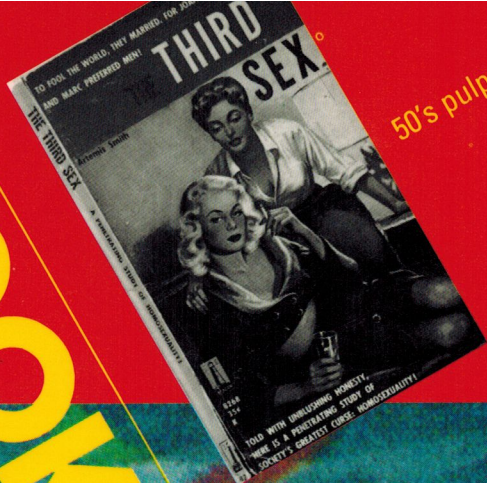


issue 12  
spring 1991  
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# OUTLOOK

NATIONAL  
LESBIAN  
& GAY  
QUARTERLY



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subversive  
snapping

**k.d. lang &  
women's  
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a true story







QUEERS  
FOR  
PEACE

MAKE  
OUT  
NOT  
WAR

WHO MADE  
U.S.

FUEL







# 12

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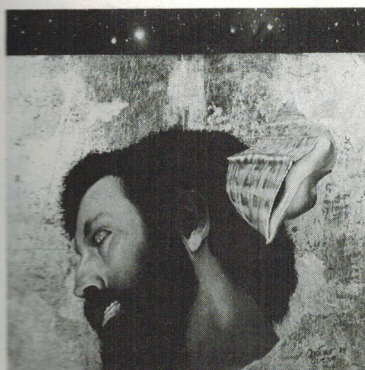
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OUT/LOOK spring 1991

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*Instead of our usual Editor's Welcome, I thought I'd share with you a letter I wrote to Jackie Goldsby, a former member of OUT/LOOK's Editorial Board. Hope you don't mind reading other people's mail.*

Tomás Almaguer

Dear Jackie:

Greetings from the OUT/LOOK office. I thought I'd take a few minutes to catch you up on news from this end. Things have been real hectic here since we lost our new Executive Editor a few months ago. It was a mutual parting of the ways; good intentions on everyone's part but the marriage didn't work out. As a result, Arlene Stein and myself have been drafted to serve as "guest editors" of the current issue. Now that I know how much work is involved, however, I think that "guest workers" would be more appropriate.

Since being pressed into service, I've seized the opportunity to give the issue a strong third-world focus (you know what a control queen I am). I think we have put together an exciting issue—perhaps the best ever. We are publishing some of the most powerful voices of people of color that we have ever printed; they are inspired examples of minority writing on gay and lesbian issues. For example, we have these two great articles by Marlon Riggs and Charles Fernández on negotiating multiple subjectivities (and white people think they have identity problems!). Then there is this wonderful literary analysis of Cherríe Moraga's writings by Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano that the lesbian literati will especially love. Rounding out the issue is a totally *sin vergüenza* portfolio of homoerotic art from Mexico and

some amazing poetry and prose by various Black, Chicano, and Filipino writers. All in all, a great mix of genres and voices echo through the pages of the current issue.

Although working with Arlene and the production staff has been a great learning experience, my ongoing relationship with the magazine remains a mixed bag. As you know, it's been over two years since I joined the talented white folks that started the magazine. (I guess the nuns were right, speaking a little English does get you far.) To their credit, my editorial comrades generally have been very responsive to third world issues and we have welcomed a number of other people of color onto the board since you've left. It's actually quite amazing, seven minority editors have now worked on OUT/LOOK—that's over one-third of all our past and present board members. While this is certainly commendable and speaks well of our colleagues' political sensibilities, it does have its down side—as you may painfully recall.

I still get into more than my share of skirmishes with white folks on the board and have co-produced some of the more memorable cheap scenes in recent board history. Sometimes these differences are simply viewed as "personality clashes"; other times they are acknowledged as more fundamental. We especially tangle over whether or not to publish articles on third world issues written by white queers who have ventured into our communities ("tourist" literature I call it). I've always felt that we no longer need well-intentioned queers to "translate" our issues for the OUT/LOOK readership—we can do that ourselves,

thank you. Rüdiger Busto, Ken Dixon, Veneita Porter, Ming-Yeung Lu, and Francisco Alarcón have been great allies in assuring that OUT/LOOK aggressively solicits and publishes third world voices.

But white man's (and woman's) burden is hard to overcome. White queers still have little reluctance to cast themselves as ventriloquists and render us voiceless. I tell you, Jackie, white folks have got to get over their "right" to address whatever they want, including the right to speak for people of color. Sure, I'm against censorship, but that doesn't mean we have to privilege their voices and give them uncontested space in the magazine.

It's becoming clearer to me that there truly are multiple "discourses" being simultaneously played out in the pages of the magazine. OUT/LOOK has become an interesting forum for the unique concerns of our diverse communities. Nonetheless, I still admit being surprised at how seriously white queers often take their precious identities and politics. I can't help but laugh when I hear them essentializing about having gotten in touch with their "gay spirit" or defining themselves as "fairies." (My mom would slap me silly if she heard I was rolling around in the mud flats near my grandparents' home in New Mexico or dancing around trees in the woods someplace). Even scarier is the way this Queer Nation bravado has so blithely ignored the (homo)genizing specter of "queer nationalism." Part of what we struggled for in the 1960s and 1970s was the right to reclaim and retain our cultural distinctiveness. And many of us continue to resist being whitewashed by either



straight or gay culture. Why can't they accept the fact that being "gay" is not the primary basis of my self-identity?

You know, Jackie, being around gay people only serves to reinforce my main identity as a Chicano. The bottom line for me is that I just don't see the world in the same way they do. Because of the primacy of race in this country, white gay men and I generally have little in common other than sexuality (but you know how fond I am of building political alliances with cute white guys). In all honesty though, I think I am more comfortable with *macho-maricón* (what Black folks call a "butch queen") than "gay" as my main gender/sexual identity.

When all is said and done, I guess I still get satisfaction out of being cast as a gadfly in a white queer world. But it's not easy being an intermediary between two cultural worlds—or, as it were, two nations. So they can wallow in their identity angst all they want as long as the issues closest to my heart and my cultural sensibilities aren't abused

or ignored. Like I've said before, my work with OUT/LOOK is primarily a matter of coalition politics. It's tough sledding sometimes—you know how weird white people can be, especially those modern queers.

Well, that's it for now, I'll check in with you later. We miss

you dearly and hope that you rejoin us soon.

In sisterhood,  
*Tomás*

P.S. I finally got my ticket to the production of *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Met. Don't you just love cultural contradictions?





## They love us, They love us not

I have become increasingly disturbed at the number of readers who appear to be horrified that *OUT/LOOK* has not dependably been a publication they feel is suited for display on the coffee table for the perusal of our families, straight friends, and children. Concern has centered often on the possibility that there has been an overabundance of coverage of our community's sexuality. That this focus "looks bad" to those looking in who have already assumed this one-track-mindedness of our kind. This attitude is an internalization of this very prejudice. Of course there is more to being lesbian or gay than who we sleep with and how we do it but this does not preclude us from discussing our sexuality. Though accepting those who are radically different from our own definitions of what it means to be gay may sometimes be difficult, if we aren't willing to do it, how can we expect anyone else to be?

In *OUT/LOOK* we have an all-inclusive forum (refreshingly free from the quasi-pornographic advertisements that pervade most of our publications) for us all to discover ourselves and each other — women and men alike. Sure there have been times when I have been shocked or disturbed ... or, do I dare say, embarrassed by material reflecting the attitudes or practices of fellow gay people. I thought that just one more article on lesbian s&m would make *me* drop my subscription — but the feeling quickly passed. This journal is for us — to make us think and learn.

I have felt no urge to hide my *OUT/LOOK* or use the age-old tactic of the ignorant and reli-

giously fervent: book burning. I heap it on the coffee table with everything else. For those uncomfortable with this may I suggest a subscription to *Architectural Digest*.

Laurence J. Nolan  
Wilmington, Delaware

I agree with the letters in your Winter issue that find your publication offensive. I especially agree with Tara Wolfstar's observation that what your ad promises and what your magazine delivers are very different. I also found it very offensive that you printed these letters under the heading "Is It True That Lesbians Hate Sex?" Your bias was certainly loud and clear.

If you do indeed have any lesbians working on your staff, you certainly need to hire more with different viewpoints to give your publication some balance. Most of us, I believe, are pretty tolerant of varying views, but your lesbian-directed articles are consistently concerned with dildos and/or sadism. Your magazine would have to change drastically before I would consider renewing.

B.A. Lee

I started laughing when I read the one letter that said you were "an embarrassment to the gay community," you know, the letter written by the woman who, unlike savage fringes of the gay community, "act[ed] and look[ed] like [a] woman." Where is our sense of frivolity and enjoyment that we are so well known for, that has saved us in countless situations? (Fortunately, it was right there, in your title: "Is It True That Lesbians Hate Sex?")

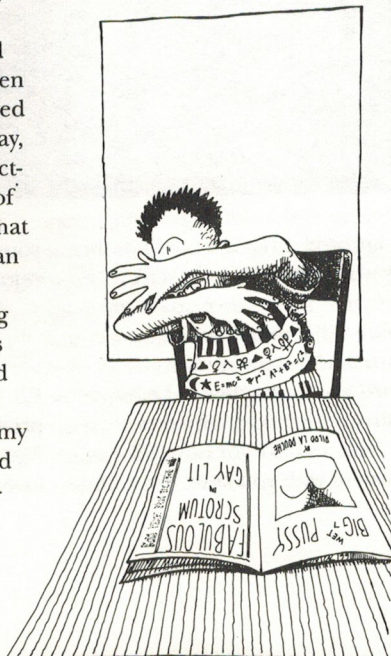
By the time that I got to the last letter which reproached you for your "type of raw photographs of an ugly nature having no artistic value," I wondered what kind of sheltered lesbian or gay publications these people have been reading, and whether they would secretly vote for the NEA fund restrictions if they were in office.

For some unexplained reason, the old leftist adage, "I don't want to be a part of your revolution if I can't dance" came to mind after reading those letters. Then my memory banks drew up two more phrases: Ferron's line, "If you're afraid of them talking, friend, they're all talking still," and (paraphrased from somewhere in *A Bridge Called My Back*) "I kept silent because I was afraid of getting hurt, but I was hurt by being silent."

Just thought I would get that off my chest. I really like *OUT/LOOK*, and I especially think it is remarkable and indicative that there is such an even amount of lesbian and gay male materials in the magazine. I am really happy to find that balance after seeing so many supposedly dual-interest magazines that end up being fairly lopsided (usually to the male side).

JanNathan Falling Long  
Columbus, Ohio

Kris Kovick





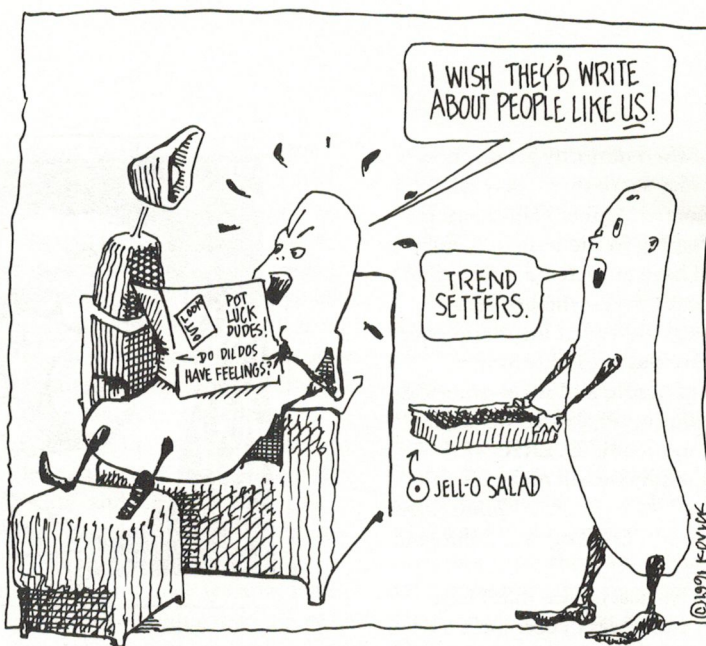
I find your publication to be exploitive of sex among humans in the sense of degrading them, lowering human sensitivity and vulnerability to slickness, sensation, and sleaze.

You masquerade your pornographic publication as an urbane, daring, liberating addition to the literature of gay and lesbian life. Well, I see through your disguise. Any magazine which accepts advertising for information on "stunning Asian men," and prints photos of human genitals dismembered from the unique, precious, divine human creature to whom they belong isn't worth the paper it's printed on.

name withheld

Your magazine represents to me the cutting edge of diversity — an all-inclusive diversity that allows me to reflect on where I stand on many of the controversial issues facing our community. I read the magazine cover to cover, and I have yet to be offended. Not to mention the fact that *OUT/LOOK* is, in my opinion, one of the best looking magazines around — it is "slick" — a refreshing change from other underground-looking wads of paper I see around. The fact that you present so much from so little is incredible; you've got plenty to be proud of, and I've got plenty to be thankful for.

Funny, but the last thing I expect to read in a lesbian/gay magazine is the homophobic attitude of lesbians and gay men who think they've got the corner on the market on "proper" behavior for homosexuals. (And why does it almost always seem to be women complaining about the openness of your magazine? Does this mean men are generally more accepting of our dif-



ferences?) We hear enough of that crap from people like Jesse Helms and his right-wing followers, not to mention straight people who don't mind us homosexuals, but do we "have to be so blatant about it?" I refuse to fit anybody's picture of how I should look, dress, act, or behave, and I don't expect anybody else to fit mine. If a lesbian couple wants to "act and look like two women," great. But please don't push your standards on me. Do they really expect me to believe that I have to act and look like society's stereotypical norm of what a woman should act and look like — that norm typically refers to the preconceived notions for straight women, not gender-bending dykes like myself.

Maybe as more and more lesbian and gay couples choose to raise children, they could be more open-minded about what their children read; keeping magazines like this out of their reach only whitewashes reality. Perhaps those offended readers should stick to *Reader's Digest*, so they can share *those* white-bread views with their children, instead of the reality and beauty of our

diverse culture. Then they can wonder where they went wrong when their children grow up to be queerbashers.

Pat Harrington  
Oceanside, California

I am discontinuing my subscription because I am bored. The articles are too long. The one about a lesbian (?) being with a man and others. It is too hard to sit through and even the type face does not lend itself to easy reading. Although innovative and creative, pages 50 and 51 of issue #11 hurt my eyes. I applaud your efforts and your almost premier publication to join lesbians and gay men.

Karen Stewart  
Austin, Texas

### Women and Queer Nation

Your material on Queer Nation (winter 1991) is magnificent ... thank you for the insightful coverage.

We all hope that Queer Nation will not become just another white male group. Here in Los Angeles, we are concentrating on outreach, asking other es-



established minority groups how we may serve them. Several women of Queer Nation are participating in the lesbian forum and have attracted a loyal group of great dykes who are very young and full of ideas and energy. We have visibility in the Asian, Latin, and Afro-American communities, too, so we are trying to include EVERYONE. Hopefully we will make it work.

*Jaime Green*  
Los Angeles, California

The hardest choice that I have ever made was to become a lesbian mother, and I resist Maria Maggenti's suggestion ("Women as Queer Nationals," winter 1991) that lesbian parenting is an "almost relieved dash for normalcy and assimilation," a "comfortable return to individual comfort over group advancement," and that actually the lesbian nation is "far more creative and undefinable" than the "burgeoning movement toward lesbian parenting" would have us believe.

My lover is pregnant, and there is nothing comfortable or easy about it for either of us. Not only is pregnancy itself a profoundly challenging state for her to be in physically, we also have to confront the homophobia of the obstetric community, the constant assumption of a husband's involvement by the world at large, and the legal barriers placed before me as a non-biological mother. In addition, we have ahead the delight of dealing with the school system, and, most terrifying of all, the prospect of our own child's potential homophobia towards us.

The choice to have a child has been, and will continue to be, a highly political and activist one for us. We may be the first lesbians to file for a non-biolog-

ical mother's adoption rights in San Mateo County. This arduous and expensive task — in which the county social workers must deny our adoption application and then we must appeal the case in court — is more than just an attempt to define our family as nuclear. We will be setting legislative precedents (if all goes well) in a community that denies our very existence.

There are many different kinds of lesbians making many different choices — and all of these choices are creative ones. I do not want to be pigeonholed because I am having a child, and I do not want to be seen as apolitical because of my choice. This kind of thinking comes directly out of a patriarchal devaluing of motherhood. I thought that Maria Maggenti was going to carve a political place for women away from the male-dominated environments of ACT UP and Queer Nation that she describes. Instead, she takes their male perspective on lesbian mothering and makes it her own.

*Ashley McNeely*  
Burlingame, California



Kris Kovick

## Lesbian Desire

It's difficult to know *how* to begin to respond to Julia Creet's reading of lesbian desire in your Winter 1991 issue. Difficult, in part, because Creet's analysis blurs some of the standard distinctions between theoretical writing and the popular essay, a pretty risky strategy writing for a broad-based community of readers.

Nearly all your articles on lesbians seem preoccupied with either the Phallus, the penis, or the exceptional male lover. I have nothing against the penis per se, but I do object to literalizing readings of complex ideas. In Creet's allusion to the Phallus "as the symbol of desire" early on in her essay, for example, she collapses a complicated, and heatedly contested, discourse on language and power without ever once referring to either psychoanalytic theory or the various feminist responses to it. This is incredible too.

I'm not suggesting that Creet should have written an essay on psychoanalytic theory. I am suggesting that it is silly to talk about the penis and lesbian desire without *questioning* why the penis ex-



erts such allure for her. Without, in other words, talking about power. Not simply institutional power. I mean the power that frames our ability, as lesbians, to conceptualize our sexuality.

This, I believe, is the power to which Marilyn Frye refers when she writes, "I have no linguistic community, no language, and therefore in one important sense, no knowledge." I suspect that no simple mapping of gay male sexuality onto the lesbian body would provide Frye with the knowledge she requires. Knowledge is not merely mimetic, even if we do learn by imitating those we admire. Nor is it derivative. Women have had to learn this the hard way every time they attempt to play hard ball "like a man." So have people of color. So have gay men, whose response to the politics of AIDS has become a form of knowledge about power.

Sorry, I don't think we can appropriate that knowledge, no matter how much we love our brothers. We have to make our own. To build an authentic lexicon for lesbian sex we have to risk not being understood by a great many people whose approval we may want, including gay men. But just think about the payoff, beginning with a language for fucking as women that is not always lapsing into parody or simile, that does not need to confess how in order to get on with each other we pretended to be gay men at the baths. A language that can describe what it is like to get hard *as a woman* without alluding to the famous hardness of a cock. A language, to borrow from Luce Irigaray, that makes the lips famous.

I don't think we can begin to do this until we are willing to confront our relationship to language. If you believe, as Creet

seems to, that exchanging the Phallus is the inevitable "truth" about desire, then I suppose we have to face the fact that as lesbians we are forced to console ourselves with an assortment of parodic gestures, not the least of which is the parody of a discourse about ourselves. The good news is the news Creet leaves out in her essay, the fact that numerous lesbian writers, such as Monique Wittig and Nicole Brossard, as well as radical "straight women" such as Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, have advanced multiple readings of female desire that take seriously the possibility that not only does woman's sex "exist," so do we.

*Camille Norton*

Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts

### The Ivory Closet Opened

Jeffrey Escoffier's survey article on gay and lesbian studies implies that there is little contact between the old and the new gay scholars, that abstract theory has triumphed in the university, and that the new intellectuals of gay life are as cut off from gay community issues as the intellectuals of the left are from labor activists. This is far from the truth, at least in the university where I work.

At UC Santa Cruz, these presumably separate styles (activism and intellectualizing; literary analysis and social science documentation; research and teaching; white male scholarship networks and multiracial feminist analysis) exist together, sometimes within the same person. Perhaps this is because our campus is unusually diverse in the forms through which openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual sensibility, scholarship, and activism are expressed. But I think it is more

because our condition as gays, lesbians, and bisexuals — simultaneously oppressed and politically emergent — demands and encourages this mix.

At Santa Cruz, in addition to a wide range of courses in the social sciences and humanities, and a university-funded faculty research group focused on our issues, we have a residential college whose new academic and cultural theme is the exploration of the cultural intersections of sexuality, race, class, and gender. Of the twenty-eight permanent faculty now located at Kresge College, thirteen are either gay or doing research about some aspect of homosexuality.

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at Santa Cruz are open and active both on campus and off. On campus, they insist on relevant courses, support faculty who are out, and by creating a positive institutional atmosphere for themselves, have produced an environment that makes survival possible and enjoyable even for the most "out" faculty. Our local community is also liberal: we have had both gay and socialist mayors in the past ten years. This also helps.

All this works in a mutually reinforcing way: faculty and students support each other; so do the intellectuals and the activists; and the university and the community. As a result, we all survive and appreciate each other.

*Nancy Stoller*

University of California, Santa Cruz

I have just read Jeffrey Escoffier's piece on lesbian and gay studies in the fall 1990 issue. While I'm very flattered to be identified as the progenitor of the "American gay left," I do want to point out to those who don't know me that I am, in fact, Australian. While I



have written three books on the American gay movement (*Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, *The Homosexualization of America*, and *AIDS in the Mind of America*), I have lived the great part of the past twenty years in Australia, and my perspective has been very much that of a non-American observer — and sometimes participant — in what's happening in the gay world of the United States.

One of the features of modern lesbian and gay studies is that it is, in fact, international. We in Australia, like our counterparts in the rest of the world, are very conscious of the ways in which lesbian and gay Americans influence us. Jeffrey does acknowledge the contribution of the English social constructionists, of Foucault, and of the Canadian journal *Body Politic*, but as "lesbian and gay studies" struggles to become institutionalized in academia I suspect there is declining interest in developments outside the United States. Ironically, it's precisely the cross-cultural nature of our experience that seems to me to justify "lesbian and gay studies" as a separate discipline. What we need is more sophisticated understanding of what unites us across political and cultural boundaries, and greater recognition of what is peculiarly national and what international in the sort of debates magazines like *OUT/LOOK* encourage.

Dennis Altman  
Bundoora, Australia

I was greatly saddened that Jeffrey Escoffier's essay, "Inside the Ivory Closet" (fall 1990) made no mention of *Homosexualities and French Literature*, the collection of interviews and critical essays edited by Professor Elaine Marks and

myself and published in 1979. We had to overcome mountains of homophobia to have this book accepted, including considerable resistance even at Cornell University Press, which eventually agreed to publish it. For example, a member of the advisory board at the Press fiercely objected to our qualification of pioneering works on homosexuality by Gide, Proust, Colette, Cocteau, Genet, and Sartre as "courageous texts." He was afraid this would suggest that homosexuals themselves were courageous people and therefore would send the wrong moral message to readers!

Elaine Marks and I did this book to put an end to such maddening bigotry. We wanted to open up not only the field of French studies but of lesbian and gay studies in general so that scholars would not be denied promotion or tenure if they wrote on this subject, so that academic journals would not continue to reject blindly any article on gay topics, and, most important, so that graduate students would no longer be advised to avoid the subject if they had any hope of finding a teaching position.

*Homosexualities and French Literature* was reissued in paperback this year and has been in bookstores for several weeks now.

George Stambolian  
Professor of French and Lesbian and Gay Studies, Wellesley College

### Seniors Ignored

As in many magazines, letters to the editor are one of the best features. I am writing because one of these, from Manhattan, Kansas, struck home. The author need not fear that he was being boring. On the contrary, the problem is that as a product

of the self-loathing of homosexuals, people in our age group (sixty and over) are ignored (of course). However, we exist and we have the same needs as our younger fellows. I would like to see your magazine publish work by and about seniors, promote contact between them (do we need our own lobby group?), recognize that we are a sizable number, with rights. Why don't younger homosexual academics take time out from worrying about tenure to publish much-needed papers about this subgroup?

name withheld

### Remember the Environment

I love what you cover and what you stand for, but it is too late in history to print things on new shiny, unrecycled, and *unrecyclable* paper!

While we fight for lesbian and gay rights, AIDS cure development, and freedom from racism, violence, and oppression, we must also fight for a sustainable environment to ensure that we even *have* a future! When you become more conscious and outspoken on this issue and live by it (use recycled paper, etc.), then I will subscribe. Until then, I'll borrow used copies from friends.

Catherine Murphy  
Portola Valley, California  
We're working on it (see p. 72). — Editors

Please send letters to *OUT/LOOK*, 2940 16th Street, Suite 319, San Francisco, CA 94103. Letters may be edited for length and must be received by April 1, 1991 for issue 13.

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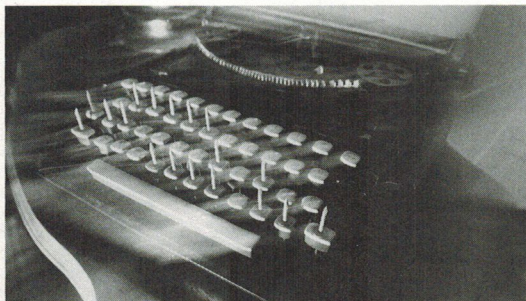
# OutWrite '91

## National Lesbian & Gay Writers Conference

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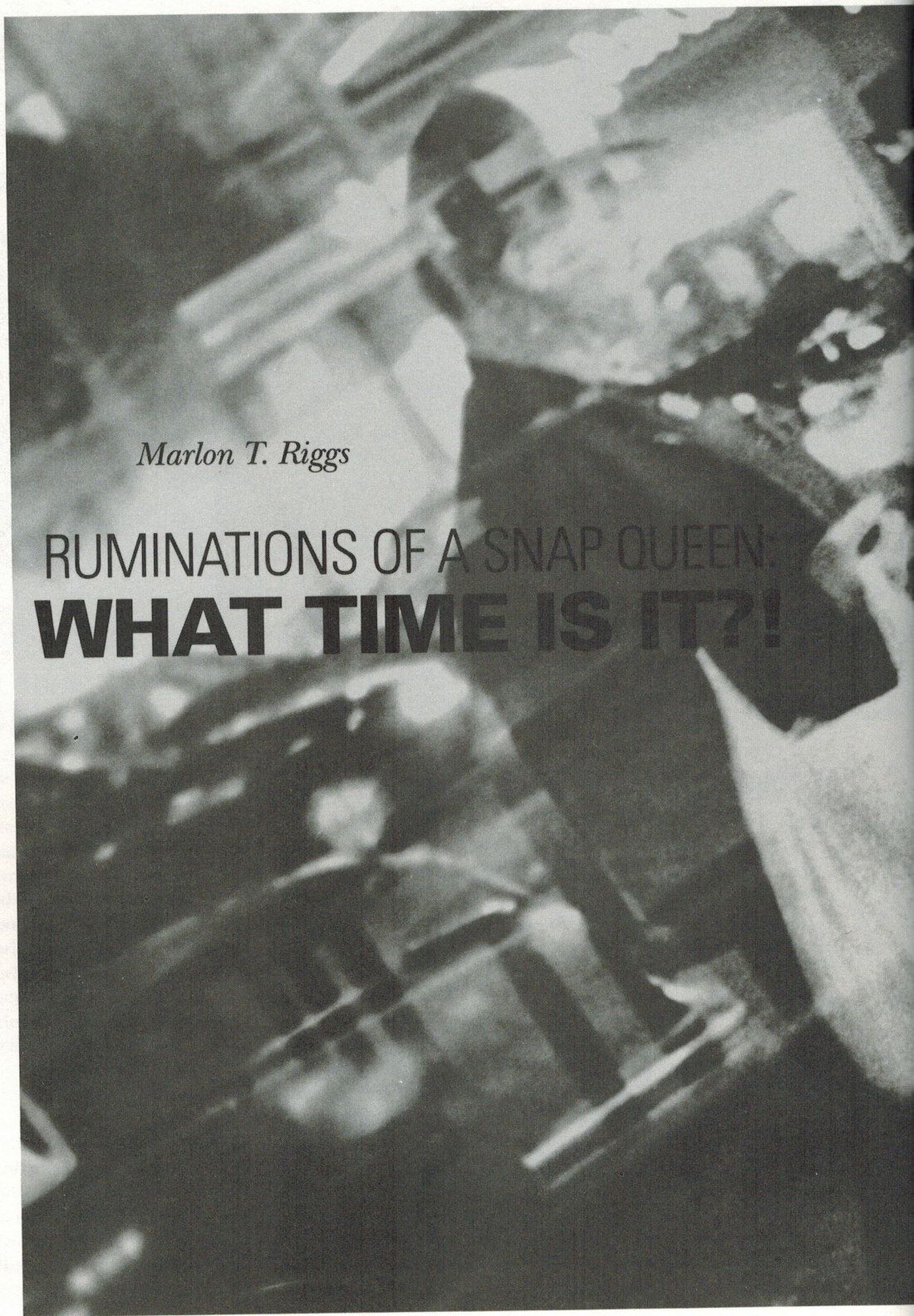
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*Marlon T. Riggs*

RUMINATIONS OF A SNAP QUEEN:  
**WHAT TIME IS IT?!**





This article was the keynote address given at the Fourth Annual Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Studies Conference at Harvard University on October 25, 1990.

## What time is it?

The Soviet Empire is in shambles. Pick up any newspaper today; watch the morning, midday, evening, late night news — the announcements are inescapable — and you will witness, up close and personal, reports of a society profoundly dysfunctional, listing on the edge of chaos. Gorby wins the Nobel prize! But can he salvage his political economy? Will he last? Will the nation?

Most of us have been riveted by such news, by the sights and sounds of walls ripped apart and flooded over by an angry, impatient humanity, unwilling to live by dissembling myths of the past, to live *with* the worsening perils of the moment.

The Eastern Bloc crumbles, and millions of Americans watch — at once riveted and, reassuringly, cocooned by their belief that the Soviets have finally arrived at an inexorable fate, while we, the victors, stand tall and intact, the armor of American might — and ideology — gleaming radiantly throughout the world for others, at best, to emulate, and at least, to defer to.

Few Americans have noticed — in part because our popular media have scarcely bothered to inform us — that here at home, our walls, too, are profoundly fractured and crumbling, that just as the Second World is on the verge of overdue collapse, so is the First.

## What time is it?

The mythology of America, the myth of what it means to be an American, is facing, at last, its own inexorable fate. For what this myth required, for too long, for too many of us, was the soul-crushing negation of our lives, the rejection of our most intimate,



deepest, life-sustaining truths. The mythology of America always demanded of its devotees and its victims more than mere assimilation: it forced us to view the best within ourselves as the worst. The most precious within us, that which shaped and nurtured our distinctive characters, our identities, we jettisoned. For the sake of cultural conversion — or better still, conformity — to the status quo, we paid a price, and are paying it still, with currencies of self-abuse, self-hatred, alienation, violence, isolation, silence, and brutal death. The price has been measured in our spiritual devastation — and our blood. And the reason America's walls are finally crumbling is simply this: we are no

PERIENCING PROBLEMS  
FINANCIAL INSTITUTION  
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TAKE YOUR CARD AND  
AIN AT A LATER TIME

longer willing to bleed, and hence, to pay.

As a Black Gay Signifyin' Butch-Queen devoted to the fine and sometimes *martial* arts of the "Wicked Read" and the "Subversive Snap!" I cannot help but jump with jubilation over the quickening disintegration of the American myth. For this myth has been my prison: each time another hollow pillar of the myth crumbles, I taste freedom, gain new vistas on the world and my life. The Old American Empire — the old, imposed American identity — is cracking up. Our mythic center is no longer holding. Things, I'm happy to announce, are finally falling apart. And I bless this destruction.

With it, you see, arrives my freedom, my too long delayed, my truest emancipation.

Now, I ask,

## what time is it?

Lest our Harvard hosts misunderstand, it is not your buildings, schools, and *houses* of authority I want to burn, or bring down; it is your authority, as such, to dictate my life, my history, my status within the world, your authority, which must be broken. Your house can stand, as long as it's understood to be my house, too, so that I, too, can furnish its learned interior, remodel and repaint it, and add new, more colorful wings should — or better yet, when — the old ones collapse.

Fifteen years ago, I admit, I told a different time. As an undergraduate at this institution, I was as much a prisoner as a student. Like most others, I had come here to learn, but foremost, I had come in search of community, of people like myself — the young, gifted, and Black; Nina's song was my anthem then — who shared my values and concerns, my intellectual and political commitments. I had come to Harvard, naively, in search of my own Black reflection. I awakened, after I arrived, to the realization that I was also gay. And the reflection of myself that this new me suggested, this reflection I found nowhere. Worse, I believed it existed — nowhere.

There were no lesbian/gay studies then. There were no bisexual/lesbian/gay students' associations. There were no "out" faculty, to my knowledge, nor conferences or seminars that addressed, in the remotest way, the turmoil or the raging questions within me. There was no *In the Life*, or *Other Countries*, or *Looking for Langston*, or *Tongues Untied*, or *Gay Men of African Descent*. Nothing ostensibly "gay" seemed to embrace the totality of me; nothing "black" did either.



Most days, at lunch and dinner, over the course of my freshman year, I self-consciously surveyed the dining hall, steered a course beyond the anonymous rows of young white animated faces, among whom I clearly did not belong; moved further still beyond the cluster of "Black Tables," where I knew deep down, no matter how much I masqueraded, my true self would show and would be shunned; and sat, often alone, eating quickly, hurrying my exit from a room where all eyes, I felt, condemned me with unspoken contempt: misfit, freak, faggot.

Beneath such judgment I did as millions have done before me and since: I withdrew into the shadows of my soul; chained my tongue; attempted, as best as I could, to stuff out the flame of my sexuality; assumed the impassive face and stiff pose of Silent Black Macho. I wore the mask. I was serving time. For what crime I didn't know. But I wore the mask, however stiff, confining, suffocating: I *served*, in rage, pain, and bitter, needless solitude, for three and a half of my undergraduate years, ignorant that there could be any other way.

## What time was it?

Certainly not "Nation Time," not for this young, gifted, Black — and queer! — student. No nation, however revolutionary, had dared claim me. No revisionist history, Black, Marxist, or otherwise, dared mention my name.

## Whose time was it?

Certainly not *my* time! Despite Douglass, Tubman, Sojourner, DuBois, Garvey, Langston, Rustin, Ella, Eldridge, Angela, Martin, Malcolm, Stokeley, and Jesse, my time, back then, had decidedly not arrived. No prophets of revolution spoke to me, spoke *of* me. The Last Poets did not mention my name. The New Nationalists, on the rare occasion they acknowledged my existence at all, spoke of me with utter contempt, spat

and twisted my name like the vilest obscenity.

Dutifully, nevertheless, I attended classes, in search of something more than knowledge or scholarship — in search of a history, a culture that spoke to my life. A history and culture that, simply, talked to me.

Because of this search I began a lesson, in truth, I've never stopped learning: when nobody speaks your name, or even knows it, you, knowing it, must be the first to speak it. When the existing history and culture do not acknowledge and address you — do not see or talk to you — you must write a new history, shape a new culture, that will.



By the winter of my senior year in college, I learned to speak: my name. At first it was just a whisper. Yet it was not the words I uttered that were most important, but the will to utter them: I am young, Black, and gifted, and gay: from this knowledge, this quiet certainty, I shall not — must not — be moved.

Intent on knowing more about what being gay meant, not so much in the present tense but, typically for me then, in the past, I petitioned my department for a special independent course of study. I asked for an in-person interview with the chair. I did not explain beforehand how "special" my study



would be. I did not deeply weigh what I was doing. Nor did I consider what this revealed of me. I did not know if what I was asking had been asked before. And in an unconscious way, I didn't care. I went before the head of my history department, and asked, with a naive matter-of-factness, whether he, the chair, could advise me in my "special" study. He professorially congratulated my initiative, then asked, in an appropriately professional academic tone, what the nature of my subject was. I, twenty years old, answered quietly: "The evolution of the depiction of male homosexuality in American fiction and poetry."



His jaw did not drop. But the look in his eyes was an equivalent. "I am not an expert," he announced, after a long, long pause, "in that subject." The chair declined to advise me, but granted that I could pursue the course of study if I found someone who would.

I'm sure he knew, as I soon learned, that this was far easier said than done. From one eminent professor to the next I went in search of an advisor. One after another politely but curtly declined me. "Not my expertise," said one; "not familiar with the subject matter," explained another; "never explored *that* particular theme." None of the eminent schol-

ars, I found it odd, would say the word "gay," or even "homosexual." For the first time in my Harvard experience, indirection and ignorance were passed off as virtues.

Still, I continued to look, and eventually, I found him. Not an eminent professor, but a teaching assistant, an inveterate graduate student with a long-overdue, unfinished dissertation on Walt Whitman — a teacher, by Harvard standards, far beneath the first rank. Yet he was the best this institution ever offered me. For one simple reason: the history and culture he sought to share with me, at last, spoke to my life. Talked to *me*! And to my youthful amazement, what I heard in the resonances of this new, living history gave strength and clarity to my own maturing voice.

Now, not only could I read and see and hear the past, discovering new relevance, significance unimagined, but I could also, in turn, speak to this past, and thus re-animate and re-shape it, define it anew. I had begun learning, without conscious intent, the fine and powerful art of Signifyin'.

Paul Alan Marx, advisor, mentor, friend, shaped my life in ways I'm sure he never imagined. Paul Marx is dead. Last year. AIDS. I consecrate this moment to his irrepressible spirit, which even now animates my own, and always will, until I someday join him.

When I consider Paul's life, his death, I perforce reflect on the question: what time it *was* when I first learned to speak, and what time it is now when so many are so intent to once again silence me, by any means necessary.

For the power of Voice which I belatedly learned twelve years ago was the same power that multitudes of Americans — the *true* silent multicultural majority — also discovered, and have effectively used, in the wake of the Civil Rights movement. That unprecedented social upheaval liberated the living



— and the dead — from centuries-old, even millennial silence, ancient ghost-like invisibility. Liberated us to speak, sing, and shout ourselves into flesh-and-bone-and-blood existence! We spoke and the foundation of America's mythological identity was rocked. We speak and set off a deafening alarm. Today the ideological prison that has historically contained us fissures, teeters, trembles. It is so powerfully assaulted by the voices and visions of peoples too long oppressed, I do not believe America's essentialist mythic identity — this prison — can much longer stand.

But what our adversaries confront in today's cultural, ideological fragmentation — in the assertion of *our* voices and *our* multiple truths — is something altogether terrifying: they see not the overdue liberation of an oppressed humanity, but the destruction of an ideological fortress that since Columbus has privileged and protected them from scrutiny about their mechanisms of social control. They see, in short, their power, and what is more, the ideological foundation of their power, eroding. Hence their present hysteria, and their ever ready disposition to oppose us with whatever half-assed arsenal they can muster.

## What time is it?

It's truly, for most of us the best and worst of times. For as gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, as people of color, as feminists, in short, as the outcast, marginalized collective Other, we have achieved, over humankind's entire history, an unprecedented public visibility, an unparalleled strength to define a world view that affirms the totality of our lives. Isn't this event in this space a metaphor of our achievement?

But in this poised moment, we also face a resistance more resolute, more rabid, than ever.

Consider: the futile but relentlessly savage

attacks on the Mapplethorpe and Serrano exhibits; the federal impounding of all slides, negatives, and stills of a San Francisco photographer, internationally acclaimed for his nude portfolio; the arrest and trial of the rap group 2 Live Crew.

Consider: the escalating harassment of other Black male rappers whose songs boast aggressively political and sexually explicit lyrics; and who have thus drawn the wrath of the government, which now shamelessly deploys the police, the law, the courts to control rap and confine it to a Black cultural ghetto — yet another sorry testament to America's chronic, pathological obsession

**Our communities  
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name...**

with, and persecution of, the mythic Big Black Dick.

Consider: the censorship cesspool that engulfed the National Endowment for the Arts, and near fatally poisoned it; Congress's legislative presumption that "homosexualism equals obscenity"; and not least, the Endowment's all too ready willingness to offer progressive, politically engaged artists as sacrificial fodder to appease the blood-lusting Right.

Consider this, and witness conservative/fundamentalist America's ever more desperate attempts not simply to restore "traditional



values," but to bludgeon us back into historic cells of solitude, shame, and silence.

## What time is it?

It is a paradoxical time of our growing collective strength and the continuing, massive public indifference to our struggles — an indifference that is more than simple apathy, but is rather a willful ignorance and contempt of our lives. It is a time of arrogant indifference, in the midst of AIDS, that kills. An attitude that sanctions, if not secretly applauds, the deaths of thousands, the needless dying of millions. And the consequence of such indifference? Our communi-



ties are robbed, not so much through the regular, warlike attrition of our best and brightest, but by the loss of every man, woman, and child who spent a lifetime learning to speak his or her true, proper name, and was cut short in this profound and noble act of self-articulation.

## What time is it?

It is a time when dykes and faggots are knifed and bludgeoned, too often with impunity, by night and by day, in our own neighborhoods. A time when queer blood runs loose and wild along the curbside. Yet in such savage attacks, the weight of the

crime lies less on the teenaged bigot who wields the bat, the brick, the razor, than on the society whose values, laws, education — and religion — systematically sanction the obscenity of hate-motivated violence.

## What time is it?

Some might say "Queer Nation Time!" But that would be premature, because we still inhabit an age when the laws of the state remain intrinsically designed to safeguard the privileges of whiteness, maleness, and procreative heterosexuality. Challenge this world view in any serious, loud, *effective* way and you risk being cast as a social and criminal outlaw: you risk the outrage and retribution of the State.

Ask the millions embattled by HIV and AIDS what time it is — the millions who regularly clock their dwindling T-cell counts, their diminishing stock of increasingly ineffective AZT, their few, limited alternatives. *Ask these millions* who must clock their draining resources — mental, physical, financial — and must bear the outrage of government and civic leaders who proclaim "compassion for the unfortunate AIDS victims" while systematically undercutting the funding and authority of agencies that could make a difference. Ask these millions — *ask us* — about this profoundly private and public disaster, and what you will hear with the force of a slap is this:

We are in a state of siege. Our lives (people of color, queers, the politically "deviant") are being systematically locked away in closets, in prisons, in caskets. Our boldest, most life-affirming voices are systematically being silenced by spiritual fatigue, and by slow, agonizing death.

Therefore, whenever we speak the truths of our lives, our words must be more than mere words: Every time we speak, we must engage in the most radical — as in fundamental — form of self-affirmation. As com-



munities historically oppressed through silence, *through the power of Voice* we must seize our freedom, achieve our fullest humanity. Because of this ongoing political, social, and psychological dynamic we have fundamentally redefined Descartes's principle of self-cognition:

"I *speak*, therefore I am."

We speak, creating a world that speaks, in turn, to us. Thus we affirm our right and our fight to live.

We are on the brink, I believe, of a *New Nation Time*. A nation unlikely to be seen until the next century, but coming nonetheless, in which notions of identity — based on gender, race, sexuality or nationality — will explicitly embrace multiple subjectivities of human experience and points of view.

What we as cultural theorists, historians, activists, and students of social change are now challenged with is not just combatting the ideological Right, — whose "consensus" is crumbling, and whose days are decidedly numbered, no matter how much they posture, pray, bash, and sue. Our greatest challenge rests in finding a language, a way of communicating across our subjectivities, across difference, a way of navigating the cultural borders between and *within* us so that we do not replicate the chauvinism and reductive mythologies of the past.

This is no easy task.

An all too frequent and unfortunate pattern among peoples achieving social empowerment is their predisposition to reformulate social hierarchies so that they now become privileged while others are oppressed. The system of hierarchy remains intact; only the relative placement of the groups changes.

The burden of today's historical moment, when identities worldwide are radically reformulating, is for us to speak *to* and *with*

each other, across the borders of cultural identity, across insidious barriers of class and academic training, in ways at times merely honest and inquiring as well as provocative and sharply critical. We must create a cultural language, a notion of identity, which appreciates difference yet escapes the tragic pitfalls of outsider/insider, and the resultant tendency toward an exclusivist subjectivity, toward an uncritical essentialism. Again, this will be no easy task.

Thus far we have opted, for the most part, for a simplistic multiculturalism, a polite, deferential appreciation and respect for cultural pluralism — "diversity" — without

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developing a rigorous discourse that analyzes how multiple subjectivities intersect, compete, and collide.

Perhaps we have failed to do this because it is still very early and many of us have only just learned to speak, to ourselves. But as we contemplate this time in our history and the promise of the time to come, remember the greater work we have to do. For what we do in this dialogue and others like it will decide whether this age is remembered as the advent of a more progressive, inclusive, dynamic construct of humanity or as yet another historical promise, deferred.

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## Undocumented Aliens in the Queer Nation

Charles Fernández

### This month I celebrate

the seventh anniversary of the first time I had sex with another man. That encounter occurred during my first year in college. Although it initiated my life as a sexually active being, it certainly didn't dispel all of my conflicts. At the same time, I was also escaping my Cuban family and my Puerto Rican upbringing in order to come to terms with my sexuality. I continued to struggle for years over the issue of sexuality with my friends, boyfriends, and therapist.

When I became active in gay politics and facilitated a workshop on heterosexism and homophobia for the first time, I felt I had come to terms with a fundamental truth about myself. That semester I also happened

to be enrolled in a course on "Philosophy and Feminism," in which the instructor asked that we write a paper integrating theory and personal experience. In this assignment I wrote, "Along with the earth-shaking joy of finally being able to communicate to myself and others came the anger of realizing that I had been silent and silenced for so long. I had previously assumed that all of us spoke from our experience and our feelings — in short, as ourselves — but having only recently discovered a voice that finally felt genuine, I realized that I had taken too much for granted. Our society proscribes far too many voices, molding them into an obedient chorus."

I went on, "Reading *This Bridge Called My Back* and *Home Girls*, my understanding



went beyond the intellectual level to a deeper, emotional level, even if I could not fully identify with the experiences of those writers. I could not share their experiences of being oppressed because they were women, lesbians, and racial and ethnic minorities, but I could share with them the experiences of simply being oppressed, of being denied because of who we were, of being silenced."

When the professor returned the paper to me, she asked why I didn't identify with Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa in our common ethnicity. At the time I wondered what the hell she meant by that.

**I threw myself fully into** lesbian and gay organizing on campus, and after college I deepened my commitment by seeking a job in the movement. But by then, I was finally beginning to focus my attention on that other part of my constructed self, my ethnicity, which had long been neglect-

ment's agenda and strategies, in the academy's methodology and theorizing, and in the lesbian and gay community's own self-understanding.

In retrospect, I realize that I initially had focused on my sexual identity because it was most in question at the time. My ethnicity didn't seem to require my attention — it was a simple fact with no significant ramifications. As an assimilated, light-skinned man with a very slight accent, I had the dubious and deluded luxury of being incorporated in the homogenizing whole.

And while friends, fellow activists, and mentors encouraged and sustained me in these efforts, I never felt encouraged to explore those differences that might break the mold into which I was so neatly forcing myself. A friend from those days recently told me that back then I had no race politics. That's not entirely correct: I did have a sense of race politics, even if rudimentary and

## **In the "melting pot" that is our Queer Nation, all difference becomes subsumed under the homogenizing "gay and lesbian community,"**

ed and misunderstood. I began by writing my senior paper on sexual politics in the Cuban Revolution. When I moved to New York I actively sought out the Latino/a gay and lesbian community. Now fully immersed in the politics of ethnic and racial identity, I had another profoundly alienating realization: the lesbian and gay movement that had up to now absorbed my attention and energies privileged a white, middle class, and often male subject that stood in opposition to heterosexual categories.

The movement's subject and protagonist, in all his white, middle-class, and male (homo)geneity, was clearly reflected in the general public's image of the typical homosexual, in the lesbian and gay media's depiction of their target audience, in the move-

inarticulate. What I lacked, however, was a sense of myself as a racialized subject within the context of a politics of race.

**A gay person defines her-**self or himself exclusively in opposition to the category of heterosexual. Both personal and communal identity are constituted by this opposition. The struggle against homophobia and heterosexism becomes, then, the primary agenda for a movement towards liberation. It is a movement that cannot afford to waste energy fighting against other oppressions — no matter how worthy the causes. Perhaps the best articulation of this position is Richard Mohr's *Gays/Justice* where he argues that coalition politics — engaging substantively in common struggle against sexism,



racism, or classism — is fundamentally a drain on the lesbian and gay movement. The struggles of “other” groups, he says, are not “our” struggles. That some gay people might be obliged to struggle against racism, or against sexism, or against class oppression is for Mohr, and many movement leaders today, of no major concern.

These are not only the views of the arch-conservative gay men and lesbians among us. I’ve heard avowed leftist sex radicals assert that linking the struggle against heterosexism with other struggles represents a homophobic attempt to legitimate the former by means of the latter. Ironically, this ostensibly more progressive political argument shares Mohr’s exclusionary conclusion.

These views effectively shut out those among us whose personal and political ideologies are defined by more than simple opposition to heterosexuality. Writing about feminism, Norma Alarcón has argued that

community. As Alarcón writes, “Anglo feminist readers of *This Bridge Called My Back* tend to appropriate it, cite it as an instance of difference between women, and proceed to negate that difference by subsuming women of color into the unitary category of woman/women.”

I was unable to identify racially with the writers of *This Bridge* because I was intent on defining myself as queer. This is a matter of great personal pain. It reflects a profound failing, and an indictment of the movement.

**The agenda of the early** gay liberation movement was meant to transform society and, in the process, liberate a safe social space for lesbians and gay men. But “social space,” which was originally meant as a metaphor for the freedom to live openly gay lives, became concretized in the gay ghettos of our major cities. That quest for social space has now been taken a step further with

## **We are rendered invisible even as our differences are touted as examples of the colorful diversity of our gay and lesbian community.**

“The inclusion of other analytical categories such as race and class becomes impossible for a subject whose consciousness refuses to acknowledge that ‘one becomes a woman’ in ways that are much more complex than in a simple opposition to men. In cultures in which ‘asymmetric race and class relations are a central organizing principle of society,’ one may also ‘become a woman’ in opposition to other women.” Similarly, by building an identity exclusively around one’s sexuality and developing a political agenda that either excludes or subordinates other forms of oppression, the lesbian and gay movement has narrowly defined its primary subject.

We are rendered invisible even as our differences are touted as examples of the colorful diversity of our gay and lesbian com-

the rise of queer nationalism. One may well wonder if all of this won’t result in a call for a queer homeland anytime soon.

In the “melting pot” that is our Queer Nation, all difference becomes subsumed under the homogenizing “gay and lesbian community,” and important political and philosophical differences get dismissed. The rise of queer nationalism leads some of us to wonder if we are to become second-class citizens, three-fifths human, or recognized subjects within it. The historical precedent offers little comfort.

The strange advent of queer nationalism may perhaps be attributed to the lesbian and gay community’s even stranger tendency to view itself as something akin to an ethnic minority. Oppressed by a hostile majority



from whom it sought assurances of certain rights and privileges, the movement, perhaps predictably, attempts to fashion itself in the image of other groups who had struggled for their own liberation.

In this regard, Steven Epstein argues that the lesbian and gay movement's self-identification as an ethnic minority coincided with a revival of European-American ethnicity during the 1970s. But the lesbian and gay community doesn't compare itself to white ethnic communities, like Greeks, Italians, or Poles. Instead, the movement measures its gains, setbacks and obstacles against those of the "other" minority groups battling for political power in our society: African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. But there are fundamental differences between the experience and reality of white ethnic communities and that of communities of color in this country: the effects of hundreds of years of extinction,

## Who ultimately benefits

when the gay and lesbian community embraces an ethnic self-understanding? How does this movement determine political discourse and strategy, or the possibilities of radical political change? What impact does this self-understanding have on the possibility for forming coalitions with communities of color, or engaging substantively with them in the struggle for lesbian and gay liberation? These are some of the questions I have asked myself as I juggle the seemingly irreducible demands of structuring my political commitments. One possible explanation of who benefits may lie in the fact that fractious disenfranchised groups competing in the marketplace of rights, representation, and privileges pose no great danger to the political and social system that oppresses us all.

While identity politics has politicized new arenas of human experience, taken to

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slavery, colonization, imperialism, and racial hatred. In this context, it's troubling to witness a white-dominated movement compare its gains and grievances to those of communities of color.

While it is undeniable that racial minorities have endured centuries of brutalizing racism, one could also argue that those who engage in homosexual behavior have certainly fared no better. It is, however, difficult to navigate this assertion without becoming beached on the barren rocks of ranked oppressions. Nevertheless, one cannot help but appreciate the irony of a white-led movement with limited racial consciousness turning around and appropriating ethnicity and the stigma of race as legitimating tools.

the extreme it has resulted in a fragmentation of subjects. It has dead-ended in an over-emphasis on identity and personal development rather than liberation, justice, and solidarity. It may be unreasonable for me to hope to find myself as a Latino in the lesbian and gay movement. But it is not unreasonable to demand that that movement include my concerns if it expects my continued support and participation. One may hope that a more integrated analysis of what it means to be "gay" or "lesbian" in this country will help spawn a movement that recognizes multiple subjects and the necessity to move toward liberations across a greater spectrum of struggles.

This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the Fourth Annual Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Studies Conference at Harvard University on October 26, 1990.



# Latina/o Lesbian & Gay Community Organizations

## United States and Puerto Rico

### NATIONAL

**LLEGO** The National Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Organization  
P.O. Box 44483  
Washington, D.C. 20026  
(202) 544-0092  
Co-chairs: Mario Solis-Marich,  
Nena Trujillo

### CALIFORNIA

**AMARANTO**  
Nexo Con Latinoamérica Homosexual  
3543 18th Street  
P.O. Box 33  
San Francisco, CA 94110

### CASA

P.O. Box 590276  
San Francisco, CA 94159  
Contact: Carlos Peña  
(415) 621-6176

### CURAS

Comunidad Unida en Respuesta al SIDA  
347 Dolores Street, Suite 113  
San Francisco, CA 94110  
Contact: Joe González  
(415) 255-2731

### CONNEXXUS

Centro de Mujeres  
1017 N. La Cienega Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90069  
Contact: Pat Martel  
(213) 652-3894

**GLLU** Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos  
P.O. Box 85459  
Hollywood, CA 90072  
(213) 665-2196

**GELAM** Gente Latina de Ambiente  
4162 20th Street  
San Francisco, CA 94114  
Contact: Miguel Angel Zapata  
(415) 626-8306

### HOGAR LATINO

c/o GLCSC  
12832 Garden Grove # A  
Garden Grove, CA 92642  
Contact: Mario Hernández  
(213) 258-6709

### Lesbianas Unidas

P.O. Box 85459  
Hollywood, CA 90072  
(818) 308-0932

### LLEGO - California

P.O. Box 40916  
San Francisco, CA 94140  
Contact: Hank Tavera

### LLEGO - Central California

c/o Lesbian & Gay Community  
1332 Commerce Lane  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060  
Contact: Jorge Cabrera  
(408) 457-0566

### MUJERIO

Bay Area Newsletter for Latina Lesbians  
c/o The Women's Building  
3543 18th Street, Box 23  
San Francisco, CA 94110

### Raíces Latinas (Grupo de Apoyo)

c/o "The Center"  
2017 East 4th Street  
Long Beach, CA 90804

### VIVA Latina Lesbian and Gay Latino Arts Organization

1022 N. Virgil Ave. #444  
Los Angeles, CA 90029  
Contact: Rolando Palencia  
(213) 232-8482

### COLORADO

**GALA** Gay & Lesbian Latina/o Alliance  
869 Santa Fe Drive  
Denver, CO 80204  
Contact: Robert Garcia-Williams  
(303) 623-9153

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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Contact: Manuel de Alba

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1639 N. Claremont  
Chicago, IL 60647  
Contact: Carmen Abrego

### MASSACHUSETTS

#### CLHL Comité Latinoamericano de Homosexuales y Lesbianas

P.O. Box 365  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
Contact: Armando Gaitán

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Southwest Hispanic Research Institute  
The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, NM 87131

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New York, NY 10001  
Contact: Moisés Agosto  
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New York, NY 10163-6027  
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New York City, NY 10013

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# Androgyny



**22**-year-old Danielle Brugmann of Rochester Hills, Michigan, has never heard of women's music, *On Our Backs* magazine, or even *off our backs*. She attends a monthly gay coffeehouse in Detroit, twenty miles away, when she can get to it, though she much prefers riding her motorcycle or going hunting. But Danielle can recall the day, four years ago, when she spotted k.d. lang on a late-night TV talk show, with a butch haircut, a man's western suit, and no make-up, like it was yesterday. "I took one look at k.d.," she says, "and I said to myself: is that a guy or a girl? There

was something about her attitude that I liked."

Danielle's room is filled with k.d. videotapes, promotional CDs, posters, autographed photos, T-shirts, and ticket stubs — paraphernalia she has collected through ads placed in magazines and bookstores. She finally got a chance to see her star in the flesh last year in Detroit, an experience she exclaims was "amazing."

"lang thangs" like Danielle, primarily young women, mob k.d. wherever she plays. When a fan club sponsored a video night at one of the oldest women's bars in San Francisco last year, the place was packed tighter than anyone can remember. k.d.



# goes pop

BUT IS IT LESBIAN MUSIC?



*Arlene Stein*

27

OUT/LOOK spring 1991

lang look-alikes wearing bolo ties and cow-girl skirts danced the two-step. Others sat on the floor, eyes transfixed by the collage of promotional videos and homemade footage assembled especially for the occasion. The glee in their faces, the longing for identification, were proof of how starved they were for celebrities to call their own.

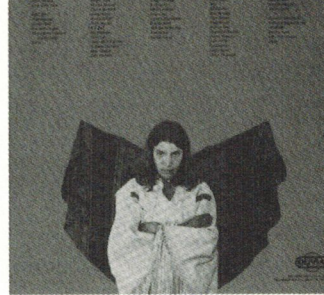
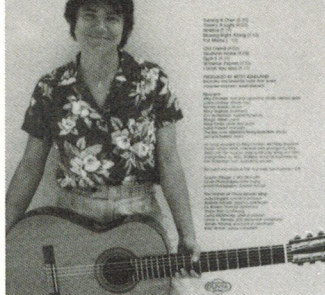
Lang, a cross-dressing crossover artist, is not the only performer to capture the attention and imagination of lesbians throughout the nation. In 1988, Michelle Shocked, Tracy Chapman, the Indigo Girls, Melissa Etheridge, and Phranc also burst upon the music scene, and journalists pronounced the arrival of a "new breed of

women" in popular music. "Neither their songs," one critic wrote, "nor the images they project, cater to stereotypical male fantasies of female pop singers."

While many of these artists had received initial exposure through the nationwide network of coffeehouses, bars, and music festivals that cater primarily to lesbians, once they achieved commercial success, it wasn't something they were quick to mention. They studiously avoided male pronouns in romantic ballads and carefully constructed their personas to assert a strong, sexually ambiguous female presence. Through the subtleties of self-presentation, whose message was often lost on those who



Meg Christian,  
Ferron, and  
Cris Williamson,  
foremothers  
of today's  
"androgynous pop?"



weren't cued into the codes, they presented themselves as objects of female as well as male desire. It was a fact that displeased some veterans of women's music who had earlier made a politics of their lesbianism.

"Almost twenty years after Stonewall and fifteen years after Alix Dobkin and Kay Gardner issued *Lavender Jane Loves Women*," said Ginny Berson, a founder of the pioneer women's music label, Olivia, "there are still no out lesbians in the national 'mainstream' music scene. There are plenty of out lesbians in the alternative music scene — and plenty who are not out — and plenty of closeted lesbians in the mainstream, but it seems that never the twain shall meet."

Nonetheless, a younger generation of women eagerly snapped up the new mainstream artists' records, crowded their concerts, and spread the word to friends, as a Chicago woman named "Mary," in a letter to New York's *Outweek*, proclaimed. "Ladies, let's be Phranc," she wrote. "We all love k.d., Tracy, Melissa, and the Indigo Girls. Many of us knew and loved them long before they achieved their current mainstream popularity. I went to see Melissa in Chicago last week. I didn't go with my girlfriend or any girlfriends. I went with one of my little brothers. And you should have seen him dancing in the aisle!"

"All this bickering," she continued, "about whether these women should come out is like asking a bewildered junior varsity basketball star to come out at a pep rally. Let's just chill and enjoy the music, shall we?"

The arrival of the new breed of androgynous pop women, propelled in large part by an increasingly self-conscious lesbian audience, signals the fact that women can now defy conventions of femininity in popular music and still achieve mainstream success. But at what cost? Are "androgynous" women performers cowering to a homophobic industry, enacting a musical form of passing? Or are they pushing the limits of what is possible and, along with it, lesbian visibility?

A growing debate pits those who

would stand outside the dominant culture and openly name their lesbianism (even if that naming restricts their audience) against those who, in search of broader appeal, represent their sexuality more covertly. Frequently, the sides are drawn along generational lines, with older women arguing for a more separatist strategy, and younger women championing an assimilationist stance. If lesbian-feminists of the 1970s fled the restrictions of commercial music to stand outside the dominant culture, today's younger artists are trying to carve out a space for themselves somewhere between the economic constraints of the industry and the imperatives of lesbian identity politics.

## From Women's Music to Androgynous Pop

In popular culture, lesbians have long had to contend with both a scarcity of images, and ones that are either unflattering (as in the case of the typical Hollywood film) or unidimensional (as in the case of most pornography). While we have always found ways to "read" culture against the grain — changing the pronouns of songs in our heads and projecting our fantasies upon female icons — this has not aided the cause of group visibility. That began to change in the 1970s.

Producers of women's music tried to create new cultural forms that would reflect the hopes and dreams of the communities they saw themselves building. Much like lesbian fiction, the mode of expression of women's music was expressive realism. Refusing to play to the desires and expectations of men, it created images of strong, "woman-identified" women that reflected the common texture of lesbian lives — girls' crushes on their gym teachers, their feelings of love and loss.

Derived from folk, women's music was rooted in the populist tradition of social protest and in the belief that unamplified and simple was best. Less lesbian-identified



than "woman-identified," it was imbued with a belief in a universal female sensibility. Lesbian feminists who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s wanted to differentiate themselves from the image of the mannish woman, long synonymous with lesbianism in popular culture. They also wanted to distance themselves from rock-and-roll, which they dubbed "cock rock."

In 1974, Ms. asked, "Can a Feminist Love the World's Greatest Rock and Roll Band?" and theorist Robin Morgan replied with a resolute "No!" She warned that lesbian feminists who listened to the Rolling Stones were no better than those who advocated nonmonogamy and accepted transsexuals as allies: they had all adopted a "male style" which would destroy the movement.

But even in the early days, there was

Criticism also came from women in punk. Although punk embraced a politics of anti-identity, refusing to position itself as the affirmative expression of either feminism or gay liberation, from its early days it made a politics of disrupting gender and sexual codes. Punk's appeal to androgyny, and its embrace of brash, rhythmic music, was at odds with the notion of woman-identification at the base of women's music. In Boston, Rock Against Sexism announced itself as a cultural activist group comprised of "closet rock-and-roll fans" in the women's community, one of its founders explaining: "Women's music is really peaceful, not raunchy or angry; it doesn't really excite me or turn me on or get me energized."

By the mid-1980s, if an earlier belief

*Even if k.d. lang, Tracy Chapman, and the Indigo Girls tended to skirt clear identifications, they weren't particularly heterosexually identified either.*

always controversy in the ranks. Was women's music for *all* women, or just lesbians? Was it an expression of art or politics? By the late 1970s, the waning of the movement and financial problems conspired to throw women's music into an identity crisis, revealing that the cohesive lesbian community was the product of a particular historical moment and that women's music rested on a precarious unity.

For one thing, it had become firmly entrenched in what was, for the most part, a European tradition — "sucky sister" music to many women of color, who resisted the claim that it represented the authentic voice of women's and lesbian culture. Confirming their suspicions was the fact that albums and tours by Black artists (such as Mary Watkins and Linda Tillery) failed to attract much-needed sales.

that women's music could reflect an "essential" femaleness was increasingly becoming suspect, its undercapitalization forced it to remain rather conservative. As sales flagged, many women's music producers responded by moving away from their lesbian-feminist roots. Olivia formed a subsidiary, Second Wave, which released less feminist-identified music and broke with its commitment to use only female musicians.

"I thought they were playing a funeral dirge during the intermission at the album release concert of Cris Williamson and Teresa Trull in Berkeley last month," Ginny Berson wrote in 1989. "For the first time in its history at an Olivia Records concert, there were more men than women on stage ... I thought I knew that 'Olivia Records Presents' meant something — music about women's lives, music written by women,



music performed by women. But what we had here were a few songs about women and a lot about horses; lots of songs written by men; and mostly men playing the music. Is this women's music?"

If the viability of women's music was thrown into question by a crisis of identity and by the competitive pressures of the capitalist market, its problems were exacerbated by the fact that the feminist movement had helped to create an audience and a market that was beginning to outgrow the counter-culture. While lesbian musicians of the 1970s were forced out of the mainstream in order to achieve some artistic autonomy, fifteen years later there were signs of greater openings.

In 1988, as Olivia Records celebrated its fifteenth anniversary with a series of concerts throughout the country, larger-than-life posters of Michelle Shocked and Tracy Chapman were plastered on every record store wall, while Olivia records languished in the "women's music" section in the rear, if they were there at all.

### Gal Pals and Real Women

As women's music, in an effort to reach a broader audience, was looking less and less lesbian, mainstream music was looking more and more lesbian, or as the industry liked to refer to it — *real*. Tracy Chapman became a veritable household name in 1988, selling more than 10 million albums, signed by Elektra because she was "just so real," according to a company executive. Chapman's huge success sent other record companies scrambling to find "real" women artists of their own. Michelle Shocked was picked up by Polygram, and Phranc was signed to Island.

If an earlier move toward androgyny among male pop stars like David Bowie was influenced by gay drag's tradition of artifice and costume, the new wave of women's androgyny was typically described, by participants as well as critics, as a move "back to the basics," as a retreat from artifice and

role-playing into authenticity.

Women performers, long forced into the boy-toy role, can now "be more than just pre-packaged gals," says Phranc. She should know. Her 1989 album, *I Enjoy Being a Girl*, sported her in a flat-top haircut (alongside a blurb which sang her praises as a "little daughter of bilitis") — proof that being natural, socially conscious, and even androgynous were qualities that were beginning to find their way into the mainstream.

It was a movement that confounded the critics. "The most astounding thing of all is that Tracy Chapman *et al* even happened," mused one. "Since when did the industry that insisted its strongest women play cartoon characters ... allow a serious, powerful, flesh-and-blood female to stand firm on a concert stage?" The answer, as any informed observer could say, was rather simple. The "new breed" of pop women emerged once the industry was convinced that it would sell.

Historically, record companies spot a trend and quickly jump on the bandwagon to claim it as their own. Subcultures have long fueled musical innovation; hugely successful commercial disco and house music has its origins in the Black gay dance floors of Chicago and New York. Likewise, on the heels of the feminist movement, female performers and fans became commercially important "properties" and "markets," placing both musicians and fans in a new position of power to define what they did and demand what they wanted.

The trail was blazed by such performers as Cyndi Lauper and Madonna, whose messages, though at times contradictory, affirmed an empowered female sexuality practically unseen in commercial pop. In 1983, Lauper released the single "Girls Just Want to Have Fun," a "powerful cry for access to the privileged realm of male adolescent leisure and fun," in the words of critic Lisa Lewis. Madonna, one of the most successful female stars of the contemporary period, exuded sexual invincibility, at times making allusions to lesbianism (as in her "Justify My Love" video, which was banned



by MTV). "Clothed in the language of heterosexuality" but "soliciting a lesbian gaze," Sydney Pokorny proclaimed in the pages of *Gay Community News*, Madonna had transformed herself "from boy toy to gal pal."

Many female performers saw mainstreaming as an act no less subversive than the feminist disaffection from commercial music a decade earlier. Phranc toured as the opening act for the Smiths and other popular post-punk acts, playing for mixed audiences because, she said, "It's important to reach out to the kids." Two Nice Girls, an Austin group, made lesbianism an integral part of their act, but made the conscious choice to record on Rough Trade, a large independent label, because, band leader Gretchen Phillips said, "We don't want to be found only in the specialty bin at the record store. We want to be in your face." She later quipped, "We love men. We just don't want to see them naked." Younger than their women's music predecessors, they had been shaped by punk as much as women's music, and by a different political mood.

But there are limits to this new found power. While women performers today may enjoy unprecedented freedom to present themselves as they please, lesbians are still "safe" (read: marketable) only when their sexuality is muted. A woman singing a love song to another woman is, for the most part still taboo, as Phranc sang: "Everybody wants to be a folk singer. They want to be hip and trendy. They want to make sensitive videos and sing about politics. Androgyny is the ticket or at least it seems to be. Just don't wear a flat-top and mention sexuality, and girl you'll go far, you'll get a record contract and be a star."

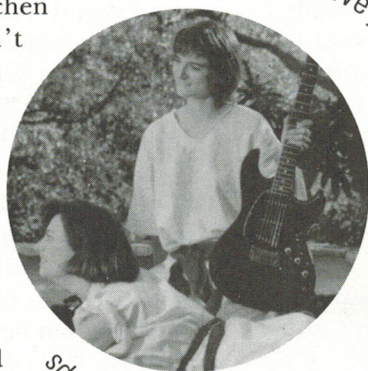
In a homophobic culture, out gays and lesbians are generally believed not to be

crossover material. Large record companies, organized to minimize risk, attempt to hold back discreditable information about a performer from the public. "This is a very conservative country and record companies like to steer away from potential controversy," says Howie Klein, Vice President at Sire Records, k.d. lang's label. Driven by big hits, companies often sink enormous sums of money into developing and promoting an individual artist and are loath to take chances. They tend, instead, to seek out the lowest common denominator, hoping to turn out stars who can appeal to a broad audience rather than targeting specific markets defined geographically, ethnically, or sexually.

While there has yet to be a promotional strategy in which a commercial record company specifically targets a lesbian audience, a few smaller companies at least recognize its existence. In marketing Phranc, Rick Bleiweiss of Island Records acknowledges that since her "core" (read: lesbian) audience already knows about her, the company's role is to seek out the poten-

tial crossover consumers — primarily the college and "independent" music audience, and to expand her reach into a larger, more mainstream audience. But Bleiweiss acknowledges that performers like Phranc, who make their lesbianism a central part of their act (that is, they mention it at all) may have a "limited consumer base."

A rare acknowledgment of the lesbian roots of the folk boom came from Michelle Shocked. Upon accepting the award for Folk Album of the Year at the 1989 New Music Awards in New York, for which she was nominated along with Phranc, Tracy Chapman, and the Indigo Girls, Shocked quipped, "This category should have been called 'Best Lesbian Vocalist.'" She told



"We love men. We just don't want to see them naked." Two Nice Girls' Gretchen Phillips



*Outlines*, a Chicago gay paper, "I resent like hell that I was maybe eighteen years old before I even heard the L-word." Yet Shocked herself later complained to an interviewer about being lumped together with all the other emerging women performers. Others avoided the subject entirely, refusing to be interviewed by lesbian/gay or feminist publications.

Even as they were being applauded by the critics for their fresh, unencumbered simplicity and their return to "honesty" and "naturalness," when it came down to it, most of the new androgynous women constructed their songs and their images with a sexual ambiguity that at times verged on camp. A video of Shocked's single, "When I Grow Up" features a posse of her feminist friends. Shocked sings, "When I grow up I want to be an old woman" and all the friends say "yeeeaah!" Then she sings, "Then I think I'm gonna marry myself an old man," and they respond, disappointedly, "oh." Then she sings, "We're gonna have 120 babies," and they say, "I get it."

On her 1989 album, *Captain Swing*, one had to listen closely to "Sleep Keeps Me Awake" to make out the fact that it was a love song to a woman.

### Shifting Loyalties, Mixing Identities

"We have gone through some magnificently bizarre changes," Judy Dlugacz of Olivia told representatives of the 2,000-member Association of Women's Music and Culture, the women's music industry organization, when they met in San Francisco last spring, "but the news is not altogether good."

As she tells the story, independent record labels close daily and women's music is being squeezed out of existence. The most loyal sectors of their audience — lesbian baby boomers — have aged, shedding some of their political commitments to alternative women's culture, while others have left the lesbian fold altogether. The number of women in powerful positions at the major labels, and in the music industry as a whole,

has grown at a snail's pace. Successful lesbian stars don't declare their sexual preferences because they are scared of the possible impact on sales. And to make matters worse, as mainstream labels have offered more openings, it is becoming more difficult for Olivia to sign talented artists, many of whom would opt for more lucrative opportunities.

Dlugacz bristles when she recalls that Melissa Etheridge once sent a demo tape and was turned down with the reply that Olivia was not looking for new artists. Redwood Records, the label that Holly Near built, tried to sign Tracy Chapman when she was still in school in Boston, but could not compete with Elektra. As the producers of women's music see it, the new wave of sexual ambiguity signals the fact that the revolution has been stalled, gobbled up, and watered down by "the industry."

The terrain has shifted, they say, from lesbian-identified music created in the context of lesbian institutions and communities, to music that blandly emulates women's music, playing with signifiers like clothes and hairstyle in order to gain commercial acceptance, but never really identifying itself as lesbian. "We've made the world safe for androgyny in the charts," said feminist singer-songwriter Deidre McCalla, referring, not so obliquely, to the likes of k.d. lang and Tracy Chapman. "But a few women musicians in the forefront is not what we wanted."

It is true that the dream of a body of music and art which expresses lesbian experience openly and honestly has not yet come to pass in the mainstream. The classic dilemma persists: a performer either becomes known as a "lesbian artist" and is thus doomed to marginality, or she waters down her lesbianism in order to appeal to a mass audience. The pioneers of women's music chose the former route. The new wave of androgynous women have chosen the latter. We have yet to see a lesbian artist who is able to integrate her sexuality into her art without allowing it to become either *the* salient



fact, or barely acknowledged.

Yet to call the new wave of artists assimilationists and sellouts is to do them a disservice. Such criticisms set women's music up as the only authentic voice of lesbianism, and they obscure the efforts of women to make inroads into mainstream pop. For the "new breed" of women are not particularly heterosexually identified, and many are no less out than their women's music predecessors. Phranc and Two Nice Girls are the two most obvious examples, but much the same could be said for k.d. lang, probably the butchiest woman entertainer since Gladys Bentley (even if she'd rather support animal rights than say the "L-word").

If many of today's performers are ambiguous about their identities it is not only because of industry constraints. It is also because, frequently, their identities are ambiguous.

Tracy Chapman, a Black woman, is an obvious example of a complex personality with commitments to more than just the lesbian community. So, too, is Michelle Shocked, who is now rumored to be involved with a man. Ten years earlier, Holly Near often hid her bisexuality in order to appeal to a women's music audience, in the interest of providing a united front.

Today there seems to be greater tolerance for ambiguity, and even a certain attraction to *not* really knowing the "truth." Anyway, what *is* the truth? This is the 1990s, after all, an era in which "pleasure," says critic Larry Grossberg, "is replacing understanding." David Letterman, the baby boomers' late night talk show host of choice, celebrates alienation with a mocking self-referentiality. MTV blurs the boundaries of pop music and advertising. Quick-change, recombinant pop jumps

from style to style, integrating new sounds and textures, new identities and images, and blurring cultural categories of all sorts.

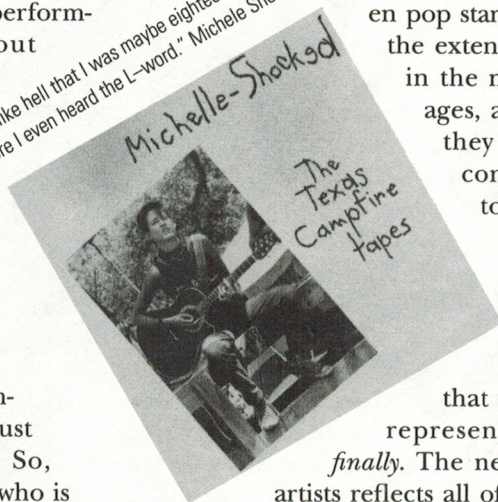
A rap song samples the theme song from *Gilligan's Island*, while Peter Gabriel and Paul Simon borrow from African traditional music. Comedian Sandra Bernhard mixes and matches identities, alluding at times to her lesbianism without ever really embracing it, walking a fine line between ambiguity and reality. "I would never make a declaration of anything," she told Lawrence Chua of the *Village Voice*. "It's so stupid. Who even cares? It's so presumptuous."

Bernhard's smugness aside, the charge that the "new breed" of women pop stars are sellouts understates the extent to which they conspire in the making of their own images, and the degree to which they are working within the constraints of the industry to get their messages out to an increasingly self-conscious and sophisticated lesbian audience.

This is not to say that we have been liberated, represented, and made visible, *finally*. The new wave of androgynous artists reflects all of the potential and all of the ambiguity of our times. They signify a disaffection from the ranks of the Lesbian Nation and a cynicism about the prospects for liberation. They embody the triumph of commerce over a certain brand of cultural politics, and also a testing of the waters, and an increased freedom to maneuver. They reveal a new visibility of lesbian imagery in popular culture, and tell us, too, how much further we have to go.

photo credits: k. d. lang by Stuart Watson, Melissa Etheridge by Dennis Keeley, Tracy Chapman by Janette Beckman, Phranc by Rocky Schenck, Meg Christian by Irene Young, Ferron by Gayle Scott, Cris Williamson © Olivia Records, Two Nice Girls by Scott Van Osdel, and Michelle Schocked © PolyGram Records

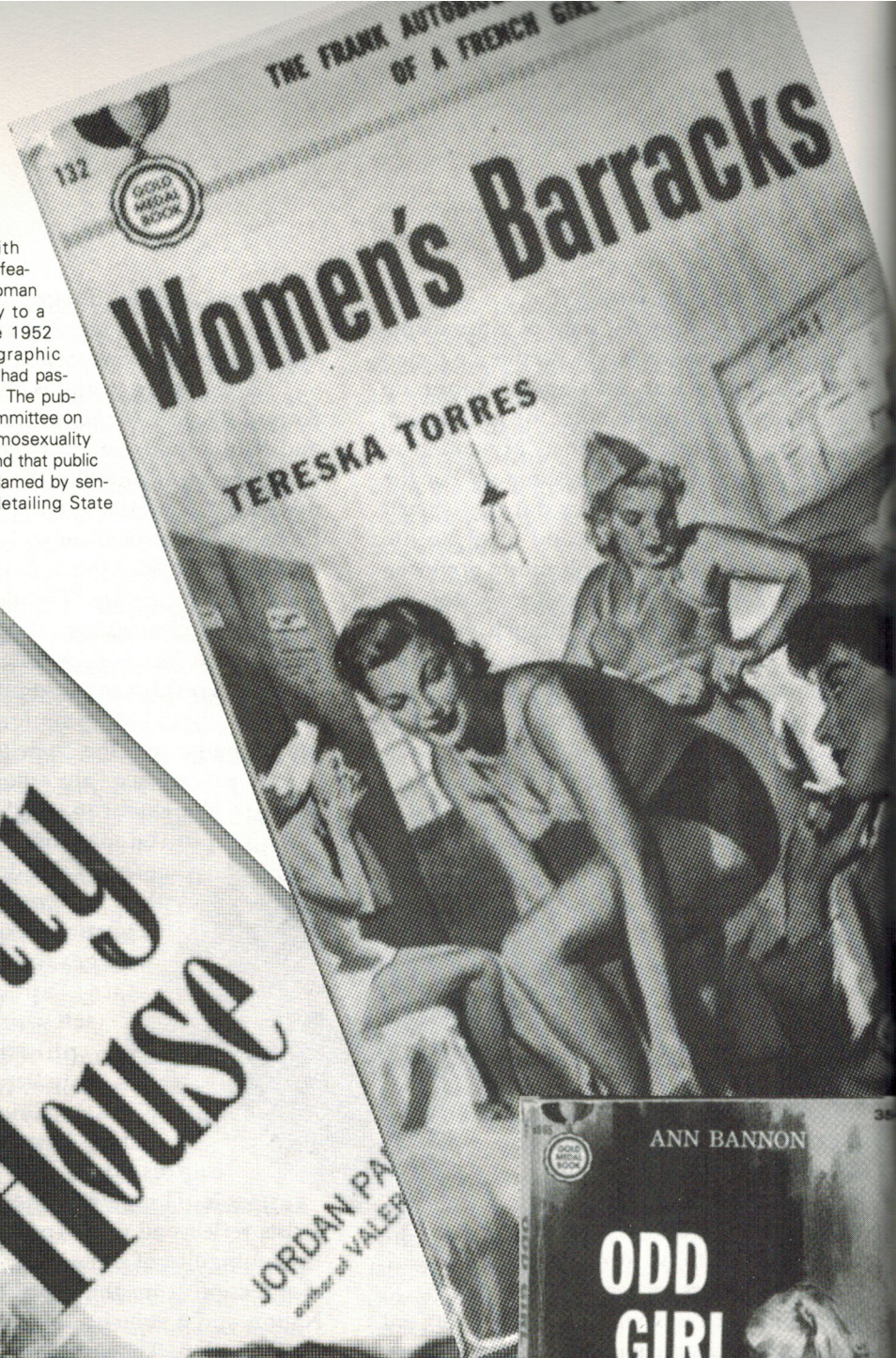
"I resent like hell that I was maybe eighteen years old before I even heard the L-word." Michelle Shocked





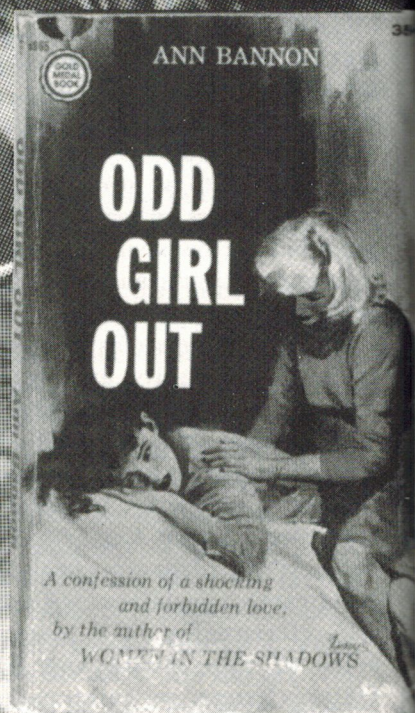
**Women's Barracks**, Tereska Torres  
(New York: Fawcett Books, 1950).

The first paperback original with significant lesbian content, this book features two lesbian officers and one woman who has a lesbian affair on the way to a straight life. It was targeted by the 1952 House Subcommittee on Pornographic Materials, which stated that the book had passages not quotable in a public hearing. The publisher defended the book before the committee on the grounds that its treatment of homosexuality was milder than Plato's *Symposium*, and that public interest in homosexuality had been inflamed by sensationalistic newspaper headlines detailing State Department purges.



**Sorority House**,  
Jordan Park  
(New York: Lyon  
Library, 1956).

Many lesbian novels take place in colleges, girls' schools, and sororities. The author's previous work, *Valerie*, had lesbian themes. This book, however, is not really about lesbians, although it was marketed as such.





# Odd Girls and Strange Sisters

## Lesbian Pulp Novels of the '50s

Roberta Yusba

Beginning in the mid-1950s, one could go to a drugstore, bus station, newsstand, or supermarket and find paperback novels with titles like *Twilight Girl*, *Odd Girl Out*, and *Strange Sister*. Lesbian pulp novels shared wire racks with westerns, mysteries, romance novels, and science fiction. There were many trashy pulps, obviously written by men under female pseudonyms. But many of the first to appear were "good" lesbian pulps, written by lesbians for lesbians.

During the war years, many women left small towns for the first time either to join the military or to take the jobs that men had left behind. Opportunities to find other lesbians in the service or in the growing bar culture were plentiful. When the relative social ease of the war ended, the State Department purged gays from its ranks on the basis of national security and questionable moral character. In 1950 a Senate committee produced a document entitled "Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government." *The New York Times* also carried headlines such as "Perverts Called Government Peril." Gays and communists were suddenly placed in the same dangerous category.

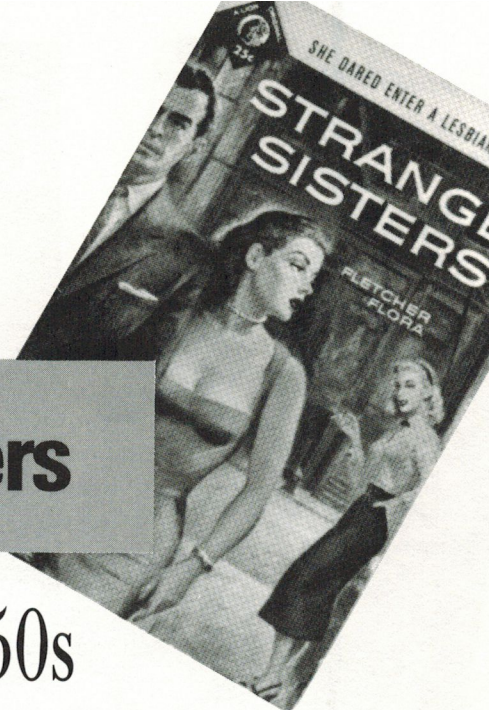
Public awareness of homosexuality was fueled by the popularization of psychology, and by the Kinsey Reports, which revealed that a surprising number of men and

women were homosexually active.

The publishing industry picked up on the interest in lesbianism, and in homosexuality more generally. A paperback boom spurred by advances in cheap mass production processes made inexpensive books available everywhere. Lesbians, starved for images of themselves, along with a curious heterosexual audience, purchased them.

It is amazing that lesbian pulps could sell thirty years ago, even in the absence of a mass lesbian and gay movement, queer theory, gay presses, women's and gay bookstores, or masses of people out of the closet. It is also noteworthy that despite the context of repression, many pulps were actually pro-sex and pro-lesbian.

The covers usually featured paintings of two women, one blond and one brunette, in scenes resembling grade-B movie stills. The women on the covers, as well as in the books, were almost invariably white. With few exceptions, they appeared tortured, lonely, and at war with their emotions. The titles typically included one of the code words used to signify lesbianism: "strange," "twilight," "whisper," "shadows," "twisted," "odd." At the top of the cover was a "skyline," a short blurb telling the reader why he or she should read the book:





"Greenwich Village ... and that twilight world where women are in love—with other women"; "A brilliant story of a woman in the grip of her own strange desires ..."; "Behind their placid, conventional marriages were two hearts crying for another kind of love."

The authors of paperbacks had no control over covers or titles. The marketing philosophy produced a confusing package. The sleazy covers seemed to be designed to

attract men, but the content was often directed at women. Although the lesbians in the novels were often sex-role-defined, it was unusual to see a recognizable butch on the cover. Perhaps butchiness was deemed too controversial by the male publishers who chose the covers to appeal to men, who comprised the bulk of the paperback-collecting audience. Men could fantasize about converting a femme, but butches evoked hostility. Ann Bannon has said that Fawcett was aware of the market among men for lesbian novels, but surprised at the extent of the lesbian market.

Lesbian pulps dealt with sex between women at a time when homophile organizations like Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) were ignoring sex in an effort to put their best foot forward. You would never find scenes like the following in DOB's periodical, *The Ladder*:

...all the length of their bodies touched, fitting as if something had prearranged it ... I love you, Therese wanted to say again, and then the words were erased by the tingling and terrifying pleasure that spread in waves ... she was conscious of Carol and nothing else, of Carol's hand that slid along her ribs, Carol's hair that brushed her bare breasts ... and she did not have to ask if this were right, no one had to tell her, because this could not have been more right or perfect.<sup>1</sup>

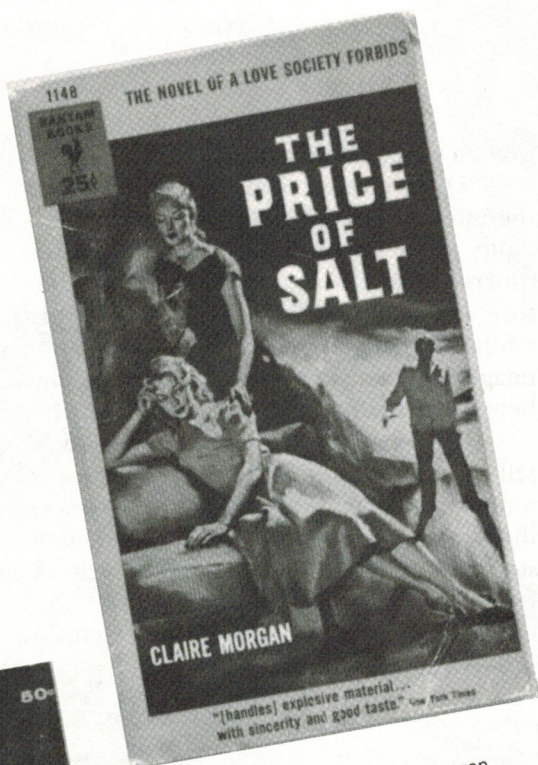
Or even something as inexplicit as this:

Time passed over them in great waves, like a sea aroused. It had never been like this before ... Now, striving together, they had reached that bright land where the sunshine was a white fire and the flowers were neon-colored, blinding. The surf receded. They lay there, gasping together.<sup>2</sup>

Current reprints of these books by lesbian presses lack historical prefaces and original covers. But they can provide a window, however distorted, on lesbian life in the 1950s.

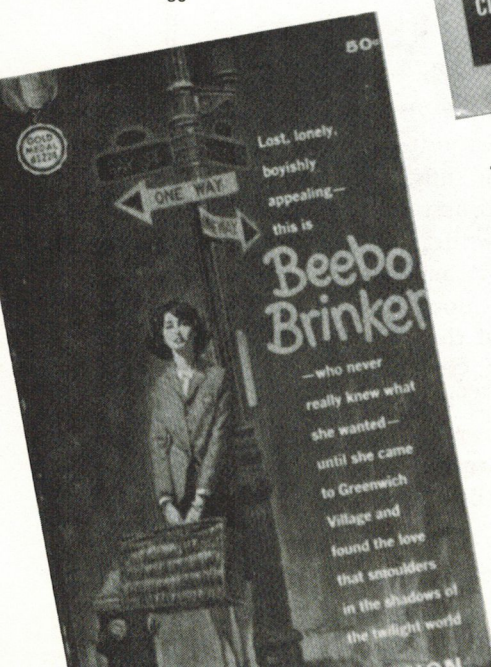
<sup>1</sup> *The Price of Salt*, Claire Morgan (New York: Bantam Books, 1952).

<sup>2</sup> *Appointment in Paris*, Fay Adams (New York: Fawcett Books, 1952).

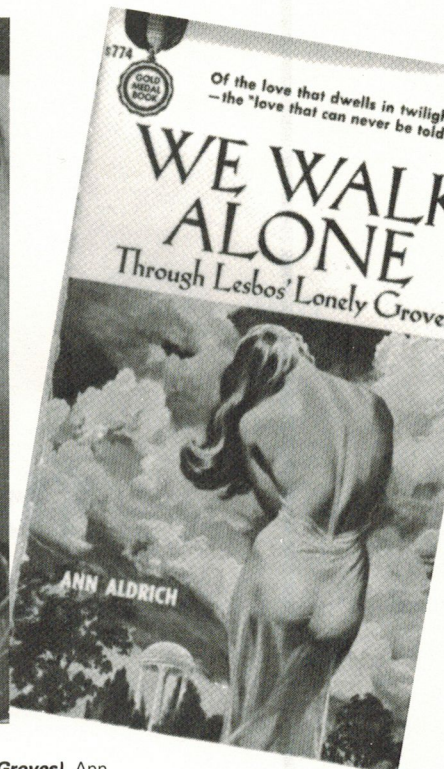
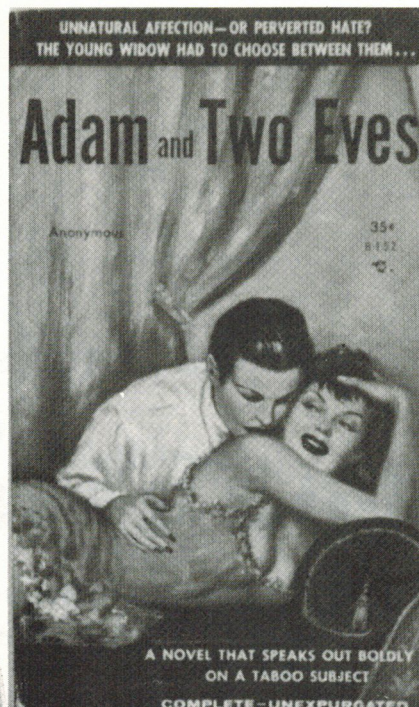
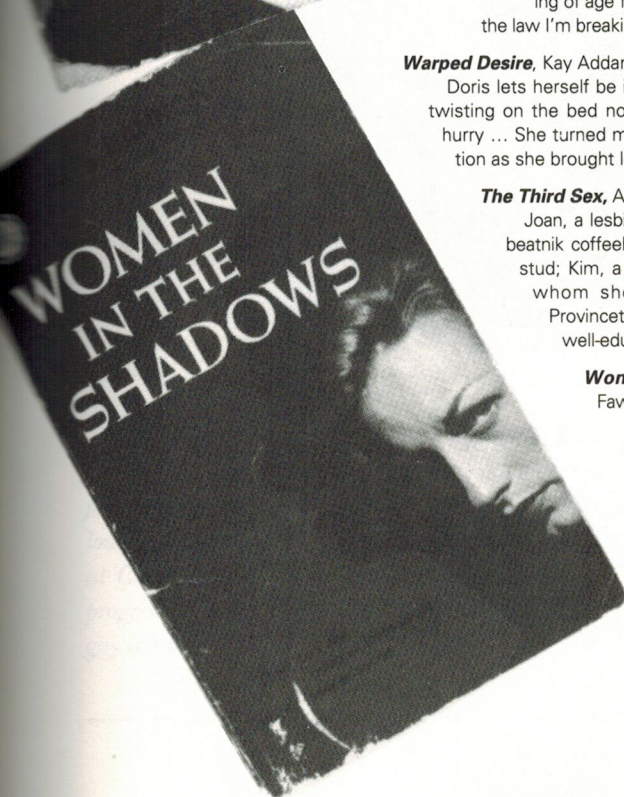
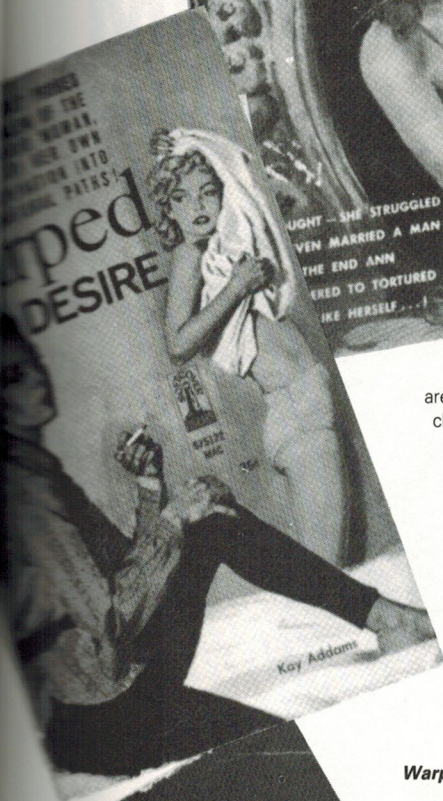
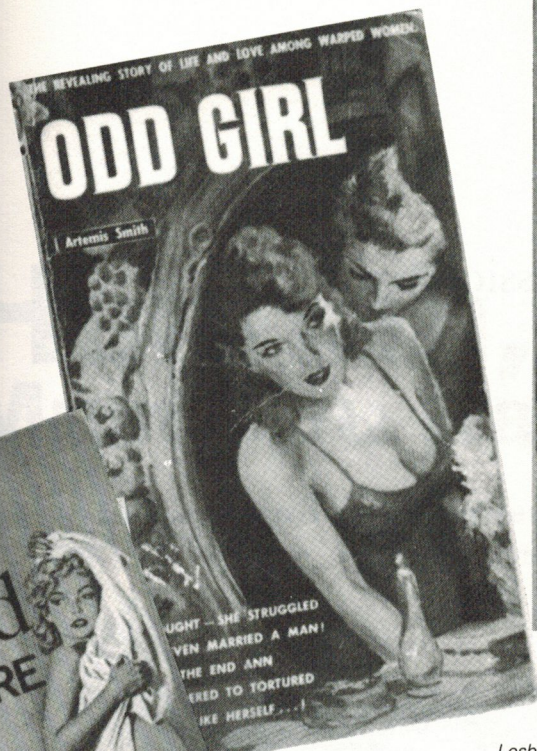


**The Price of Salt**, Claire Morgan (New York: Bantam Books, 1952). Originally in hardcover and unusually literate, this book got a favorable review in *The New York Times*.

**Beebo Brinker**, Ann Bannon (New York, Fawcett Books, 1960). Beebo describes her first entrance to a lesbian bar: "... they were being admitted to a basement ... filled with girls ... For the first time in her life she was proud of her size, proud of her strength, even proud of her oddly boyish face."







***We Walk Alone (through Lesbos' Lonely Groves)***, Ann Aldrich (New York: Fawcett Books, 1955).

This book is described in Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin's *Lesbian Woman* as the first nonfiction book about lesbians written by a lesbian. "I am convinced that the opinions and viewpoints of the lesbian herself are as valuable ... as those proffered by the psychiatrist, sociologist, anthropologist, jurist, churchman, or psychologist" (from the foreword). It contains a strange combination of conversations about make-up, snide comments, defenses of lesbians, and quotes from the likes of Simone de Beauvoir and Djuna Barnes.

***Adam and Two Eves***, Anonymous (Edith Gyorgy) (New York: Beacon Books, 1956).

It is unusual to see a butch on the cover, especially one with painted nails. Carroll, a pretty young widow, is taken into the household of a straight couple and becomes intimate with both of them. Of the woman (pictured on the cover), she says: "She silenced me with her ardent lips and I felt the world vanishing."

***Odd Girl***, Artemis Smith (New York: Beacon Books, 1959).

Artemis Smith, who occasionally contributed to *The Ladder*, wrote this book, one of the most positive lesbian pulps. The story ends happily, after a long coming of age for Anne. "You are breaking the laws of nature—" her father said. "If the law I'm breaking is against nature," Anne said, "the law will have to be changed."

***Warped Desire***, Kay Addams (New York: Softcover Library, 1960).

Doris lets herself be initiated into lesbian mysteries by beautiful Laura Stevens. "I was twisting on the bed now, all restraint gone, wanting her to please me, begging her to hurry ... She turned my body into a savage thing of desire that knew complete satisfaction as she brought love to me again and again."

***The Third Sex***, Artemis Smith (New York: Beacon Books, 1959).

Joan, a lesbian, marries Marc, a gay man, whom she meets in a beatnik coffeehouse in Greenwich Village. Her lovers include Gig, a stud; Kim, a WAC on leave; and finally, Marc's sister, Ruth, with whom she lives happily ever after. It includes a trip to Provincetown, where Ruth and Joan meet Alice and Chris, two well-educated, professional feminists.

***Women in the Shadows***, Ann Bannon (New York: Fawcett Books, 1959).

Chronicles the turbulent relationship of Laura and Beebo Brinker, who is cruel but also handsome and charismatic. The darkest of the Bannon novels, it includes Beebo's spiteful murder of her own dog and ends tragically with Laura marrying her gay friend, Jack.





## Lesbian Expressionism

*Eileen Myles*

I would like  
to be part  
of your problem.  
Right in  
the midst  
of it, like  
your you-  
know-what.  
That's it.  
I would  
like to  
be your  
pussy.  
I would  
wiggle  
& shout.  
I would  
knock  
you  
right  
out  
with  
my  
song.



# Hannah, Must You Have a Child?

Nurturing Lesbian/Gay Families in the Jewish Community

Yoel H. Kahn



*The story of Hannah is found in I Samuel 1; it is part of the traditional Jewish scriptural reading for Rosh HaShanah, the Jewish New Year. The following sermon was delivered in September, 1990, at Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, San Francisco's progressive Reform synagogue for the lesbian and gay community.*

On the steps of a small sanctuary in the town of Shilo in the Land of Israel, three thousand years ago, stands a woman named Hannah, weeping bitterly. So overcome by emotion, she sways wildly from side to side and, unconsciously, her lips silently move as she utters an inner prayer. The priest on



duty misunderstands her anguish and tries to chase her away: "How long will you be drunk, woman!" he says. "Throw your wine away!" She looks up at him through her tears and says: "I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have had no wine—I have come to pour out my soul before God." She returns to her prayer, asking God to help her have a child.

Reading Hannah's story, I feel her pain. Hannah reminds me of all the women from her day until our own whose deepest needs have been misunderstood by the men who are the gatekeepers of the Temple. But Hannah as a model of Jewish womanhood and personhood is troubling for me. For she is not primarily known as the woman who stood up to the men who controlled the door to the Temple, nor is she honored as the author of poems and prayers. Hannah is remembered as the woman whose life had no meaning because she could not bear a child. As a modern, liberated Jew I rebel against this identification of self-fulfillment exclusively with parenthood. Why, Hannah, must you have a child? Hannah, get an MBA!

As gay and lesbian people, our lives, our loves, our relationships and families have been declared second class, empty, or meaningless over and over again, if not simply ignored because we "can't have children." The fact that homosexual sex is not procreative is intimately intertwined with many people's homophobia. As Anita Bryant once succinctly explained: "They can't reproduce, so they must recruit." And it is not only societal prejudice we face; we have been ostracized and rejected by other Jews because of the presumption that we do not have children. Many of us have struggled to make peace between the apparently irreconcilable equations "to be a Jew, I must have children," and "as a lesbian or gay person, I cannot."

Neither one of these axioms is as simplistically true as I—and I suspect, most of you—once thought them to be.

In this, our synagogue's thirteenth year, we have begun planning bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies for the children of the first pioneering, openly lesbian families. Our school continues to grow, the only one in the world whose charter is to reach out to the children of gay and lesbian families. More and more of us who thought that becoming a parent was forever closed to us have now begun to consider what might be possible.

But we must be careful, lest we internalize the messages and methods of the wider society around us. Our affirmation that gay and lesbian people can and should be parents cannot be interpreted as our acceptance of the proposition that only families with children are "real" families. The presence of children in our homes need not mean that we will become gay and lesbian copies of the dysfunctional or patriarchal family systems in which we may have grown up and which we are surrounded by today. While it is surely necessary to move away from a self-definition that pitted us against so-called "breeders," we need to affirm and support families with children without buying into an oppressive system which only considers those who are "married with children" to be legitimate Jews or mature adults.

For Judaism, there can be no underestimating the importance placed on the responsibility to have and raise children. Many Jewish teachers consider the *mitzvah* [literally "commandment," a primary obligation] "to be fruitful and multiply" the first, and therefore the most important, instruction in the Torah. This responsibility is codified in the Jewish *legal* tradition in which a *man* is required to have



two children—ideally a boy and a girl, thereby imitating God's action at creation. This legal requirement only hints at the cultural and social significance placed upon procreation and family in the Jewish tradition. We hear echoes of it everywhere we turn, from the biblical blessing: "May you live to see children of your children and peace upon Israel" to the Yiddish folk blessing, "*du zolst habn naches fun kinder*—You should have pride and pleasure from your children!"

Having children is seen as an act of faith in the future, a messianic hope—even in the face of death. The urgency of continuing the covenant only increases when its future appears endangered. On an individual level, children are seen as the key to our own immortality, carrying some part of ourselves on into the future. Those who have no children supposedly have no one to say *Kaddish* [the mourner's prayer] for them—and, symbolically and actually, no one to carry on their own name or the Jewish future.

Since the Holocaust, some Jewish leaders have urged Jews to have lots of children in order to help replenish the diminished ranks of our people. In this way, the traditional obligation has taken on new meaning and importance for some, and our apparent disregard of the traditional expectation is that much more insulting. Some rabbis refuse to officiate at a marriage for a couple who state that they do not intend to have children; you can imagine these rabbis' response to openly gay people.

It is against this background that we have struggled to claim our rightful place as Jews. Let me make my apparent dissent from historical Jewish teaching perfectly clear: people who are not themselves parents are not in any manner inferior Jews. Many people who were not good candidates to be parents have had chil-

dren because they felt that this was "the right thing to do." Each of us surely knows unhappy parents and children who grew up in a household lacking a minimum of emotional or spiritual warmth. But not only this; I support people's right to make a conscious, deliberate decision not to have children.

But, I must tell you, if the essence of our modern freedom is choice, and I therefore reject a value system which precludes choice, the essence of Judaism is covenant, and covenant means being in relationship, and every relationship demands responsibility. The importance of children and ensuring the future is too central and too fundamental a part of the Jewish tradition to turn away from it so quickly. The *mitzvot* of bringing new life into the world, of raising children and providing for the future are, I believe, binding upon us as Jews no less than upon our ancestors.

What must change—and in this way we are not deviants from the wider Jewish community, but teachers and role-models for our generation—is our understanding of the ways in which this *mitzvah* can be fulfilled. What we have created out of necessity and in the face of adversity will become, I believe, a model for the entire community. The *mitzvot* of parenting and raising children, of teaching the next generation and ensuring the future of the covenant are *mitzvot* for *all* Jews—including lesbian and gay Jews, those who are parents and those who are not, single or in relationship, young and old—but we cannot legislate a single "correct" way to fulfill them; we need to be able to choose among many different paths to fulfillment of this fundamental Jewish obligation.

There are, then, two essential tasks: we need to name fully what we are doing now, recognizing that we are already fulfilling these *mitzvot* in new and cre-



ative expressions; and we have to break out of the narrow categories that have been offered us in order to expand the possibilities.

For example, who is a parent? There are biological parents—essential for life. But parenting a child is a task and responsibility that extends far past the date of birth. As adoptive families have taught us, one need not be a birth-parent to be a real parent—and if we move away from the limited categories of biology, we will see that a child can indeed have two Moms, or three. Foster parents, god-parents, and honorary grandparents are essential roles in extended family and should be recognized as equally valid ways to fulfill the *mitzvah* of parenting.

Now not everyone can be a parent. But most of us are part of a family. In the gay and lesbian community, we have recovered and renewed an ancient institution that the mobility and fragility of modern society has largely lost—the extended family. If family can be defined as the people “who take you in when no one else will,” then our families are the strongest and most enduring ever known. From the earliest days of the AIDS epidemic it has been our families—the non-biological, non-legally-recognized relationships and friendship groups, composed of roommates, former lovers, and friends—who took in the ones who were sick and sat by their bedsides, feeding and bathing and caring, when the rest of the world was still afraid to walk in the door—and you have been there ever since.

How dare anyone say that “queers can’t have families”! We don’t need to add children in order to establish the legitimacy of our families! But what we have learned, that caring and nurturing need not be a heroic task shouldered alone, ought to be a model for our families on how we raise our children. Every child needs

trusting relationships with other adults, and your role can be the regular care provider, the godparent or aunt or uncle, or emergency relief.

Another route to the fulfillment of these *mitzvot* is as educators and healthcare and childcare workers and other providers of services to children. The Talmud teaches that a teacher is more important in a child’s life than a parent, for the biological parent brings the child into the world and the teacher gives the child a future in the world.

If we are going to support the children around us, I think that we must also grieve for the children we don’t have or were denied. While we have fought to affirm that having children is not a requirement for full Jewish citizenship, many of us would dearly love to have children. Being a parent is an immeasurable blessing. For most gay and lesbian people until today, it never seemed possible unless we denied who we are. Having grown up with the expectation that we would be parents some day, coming out meant accepting the reality that we would not.

I do not believe discussion of the magnitude of this loss for so many has ever been an open topic in the gay and lesbian community. Parenting has never been easy for gay and lesbian people, and even today when technology and society have both made progress, it is still not easy. For some parents, coming out threatens to end access to the children they already have. For many people—gay and not gay—the absence of a committed partner to share the burdens precludes serious consideration. Just as options appear to be proliferating for many, for others of you these opportunities have arrived too late, as increasing age or eroding health mean that parenting is not a realistic goal. The loss, the disappointment,



the pain are real and we need to allow ourselves to express them and hear them.

Further, I wonder about the possibility that, to some degree, we have internalized society's homophobia. Cautioned against getting too close to children, many of us have been cut off by "family members" from the children of our extended family of origin. The continuing linkage of homosexuality with child abuse is part of the societal cover-up of the truth that the great majority of sexual abusers are male, heterosexual, and part of the immediate family. Is it not possible that part of our defense mechanisms is a social convention that gay men aren't supposed to like children? Is the discomfort some of us experience around children a result of not being used to having them around—and thus a shameful consequence of the homophobia that pervades our civilization?

Now there are those among you who have no desire to be parents, who don't especially enjoy young people's company, who do not include children in your lives, and who are just fine with this state of affairs. Perhaps you are convinced that these issues have nothing to do with you.

But they do. The covenant is made with all of us and with each one of us. I do not insist that you change your social relationships or that you become a parent. But the Jewish tradition teaches—and upon this I must insist—that you care and act. Your caring is expressed, of course, through your support of the community and its programs.

Our caring is also reflected in our attitude towards the next generation in our midst—seeing these children not as a "special interest" of a few, but as close to us, our concern, our future, projects of the entire community. In this manner will we honor and fulfill the covenant,

like every Jewish community before us in history.

Yet this congregation of gay and lesbian Jews, their families, supporters, and friends is different from any Jewish community ever before in history. If we are to speak of the next generation, we've only discussed half our children. Right now, the next generation of gay and lesbian youth is growing up. And someday, they are going to arrive at our door. We don't need to recruit—creation's order sees that our numbers are naturally replenished. The next generation of gay and lesbian Jews are *our* children, they look to *us* for guidance and inspiration, and when they arrive we will be here to welcome them home. This is a responsibility only we can fulfill.

In the Talmud, we read an oft-told story of an old Jew who is planting an olive tree in an orchard. A Roman soldier comes by and asks, "Why are you bothering to plant that tree? You will surely not live the many years it will take until it bears fruit." The Jewish elder looks up, points at the other trees in the orchard, and says, "My ancestors planted these trees that I might enjoy their fruit. I am planting this tree so that my grandchildren may enjoy its fruit." In our orchard, some of us will plant the trees; others of us will take the seedlings under our care. Some will water and feed the saplings, others will shape and guide their growth. Some will stand at the gates always watching over, others will visit at special seasons of the year. All who have tended this orchard—whether we live to see the day when our trees come into flower or not — shall be blessed by the harvest.

*Ken yehi ratzon. So may it be. Amen.*



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A fundraiser for the  
OUT/LOOK Foundation—  
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*Ferryboat Santa Rosa*  
*Pier 3, San Francisco*

*6:30 p.m. Reception with Honored Writers*  
*Sponsor's donations \$125-\$1000*

*8:00 p.m. Writers Gala Cabaret and Dance*  
*\$30 at the door*

*dance & schmooze under the moonlight*

*Out is In is produced in conjunction with*  
*OutWrite '91 The National Lesbian & Gay Writers Conference*  
*All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law*



*Brian E. Bengtson*

45

I rode the rain last night  
and watched my room become  
a nighttime negative.

I heard the screams of my lover's  
last touch.

wasn't it you who curled up beside me  
as the thunder got too loud?  
and made the patter of a small child  
when you went for some water.

I settled with the snow this morning,  
sighed with the buffered city.

I felt the turning inside-out  
of my lover's last touch.

wasn't it me who howled like the wounded  
and cried once a day in my room?  
and stooped like the lost  
when I picked up your things?

I wandered with the wind this afternoon  
touched each sidewalk direct.

I felt the sudden release  
of my lover's last goodbye.





# A Family Comes Out

*Kt. Vermeulen*

OUT/LOOK  
spring 1991

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Not too long ago, after a busy gay pride weekend, my partner Laurie and I overheard our daughter Rachel telling two other four-year-olds in the playground, "You know what? That's my Mommy and my Mama. We're gay. We went to the march, but you can't go because you're not gay." When we brought this up later and told her that she's too young to be gay, she was adamant: "I AM GAY. I AM!"

I am a thirty-five-year-old biological mother, a lesbian, and a converted Jew. Before I came out, I had always imagined having lots of children. Funny how the fantasy never included a husband, just lots of kids. After coming out I tried to give up the

idea of having kids. I didn't think lesbians had children. I couldn't imagine how they could. I settled down to have a childless life. But that didn't last long.

By 1978 I knew that my life must include a child. I told each woman with whom I had a relationship that I wanted a child. Most were surprised. Some were impressed. But they all said, "Not with me."

I met Laurie in 1980. When I told her that I wanted a child, she too said, "Not with me." But somehow that did not discourage me. As our relationship progressed, I continued to push Laurie on the baby issue. Finally, after four and a half years, she said, "Well, when are you going to get pregnant already?"

But Laurie, a child of Holocaust survivors, wanted us to raise the baby Jewish. I was raised a Catholic, but had attended synagogue with Laurie and was intrigued by Judaism. I eventually agreed to convert — not an easy decision to make. Within three months I was pregnant by alternative insemination with an anonymous donor.

Most colleagues and strangers who didn't know I was gay assumed, because of my pregnancy, that I had a boyfriend or a husband. I was awarded immediate heterosexual status, and I became a socially valid person. People on the street smiled at my bulging abdomen. Acquaintances, neigh-



bors, and storekeepers suddenly became friendly. I was no longer invisible. But as I became "special," Laurie became nonexistent. Because the nature of our relationship remained under wraps, Laurie was ignored. She was assumed to be the "friend" or "roommate."

There were definitely ways in which we contributed to the situation. I went for inseminations alone. I did not correct people who assumed I was a "single mother by choice." I went for O.B. check-ups alone. Laurie remained in the background and did not fight for status. And I did not fight for her. The pressure from and assumptions of heterosexual society were so great that we did not combat them. We took what we thought was the easy way out and ran for cover.

When Rachel was born, six weeks early and with hyaline membrane disease, Laurie was allowed all the privileges of a "father" because she was my designated "significant other." She saw Rachel first, was allowed into intensive care to be with me, and enjoyed unlimited visiting hours. But at another hospital, Laurie was prevented from visiting Rachel until I was able to speak to the social worker.

As Rachel grew, we became more and more uncomfortable with our situation. When she was two years old we enrolled her

in nursery school. First we had to deal with the forms. There were spaces for mother's name and father's name. We decided to take a risk. Next to "mother" we printed my name. Then I crossed out father and printed in Laurie's name. When I handed in the forms I explained that Rachel had no father and that Laurie and I were raising her together. The director said, "Oh. Well, who is the legal mother? Just so we know." We considered that a positive response.

We had decided not to come out as lesbians for two reasons. First, we were afraid that we would alienate other parents and teachers and be shunned. Secondly, we were afraid that it would negatively affect how adults and children related to Rachel. We naively thought that if we just said, "we were both raising Rachel," that those who didn't want to know we were lesbians wouldn't, and that those who were already comfortable with gays, would assume.

When Rachel was almost three and a half, she began to bring up the "daddy" issue. I told her she had no daddy, that Laurie and I were two women who loved each other and wanted a baby, so we had her. But she was unrelenting. After questioning us for a few weeks, she looked right at me and said, "I wish I had a daddy." I was not prepared for this, yet I knew it would not be the last time she expressed this, no matter how we handled it. I put my arms around her and said, "I know. I know you want a daddy. It's ok to want a daddy. I wish I had a daddy, too." I told her a bit about how I felt not having a daddy when I was young — my father died when I was eleven.

The issue came up again when we least expected it. We were bringing home pizza for supper one night and were in the supermarket. The cashier asked, "Is that pizza for Daddy?" I was dumbfounded. The woman asked again and we did not answer. After she walked away I was angry at her for her presumption and at myself for not answering. I talked it over with Rachel, and the next time we arrived at the check-out counter, Rachel spotted the woman and



stated, in a very loud, clear voice, "You know what? I have no daddy." This time the cashier did not answer.

Around this time we heard of a group of lesbian and gay parents and their kids. We had never had role models — we knew no other lesbian mothers — and this was just what we needed. Laurie and I found gay parents for support and friendship, and Rachel found other kids with two moms. Some even had two dads and no mom! I met Bob, an openly gay father of an apparently happy, comfortable teenager. Bob believes that being open is best for our children.

I thought about that a lot. It was clear from our "daddy" experience that being open was best for Rachel. Laurie and I began to talk and see the ways in which we were closeted and how it hurt us. We had trouble keeping babysitters. We suspected they disappeared because they found out we were gay. We had trouble explaining Laurie's place in our family to other parents and kids. As a result she remained invisible. Rachel was reluctant to discuss our family situation with other kids and never introduced Laurie as her mommy.

As Laurie and I talked about it, it was apparent that our choice had been made. We were fooling no one by saying, "We are both raising Rachel." I asked a straight friend, a parent of one of Rachel's friends, when she figured out we were lesbians. She said, "Right away!" It was obvious Rachel's teacher knew — she even recommended a TV program about lesbian mothers to us. We were only fooling ourselves.

Thus begins a new chapter in our lives as a family. We have been more open with others and ourselves. We confront the daddy issue daily. We tell potential babysitters that we are two "gay" women with a child. We have had some positive feedback. Right before Gay Pride Month, Laurie and I attended a show presented by Rachel's class. I introduced Laurie to Rachel's best friend as Rachel's other mommy. I explained to the puzzled child that we were

two women who loved each other and wanted a baby, so we had Rachel. The little girl thought about that and a few minutes later said, "Kate, you know what? I wish I had two mommies."

Not long afterwards Rachel called to me from the tire swing. I waved. She turned to the child next to her and said, "That's my mama. We're gay. Do you know what that means? It means two women love each other and have a baby. So they had me!"

Rachel is emulating us and boasting to her friends, very much like the children of heterosexual parents do. She is fitting herself into the world. We hope it is not too late to help her form a solid base of pride and courage upon which to stand. As she grows older and begins to discover social homophobia, she will have us, her parents, to confide in, other children of lesbian and gay parents to gain support from, and positive contacts with a few supportive heterosexual families.

Sometimes it feels like I am starting all over again. I came out for the first time when I was twenty. Then I was an individual. I was alone. This time I am a member of a family embarked on an exciting, yet difficult, journey. Together we form a whole — the three of us. We are a family coming out. We are very brave.

"A Family Comes Out" was a runner-up in the 1989 Lesbian and Gay Families Nonfiction Writing Contest sponsored by *OUT/LOOK* and the Gay Rights Chapter of the ACLU of Northern California. This contest was made possible by the Norman Sanson Bequest.



## Close Call

*Ramón García*

it's summer  
Mom and Dad are at work  
Sandra says she is going to the mall  
she'll be back later

Xavier and I look at each other  
in anticipation  
we are anxious to kiss and undress  
we've been waiting  
for the coming together of our bodies  
for hours

the oldsmobile pulls  
out of the driveway  
in the heat of the day  
in the warming bedroom  
we've already begun  
taking our clothes off  
pulling the shades down  
to block the burning sun  
and the neighborhood outside

soon we are going at it  
and I'm moving on top of him  
ready to come  
and I do  
as the slamming of the front door  
rips us violently apart  
footsteps like heartbeats nearing  
Veronica is home from a friend's early

we jump out of bed  
as my jr. high sister walks  
without knocking  
like she usually does  
and sees that Xavier is putting on his  
underwear  
next to my bed

and I've got a towel  
around my waist  
moving away from  
his direction

"What the ... ?" she says  
noticing something is funny

I summon my coolness  
"Close the door, can't you  
see we are getting dressed?"

I block her view  
Xavier half naked behind me  
by the expression in her face  
and the tone of her voice  
I know that the strangeness  
she witnessed is dwindling  
"Do you guys want gaspacho?"

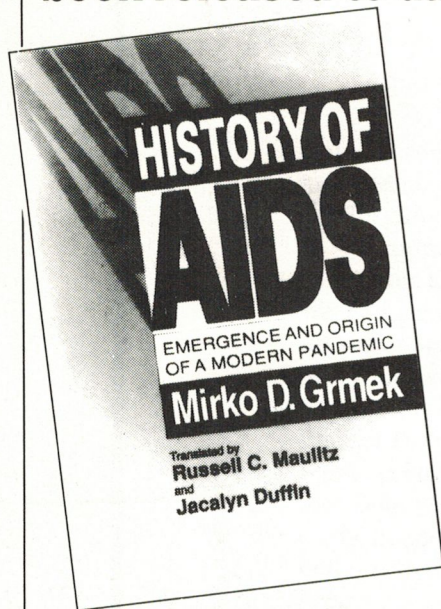
"No thanks, we're not hungry"

"O.K." she said as she left

the door slammed  
I turned to Xavier and smiled  
never had we been so relieved



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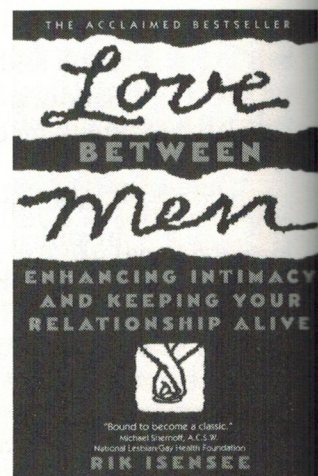


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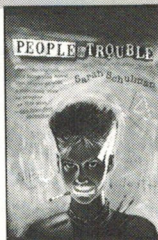
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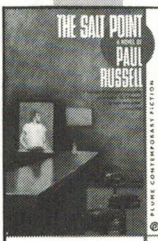
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# The Western Union Lady

*Kaila Compton*

She had a funny look on her face  
the western union lady  
she didn't know  
that I had to be with you  
right then  
but the best I could do was a telegram

she didn't know  
that I was used to seeing four legs  
when I looked down at the sidewalk  
and my own two legs were just not enough

she didn't know  
that the space in the air  
where your hand was supposed to be  
was so cold and empty  
that the brittle traffic noise  
was supposed to be filtered by your soft voice

the best I could do was a telegram  
I took the order form and wrote  
"I want to touch your skin  
and lick your stomach"

the western union lady  
had a funny look on her face  
but she said it would only take a day

What did she sound like?  
the western union lady in Ohio  
when she said to you over the phone  
"I want to lick your stomach"



# You're not a son of a bitch like he is

*L.K. FitzSimmons*

## Prologue

My father came out to me when I was seventeen.

"Uh, wait a minute — you mean your dad's ... *gay*??!"

Well, yeah. That's precisely what I mean.

OK, all right, fair is fair. I think I should backtrack here a little bit for those of you who still don't understand what I'm getting at. Let's start from the beginning, like, two years before I was conceived, and very quickly, move through my senior year in high school. So, here goes ...

## One

1965. Honolulu. My father had moved to Hawaii after hitchhiking across the United States and working odd jobs for several years after graduating from Cornell. He inevitably wound up in Hawaii because, after serving in the Korean War, he decided that he wanted to move somewhere with a strong, predominantly Asian culture. Japan was his first choice, but he knew he'd have a hard time making it there. Thus he settled on Hawaii. After arriving there in 1963, he worked a number of odd jobs. By the time 1965 rolled around, which is when the important stuff

started to happen, he was driving taxicabs, while trying to find some acting work on the side. This proved difficult, since Honolulu isn't exactly Broadway, yet he did manage to land a few roles here and there. He had recently won a spot in the film version of James Michener's *Hawaii*, which was to begin filming soon on Oahu's west shore.

1965. Los Angeles. My mother had just obtained a job as the assistant to well-known film director George Roy Hill. Hill had needed an assistant for his next big film project, which just happened to be the film version of James Michener's *Hawaii*. Within two weeks, she, the production crew, and a slew of actors, were on their way to Honolulu.

And the rest, as they say, is history. My father and mother met, they fell in love, they lived together, and in 1966, they married. Then, in 1968, I came along. They never moved back to the mainland; they felt as though they were truly in paradise.

## Two

In June of 1969, however, paradise began to shatter. Six thousand miles to the east, in New York City's Greenwich Village, a riot was going on. Seems as though some police officers had a thing for storming into a bar called the Stonewall Inn and harassing the patrons. Why? Turns out that a lot of the pa-



trons were, what were more commonly called at the time, homosexuals. And the police took some strange pleasure from raiding the place and harassing the patrons such that they were forced to leave. On one night in particular, however (and not coincidentally the night after Judy Garland died), the cops came in to do as they always had. Yet they were completely unprepared for the notion that the patrons might fight back. And on that night, the patrons did just that. After three days of rioting, the drag queens and other gay men and lesbians had won their battle for freedom. The Stonewall Riots, seen as the birth of the lesbian and gay movement, were over and the eyes of America were suddenly on the homosexual.

1970. *Life* magazine runs a long, pictorial story about gay life in America. My father leafed through the article, and came to the stunning realization that among the faces in the article's color photographs should be his. This was where he belonged; this was who he really was. He had known for a long time about his homosexual inclinations and had even acted on them once when he was younger. But, as far as he had been raised, there was no place for homosexuality in his life. After he turned thirty, his mother and sister began to pester him to settle down and start a family. This intense pressure inevitably led to marriage, and to me. But Stonewall changed all of that — he realized that he was living a lie, and he could continue to live the lie, or get out of it and begin living the truth. While he wanted the marriage to work and he wished he could change his inclinations, he had no success, and four years later, the marriage dissolved, and he was off to America's gay Mecca, San Francisco.

So that's the situation in a nutshell. I know very little about my dad's life in San Francisco, or about his life in Seattle, to which he moved three years later. All I know is that when I'd ask either of my parents why they got divorced, I always received the same answer: "It's too hard to explain."

## Three

My mother encouraged hostility toward my father, and she still does today. She will never forgive him for "living the lie"; for jeopardizing our happiness; for leaving us virtually penniless. For much of my life after the divorce, I was raised by my mother in a rented house in Honolulu's inner city. The beautiful house in one of Honolulu's elite neighborhoods with the big yard, lush flower garden, and swimming pool that my father had bought soon after marrying became a cloudy memory.

The hostility that my mother preached rubbed off on me for much of my life. I talked to my dad roughly once every two months, and maybe saw him five days out of the year. We really never had anything to talk about. We never really connected.

It wasn't until the summer of my fifteenth year that I decided that I wanted to spend a significant amount of time with him and try to get to know him better. I lived with him in Seattle for three whole months, and the constant interaction did a lot of good. I was finally getting to the point where I could respect him as a human being, where I didn't have trouble uttering the word "Dad." But it was during this time that I became suspicious. Just why *did* he and mom get divorced? What could it have been that was apparently so "hard to explain"? Why didn't he remarry? And who was this guy Paul that he was always hanging out with? It made no sense to me, yet I knew something about the situation was, well, (no pun intended) queer.

I enjoyed my summer with him. I felt like I was really beginning to get to know him. But it still tore me up inside that I would never know why he and mom divorced. *It must have had something to do with me, and they just didn't have the guts to say so.*

## Four

About a year later, and I don't remember



why now, my dad and I got into an argument. I didn't feel like talking to him directly, so I opted to write a letter. After putting out my feelings, I ended the letter with something like, "And I can't stand not being given a straight answer as to why you got divorced. Every time I try to ask, I'm always told, 'It's too hard to explain.' Well, I've been putting up with that excuse for over ten years now, and I think I'm old enough to be able to understand something that's difficult to explain. And I think you owe it to me, as for all these years I've figured it's been my fault."

## *Four and a half*

Oh, jeez! I'm forgetting something really important here. At the same time I was dealing with all this, I was also trying to come to grips with my homosexuality. I mean, I'll say more about this in a second, as it becomes more relevant, but it's important for you to understand that I was having my own difficulties before I even knew about my father. Which is next on the agenda ...

## *Four and three-quarters*

So I received a reply from my father. "I hope you're sitting down," it began. The letter explained just about everything I've explained here. How he had felt pressured into getting married and having a family; how he felt that he was living a lie after he heard about Stonewall; why he had to leave. And that it had nothing to do with me. Although he entered the marriage with the wrong intentions, he is glad he did get married; otherwise, I wouldn't be here. At the end of the letter, he explained that he wouldn't be surprised if I never wanted to speak to him again, thinking that I would be so repulsed by his homosexuality. Little did he know ...

I called him back two days later. He was surprised at my carefree tone; I think he was

expecting some sort of No-Father-Of-Mine's-Gonna-Be-A-Fag attitude from me. He was certainly taken aback by the fact that his sexuality didn't change my feelings towards him; rather, it answered the question for which I had sought the answer for so long. In fact, my finding out he was gay made me feel even closer to him, primarily because we had something in common. Yet ironically, his disclosure made me feel more uncomfortable about my *own* sexuality. In a way, I felt he was somehow responsible for my being gay. At the age of seventeen, a time in which I already hated myself for my sexual orientation and prayed that it was just a phase, I found out that it was something that apparently runs in the family. Oh, shit.

## *Five*

Well, my self-hatred based on my sexuality eventually disappeared, about a year after starting college. I realized that no matter how much I wished it, it wasn't gonna go away. And just having moved to Berkeley, an area where there is relative acceptance of gay people, made it much easier, too. At the end of my first year of college, I planned to go up to Seattle for about a week to see my dad before returning home to Hawaii for the summer. I had decided that this was the time that I was going to tell my father the truth about me. A few days before I went up, we talked on the phone, and he told me that he was "living with someone." I was genuinely happy for him; I wanted him to settle down and have someone in his life, and I looked forward to meeting the guy, Alex. Well, my dad failed to mention one key thing about Alex before I got there: namely, that he was MY AGE! Here my potential "stepfather" was more likely to be my stepBROTHER.

Once again, I was driven back into the closet. This whole situation to me seemed so sleazy. I interpreted it as characteristic of all gay relationships, and I suddenly felt that I wanted to have no part of this community. I felt so dirty. Perhaps things would have been



a little different if I had *liked* Alex. But, although he was just a few months older than I was, he was often incredibly childish, self-centered, and immature — a spoiled brat. He was extremely intelligent, however — one of those child prodigies, I guess. Yet I got the overwhelming sense that he and my father were simply using each other, and I saw the whole situation as being overwhelmingly destructive. My father, I thought, was using him in an attempt to recapture his youth and to stop aging, while Alex was using him for financial stability. The whole situation nauseated me. I dragged the one foot I had out the closet door back in, and returned to Hawaii. At the end of the summer, I returned to Seattle before heading back to school for my sophomore year, and my dad and Alex were still together. And while the summer in Hawaii was a positive experience in my feeling more comfortable about my sexuality (I met my first boyfriend that summer), the whole situation with my dad still made me queasy.

## Six

Three months later, I was talking to my dad on the phone, and he mentioned, "Oh, Alex moved out last week."

"Oh, really?" I asked. "Why?"

"Well, I guess he didn't exactly move out. More accurately, I threw him out."

"Oh, really?" I asked inquisitively once again. "Why?"

"Well, I caught him stealing out of my wallet the other day. Actually, I had known for a while that he'd been doing that. And I guess I allowed him to do it, because I wanted him so much in my life. But he *was* using me, and I couldn't allow that to happen any more. So I sent him on his way."

I wanted so much right then and there to say "I told you so." But it didn't seem like the appropriate thing to say at the time. I was so glad that he came to his senses, and I was so glad that he kicked the little shit out. Yet the only thing I could utter at that mo-

ment, despite the overwhelming joy I was feeling at the time, was "I'm sorry to hear that." I felt like I had him back.

Yet I still felt uncomfortable about telling him the truth about *me*. I don't know why exactly. I think I was still feeling that it was somehow genetic, and that he was in some way responsible. But I realized that I didn't care any more whether or not he was responsible. I had finally gotten to the point where I felt comfortable enough about myself and that I knew I wasn't going to change. I felt as though I could live with my sexuality, and I was getting to the point where I was no longer ashamed of it. I had told a significant number of my heterosexual friends that I was gay, and none of them (much to my surprise) seemed to have any problem with it. One of my closest friends said, "So what?! You're still my buddy." When I look back on it now, I think I didn't want to tell my dad because I was afraid he'd internalize it and blame *himself*. And while I was finally beginning to realize that I didn't find him to have had any influence on my being gay, I didn't want him to blame himself and feel guilty. I just didn't want to lay that on him.

## Seven

My second year at Cal trudged on. I finally got up the nerve to go to the office of the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Alliance (GLBA) on campus. I had wanted to go there for quite a while, but didn't want people to look at me funny and to start gossiping about this "new kid." But I was growing weary of the bar scene and the Castro. I was feeling that the only meaning of being gay was to drink, dance, cruise, and fuck. I wanted to find out if there was more to it than those things, because if there wasn't, then I didn't want to label myself as "gay" anymore.

I found just what I wanted with the folks at the GLBA — a safe space. It was through them that I learned about Stonewall, about the oppression that gay



men, lesbians, and bisexuals face every day in our society, and that there were plenty of other gay men like myself out there that wanted to form some positive, lasting friendships, without any sexual pretensions. After a while, not only did I accept my being gay, I was *happy* with it. Yet I was still scared to tell the world about it.

But one day, that all changed. A column appeared in our college newspaper, written by a militant Black activist who was trying to dispel the parallels that many have made between the oppression that African Americans face and that which Gays face. While I personally felt that the injustices that both groups face are similar, I was willing to admit to some differences. It was the tone of his article, however, that really pissed me off. What he was arguing was that the oppression that gays people face is *justified*, because homosexuality is a sin, a perversion, a threat to society, and downright disgusting. He was saying that it was okay to hate gays! My friend Kevin (who was very out) and I discussed his article, and both of us felt a great deal of rage. Kevin said that he was going to write a response to the editor, and asked me if I wanted to help him write it. That would mean putting my name on a letter which would identify me as gay. Was I ready? How would people react? What would it do to my career? At this point, it didn't matter, I was too enraged to care. I felt that I was finally a part of this community, and that my community was being violated. I didn't care what people thought; defending my community came first.

So the letter appeared, and the word was out. My friends who already knew about my sexuality were impressed and really didn't bat an eye otherwise; others I ran into in the following days either said, "I didn't know you were ..." or just ignored me altogether. While some reactions were frustrating and made me feel tense, I felt so empowered. I felt I had made a difference; I felt I had woken some people up. *I was out, and out to stay.*

## Eight

July 4, 1988. I went up to Seattle to see my dad for the Independence Day weekend. We had decided on the Fourth to drive to the ocean and check into a hotel overnight. We got to the shore, and every single hotel and motel was booked. Frustrated, we had dinner at a tacky Polynesian restaurant near the beach, then walked on the beach for a while, and finally decided to head on the three-hour journey back to Seattle.

I was so tense that entire day. I had decided before I flew up that this was going to be the trip in which I finally told him. Why should this be so difficult? I think in the back of my head I was afraid that he was going to react like most fathers, with some No-Son-Of-Mine's-Gonna-Be-A-Fag attitude. But why should he? The situation was reversed just three years ago and I handled it; plus, he's gay, he'll *understand*.

There was a great deal of silence on that car trip back. We were getting close to Seattle; I realized I had to tell him soon or never. We passed the ENTERING SEATTLE sign, and I knew the time was now. Fortunately, I was driving the car, so if he *was* shocked, I knew I wouldn't have to worry about him swerving off the freeway and crashing at the bottom of the cliffs below. Taking a deep breath, I finally broke the silence. "Dad, I've got something I need to tell you."

He kind of jolted, perhaps surprised by the sound of my voice after a long period of quiet. "What?" he asked, somewhat nervously.

"Well, there's no way of saying this by beating around the bush, like I usually do. Is your seat belt on? Dad, I'm gay."

There wasn't even a pause. "You're kidding!" he said, surprised, but without any hint of anger in his voice.

Again, without even a pause, I replied, "I wouldn't kid about something like this. I don't know what else to say. I'm not ashamed or anything; I just thought you should know, if you haven't figured it out already."

"Uh, well, I wasn't exactly sure. I'm not



surprised; I just figured maybe you hadn't made up your mind yet," he said, suggesting that I had some sort of choice in the matter. "My friend Bonnie asked me if you were, and that's the first time I really thought about it. I told her I wasn't sure, and it didn't really matter to me. I've always felt you can do whatever you want with your life. It doesn't matter to me; I'm fine with it. After all, I can relate ..." He laughed.

Well, it was out, but it didn't really feel good. I knew that right then and there our relationship had changed. I told him how I had pretty much always known, how it explained my acceptance of his sexuality, and how I had explored my sexuality physically and knew it was right for me. It was that last thing that I think was a little hard for him to swallow, as he later admitted he didn't feel comfortable thinking of me as a sexual being. Then again, that's probably how a lot of parents are. And it goes the other way too, as I sure as hell have problems imagining either of my parents as having any semblance of a sex life. The entire length of this conversation took as long as it did to get from the city limits to the garage. As we got out of the car, he once again reassured me, noting the tenseness and embarrassment in my face, "I'm fine with it; it doesn't change my love for you. But it's gonna take a while to sink in."

## Epilogue

So it's been almost three years since I came out to my dad. A few months after doing so, I told my mom, though not so directly. I had written another article for our school newspaper, partially in response to the homophobic column I mentioned earlier, but more in celebration of National Coming Out Day, 1988. My relationship with my mother had been sort of stormy, so I sent her a copy of the article and wrote a note on it saying, "I thought you might like to know what I've been up to. This is the easiest way for me to tell you this. Oh, well, like father, like son, huh? Love, LKF." After I sent it, I

realized that it might hurt her. She called me a few days later and told me that she had known for about a year and a half. Mothers have that sort of intuition, she noted. But she said "You're nothing like your father, even if you both *are* gay. *You're not a son of a bitch like he is.*"

The relationship between my father and me has only grown stronger. I've finally been able to forgive him for the shit he put us through after the divorce, and I understand his reasons for leaving. My mother still can't deal with it, and she still has this fear that just because I'm gay I'm somehow gonna get AIDS. My dad and I, on the other hand, have grown to be able to deal with each other's sexuality. As a matter of fact, for the first time, we recently talked without inhibitions about sex: I was comfortable in talking to him about the problems I was having with this guy I was dating, and he asked me, point blank, "Well, is he any good in bed?"

"No, not really ..."

"Then you ought to tell him that. That'd put him in line and make him pay attention!"

Whenever I'm in Seattle, he and I make a point of going to The Ritz, a classy little piano bar and restaurant in Capitol Hill. I can't help but feel that every time he and I go in there together, everyone looks at us like, "Look at this couple ... how much money do ya think the young one's gettin'?" To which I have to respond with a piercing stare that says "No-He's-Not-My-'Daddy'-He's-My-Father-Really-He-Is." I suppose it's pretty humorous, but I just know that all of the other patrons are buying into the stereotype that trapped me when my dad was seeing Alex. Can't two gay men, regardless of the age difference, just be friends? Or even a father and son? We've got a lot of educating to do — within our own community, especially.

I know it sounds stupid, but I think everyone should have a gay dad. In fact, a lot of people do; they just don't realize it. I know I wouldn't give mine up for the world.



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# America is in the Hard-on

*Pablo Archimedes  
Tapay Bautista*

60

Previously published in the  
August 1990 issue of  
*Lavender Godzilla:*  
*Voices of the Gay Asian Pacific Alliance,*  
Vol. 3, No. 4.

The head of his stiff cock rams the back of my throat hard. *I did not want to lose him.* His balls hang heavy like ripe purple plums pounding against my chin the corners of my mouth on the brink of tearing his cock expanding, bursting ...

I dream of transforming into a wolf hairy with sharp teeth and long velvet tongue wrapped twice around the shaft of his pulsating thick-veined prick biting his tender organ off puncturing tasting the warm river of blood gushing out between my canine teeth his big beautiful knobby cock shrivels up like 5-day-old birthday balloons.

eyelids fluttering, lips dripping, teeth clenching, white marble body trembling on the verge of collapse the tongue is mightier than the words swallowed.

He fucks my mouth vigorously grabbing my thick black hair from below I blindly grope for his nipples fingers aching to pierce through this boundary called skin white as marble, from below I pinch his nipples hard feeling them redden blushing like pricked rosebuds.

i am an altar boy. on cold marble i kneel before my faith, in God numbs the pain my knees bare.

the thrust the sweet violent thrust between parted lips is savored.

*I was born during San Pablo's fiesta in my village in the Philippines. Mother claims that Greek as well as Spanish blood run through my veins. In high school I boast that my grandfather has the deepest darkest bluest eyes of any Pilipino farmer.*

Pulling my head away from the base of the penis tongue unraveling he tightens his sphincter the spongy head alive hits the roof of my mouth my head jolts back. Inserting an assertive finger he loosens releasing the fragrance of shit the texture of thick velvet a whiff a rose he groans.

The mouth of the urethra glistens puckering the soft ripples of his scrotum melt at the touch his cock quivering and pink slapping across my face spews forth ... fuck me yes oh beautiful boy yess my little brown cocksucking brother yesss ohh you lovely people janitors of the world brown monkeys niggers of the jungles of Asia yesss Yesss **YESSSS**

Obediently he ejaculates at my chest.

I watch myself turn off the light, close the door behind me, and walk away my strides slow but certain.



## Recuento de Afinidades Inventory of Affinities

Naum B. Zenil

*San Miguel Arcángel (St. Michael the Archangel)*, 1989, mixed media on paper, 72x52.



For the past several years, Círculo Cultural Gay (Gay Cultural Circle) has held a gay cultural week at the Museo Universitario del Chopo of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. The week consists of round tables, panel discussions, poetry readings, theater, and a special art exhibit.

In 1989, the exhibit, curated by José María Covarrubias, was entitled "Ex-profeso: Recuento de Afinidades" (Inventory of Affinities on a Theme). Carlos Monsiváis, a leading Mexican intellectual, described the exhibit as "a lesson in tolerance, in living together, and in the convergence of diversity." The exhibition of lesbian and gay erotic images included the works of more than sixty-five artists.

While in Mexico City in April of 1990, Martín Ornelas of the National Task Force on AIDS Prevention met Covarrubias and asked him to investigate the possibility of bringing the exhibit to San Francisco.

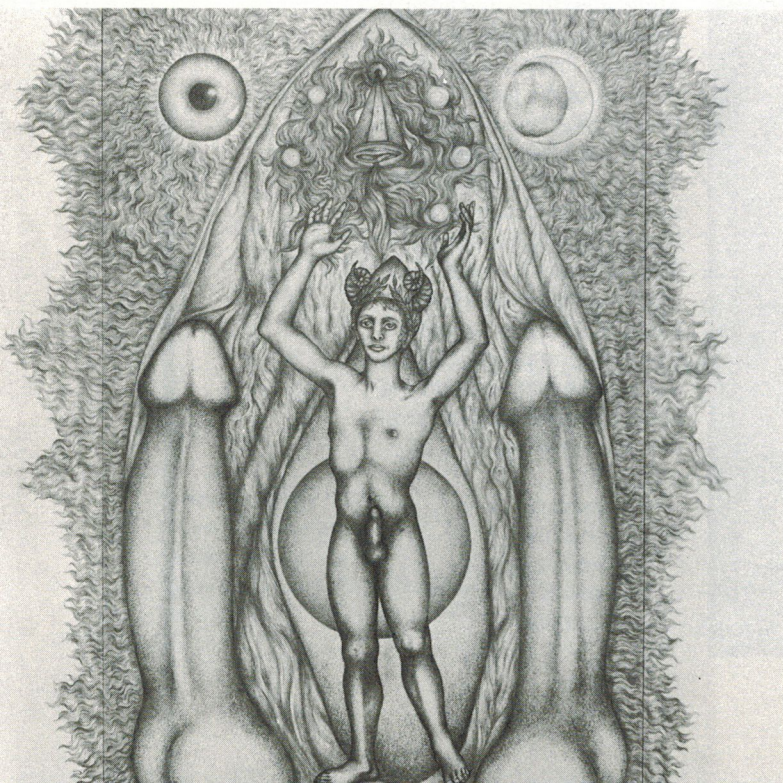
After some immigration and customs delays, Recuento de Afinidades opened to great acclaim in June 1990, for Lesbian/Gay Pride Month, during the peak of the Jesse Helms/NEA censorship hysteria. The exhibit was displayed at the Galería Museo of the Mission Cultural Center, in the heart of the Latino district of San Francisco. It consisted of more than fifty works by renowned Mexican painters, sculptors, and photographers and was the first exhibition of Mexican lesbian and gay erotic imagery in the age of AIDS.

For more information contact:

Círculo Cultural Gay  
Apartado Postal 27-237  
Colonia Roma Sur  
Mexico, 7 D.F. 06760

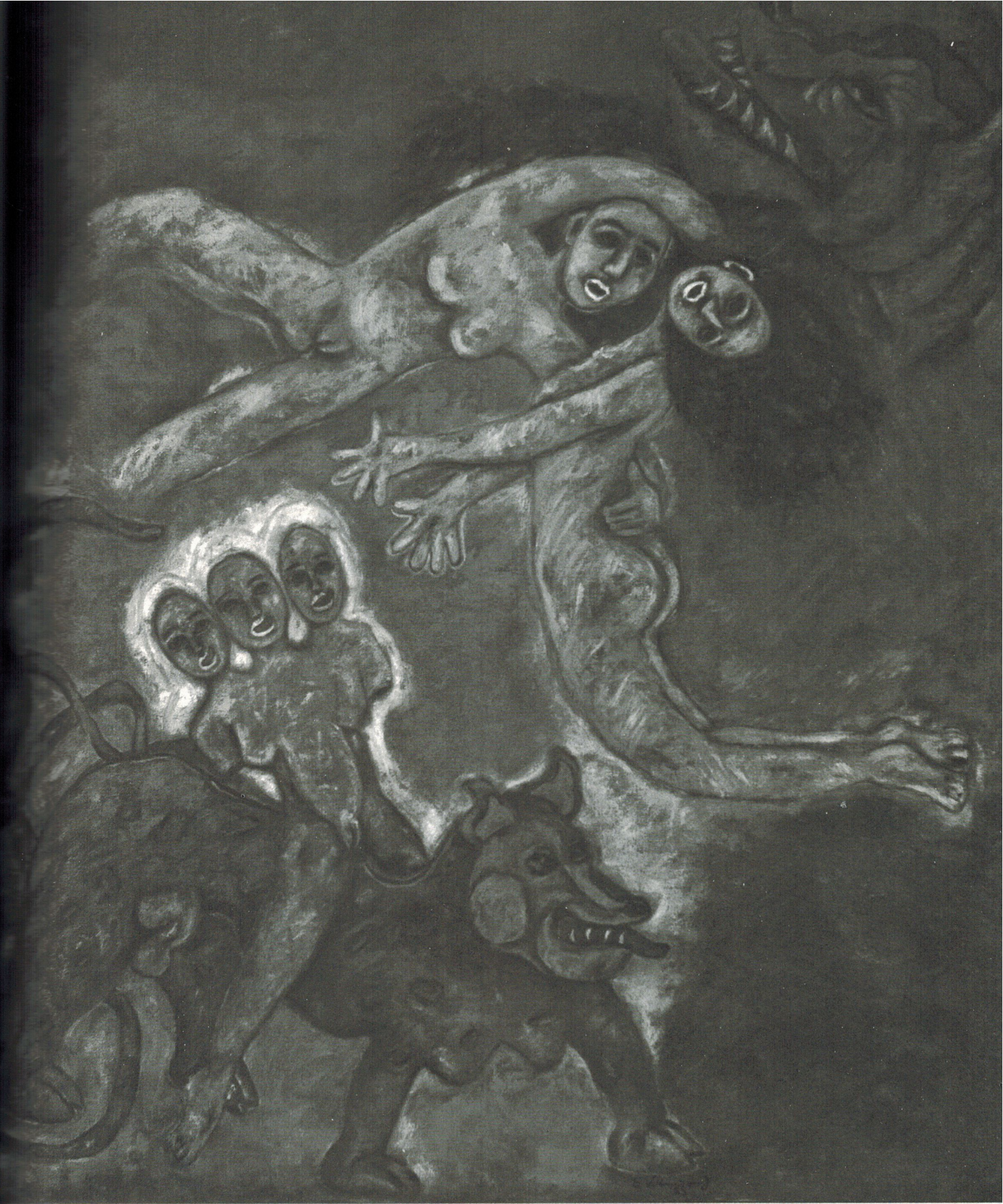


Carla Rippey  
*Quisiera ser como tú (I  
 Want To Be Like You)*,  
 1989, graphite on  
 paper, 108x80.



Paul Antragne  
*El emperador  
 Heliogábalo Augusto  
 (Emperor Heliogabalus  
 Augustus)*, 1974,  
 graphite on paper,  
 38x38.





Eleña Villaseñor

*Saturnal*, 1989, oil & encaustic on canvas, 140x123.





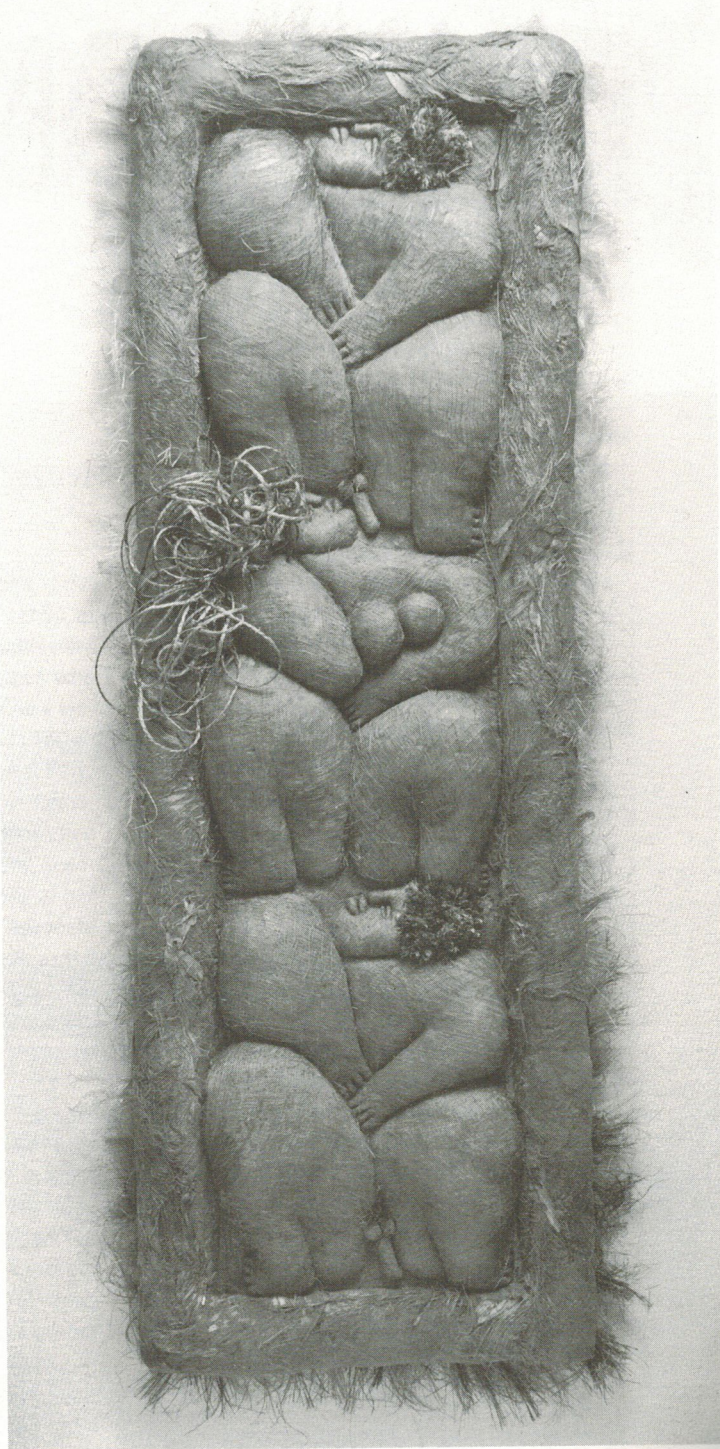
Ernesto Alvarez  
*La Anunciación (The Annunciation)*, 1990,  
 silver gelatin print,  
 34x27.

Oliverio Hinojosa  
*La noche metalica (The Metallic Night)*, 1985,  
 charcoal and acrylic  
 on canvas, 162x300.





Noemí Ramírez  
*El Columna sin fin*  
(*Endless Column*),  
1989, mixed textile  
media, 106x36.



Special thanks to  
Francisco X. Alarcón,  
Ernesto Alvarez,  
Yolanda Andrade,  
Rene Castro,  
Jose María Covarrubias,  
E.G. Crichton,  
Jorge Luis Fichtl, and  
Maritza López  
for the development of this portfolio.



# COMRADE

*Debryanskaya increases her  
"already scandalous reputation"*



# IN ARMS

*Masha Gessen*

**S**he refers to herself as the Soviet Union's "First Lesbian," in the decidedly Western sense of quasi-royalty. To date, she is the only contestant for the title — the only woman in the Soviet Union who has been publicly identified in the Soviet media as a lesbian. She may seem an unlikely candidate for this particular spotlight, but this daughter of a late Communist Party operative had gained prominence well before the formation of the country's first gay and lesbian organization last year. A pro-democracy activist, she's grabbed headlines at home and abroad as a founding member of her country's first opposition party, and later as an advocate for such unpopular groups as prostitutes, drug users, and homosexuals. In a climate where acts of political courage most often stem from personal desperation, she was neither a preacher in search of a pulpit nor a person with nothing to lose.

Yet in February 1990 Yevgenia Debryanskaya, a thirty-seven-year-old mother of two, spoke at a press conference announcing the formation of the Moscow Association of Sexual Minorities (later renamed the Moscow Union of Lesbians and Gay Men). Unlike all but one other participant, Debryanskaya used her real name. Within months, she became the first person to sign her name to an article in *Tema*, the Union's newspaper. In November, on the eighty-third anniversary of the October Revolution, she paid a visit to the Soviet Mission in New York, delivering a stack of letters demanding rights for lesbians, gay men, and people with AIDS. The following interview, conducted in Russian during her subsequent six-week stay in New York, was translated by the author.

**Who were the people at the press conference in February 1990?**

There were about fifteen of us at someone's apartment, but only two of us — Roman Kalinin and I — used our real names. There were ten men and five women. The average age of the men was about twenty-five. It was a wonderful group of people. It's hard to describe, but there was something on the people's faces ...

Most of them remained anonymous. I feel sad for these people because they are forced to live underground to protect their social positions. The women in the room were very young — their average age was about twenty. Most were university students.

**What are the short-term and long-term goals of the lesbian and gay movement?**

The main goal, both in the short and the long term, is to facilitate the formation of the concept of freedom for all people in the Soviet Union. I don't mean to say we are gods, but we have to do what we can. People have no concept of deserving, wanting, fighting for freedom. Instead we have a tendency to blame everything on the government and expect everything from the government, which is the wrong thing to do, because, in my opinion, any government is by nature vampirical, parasitic, an entity that will attempt to take away freedom. We have to cultivate the desire to oppose, which we do not have. Right now, for example, there is no bread, and instead of calling for the resignation of the government, people are standing patiently in line waiting for bread to appear.

**Speaking of the lack of bread, what do you think of the opinion**



**that in light of the dire economic circumstances in the country, political action concerning sexuality is frivolous?**

I firmly believe that one's sexual life is the beginning of all beginnings, and no society, no matter what terrible predicament it finds itself in, can afford to ignore issues of sexuality.

**Do you see a feminist movement in the Soviet Union?**

Officially speaking, there is the Committee for Soviet Women, whose charge, theoretically, is to realize the Constitutional article that guarantees equality between men and women. If they have made any attempts to accomplish this goal, they have not been successful.

As for an alternative movement, it does not exist — also because of the lack of the concept of individual rights on the part of women.

**Can a lesbian movement exist in the absence of a feminist movement?**

Yes, I think it can. Lesbians can exist ... While there is no women's movement, there are individual women who want to create such a movement. One such woman, Olga Lipovskaya, has started a magazine called *Women's Reading* which has attracted a group of like-minded women. Considering how few of us there are, we have to work together, whether or not we want to.

**Are the lesbian movement and the gay movement the same?**

From a political point of view, these [two] movements are inseparable, as are all movements

for the rights of minorities — including prostitutes and drug users. From a cultural, aesthetic point of view, though, these are not only separate but unrelated, since, as I see it, gay male culture is based on the phallus, while women's culture is based on the female, the earth.

**What is the state of lesbian culture in the Soviet Union?**

Until a certain time — the 1970s — lesbians were considered a labor-camp phenomenon, never a part of the general population. In that sense, it was easier to be a lesbian in the 1970s because lesbians were invisible ... Now that the subject of lesbianism has drifted onto the pages of the Soviet media, we are for the first time seeing women leading perfectly normal lives who are identified as lesbians. The term has appeared, taken a place in the public consciousness. Now there's an awareness that lesbians are a part of society.

**How did this come about?**

There have been some articles — meek, vague ones, but they are there. We are slowly beginning to learn about the cultural heritage we have as lesbians, the works of literature and art that were created earlier in this century ...

I know I will probably provoke the anger of a great many lesbians by saying this, [but] before coming here, I had always entertained the illusion that in the West, gay men and lesbians were in the forefront of creating a new sexual culture. To my great dismay, I have not found that to be true. What I have seen are the same families, built on the heterosexual model, perhaps built to provide the stability

that is lacking in everyday life. Indeed, these relationships seem stable. But I don't think that love is a stable thing.

**How are lesbian relationships structured in the Soviet Union?**

Perhaps I am utterly alone in my thinking. Lesbian relationships in the Soviet Union are structured exactly the same as here. But the underlying reasons for them are different, I think. There, women build families not because they are looking for stability, but because it is extremely difficult to meet a partner. So in the absence of a choice, as it were, we have to reconcile ourselves to relationships that are based on the heterosexual model.

**How do people meet?**

Usually through friends. Two lesbians who do not know of each other's existence may drift into a social circle, then see each other at a gathering and exchange certain signals. You know, it's a certain look you give each other. Eyes can say a lot.

**How do you meet other lesbians?**

I have my own circle of people with whom I am close. I have never tried to hide my sexual orientation.

**Never? From no one?**

In the matter of my own sexual orientation, never and from no one. I have had to hide my relationships because my girlfriends, as a rule, were a part of the social structure. For their sake I have had to go to great lengths to pass myself off as someone other than who I am.



**Let's start at the beginning. You were thirteen years old when you began your first sexual relationship with a woman. Did you go to school the next day and say, "Hi, everybody, I'm a lesbian"?**

No, I did not go to school and announce that I am a lesbian! I did have to tell my mother, though, when I was fifteen. I was going through a very difficult time — the woman left me, and I was not dealing with it very well. My mother saw what was happening with me: I stopped eating and only smoked and drank water for several weeks, turning into a shadow of myself. I finally had to tell her. She immediately bought us tickets to a Black Sea resort.

**What was her reaction to the news of your sexuality?**

My mother is a very simple woman, but she behaved with uncommon decency in that situation. She has never broached the subject of my sexuality since. My mother has never interfered with my personal life, and she has never insulted any of my girlfriends, in any way, ever.

**You have considered yourself a lesbian since you were thirteen, but at the age of twenty you married a man. Why?**

It was very banal. I was pregnant. I consulted with my mother. She forbade an abortion, in part because the poor quality of health care in our country makes the procedure very dangerous, and in part because she knew of my sexual orientation and she was horrified at the thought that she would never have a grandchild — I am an only child. So she insisted that I have the child. I don't regret having my son.

**Did your husband know you were a lesbian?**

Yes, because he had known me from the age of about fifteen or fourteen ... I suggested that he keep his own apartment and that we have what we call a "visiting marriage," because I cannot — and never have been able to — tolerate the presence of men in my home. He consented, and so the visits got less and less frequent, until our relationship had run its course.

**You weren't ever concerned about the possibility of him causing trouble with your son?**

It didn't occur to me at the time. And it hasn't since, really, because he is one of those rare decent people. We have always had a very good relationship. He's married, has children, and has made a good life for himself.

**Getting back to the time when you were fifteen, and your first female lover left you — how did you proceed to make contact with other lesbians?**

I consider myself very lucky ... I became friends with a small group of people in Sverdlovsk [a small city in the Urals] — artists, writers, what we call "observers of life." We cultivated an ability to see the beauty in things our society did not consider beautiful. We were the bohemians — a term that, in our society at that time, carried extremely negative connotations.

It was the late 1960s, and, naturally, we adopted the slogan "free love." It was truly radical, especially for our provincial town, and we took this slogan very literally, [like the] Communists, who always have taken slo-

gans very literally.

So we had a sexual revolution in Sverdlovsk. "Free love" to us meant that we slept with whom-ever we wanted to, however much we wanted to, and, most importantly, we gave our love to everyone — not just to one object of your sexual orientation, but to everyone.

**How did you hear about "free love" in Sverdlovsk?**

Someone must have listened to Western radio. Somehow, information got through. We adopted the uniform: long hair, ripped T-shirts, torn pants.

**Are there gay or lesbian social circles in the Soviet Union?**

No. There are professional circles ... People who are friends because they are in the same professional field — writers, artists, filmmakers. We are still talking about underground circles, people who have been on the fringes of Soviet society, artists who have never had nor sought a market. Many of them now are dead — from drinking ...

**Now that a lesbian and gay movement is beginning, do you think that lesbian and gay social circles will appear?**

Yes, of course. I have been unusually fortunate. But most lesbians and gay men in our country have to contend with terrible loneliness. They need places where they can go, if only to look at one another, chat, rest.

**When did you become politically active?**

In the early 1980s. I had moved to Moscow at that point. There



was no pro-democracy movement in Sverdlovsk. Of course, *samizdat* [underground] publications circulated there, and we read them ... In the early eighties, politics came naturally to me. It was part of the same lifestyle. I didn't have to change to do it. At a certain point, politics and demonstrations became a part of our lives.

For a long time I worked — and continue to work — on the issues of conscientious objectors. We gathered their names, which we then passed on to organizations like Amnesty International.

Together with Valeriya Ilinichna Novodvorskaya, I organized the Seminar on Democracy and Humanism, the first legally constituted alternative political entity in the Soviet Union. This was an educational organization, but it served as the springboard for the first opposition party, the Democratic Union.

#### When was this?

The party officially came into being at its first congress in May of 1988. But the preparatory work started about a year before then. There were ten of us. We were all prepared to go to jail. So at the moment of the party's creation it had no members — just the ten of us.

But we weren't arrested, which presented us with our first difficulty: we didn't know what to do. None of us had any political experience. We made some attempts at political action that seem laughable in retrospect ... We had no history of alternative political parties in our country. We had one historical example to follow: the Communist Party, which, as we know, expends an inordinate amount of resources on its members' personal lives. Fol-

lowing this tradition, the Democratic Union also concerned itself with its members' personal lives — mine first, of course.

#### What happened?

Most leaders of the pro-democracy movement viewed my public coming out as a stupid, pointless step that just increased my already scandalous reputation.

#### What scandalous reputation?

It took years to build. It began many years ago, when I graduated from high school. At the time, the system of recommendations [official character references that for decades played a decisive role in Soviet citizens' ability to enter universities, find employment, or change residence] was still in place. Only two people in my class graduated with the kinds of recommendations that precluded any possibility of further education. I was one of the two; the other was a boy who had stood trial for his role in a gang rape. My recommendation was far more damaging than his.

#### What did it concern?

My expulsion from the Komсомол [the Communist Party Youth League]. It was a true masterpiece. I didn't show up for a Saturday "voluntary" work day in 1970. My dog had cut her foot that morning, and I spent the day taking care of her. Then I was dumb enough to tell the school authorities the real reason I did not show up. I was expected to be willing to sell my own mother for the sake of the Saturday work days — and I was taking some dog to the veterinarian! It was viewed as the

height of cynicism. I was immediately expelled from the Komсомол without the right to rejoin ... So my career was terminated before it began.

#### How did you live?

Well, when I was sixteen, and we had our hippie movement, we had this word, *askat'*, from the English "to ask" — as in "to beg." So we got money on the street. We traveled, also, hitchhiking. For some reason — and I don't think it was out of pity — people fed us ... It was truly a carefree time, a wonderful time, in part because we were not cognizant of all the complexities of the political situation in the country. We were vaguely aware of repressions, but we didn't concern ourselves with them.

Later, my parents helped me out. They understood I was not employable.

#### You point out that your situation is unusual. How is it different from what you see as the general situation of lesbians in the Soviet Union?

The majority of lesbians in the Soviet Union try to do what is expected of them as women. They enter heterosexual marriages, make heterosexual families. These women, of whom there are many, are the least fortunate, in my opinion ...

It is instructive to look at what the Bolsheviks did when they defined the laws that concerned sexuality. Basically, they created two groups whose sexual acts are illegal even in the presence of consent of the other person: prostitutes and male homosexuals. Lesbians did not make it to the law books.



**Was it because what lesbians do in bed was considered less harmful, or was it because the lawmakers did not acknowledge the existence of lesbians?**

Lesbians existed, but their sexual acts did not, to the extent that no one could imagine how these acts could be harmful to the health of the participants. In other words, prostitutes were considered the source of venereal disease, and male homosexuals were seen as people who engage in anal sex, which is inherently harmful in the view of the Soviet medical profession, but lesbians did not engage in any such acts.

But the fact that lesbianism was not criminalized did not mean that lesbians could now live freely. The psychiatric profession took it upon itself to define lesbians as mentally ill. Of course, your activities in Soviet society are limited if you are considered mentally ill.

In 1975, I was told that because I was a lesbian I would not be able to receive a professional driver's license. I actually managed to talk sense into the director with the help of a city official who was an unusually liberal-minded person ... But the reality is that the rights of lesbians are consistently curtailed. There are certain professions, such as teaching, where a lesbian would never be tolerated.

A system exists for the psychiatric repression of lesbians. They are institutionalized and "treated." I know of a fifteen-year-old girl, who, at the insistence of her teacher, was placed in the Skvortsov Psychiatric Clinic in Leningrad. She spent two

weeks there. She received intensive treatment with a variety of neuroleptics. When she was released, she was not told what her diagnosis was, but I presume it was what Soviet psychiatrists call "ongoing schizophrenia," the diagnosis lesbians usually receive ... For the next two years she had to continue "treatment" and see her psychiatrist every month. To this day, five years later, she is listed as a mentally ill person ...

I don't think we will ever know the scope of antihomosexual repression in our country. Even if relevant statistics were kept, we will never gain access to them. But I am sure that psychiatric repression has been widespread, especially in the more remote areas of the country.

**You have told me that you have not discussed your sexuality with your children. But the subject of homosexuality must come up in your household.**

Every Thursday we have a gathering of lesbians and gay men at my house. These are working meetings, though, not parties. We talk about documents, other business.

**Are your children present?**

My older son has his own apartment. My younger son is away at boarding school five days a week, so he is not home on Thursday nights.

**Have you ever discussed homosexuality with your older son?**

I have never discussed sexuality with my son at all. I have provided him with literature that

I told him he had to read. These were materials about sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS, because, at sixteen, of course, my son is sexually active. In general, he and I have a polite relationship. I would not consider it acceptable to initiate a discussion of sexuality with him unless he approached me with specific questions.

**Throughout this conversation, you have used English words, such as "girlfriend" and "gay." Can you think of no Russian words to use in this context?**

There are Russian words for gay men — *goluboi* [light blue], *pedik* [an abbreviated form of *pederast*]. There are no words for women outside the labor-camp context. So it is easier to use a foreign word, such as "girlfriend." I don't mean easier; I mean that there are no other words. Not only do we have no words with which to identify ourselves, we also have no other signals, no outward appearances. So we appropriate the lesbian culture of the West, where you have already developed the vocabulary.

**Now that you have been publicly identified as a lesbian, are you afraid of what might happen to you if the country takes a turn to the right?**

If anything happens to me in the case of a rightward shift, it will happen to me not because I am a lesbian, but because I am active in opposition politics. This can happen at any moment. When I became politically active, I knew I was taking that risk.



We are pleased to announce that *Publish Magazine* has awarded OUT/LOOK 1st prize (Journal category) in their 4th annual Desktop Design Contest.



## Politics, Money and the Art of Publishing

*Jeffrey Escoffier*

### A MAGAZINE

like *OUT/LOOK* has to compete in the marketplace with many other magazines. We have to compete for readers, for advertising dollars, and for a place in the lesbian and gay communities. In the current political and publishing environment, no magazine of opinion and commentary can survive without either substantial advertising revenues or generous subscriber support. A publication like *OUT/LOOK*, which seeks to create a forum for debate in the lesbian and gay communities must also demonstrate a sense of responsibility to those communities. The choice between economic survival and community responsibility is fraught with risks.

#### The Burroughs Wellcome Ad

We make many policy decisions at *OUT/LOOK* where we have had to choose between our political values and financial considerations. The most recent of these decisions occurred when Burroughs Wellcome, producers of the AIDS drug AZT, offered to purchase two full-page ads. (By this time, surely everyone has seen at least one of these ads — they're everywhere.) The ads encourage people to test for the HIV antibody and are part of

the largest ad campaign directed to the gay community in history.

The ad representative told us that this was Burroughs Wellcome's way of putting some of its profit back into the community and of creating a service for our community. Yet we are skeptical of Burroughs Wellcome's motives. Are they promoting the HIV test for humanitarian reasons or are they merely trying to increase the sales of AZT, still the only life-sustaining AIDS drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration? Should we help a company that, in our opinion, has exploited people with HIV by refusing to lower the price of AZT, making it less accessible to those in need?

After much debate, we decided not to accept the advertising. It is our conviction that if Burroughs Wellcome wants to perform a service for our community they should lower the price of AZT.

*OUT/LOOK* is one of the few publications in the country that has refused to run the ads. What does this mean for us? It means we lose \$1500 in ad revenue. Decisions like these are part of the reason we at *OUT/LOOK* depend on our readers, subscribers and good friends

to help subsidize our budget. The support of our sustainer and major donor campaigns by our readers and friends has been tremendous.

#### Recycled Paper

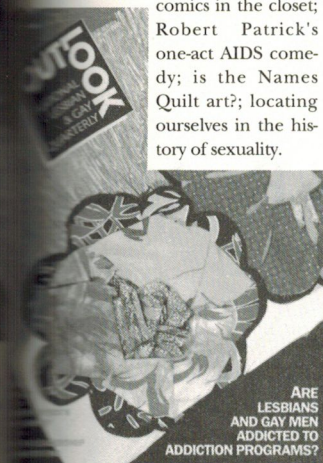
Another political and financial dilemma is posed by the suggestion of a number of our readers and staff members to print *OUT/LOOK* on recycled paper. We have not yet managed to find a source for recycled paper that is comparable in price to the paper we are currently using. However, we are exploring the possibility of fund raising to pay for recycled paper in the near future.

#### Thank you

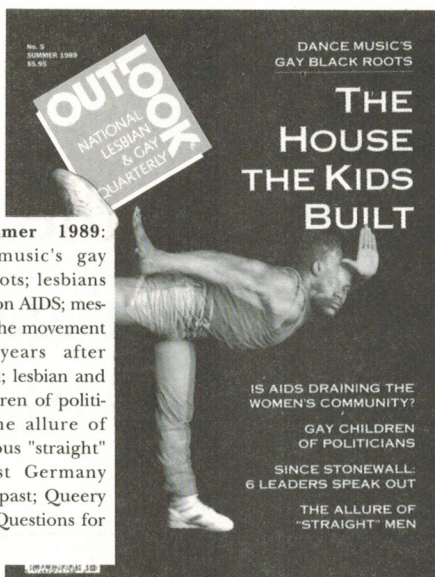
We wanted to take this opportunity to thank those of you who have joined in supporting the *OUT/LOOK* Foundation, and to encourage everyone else to consider becoming a sustainer, or to make another contribution to *OUT/LOOK* — perhaps to defer the costs of the money we lost due to the rejection of the Burroughs Wellcome ad, to support our Writers & Artist Fund, to earmark funds for our conversion to recycled paper, or simply to make a donation. All are welcome and appreciated.



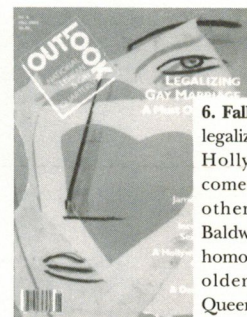
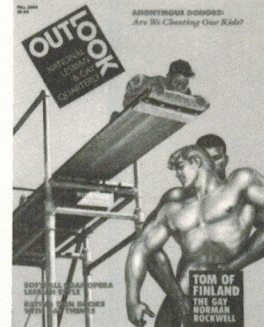
2. Summer 1988: Do addiction programs sap our political vitality?; Why gay leaders don't last; comics in the closet; Robert Patrick's one-act AIDS comedy; is the Names Quilt art?; locating ourselves in the history of sexuality.



5. Summer 1989: House music's gay Black roots; lesbians working on AIDS; messages to the movement twenty years after Stonewall; lesbian and gay children of politicians; the allure of anonymous "straight" sex; East Germany faces its past; Queery Results: Questions for Couples.



3. Fall 1988: AIDS and the meaning of natural disaster; handling the anonymous donor question; a guide to young adult books with gay themes; fiction by Dorothy Allison; dyke softball comes out; an appreciation of Tom of Finland; Queery Results: Work & Career.

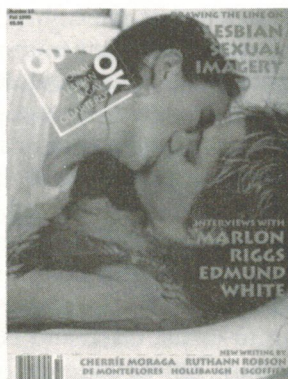


6. Fall 1989: Debate on legalizing gay marriage; Hollywood Squares comes out; incest and other taboos; James Baldwin's lost essay on homosexuality; growing older in the desert; Queery Results: Reader Demographics.

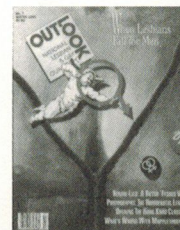
"When future historians want to know about gay and lesbian culture in the latter part of the twentieth century . . . they'll be looking at OUT/LOOK."

Kate Walter, *The Nation*.

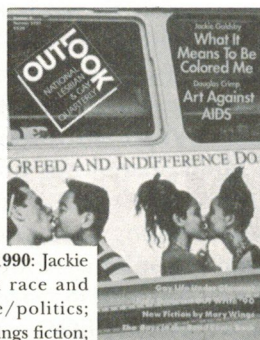
10. Fall 1990: Kiss & Tell: reactions to sexually explicit lesbian images; interviews with Edmund White and Marlon Riggs; Europe 1992: what does it mean for gay men & lesbians?; Inside the Ivory Closet: gay studies and the community; Hollibaugh and de Monteflores on writing; Queery Results: Coming Out.



7. Winter 1990: Jan Clausen: when lesbians fall for men; gay images in photography; opening the Hong Kong closet; sex, lies and penetration: a butch 'fesses up; medieval origins of antisexual attitudes; Queery Results: When Violence Strikes.



9. Summer 1990: Jackie Goldsby on race and gay culture/politics; new Mary Wings fiction; perestroika: Soviet attitudes about homosexuality & AIDS; Douglas Crimp's Art Acts UP; The Boys in the Band come back; Queery Results: Chores.



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# Reclaiming the Lesbian Body: Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years*

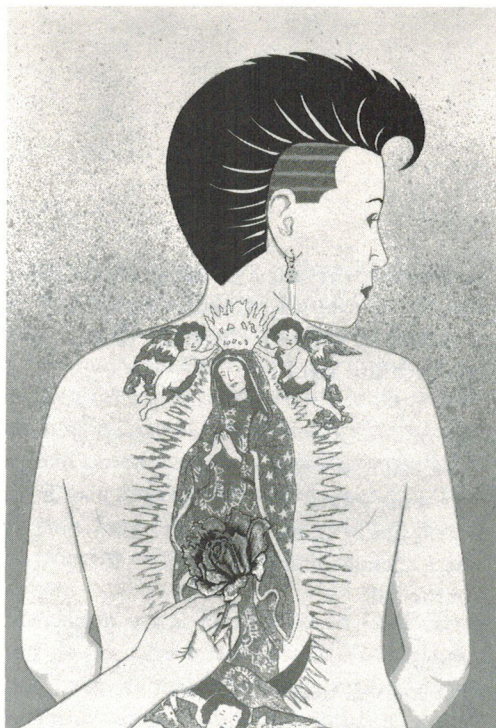
Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano

In her writing, Cherríe Moraga enacts an impossible scenario: to give voice and visibility to that which has been erased and silenced. Constructed as radically other by the tradition that defines literary authority as white, male, privileged, heterosexual, and culturally dominant, Moraga opens up a space in her writing for a subjectivity that is shaped "across and through a multiplicity of discourses in relation to the unified female subject of much white feminist theory."<sup>1</sup> As Norma Alarcón points out, many of the positions from which the Chicana subject speaks are occupied in relation to racial, class, and cultural conflicts and divisions, as well as gender ones.

What is often left out in theorizing this multiple subject is the question of sexual practice. It is imperative that the renewed emphasis on race, culture, and class as categories of subject formation and oppression not be accomplished at the expense of lesbian and gay sexuality. The mapping of subjectivity and oppression in Moraga's writing is the cartography of lesbian desire, the unspeakable speaking and unrepresentable desire of the lesbian subject of *color*, the Chicana *lesbian*.

The sexual specificity of Moraga's concerns is already visible in the title of her book, *Loving in the War Years*.<sup>2</sup> The Chicana lesbian is embattled not only on the streets but also on the field of representation. The attempt to





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make visible what has always been invisible and to say what has never been said (*"lo que nunca pasó por sus labios"*) involves both the textual construction of the lesbian body and lesbian desire and the destruction of conventional codes that govern the representation of female desire and the female body as object of male heterosexual desire.

But heterosexism and homophobia are not just "out there"; Chicana lesbians are besieged from within as well as from without. They struggle with the internalization of oppressive attitudes and representational codes in the area of sexuality as well as those of race, culture, and class. The Chicana lesbian writing subject cannot inhabit a "pure" place of opposition or rejection from which she can construct or destroy the representation of female desire and the female body. Lesbian desire and the lesbian body themselves become the field of negotiation and (de)construction, Gloria Anzaldúa's "borderland," the "third space" of flux and translation.<sup>3</sup>

While *Loving in the War Years* engages the contradictory and complex multiplicity of a Chicana lesbian subject in many different ways, I would like to focus on the representation of the body as the site of the struggle to represent a Chicana lesbian desire. In this sense Moraga's writing embodies a "sex-

ual/textual" project that disrupts the dualisms between mind and body, writing and desire. This concern is not limited to *Loving in the War Years*, but runs through all her writing. For example, in the preface to *This Bridge Called My Back*, she develops the image of the title: "How can we — this time — not use our bodies to be thrown over a river of tormented history to bridge the gap?"<sup>4</sup>

This bridge-body is rarely recuperated in its entirety in the poems of *Loving in the War Years*, but rather in fragments. Virtually every poem in the collection hinges on some part of the body: "the part of the eye/that is not eye at all/but hole" in "Fear, a Love Poem" (33), "the very old wound in me/between my legs" in "Passage" (44). Moraga's poetry constantly constructs, deconstructs, and reconstructs the entire female body in the recognition of how it has been appropriated and in the attempt to reclaim it. "The Voices of the Fallers" uses the metaphor of falling to explore the potentially fatal perils of lesbian existence:

I was born queer with the dream  
of falling  
the small sack of my body  
dropping  
off a ledge  
suddenly.



One by one, the parts of the body fragment from the whole and fall through space, to reassemble only in "dead/silent/collision/with the sand":

*Listen.*

Can you hear my mouth crack  
open the sound  
of my lips bending  
back against the force  
of the fall?

*Listen.*

Put your ear deep  
down  
through the opening  
of my throat and  
*listen.*

... her shoulder first  
tumbling  
off  
the cliff the legs  
following  
over  
her head ...

her body's  
dead

silent

collision  
with the sand.

The need to speak the unspoken ("trying to make it be said, to come out of your mouth") lends special weight to images of the mouth, tongue, lips, and throat.<sup>5</sup> In her interview with Moraga, Mirtha Quintanales connects the fundamental importance of this task with the pervasive imagery of mouths, lips, and throats in Moraga's writing, especially her poetry. The mouth plays a crucial role in Moraga's sexual/textual project, fusing two taboo activities, female speaking and lesbian sexuality. The mouth and the cunt elide into

each other, both represented as organs of speech and sex. In this context of speech/sex, the lesbian body is "whole":

Stretching my legs and imagination so open  
to feel my whole body cradled  
by the movement of her mouth, the mouth  
of her thighs rising and falling, her arms  
her kiss, all the parts of her open  
like lips moving, talking me into loving.  
(140)

Moraga develops this connection further at the end of the essay, "A Long Line of Vendidas":

In recent months, I have had a recurring dream that my mouth is too big to close; that is, the outside of my mouth, my lips, cannot contain the inside — teeth, tongue, gums, throat. I am coming out of my mouth, so to speak ...

I say to my friends as I drive down 91 South, "The Mouth is like a cunt."

La boca spreads its legs open to talk, open to attack. "I am a lesbian. And I am a Chicana," I say to the men and women at the conference. I watch their faces twist up on me. "These are two inseparable facts of my life. I can't talk or write about one without the other."

My mouth cannot be controlled. It will flap in the wind like legs in sex, not driven by the mind. It's as if la boca were centered on el centro del corazón, not in the head at all. The same place where the cunt beats.

*And there is a woman coming out of her mouth.*

*Hay una mujer que viene de la boca.* (142)

This remarkable passage, as the poem quoted before it, reconstructs the lesbian's body and redistributes her anatomy, decentering the mind and the head and locating "la boca" (newly constructed as "mouth/cunt") in the heart. In the process the text reveals the constructedness not only of our attitudes about our bodies, but of our very bodies themselves.



In "Anatomy Lesson," the heart is associated with the dangers of "loving in the war years," as expressed in the title poem: "maintaining/this war time morality/where being queer/and female is as rude/as we can get" (30). The heart is a detachable piece of the anatomy that must be placed in the back pocket "when entering a room full of soldiers who fear hearts" (68). The power of the absent heart makes the soldiers beg to see "what it is they fear they fear." But the poetic voice warns against seduction, underwriting the strategy of self-protection as long as those who fear also wear guns: "Hang onto your heart./ Ask them first what they'll give up to see it./ Tell them that they can begin with their arms./ Only then will you begin to negotiate."

The displacing of the head in favor of the heart as center and throne of speech/sexuality operates within the mind/body duality that permeates Western culture. Besides the project of reconstruction and recuperation of the female body, the representation of the body in pieces in Moraga's writing also comments on the ways women are trained to separate from their bodies, site of base impulses and decay in patriarchal discourses.

In other texts in *Loving in the War Years*, the pain of the body in pieces is associated with the conflicted relationship between the writing subject and her culture, particularly the faith of the women in her culture and her family. In a dream, her grandmother appears to her

outside la iglesia. Standing in front as she used to do after la misa ... She shows me her leg which has been operated on. The wound is like a huge crater in her calf — crusted, open, a gaping wound. (iii-iv)

In the introduction, the writing subject describes how the women who have come to see the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe in Mexico cling to the handrail of the moving sidewalk,

their hips banging up against the railing over and over again as it tried to force them off and away. They stayed. In spite of the machine. They had come to spend their time with La Virgen. I left the church in tears, knowing how for so many years I had closed my heart to the passionate pull of such faith that promised no end to the pain. I grew white. Fought to free myself from my culture's claim on me. (ii)

Moraga's work is steeped in Catholicism, but as she says in the preface to *Bridge*, she does not embrace the resigned faith of institutional religion, but the "faith of activists" that "we have the power to ... change our lives" (xviii).

At the same time, a desire to believe in the possibility of faithfulness to one another as women, as Chicanas, provides a counterbalance to the fear of betrayal by women. In "The Pilgrimage," the poetic voice makes the connection between the mother's faith and the daughter's faith in a vision of women bonding. The translation of the concept of faith from one context to another is accomplished through the oral tradition — the mother's tongue ("hay una mujer que viene de la boca") — and through writing itself, the act of appropriating the bleeding and "brown knotted knees":

She saw women  
maybe the first time  
when they had streamed in long  
broken  
single file  
out from her mother's tongue —  
"En México, las mujeres crawl  
on their hands and knees  
to the basilica door.  
This proves their faith."

The brown knotted knees were hers  
in her dreaming, she wondered  
where in the journey  
would the dusty knees begin  
to crack,  
would the red blood of the women  
stain the grey bone of the road. (18)



In "Raw Experience" the body fragments into "hands," "face," and "mouth" as the poetic voice tries to "catch up/inhabit my body/again" (48-49). Here, as in the description of the women whose hips bang against the railing at the basilica, what separates her from her body and the bodies of the women of her culture is her "whiteness." Much of the book is an account of a reconnection with "brownness," her own, her mother's, that of mestizas and women of color.

As is characteristic of her handling of other body parts, the meaning of "skin" is not fixed, but slides between that of badge of difference and that of porous boundary through which connections can be made. In "It Got Her Over," her skin

had turned on her  
...  
In the light of Black  
women and children  
beaten/hanged/raped/  
...

Her skin had turned  
in the light of these things.  
Stuck to her now  
like a flat immovable paste  
spread grey over a life.

Still,  
*it got her over.* (69-70)

Even though white-skin privilege has helped her survive "in the war years," it cannot help her "get over" her shame at "guilt by association/complicity to the crime":

recently taken to blushing  
as if the blood wanted  
to swallow  
the flesh.

...

*See this face?*

Wearing it like an accident  
of birth.

It was  
a scar sealing up  
a woman, now darkened  
by desire. (71)

In "La Güera," "looking white" both afforded privilege and separated her from her mother until the oppression she experienced by acknowledging her lesbianism connected her with her mother's own silence and oppression (52)

By representing skin color as something she has or becomes rather than as an essence, Moraga displays the constructedness of "race" in much the same way as her representation of the body undermines an essentialist reading. This is what allows her to write "My brother's sex was white. Mine, brown" (90). If she "grew white" she can also "go brown," as in "For the Color of My Mother": "I am a white girl gone brown to the blood color of my mother/speaking for her" (60). Skin can establish boundaries and separation: "I want to feel/your touch outside/my body, on the surface/of my skin./I want to know, for sure,/where you leave off/and I begin" (35). But it is also a "boundary" in Anzaldúa's sense of a place where two edges meet and mingle:

seeing yourself for the first time  
in the body of this sister

...  
like you whom  
you've taken in  
under your bruised wing

...  
taking all this under your wing  
letting it wrestle there  
into your skin  
changing you. (27-28)

In "Winter of Oppression, 1982," it is the whiteness of the bodies of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust that provides the shock loosening the conceptual moorage of "dark" and "white." Here, whiteness allows the perception of "a colored kind of white people" and the impossibility of either



choosing or forgetting, of simply falling back "upon rehearsed racial memory" (74-75). While retaining a sense of the specificity of her own oppression as a Chicana lesbian, the writing subject struggles to make the connections with other kinds of oppression:

I work to remember  
what I never dreamed possible  
what my consciousness could never  
contrive.

Whoever I am

I must believe  
I am not  
and will never be  
the only one who suffers. (75-76)

The dismantling and recomposition of the lesbian body in Moraga's writing is part of a process of making sense out of the rifts and splits of what Anzaldúa calls our "shifting and multiple identity" (vii). I stress the "process of making sense" rather than the production of a fixed meaning, for it is the multiplicity of the meanings that attach to the parts and the whole of the lesbian body/text that allows for such diverse connections to be made, from "a colored kind of white people" to the cluster of links par-

ticularly significant to this process: the tongue that both speaks and caresses. This image connotes the connection with the mother('s) tongue and the possibility that something may not be said but still be heard, just as the mouth gagged in sex still speaks:

la lengua que necesito  
para hablar  
es la misma que uso  
para acariciar

tú sabes.  
you know the feel of woman  
lost en su boca  
amordazada

it has always been like this.

profundo y sencillo  
lo que nunca  
pasó  
por sus labios  
but was  
utterly  
utterly  
heard. (149)

An extended version of this article will appear in *Chicana Lesbians*, Ed. Carla Trujillo (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1991).

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Norma Alarcón, "The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism," in *Making Face, Making Soul/ Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1990), pp. 356-369.

<sup>2</sup> Cherrie Moraga, *Loving in the War Years. Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (Boston: South End Press, 1983). Future references will be cited in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987); Homi Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory," *New Formations* 5 (Summer 1988), pp.10-11.

<sup>4</sup> eds. Cherrie Moraga & Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, Ma.: Persephone Press, 1981; republished by Kitchen Table Press, New York, 1983), p. xv.

<sup>5</sup> Mirtha N. Quintanales, "Loving in the War Years: An Interview with Cherrie Moraga," *off our backs* (January 1985), pp. 12-13.



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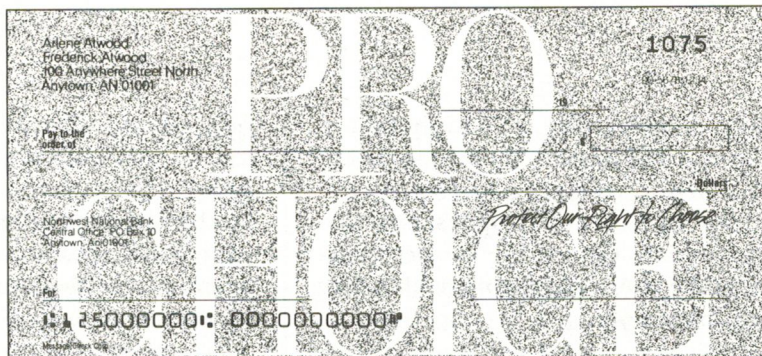
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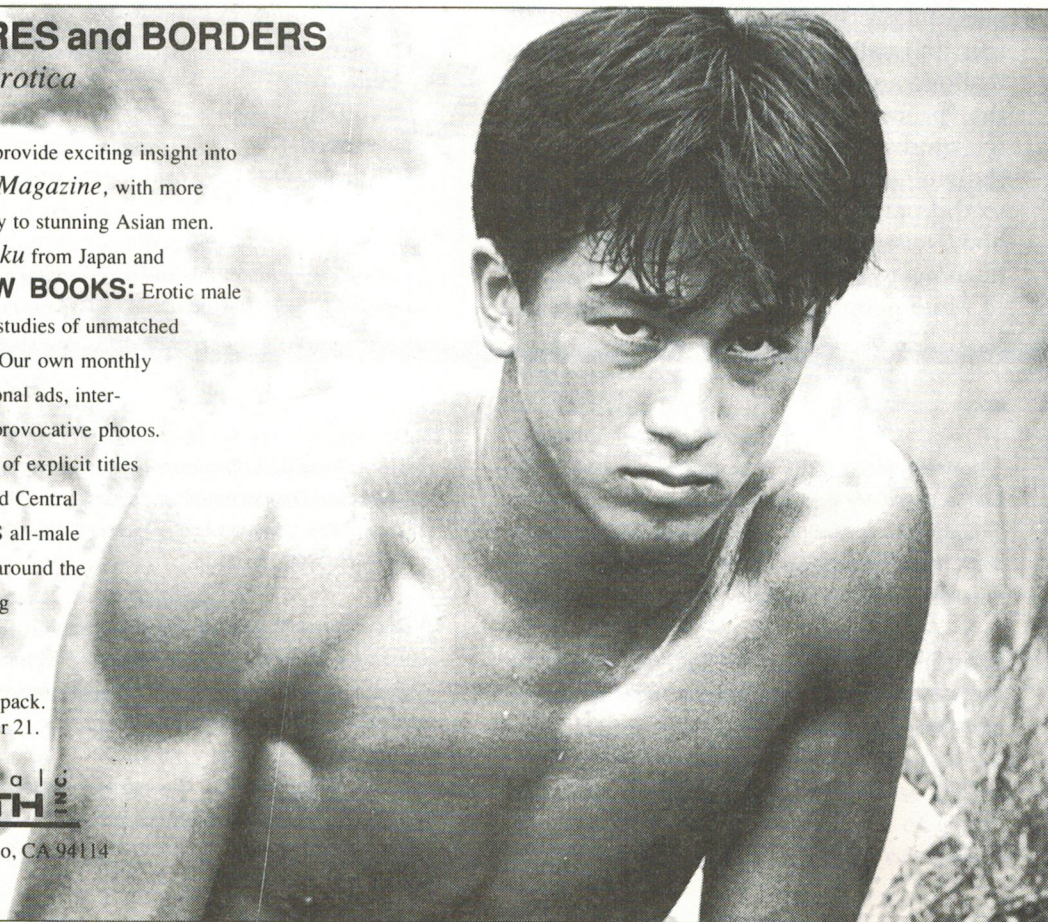
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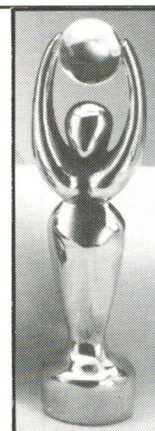
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# classifieds

## announcements

**Bi-national, Bi-cultural Lesbian Anthology** — Anthology being prepared on lesbian partnerships across nations, cultures. Guidelines: Kate Pickford, #204 European Haitsu 15 Ban-Kan, Shinade 21, Yawata, Kyoto 614, Japan.

**Lesbian Visual Art and Artists** — Soliciting ideas, information, slides, xeroxes, and copies of articles for lectures and book on lesbian artists. Include SASE for any return material. Tee Corinne, PO Box 278, Wolf Creek, OR 97497.

**Call for Submissions** — Anthology on women exploring the mind/body relationship seeks writings based on personal experiences. Can include illness, child abuse, spirituality, sexuality, childbirth, eating, aging, etc. Deadline: July 1991. NO manuscripts. SASE FOR GUIDELINES. A. Stevens, 50 Pleasant St. 9E, Brookline, MA 02146.

**Anthology on lesbian and gay marriage** — the pros and cons. Interviewing couples who have been together at least 8 years and have had a public commitment ceremony and couples who don't believe in marriage. Critical essays also accepted. Contact Suzanne Asher, 3929 Rhoda Avenue, Oakland, CA 94602 (415) 530-7559.

**Qu'Art** — call for entries. 1st Annual Invitational Gay Pride Queer Art (Qu'Art) Show. **QRhyme** — call for submissions. Poetry portfolio to be compiled in tandem with Qu'Art Show. The purpose of this exhibit/portfolio is to demonstrate the cultural diversity of the Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual artists'/poets' community and the range of concerns addressed in their work. People of color and women are especially encouraged to participate. Sponsored by Queer Nation/Chicago. Send slides or up to

five poems with resume/statement/SASE by April 15th. You will be notified by the first week of May; probable publication of poetry anthology by June. \$15 donation to Queer Nation to help underwrite cost of show/portfolio. Mail to: Qu'Art/QRhyme, c/o N. Mason, 2049 West Superior, Chicago, IL 60612-1313.

## assistance needed

**LESBIAN ARCHIVES OF PARIS** — After five years collecting and documenting French lesbian history, culture and politics, the Lesbian Archives of Paris is facing eviction. New accommodations are needed in order to continue to make this rich collection of documents available. We urgently need your contributions. Mail to: Archives lesbiennes, BP 362, 75526 Paris II, France, Tel.48-05-25-89.

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## groups

Correspond with gay men & lesbians in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and Finland. **REPORTER**, the largest gay/lesbian monthly in Scandinavia, will run your correspondence for free (50 word limit). **REPORTER**, Box 170, S-101 23 Stockholm, Sweden.

**Rutgers Gay/Lesbian Alumni/ae**. RU a RUTGERS grad? For newsletter or information, write: R-GALA, Box 160, New Brunswick, NJ 08903.

## home exchange

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## publications

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**ENTRE NOUS**: Monthly calendar/newsletter for Bay Area lesbians. PO Box 70933, Sunnyvale, CA 94086, for free sample. Subs. \$12/year.

**TEN PERCENT REVUE** script newly published: \$5.25; cassette: \$9.75. Includes postage. Aboveground Records, Box 2233, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

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*to place an announcement/classified ad* — Rates: per word: \$1.50; per bold word: \$2.00. 10% discount for four-issue placement. **Deadline**: Copy must be received by April 2, 1991 for Summer 1991, Issue 13. **Et Cetera**: All ads must be prepaid. Post Office boxes, phone numbers, zip codes, abbreviations and initials count as one word. Hyphenated words count as two. Include your phone number with your order. **No personals**. Send ad copy and payment to: OUT/LOOK Classifieds, 2940 16th Street, Suite 319, San Francisco, CA 94103.



# Race and Relationships

Gary Rocchio

QUEERY

In this issue's Queery, we are interested in learning more about gay and lesbian relationships, particularly as they relate to race. It is important to us that you respond to this survey even if you are not currently in a relationship. The results from this Queery will be published in a future issue of *OUT/LOOK*. As always, responses to the survey are completely anonymous.

**1. What is your current relationship status? (please circle number)**

- 1 Have a lover of same race
- 2 Have a lover of different race
- 3 Do not currently have a lover

**2. Which best describes your race and your lover's race?**

You \_\_\_\_\_ Your lover \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 Asian/Pacific Islander
- 2 African American
- 3 Hispanic/Latin
- 4 Native American
- 5 European American
- 6 Mixed race

7 Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Your \_\_\_\_\_

lover \_\_\_\_\_

(If you do not currently have a lover, please skip to #13. If you are not currently in an interracial relationship, skip to #5.)

**3. How often do you and your lover discuss interracial issues?**

- 1 Always
- 2 Often
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Seldom
- 5 Never

**4. What has been the impact of racial differences on your relationship?**

- 1 Extremely positive
- 2 Somewhat positive
- 3 Neither positive nor negative
- 4 Somewhat negative
- 5 Extremely negative

**5. How long have you been lovers? \_\_\_\_\_ years or \_\_\_\_\_ less than 1 yr**

**6. Where did you meet your lover?**

- 1 Through work
- 2 Through friends
- 3 School
- 4 Organizational activities
- 5 Social event or party
- 6 Classified ad or dating service
- 7 Bar
- 8 Public cruise area
- 9 Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**7. How similar are your and your lover's political views?**

- 1 Extremely similar
- 2 Very similar
- 3 Somewhat similar
- 4 Not very similar
- 5 Not at all similar

**8. How similar are you and your lover's hobbies?**

- 1 Extremely similar
- 2 Very similar
- 3 Somewhat similar
- 4 Not very similar
- 5 Not at all similar

**9. To what extent do the following items cause conflict in your relationship?**

Amount of Conflict

None Low High

- |                             | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Household chores:        |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| b. Finances:                |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| c. Friends:                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| d. Your lover's relatives:  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| e. Your relatives:          |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| f. Food preferences:        |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| g. Political views:         |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| h. Religious views:         |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| i. Age differences:         |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| j. Educational differences: |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| k. Language differences:    |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| l. Cultural differences:    |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| m. Other (please specify):  |   |   |   |   |   |   |

**10. Which one of the above items creates the most friction (use letter): \_\_\_\_\_**

**11. Circle the statement that best describes decision-making in your current relationship?**

- 1 My lover makes most of the decisions
- 2 We are equally involved in making decisions
- 3 I make most of the decisions

**12. Rate your level of satisfaction with your sexual relationship:**

- 1 Extremely satisfied
- 2 Very satisfied
- 3 Somewhat satisfied
- 4 Not very satisfied
- 5 Not at all satisfied

**13. Not counting your current relationship (if any), have you ever had: (circle all that apply)**

- 1 A lover of your own race
- 2 A lover of a different race

**14. What percentage of your previous lover relationships were interracial? \_\_\_\_\_%**  
(If none, enter "0")

**15. How important is someone's race when you are considering a potential lover relationship?**

- 1 Extremely important
- 2 Very important
- 3 Somewhat important
- 4 Not very important
- 5 Not at all important

**16. If you were looking for a lover relationship, would you join a dating service or place a personal ad in a publication?**

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

(If no, please skip to #19)

**17. Would you specify the race of the person(s) you would like to meet?**

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

**18. Would you specify your race?**

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

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OUT/LOOK spring 1991



**19. If you were considering entering into a relationship, which of the following racial groups would you definitely consider dating?**

(Circle all that apply)

- 1 Asian/Pacific Islander
- 2 African American
- 3 Hispanic/Latin
- 4 Native American
- 5 European American
- 6 Mixed race
- 7 Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**20. How has your attraction to people of your own race changed over the past five years?**

- 1 Increased significantly
- 2 Increased somewhat
- 3 Has not changed
- 4 Decreased somewhat
- 5 Decreased significantly

**21. What percentage of your friends are in interracial relationships?** \_\_\_\_\_ %

**22. How sexually attracted are you to people according to race?**

- 1 Exclusively attracted to races other than my own
- 2 Mostly attracted to other races
- 3 Equally attracted to my own and other races
- 4 Mostly attracted to my own race
- 5 Exclusively attracted to my own race

## DEMOGRAPHICS

**23. Which best describes you?**

You \_\_\_\_\_ Your lover \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 Gay or lesbian
- 2 Bisexual
- 3 Heterosexual
- 4 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**24. What is your gender?**

You \_\_\_\_\_ Your lover \_\_\_\_\_

**25. What is your age?**

You \_\_\_\_\_ Your lover \_\_\_\_\_

**26. What is the highest level of formal education that you and your lover have completed?**

You \_\_\_\_\_ Your lover \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 Attended high school
- 2 Graduated from high school
- 3 Attended college
- 4 Graduated from college
- 5 Post-graduate without degree
- 6 Post-graduate degree

**27. Please estimate your and your lover's total personal income before taxes for 1990:**

You \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Your lover \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**28. Were you and your lover born in the USA?**

You \_\_\_\_\_ Your lover \_\_\_\_\_

**29. If not born in the USA, approximately how many years have you and your lover lived in the USA?**

You \_\_\_\_\_ years  
Your lover \_\_\_\_\_ years

**30. Where do you currently live?**

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State/Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Reader: We would love to hear more from you about this issue! Please use a separate piece of paper to tell us about your interracial relationship experiences or other gay/lesbian-related racial issues you would like us to know about. Thank you—Surveys Director.

Please  
Place  
Stamp  
Here

**OUT/LOOK SURVEY #12**

2940 16TH STREET, SUITE 319

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# You do *What?* Our Readers Kiss and Tell

## Summary of Findings

The Fall 1990 Queery asked readers to rank themselves on the Kinsey Scale\* and describe the various sexual techniques they used to achieve orgasm. The Kinsey Scale ranks people's sexual behavior from 0 (exclusively heterosexual experiences) to 6 (exclusively homosexual experiences). The three areas in which respondents were asked to rank their experiences over the past five years were: Contacts (sexual contacts with other people — with or without experiencing orgasms); Orgasms (sexual activities resulting in orgasms); Fantasies (the content of sexual fantasies).

A total of 638 people responded

to this Queery: 54% of whom were women and 46% men. The average age of respondents was 34.3 (32.7 for women, 36.2 for men). On average, both men and women reported almost exclusively homosexual experiences. Women, however, reported experiencing slightly more heterosexual fantasies than men. The average Kinsey scale ratings for our readers are reported in Figure 1 below.

These results are consistent with how people identified themselves. Most of the respondents (86%) identified themselves as lesbian/gay. Only 12% said they were bisexual. One percent indicated they were heterosexual. Those who self-identified as lesbian/gay

tended to be on the homosexual side of the scale; bisexuals tended to be in the middle of the scale. More women than men identified themselves as bisexual (14% and 9%, respectively).

Respondents were also asked to rank the frequency with which they have achieved orgasm over the past 12 months by using various sexual techniques. Masturbation was the leading way orgasm was achieved for both men and women: oral-genital contact and "homosexual intercourse" were close seconds. Figure 2 reports the average ratings for our readers.

## About the Respondents

There was little racial diversity among respondents. Ninety percent are white, 4% Hispanic/Latin, 2% Asian, 2% Black, and 1% Native American. The majority of respondents are very well educated. Forty-one percent have a graduate or professional degree. Another 39% have a college degree or some graduate or professional training. Sixteen percent have some college experience and 4% have less than a college education. The religious background of respondents was mixed. Although 44% reported that they did not have a current religious affiliation, almost half (49%) said they did. Forty-one percent of which reported a Protestant background, followed by Catholic (30%), Jewish (13%), and other religious backgrounds (5%). Nine percent said they did not have a religious background and 2% did not respond.

The average annual individual income for women was \$30,181 and \$35,255 for men.

Copies of OUT/LOOK's complete survey results and tabulations are available by sending \$15 (check made out to OUT/LOOK) to: Surveys, OUT/LOOK, 2940 16th St., suite 319, San Francisco, CA 94103.

Figure 1

### The Kinsey Scale\*

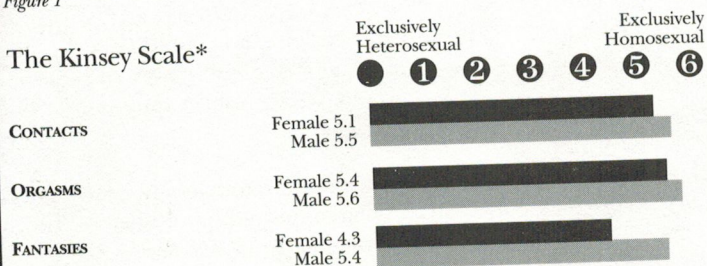
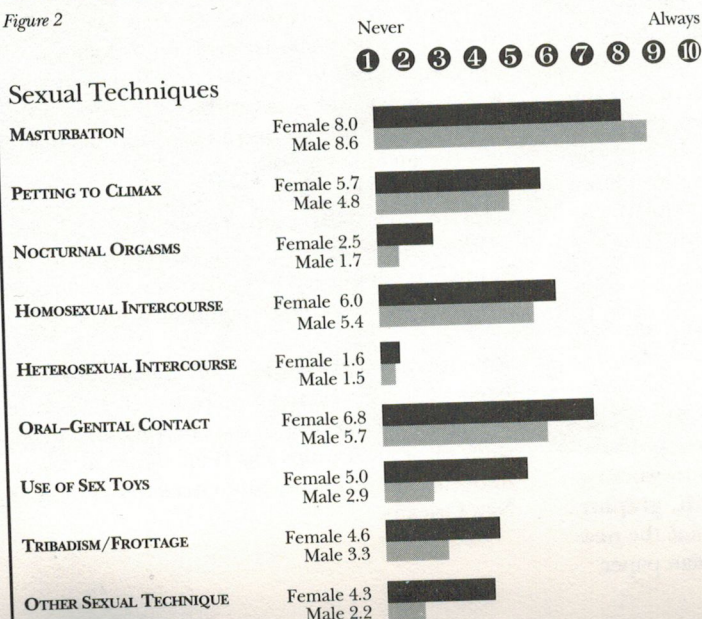


Figure 2

### Sexual Techniques



\*The Kinsey Scale was used as a measurement tool for this survey. The Kinsey Institute was not involved in the development of this Queery.



Tomás Almaguer (*Race and its Discontents at OUT/LOOK*) lives in Berkeley, California with his two teenaged sons. He teaches sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, where he also raises hell with white folks.

Pablo Bautista (*America is in the Hard-on*) studies design and Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University. He lives with his family and is a member of the Gay Asian Pacific Alliance.

Brian E. Bengtson (*poem*) was born in Omaha, Nebraska two years before Woodstock. He studied theater at the Omaha Magic Theatre for three years and currently lives in New Orleans, Louisiana, with a good ol' Cajun boy.

José María Covarrubias (*Recuento de Afinidades*) is a curator of art exhibitions and lives in Mexico City, Mexico.

Kaila Compton (*The Western Union Lady*) is a graduate student at Harvard University. She was one of the organizers of the recent Harvard Lesbian and Gay Studies Conference.

Charles Fernández (*Undocumented Aliens in the Queer Nation*) is an activist who lives in New York City. He and Manolo Guzman are currently working on an anthology of Latino gay male writings.

L. K. FitzSimmons (*You're not a son of a bitch like he is*) graduated from University of California, Berkeley in May 1990. He can often be found at San Francisco's Club Uranus on Sunday nights.

Ramón García (*Close Call*) is a product of Mexican Catholicism, California's Central Valley, the "magical realism" of the Chicano family and the University of California. As a child he wondered why his family did not resemble "The Brady Bunch" in any way. Today he knows why, but it is no longer his main concern.

Marc Geller (*inside cover photograph*) is a San Francisco based freelance photographer for *The Advocate*, *Women's Day*, and *Popular Science*.

Masha Gessen (*Comrade in Arms*) is a political refugee from the Soviet Union, currently working in New York as a freelance journalist, graphic designer, and editor of *Tema International*, the new US edition of the Moscow gay and lesbian paper.

Ester Hernandez (*La Ofrenda*) is an artist and activist internationally renowned for her images of women. She currently lives in San Francisco.

Yoel H. Kahn (*Hannah, Must You Have A Child?*) is Rabbi of Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, San Francisco.

Kris Kovick, whose illustrations grace this issue's letters section, describes herself as "shy, self-effacing, and mono-maniacal."

Eileen Myles (*Lesbian Expressionism*) lives in New York City. Her new book of poems, *Not Me* is published by *Semiotext(e)*.

Marlon Riggs (*Ruminations of a Snap Queen*) wrote and directed the award-winning films *Ethnic Notions* and *Tongues Untied*. He teaches in the Journalism Department at the University of California, Berkeley.

Arlene Stein (*Androgyny Goes Pop*) is a doctoral student in sociology, an editor of OUT/LOOK, and a closet groupie. She is editing an anthology of essays on contemporary lesbian culture to be published by E.P. Dutton.

Julie Weigel is an illustrator, designer, and actress. Her imagery has appeared in an eclectic array of publications ranging from *The Kansas City Star* to *Beef Magazine*.

Kt. Vermeulen (*A Family Comes Out*) lives in New York City, where she is finishing a doctorate in Special Education at Columbia University. She writes poetry and is organizing a support group for lesbian and gay parents of children with life-threatening illnesses.

Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano (*Reclaiming the Lesbian Body*) has been an Associate Professor of Romance Languages and Comparative Literature at the University of Washington since 1974.

Roberta Yusba (*Odd Girls and Strange Sisters*) has been a member of the San Francisco Lesbian & Gay History Project since the late 1970s. Her slide show on lesbian pulps has been shown at several national conferences. She currently resides in New Orleans.









portfolio feature  
**Recuento de afinidades**

Ricardo Anguía  
El Ilegue de un trolebús a un pesero  
(Trolleybus Hitting on a Taxi Van)

