven, offer an exceptional take on cultural and personal historiography, where artistic and sexual as well as political experiments meet. The other book was *“Our Kind of Movie”: The Films of Andy Warhol*, published in 2012, the year Douglas returned to Warsaw, again in the spring, to share another part of his memoir-in-progress and let us enjoy his company while driving through the city at night. That same year, *DIK Fagazine* published a conversation with Douglas on his travels to Poland and Czechoslovakia in the 1980s; he also made a guest appearance in Karol Radziszewski's

film *America Is Not Ready For This* (2012). He was approachable, generous, and friendly, interested in what people did, thought, and how they felt, never imposing his views or ideas yet able to make them relevant and shareable, if not irresistible. It was wonderful to have known you, Douglas.

Katarzyna Bojarska, Krzysztof Pijarski

