

Queer Formalism, Radical Formalism, and Surface Aesthetics

The Anticipatory Work of Howardena Pindell

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In the last several years, there has been a visible trend in the art world that demonstrates a desire to politicize perceived-apolitical movements in art history. Art historians and queer theorists have been coining terminology and descriptive language in service of this desire. In a 2013 conversation published in *Art Journal*, Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy used the term “queer formalism” to describe the new ways abstraction has been mobilized by young queer and trans artists to circumvent scripted forms of expression.¹ Alan Ruiz coined “Radical Formalism” in 2016 to consider how materials and form act as “carriers of the political,” and to “understand what form can perform.”² Ruiz was careful to explain that the use of Radical Formalism does not mean forgetting the sexist and classist roots of traditional Greenbergian Formalism, but rather, appropriating it to create an alternative analytic that is more inclusive and allows for more possibilities.³ In 2017, *ASAP/Journal* published a special issue on Queer Form. In an editorial titled “Queer Form: Aesthetics, Race, and the Violences of the Social,” Kadji Amin, Amber Jamillia Musser, and Roy Perez built on these definitions and related them specifically to the experiences of artists of colour. They asserted that “aesthetic form is crucial to the work of queer artists,

¹ Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy, “Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation,” *Art journal* (New York, 1960) 72, no.4 (2013), 64.

² Alan Ruiz, “Radical formalism,” *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 26, nos. 2-3 (2016), 233.

³ Formalism, broadly, is the study of art by analyzing its form and style. The key theorist of Formalism as it is most hegemonically understood was Clement Greenberg. In the 1950s and 1960s, Greenberg popularized the idea that all media (i.e., painting, sculpture, etc.) have essential elements, and that mastering these elements through formal purification was the marker of good art.

artists of color, and more broadly, artists concerned with the structural conditions of social violences.”⁴ A year later, in the introduction to a special issue of *Women and Performance*, Uri McMillan used the term “Surface Aesthetics” as a way to theorize “surface as depth and as relational.”⁵ For practitioners of Surfacing, “the realm of the aesthetic... functions as a vital resource... as they manipulate corporeal and technological surfaces... to refuse the interpretive demands of readability, certitude, and transparency so often expected of artists of color.”⁶ The recent development of these terms and associated concepts demonstrates the recent proliferation of a desire among historically marginalized and equity-deserving groups to resignify Formalism in a way that insists on its political and subjective underpinnings.

Given the proliferation of this language within the span of a few years, one might assume that the terms correspond to politics and practices that are decidedly contemporary; however, this paper considers the longer history of practices that are now called Queer Formalism, Radical Formalism, and Surfacing by returning to the work of Howardena Pindell, an artist who I see as an antecedent to all of these movements. Pindell is a Black feminist visual artist, curator, educator, writer, and activist. Although Pindell mainly worked in abstract painting during the early years of her career, her practice has always been intimately tied to her lived experience and activism. Historically, it has been difficult to discuss Pindell’s work in a way that gives equal weight to both her formal innovations and her political messaging. The importance of language is thus demonstrated through the ways that Queer Formalism, Radical Formalism, and Surface Aesthetics allow us to retroactively see and discuss the important work Pindell did in showing how material aesthetic elements are themselves political – how politics can happen through parts of the work that are not “representational” in the conventional sense. The contemporary theories of Queer Formalism, Radical Formalism, and Surface Aesthetics allow for an

⁴ Kadji Amin, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Perez, “Queer Form: Aesthetics, Race, and the Violences of the Social,” *ASAP journal* 2, no. 2 (2017), 227.

⁵ Uri McMillan, “Introduction: skin, surface, sensorium,” *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 28, no. 1 (2018), 2.

⁶ McMillan, “Introduction,” 4.

alternative reading of the work of Howardena Pindell, one which gives credit to her radically innovative philosophy.

Expanding Biographies: Radicalizing Art Historical Methods

Conventional discourses around abstraction and Formalism disregard artists' biographies. These discourses frame abstraction and Formalism as "universal" rather than particular aesthetic experiences; however, a consideration of Pindell's biography is necessary to fully understand her practice of abstraction – one which is rooted in lived experience. Thus, I present her biography to illuminate how her lived experience informs her aesthetic decisions, disrupting dominant narratives about particular genres or movements in art histories. Pindell's career traverses several fields, including her longstanding studio practice, a professorship at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, a curatorial career in which she was the first Black woman curator at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), a prolific history of activism beginning in high school, and an extensive catalog of writing including personal narratives and statistical research on gender representation and racism in the art world. Born in 1943, Pindell grew up in Philadelphia and engaged with art from quite a young age. She completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Boston University in 1965 and continued her studies in the Master of Fine Arts program at Yale, graduating in 1967. At the time, the undergraduate classes at Yale were still all male, and she was the only person of colour in her program. Pindell moved to New York City after graduation, where after a taxing job search, she eventually found work at the MoMA and continued her art practice in the evenings.

For decades, two strands of dialogue circulated around Pindell's multifaceted practice: one that related to formal innovations and aesthetic properties, and another that related to context and narrative. The first major retrospective exhibition of Pindell's work, *What Remains To Be Seen* – which took place in 2018 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago – put these two strands in conversation for the first

time. According to co-curators Naomi Beckwith and Valerie Cassel Oliver, the exhibition aimed to examine Pindell's "creative and social output in a way that allows us to think about contemporary practices in which object making, activism, advocacy, scholarship, and self-actualization become increasingly and inextricably intertwined."⁷ The scholarship on Pindell's work that emerged from this exhibition and its catalogue demonstrates "Pindell's commitment to not only shape visual language, but also to imagine new histories and possibilities of being in the world."⁸ Cassel Oliver describes her work as a "convergence on tensions between formalist and social concerns, [which] underscore the artist's commitment to free-range experimentations in abstraction and social responsibility."⁹ Pindell's abstract paintings are an example of this convergence. Her subversive use of the minimalist grid shifts it from a "formal device to an actionable device—one that expands into the tactile and becomes materialized, embodied, and mutable."¹⁰ However, as Beckwith observes, even in Pindell's "autobiographical" works—a series of paintings made after a traumatic head accident—equal value is still given to the visual elements that are a result of these personal experiences.¹¹ As Pindell describes, "the way one inhabits a set of circumstances has aesthetic implications."¹² For example, the artist was accustomed to painting in natural light, but she was not afforded this luxury once she began working at the MoMA in 1972. She adapted by developing new methods and techniques to suit her circumstances. Many of the formal innovations born of this context have become hallmarks of her practice, such as creating hole-punched

⁷ Naomi Beckwith and Valerie Cassel Oliver, "Opening Thoughts," in *Howardena Pindell: What Remains To Be Seen*, edited by Naomi Beckwith and Valerie Cassel Oliver, (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in association with Delmonico Books, Prestel, 2018), 30.

⁸ Beckwith and Cassel Oliver, "Opening Thoughts," 30.

⁹ Valerie Cassel Oliver, "The Tao of Abstraction: Pindell's Meditations on Drawing," in *Howardena Pindell: What Remains To Be Seen*, edited by Naomi Beckwith and Valerie Cassel Oliver, (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in association with Delmonico Books, Prestel, 2018), 116.

¹⁰ Naomi Beckwith, "Body Optics, or Howardena Pindell's Ways of Seeing," in *Howardena Pindell: What Remains To Be Seen*, edited by Naomi Beckwith and Valerie Cassel Oliver, (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in association with Delmonico Books, Prestel, 2018), 94.

¹¹ Beckwith, "Body Optics," 96.

¹² Beckwith, "Body Optics," 98.

paper stencils through which to apply paint and sprinkling the left-over hole-punched “chads” (the paper circles which are the result of hole-punching) like confetti on the canvas.

Working in New York in the 1960s and 1970s, Pindell experienced first-hand several new influences, shifts, and movements in the art world. One such movement was the Abstract Expressionist movement, which was taken up by painters in the 1950s and 1960s and at once valued the process of making art – the technical aspects such as gesture, colour, shape, brushstrokes, or scope – over the final product, and devalued or disregarded the inclusion of ideas, concepts, or meaning behind art. Another was Minimalism, which was also an abstract movement from the 1960s that forwarded the idea that art should not be representative of anything besides itself, but usually involved geometric shapes. While both movements focused on the formal elements of artworks, they were often seen in opposition to one another, as Minimalism reacted against the visibility of the artist’s hand and the “high-art” aesthetic of Abstract Expressionism. Through her amalgamations of seemingly contradictory elements, Pindell incorporated aspects of both these movements in combinations unique to her practice.¹³ At the same time, the 1960s and 1970s were a time of rising social activism, and New York City was experiencing an influx of feminist politics. Many of Pindell’s contemporaries engaged in activist movements in their personal lives, yet it was not uncommon for these artists to continue to create abstract work that was not connected to their political stances. As Beckwith and Cassel Oliver note, Pindell,

Was among the first wave of academically trained artists to dismiss this separation and assert that the pressures, prejudices, and exclusions placed upon her – as a black artist and as a woman – played out as much in the art world as they did in the greater social world and, as such, were fair and necessary content for her art practice.¹⁴

¹³ Beckwith and Cassel Oliver, “Opening Thoughts,” 22.

¹⁴ Beckwith and Cassel Oliver, 22.

In her essay “Painting with Ambivalence,” art historian and curator Helen Molesworth describes how feminist painters working in the 1960s and ‘70s often grappled with the tensions and contradictions of the dominant movements of the period.¹⁵ In doing so, these artists “explore how even color [or form, shape, medium, etc.] is gendered.”¹⁶ Pindell’s work offers an alternative to well-worn narratives of Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism. Through her inclusion of the Minimalist grid, as well as abstraction, she appropriated aspects of these movements and turned them into something else; this gesture itself is political, so too are the paintings that resulted.

During Pindell’s tenure at the MoMA, the exhibition *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* debuted at the museum, and in 1973, Pindell travelled to Africa with her colleague and friend, Metropolitan Museum curator Lowery Stokes Sims. The trip and the exhibition influenced Pindell to take her formal innovations further, when she began painting on unstretched canvases in 1974. Pindell has acknowledged that the constructed canvases and interwoven strips she used in works like *Carnival at Ostende* (1977) and *Memory Past* (1980-81) are connected to the African textiles she saw in the early 1970s at the MoMA and in Africa. Incorporating this influence and aspect of her identity into formal canvasses is an example of how Pindell continuously “finds material in her own being in the world,” placing the same value in both form and content.¹⁷ The development of these inspirations into formalist innovations in her work took place “at a time when assertions of connection between artists’ ethnicity and their work would not have been widely countenanced in the world. But Pindell herself has always been actively involved in a process of self-reclamation and definition in both her art and her life.”¹⁸ Pindell herself has stated, “I think one can also use abstraction and have a black aesthetic because [of] the way abstraction has been handled in

¹⁵ Helen Molesworth, “Painting with Ambivalence,” in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Lisa Gabrielle Mark, (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), 428-439.

¹⁶ Molesworth, “Painting with Ambivalence,” 439.

¹⁷ Beckwith, “Body Optics,” 98.

¹⁸ Lowery Stokes Sims, “Synthesis and Integration in the Work of Howardena Pindell, 1971-1992: A (Re)Consideration,” in *Howardena Pindell: What Remains To Be Seen*, edited by Naomi Beckwith and Valerie Cassel Oliver, (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in association with Delmonico Books, Prestel, 2018), 66.

Africa through the use of geometry and patterns.”¹⁹ In this case, she explains how works created from formal elements like shapes and patterns can be tied to identity as much as a representational work could be. This is just one instance where Pindell rejects conventions to make artwork that includes lived experience; she demonstrates that one’s artwork does not need to be representational to be legible within a politics of identity.

Experimenting with Form to Create a New Formalist Language: Pindell’s Practice

Through her formal innovation and experimentation, which detours aspects of 20th century Greenbergian Formalism, Pindell is creating the conditions of possibility for a *new* language of Formalism. Some of Pindell’s works that appear purely Formalist in aesthetic, like *Carnival at Ostende* (1977), are manifestations of a series of politically-motivated material and aesthetic decisions. From afar, the large-scale work has a cream surface, scattered with innumerable speckles of colour. When looking at the painting closer, one can see that the speckles are made up of layers of sprinkled glitter and hole-punched chads. The chads, a signature element of Pindell’s work, are brown, blue, yellow, purple, green, pink, and red. Several look as if they have been painted with stripes, and there are fragments of text on a few of the circles. Although the composition is intentional, Pindell’s thick layering of paint, paper, and glitter makes the canvas look as if it is the result of a travelling fair; remnants of what could be confetti, bubblegum, or flyers left behind on the canvas with no organizing principle. Beneath the abstract composition, however, faint lines (perhaps constructed with string, or else an illusion created by the layering of paint) are barely visible, but resemble a grid.²⁰

¹⁹ Howardena Pindell qtd. in Charles Gaines, “Howardena Pindell: Negotiating Abstraction,” in *What Remains To Be Seen*, edited by Naomi Beckwith and Valerie Cassel Oliver, (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in association with Delmonico Books, Prestel, 2018), 143.

²⁰ Within the traditions of Art History, the grid has been used by different artists who are attached to specific movements, such as Minimalism, which was one of the dominant schools at this time. The grid is an organizational tool which signifies a predetermined order. In her foundational 1979 essay, “Grids,” art historian Rosalind Krauss argues that the grid is emblematic of Modern art, and that it “declares the space of art to be at once autonomous and autotelic” (52).

The painting reflects a shift which occurred in Pindell's work during her time at the MoMA, to a "machinelike, process-based work mode," one which "evad[es] immediate legibility," – "her stencil making is controlled and meditative, the resulting painting is improvisatory."²¹ Her use of the circle and the grid in one composition, seen here and across four decades of work, grew out of her intense interest in process and form. This processional method, which emphasizes the labour of painting, reveals the artist's hand in the creation of the work. Thus, while Pindell's abstract canvas obviously privileges formal innovation and exploration, it does not share the same concealment of the artist's hand as many Formalist works of the time aim to.²² As Cassel Oliver describes, this "resistance to the hand's effacement perhaps can be read as a metaphor for the denial of selfhood as a woman and especially a woman of color."²³ Further, the shifting between shapes seen in the work "undermine[s] the rigidity and formalism of minimalism," in turn "challenging the underlying social structures and demands of the art world."²⁴ Pindell was establishing her seriousness as an artist through her engagements with Formalist conventions and the Minimalist grid; however, she was refusing to conform to the idea that Formalism results in apolitical art. The painting is a representation of how Pindell's work pushes against the boundaries of form, testing the flexibility of these boundaries and their ability to communicate new meanings.²⁵ Through her inclusion of found objects, snippets of text, feminine-coded materials like glitter, and the visibility of her hand in the work, Pindell is able to make statements about the material conditions of her life, something not normally seen as being communicated through formal elements.

Another painting that is exemplary of Pindell's practice is *Memory: Past* (1980-81), which consists of horizontal strips of cut and sewn canvas that were painted a faded hue of purple, layered with multi-coloured chads and various paper collage, mainly green in colour, strewn across the surface. Even more

²¹ Beckwith, "Body Optics," 91.

²² Cassel Oliver, "The Tao of Abstraction," 113.

²³ Cassel Oliver, 113.

²⁴ Cassel Oliver, 113.

²⁵ Cassel Oliver, 113.

than *Carnival at Ostende*, this composition is so rich in layers and textures that a viewer may be tempted to reach out and touch the canvas. The painting is representative of Pindell's favoring of haptic and kinetic experiences, her reconsideration of the primacy of the visual.²⁶ As demonstrated through both works, by the mid-1970s Pindell's process was mainly one of construction, destruction, and reconstruction. Another of her many explorations with form, she stopped using stretched canvases and began using large, irregularly shaped unstretched canvas, or cutting strips of canvas which were sewn back together. She then used these surfaces as a base for several layers of paint and other materials, such as paper chads, glitter, talcum powder, postcards, perfume, and other found objects.²⁷ This process was performative. In taking on "preconceived notions of her proper place in the contemporary art world," by remixing elements from existing styles to create a new visual language, Pindell also rejected the idea that her work as a Black woman must be a testimonial to oppression and that formalist work cannot be subjective and political.²⁸ Through a critical, deconstructive engagement with conventional styles, Pindell's work represents what bell hooks calls an oppositional gaze. In describing this sort of gaze, hooks asserts that "by courageously looking, [Black women] defiantly declared: 'not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.' Even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that contain it, opens up the possibility of agency."²⁹ As described by hooks above, the oppositional gaze is a deconstructive, and reconstructive, process. Not only does Pindell also emphasize the process (or labour) of making work, but her manipulation of preexisting forms, ideas, and movements can also be categorized as oppositional. This opposition is what creates space for new possibilities to be explored through the work.

²⁶ Beckwith, "Body Optics," 96.

²⁷ Beckwith, "Body Optics," 95.

²⁸ Cassel Oliver, 131.

²⁹ bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectator," in *black looks: race and representation* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 116.

Pindell's emphasis on process allows her to challenge "the optical aspects of painting," stressing the labour that goes into creating a painting, and undermining the illusion of transparency and readability that would come with a more figurative or representational work.³⁰ Through her refusal of representational modes and focus on tactility and feeling, Pindell's cut and sewn canvases "deprivilege the very system of seeing," thus disrupting "our models of how seeing, knowledge, and power operate."³¹ In fact, "from her earliest works, [Pindell] refuted a societal faith in seeing or the visual encounter" as unquestioned truth.³² Pindell resists binary logics and conventional stereotypes through her manipulation of the surface, ultimately presenting "alternative, even illegible, forms of representation and personhood."³³ In her work, she disrupts the expectations tied to her identity through the visual order: she "asks her audience to take her at her word by 'draw[ing] on my experience as I have lived it and not as others wish to perceive my living it as fictionalized in the media and so-called 'history books.'"³⁴ Although they may be communicated alternatively, and thus obscured by some degree of opacity, Pindell presents the audience with experiences of both joy and pain and asks viewers to take this at face value.

Further, the circles seen throughout Pindell's paintings are an example of how the artist found ways to incorporate her personal experiences into her work without relying on figuration, representation, or narrative content. Pindell once wrote,

when I was a child, I was with my father in southern Ohio or northern Kentucky, and we went to a root beer stand and they gave us mugs with red circles on the bottom to designate that the glass was to be used by a person of color. I see that as the reason I have

³⁰ Beckwith, "Body Optics," 94-95.

³¹ Beckwith, "Body Optics," 90.

³² Beckwith, 107.

³³ McMillan, "Introduction," 3.

³⁴ Howardena Pindell qtd. in Beckwith, "Body Optics," 107.

been obsessed with the circle, using it in a way that would be positive instead of negative.³⁵

Not only does Pindell imbue formal qualities with politics, but she refuses the demand that any expression of subjectivity by a so-called minority artist must be a negative one. The discourses of the 1970s and '80s treated abstraction as universal and thus not concerned with differences such as race and gender, but Pindell's evasion of transparency and insistence on the connections between formal elements and her personal experiences disrupts these discourses.

Communicating the Potentials of Formalism: The Contemporary Language of Queer Formalism, Radical Formalism, and Surface Aesthetics

Queer Formalism, Radical Formalism, and Surface Aesthetics provide a method for discussing the critical value of the ways politics can be addressed through non-representational forms, especially in marginalized communities. To reiterate, Getsy and Doyle explain how artists working with Queer Formalism use abstraction to refuse conventional functions of materials, but also to reject the demand often placed on minority artists to address sexuality or race through explicit representation. Getsy expanded on these ideas in his 2015 book *Abstract Bodies*, and again in a 2017 paper called "Queer Relations," where he described how "historically, there has been many times when formal manipulation has been the only vehicle through which queer insubordination could be conveyed."³⁶ Getsy argues that Queer Formalism encompasses not only art made by queer-identifying artists, or exclusively art that relates to sexuality, but explains that it is "a means for mobilizing formal relations in order to call forth counternarratives, to challenge given taxonomies, to attend to unorthodox intimacies and exchanges, and to subvert 'natural' and ascribed meanings."³⁷ Queer Formalism is an analytic framework for looking at

³⁵ Beckwith and Cassel Oliver, "Opening Thoughts," 33.

³⁶ David Getsy, "Queer Relations," *ASAP Journal* 2, no. 2 (2017), 254-255.

³⁷ Getsy, "Queer Relations," 255.

how form is “mobilized in relation to content as a way of fostering such queer tactic as subversion, infiltration, refusal, or the declaration of unauthorized allegiances.”³⁸ In defining Radical Formalism, Ruiz asks how form might behave differently if we detach it from the “institutionalized understandings” often associated with it – he sees Formalism as it stands as something of a “dirty word,” but suggests this is where the “exciting, yet slippery” potential in the term lies.³⁹ And, when defining Surface Aesthetics of Surfacing, McMillan actually cites Pindell as an example of “surface play at work,” as her practice in abstraction foregrounds the surface and its ability to speak for itself.⁴⁰

As Getsy articulated in 2017, “historically, there has been many times when formal manipulation has been the only vehicle through which queer insubordination could be conveyed... its proponents escaped censure by means of this dissemblance and coding through form.”⁴¹ Beyond a means of survival, Queer Formalism and related theories allows us to consider the historical demand that queer artists and artists of colour produce “art that transmits information rather than pushing aesthetic boundaries.”⁴² This demand has also, until recently, silenced an *analysis* of these artists’ aesthetic innovations or aims. With new language, however, it can be understood that, “rather than positioned as binaries, form and content should instead be understood in dialectic tension in that they are each of value only insofar as they exist in service of one another.”⁴³ Form, the proponents of Queer Formalism, Radical Formalism, and Surfacing suggest, can be utilized as “a seductive decoy;” [a strategy that makes] “difference a little *less* knowable, visible, and digestible.”⁴⁴ According to the editors of ASAP journal’s issue on Queer Formalism, “the world-making ethos of contemporary queer studies is vulnerable to critique, because when it is perceived as unmoored from history it appears idealistic and facile.”⁴⁵ Thus, mooring Queer

³⁸ Getsy, “Queer Relations,” 255.

³⁹ Ruiz, “Radical Formalism,” 233.

⁴⁰ McMillan, “Introduction,” 6.

⁴¹ Getsy, “Queer Relations,” 254-255.

⁴² Amin, Musser and Perez, “Queer Form,” 227.

⁴³ Ruiz, “Radical formalism,” 236.

⁴⁴ Ruiz, 238; Amin, Musser, and Perez, 235.

⁴⁵ Amin, Musser, and Perez, 229.

Formalism, Radical Formalism, and Surface Aesthetics to a longer history through Pindell's work serves as a way to ground and contextualize the practices they encompass, which, importantly, "wrest representation from the heterosexist and racist mishandling of history."⁴⁶ Conversely, the editors of the catalogue for *What Remain To Be Seen* propose that their project asks how to "approach a fuller understanding of Pindell's formal innovations from our current vantage point? And most importantly: how do those formal innovations extend into a mode of rethinking the social and political context of their making?"⁴⁷ The development of contemporary language such as Queer Formalism, Radical Formalism, and Surface Aesthetics—which all recognize how aesthetic form can be a tool in the subversion of art historical and art world conventions and act as an "analytic for considering how artists circumnavigate corporal limitation and resist over determined interpretations of their work"—may help in answering any parts of these questions as yet to be answered.⁴⁸

Again, one reason the discussion of Pindell's work as a unique and generative amalgamation of political and aesthetic qualities has been delayed may be due to a lack of language, especially as she was working during a time when Formalism meant a rejection of narrative, representational content, and differences of identity. Pindell rejected this definition of Formalism, "gradually peel[ing] away the layers of obfuscation with which assimilation and acculturation [had] disguised her multi-ethnic background," and identity as a woman artist.⁴⁹ Her cut and sewn canvases, innovations in geometric abstraction, and the way she connects these aesthetic properties to her identity demonstrate how her art is non-representational, as well as political. The contemporary language of Queer Formalism, Radical Formalism, and Surface Aesthetics provide scholars with the opportunity to consider Pindell's work through a contemporary lens, valuing both her formal innovations and her activism. After looking at

⁴⁶ Amin, Musser, and Perez, 231.

⁴⁷ Beckwith and Cassel Oliver, "Opening Thoughts," 27.

⁴⁸ McMillan, "Introduction," 12.

⁴⁹ Stokes Sims, "Synthesis and Integration," 66.

Pindell's work, we can see how her practice anticipates and gets to the heart of what is so important about the development of this new language, thus grounding it in a longer history of queer or racialized artists working against the grain.

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