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Disidentifications: Queers Of Color And The Performance Of Politics (Cultural Studies Of The Americas)



Synopsis

There is more to identity than identifying with one's culture or standing solidly against it. José Esteban Muñoz looks at how those outside the racial and sexual mainstream negotiate majority culture—not by aligning themselves with or against exclusionary works but rather by transforming these works for their own cultural purposes. Muñoz calls this process "disidentification," and through a study of its workings, he develops a new perspective on minority performance, survival, and activism. Disidentifications is also something of a performance in its own right, an attempt to fashion a queer world by working on, with, and against dominant ideology. By examining the process of identification in the work of filmmakers, performance artists, ethnographers, Cuban choteo, forms of gay male mass culture (such as pornography), museums, art photography, camp and drag, and television, Muñoz persistently points to the intersecting and short-circuiting of identities and desires that result from misalignments with the cultural and ideological mainstream in contemporary urban America. Muñoz calls attention to the world-making properties found in performances by queers of color—in Carmelita Tropicana's "Camp/Choteo" style politics, Marga Gomez's performances of queer childhood, Vaginal Creme Davis's "Terrorist Drag," Isaac Julien's critical melancholia, Jean-Michel Basquiat's disidentification with Andy Warhol and pop art, Felix Gonzalez-Torres's performances of "disidentity," and the political performance of Pedro Zamora, a person with AIDS, within the otherwise artificial environment of the MTV serial *The Real World*.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Whether you're a gender studies student or just interested in learning more about queer theory, I really recommend *Disidentifications*. To get the most out of Munoz' text, I suggest reading about Julie Kristeva's concepts of abjection. This will help you better understand the concept of disidentification, which can be initially very confusing and elusive within the beginning pages of the book. If you're stuck looking for a clear definition in the book's introduction, don't feel frustrated! Keep reading, as I think Munoz deliberately avoids laying out his concept in broad daylight. The book is a welcomed relief from dense and confusing theory alla Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michel Foucault and Gayle Rubin. Munoz writes clearly and not in the confusing manner that some academics use. This doesn't mean his ideas are simple - they are anything but! Sometimes it's easy to be frustrated with queer theory texts because they don't always provide solutions for the problems they talk about. However, this book has lots of potential for real-life application in the queer community. Most optimistically, disidentification can save lives and be an agent of cultural change. Speaking from an American perspective, our culture is becoming more accepting, but there are some places or environments that are still very hostile towards queer bodies and people. Drawing from intersectionality, cross-identification and abjection, Munoz outlines disidentifications as a political and survival especially useful for queers of color, or queers with multiple minoritized identities (i.e. poor and trans and gay). Finally, people dissatisfied with the mainstream LGBTQ movement and its assimilation-like tactics may also find this book useful and/or relevant.

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