

OUTLOOK

NATIONAL
LESBIAN
& GAY
QUARTERLY

BIRTH OF A QUEER NATION

HOWARD CRUSE
ON DOONESBURY

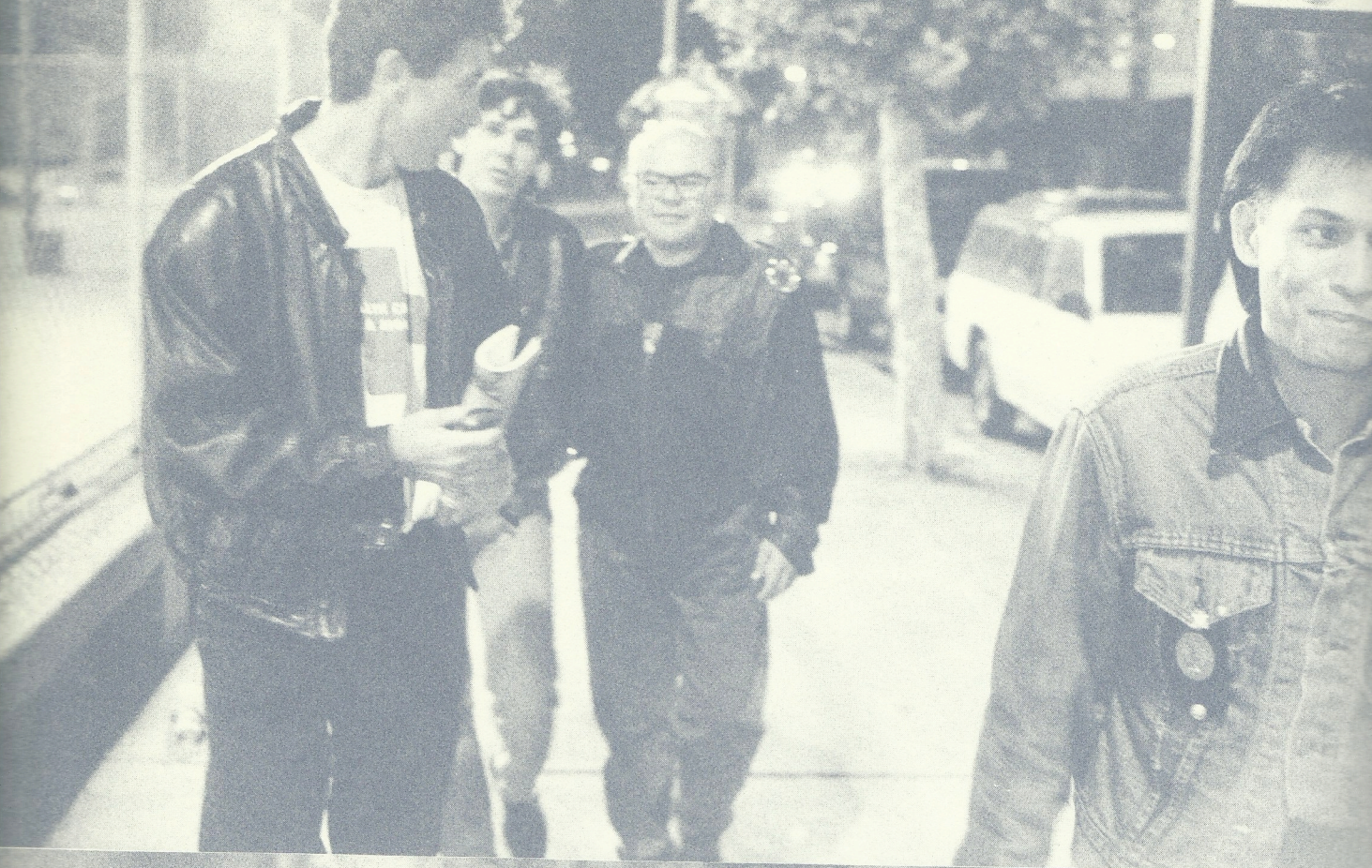
LESBIAN SEX/GAY SEX
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

DOS MUJERES
MEXICO'S BEST SELLING
LESBIAN NOVEL

NIGHT AT A
J/O CLUB

QUEER NATION





SUBSCRIBE & SAVE



RAPE
IS A MAN'S
ISSUE
DEFINITION

QUEER
NATION
CISCO

11

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publishers

Jeffrey Escoffier Kim Klausner

executive editor art director

Jan Zita Grover Dominic Cappello

editors

Francisco X. Alarcón Tomás Aimaguer

Allan Bérubé Rudiger Busto

Dominic Cappello Debra Chasnoff

Ken Dixon Jeffrey Escoffier

Rebecca Isaacs Ming-Yéung Lu

Veneita Porter Ariane Stein

poetry editor

Francisco X. Alarcón

contributing poetry editors

Leanne Dornes David Drott

essays

Leanne Dornes Rudiger Busto

book reviews essayist

Francisco X. Alarcón

developmental director

Francisco X. Alarcón

production editor

Francisco X. Alarcón

letterbox editor

Francisco X. Alarcón

advertising

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I'VE worked at OUT/LOOK less than five months, but I can already see two patterns here that long-timers confirm and that I think you should also know about. Both of them are related to scarcities—one cultural and one material.

I

Reading through the back files of letters to the magazine as well as the ones we currently receive, I am struck by the intensity of so many readers' outrage, fury, and sense of betrayal over articles and artwork that do not reflect their own sense of how lesbian or gay life is or should be. Readers who claim that they intend to burn a particular issue or that we are betraying gay people to bashers and homophobes by fueling prejudices have their own ideas about what we should be publishing but aren't. People who write to tell us they are canceling subscriptions because an illustration or feature is inconsistent with their own most cherished values or practices are not airing arbitrary grievances—they're telling us that the texts and images that we publish are not their own. And in the absence of representations that mirror, affirm, or shed light on their own lives, they find nothing personally familiar or useful in our pages.

What seems undeniable is that with the overall scarcity of publications producing thoughtful representations of important issues in lesbians' and gay men's lives, each one of those that we publish bears a burden of read-

ers' expectations far in excess of what it can bear. Those of us who for any reason—e.g., our sexuality, our race, our age, our abilities, our gender—are consistently un-represented, under-represented, or mis-represented* have enormous stakes in the terms in which our issues get addressed. In effect, implicit in readers' expectations of those forty-plus articles we manage to publish at OUT/LOOK each year is that each of them should make up for the scarcity of subtle, thorough, and inclusive representations of lesbians and gay men in all other publications.

Unhappily, these are expectations that we cannot meet. I see it in your letters: the sense of betrayal that an article, a photograph is not the one that speaks to your own nuanced sense of how a topic should be handled. And as each individual's expectations fail to be satisfied by the very few representations we are able to publish, the anger, the sense of being denied something one wants and needs, grows. This is one kind of scarcity at OUT/LOOK.

II

Everyone working here has had the experience of being told, "You're so slick, — You must have a huge staff." Readers who see our offices are usually stunned by our three cluttered and modest rooms at the corner of Capp and 16th Streets—a corner we share with a thriving drug trade and street prostitution. Our "huge staff" consists of one half-time paid editorial employee (me), a half-time art

director (Dominic Cappello), a designer brought in for a few weeks of production work each quarter (J. Michael Marriner), two half-time publishers (Jeffrey Escoffier and Kim Klausner), a three-quarters-time publisher's assistant (Kelly Lee), and a quarter-time subscription manager (Fred Morris). Everything else involved in putting out our 90-page quarterly magazine—sorting and answering mail; logging contributions; soliciting,

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editing, approving articles; copy-
editing; proofreading; finding
illustrations; organizing the
magazines and books sent to us;
organizing and producing
OUT/LOOK Write, the writers' confer-
ence that took place last March
and will again in March 1991—is
made possible by our magnificent volun-
teers, including the editorial
board and the Foundation's
directors.

We have three Macintosh com-
puters in our office, two of them
on loan from employees and
volunteers. The entire magazine
is produced on these three
machines. We have no copier or
fax machine, but luckily one of
the other not-for-profits in the
building allows us to rent time
on theirs. We have only two
phone lines.

Why am I telling you this? My
assumption is that most of this
will be news to you, as it has
been to almost all the readers I
have talked with. Because
OUT/LOOK has slick color cov-
ers, clean design, and comes out
regularly, readers assume that
such a confident-looking publi-
cation flows from abundance. I
want you to know that it flows
instead from superhuman effort
on the part of volunteers willing
to work twenty hours a week for
the three weeks preceding each
issue's publication, from the
staggering surplus of unpaid
hours that its part-time paid
staff put into each issue, from
people willing to donate their
own belongings and to forgo
employment benefits like pen-
sions and fully paid health plans
just to get the magazine out. I
want you to know this because
the scarcity of material
resources at OUT/LOOK affects
the other kind of scarcity that
you as readers already know and
care about—the scarcity of edi-
torial space for a broad range of
representations of gay and
lesbian life.

I am not bringing this up to
excuse us and accuse you. I
bring it up because the connec-
tion between the first kind of
scarcity I discussed—a scarcity in

the variety, inclusiveness, and
sweep of the writing and images
we publish—and the second
kind of scarcity—our scarcity of
material resources—is a reciproc-
al one. And this is where you,
our readers and supporters,
come in.

If our material needs were not
so chronic and severe, we could
seek out a wider range and a
greater volume of material to
publish. We could appear more
frequently, or publish more
pages per issue, or both. With
either or both of these forms of
growth, the range of what we
discuss, both in approach and
subject matter, would increase
to embrace more of your
concerns.

In OUT/LOOK's first WEL-
COME, its founders thanked
you, our readers, for having the
faith to take out subscriptions to
a magazine that didn't exist
yet—a magazine that was still an
idea at the time of the 1987
March on Washington. I'd like
to thank you again for your faith
in us. It is because of you that we
have an office, our Macintoshes,
our loyal volunteers. If what I've
said here makes sense to you, I
ask you to help us extend the
magazine's and Foundation's
vision. Your present subscription
plus two more for friends or
family would make it possible
for us to extend our coverage of
your issues dramatically.

Thank you for any help and sup-
port you can extend us.

Jan Zita Grover for the Editors.

*I am indebted to Douglas Crimp for
the succinctness of this formulation.

IS IT TRUE THAT LESBIANS HATE SEX?

■ After receiving my first issue of *OUT/LOOK*, I am cancelling my subscription, and I am thankful that I've not already paid for it in full.

My lover and I are both very politically active, out dykes and consider ourselves very open-minded people, but your publication offended even our liberal thinking. I had visions, when I subscribed, of *OUT/LOOK* as a political forum with articles and essays addressing issues pertinent to the struggle of lesbians and gays in society today, especially in the US. That is, at least, the way your ad came across. The cover was beautiful and the article regarding Out/Write 90 was interesting. Beyond that, the magazine was pure trash. I think you should advertise yourselves as a lesbian/gay SEX magazine, because that is practically all this issue was.

Maybe we're missing something. Maybe the majority of the lesbian and gay population consists of horny sex fiends looking for a lay, and we, along with all of our friends, are the oddballs. If so, the straight community's general viewpoint of us queers ain't far off-base, is it? What a pity that a publication that advertises itself to be a national lesbian and gay forum perpetuates the stereotypical views of the lesbian and gay community.

We have four children with whom we share literature and information pertinent to lesbian and gay culture. They frequently pick up our alternative literature and read through it and we discuss it with them. I shudder to think of one of them picking up this issue of *OUT/LOOK* that I have. I think

I'll burn it. I'm certainly not happy having it in my house.

I can't see how *OUT/LOOK* is doing or will do much of anything to further lesbian and gay human rights or political interests. It may possibly come in handy for the Jesse Helmses and Jerry Falwells of the world when they try to bury us, however. It is unfortunate that a far-reaching publication such as yours can't do more to help us out.

Tara Wolfstar
Seminole, Florida

■ I would like you to know why I'm not renewing my subscription. Your publication is an absolute *embarrassment* to the gay community. When I read about the lesbians who loved to wear false testicles and penises and who constantly dreamt about having intercourse with men, I knew that these people were *sick*.

My lover and I act and look like two women. I have been pregnant and we have a three-and-a-half year-old daughter. I enjoy being and acting like a woman. Your publication only serves to reinforce the negative stereotype that exists concerning gay people. I hope that no heterosexual people even look at your publication because it puts the gay movement back thirty years. Gay people today are looking better and better.

Don't set us back to the pre-20s era or maybe turn-of-the-century.

Name Withheld
New York, New York

...NOT NECESSARILY

■ I was so glad to see the Fall Tell article (Fall 1990) and was pleased that a short story was included. All opinions are valid and all individual matters should be a statement of fact and not a

instead of "I personally don't care for it") a barrier is set up.

I feel the reactions to the Kiss & Tell showing are indicative of the individuals' reactions to a variety of topics. What is so sad is that we as a people while trying to gain freedom and equality hamper ourselves with bigotry. I always equated the state of being gay with a higher consciousness, *i.e.*, if I am open enough to accept the fact I love other women and expect respect for that, then how can I condemn others and not be a hypocrite? It saddens me deeply that the Reagan-Bush consciousness (me, me, me) of the 80s and 90s is so prevalent in gay society.

We condemn others for not acting as gay people should, for having sex in ways we wouldn't, for looking the way we shouldn't look, for either being way out or not out enough. My God, we even hate men for simply being men or women for simply being women. Recently I found out I have lupus and am not doing well. I am thirty-two. Life has become more precious to me than ever. I wish I could impart to all intolerants in the world, straight or gay, what a waste bigots are. People complain all the time about how lonely they are and how isolated they feel. Get rid of the intolerance and it's amazing what happens. We do need to fight for our cause but against the likes of Jesse Helms, not each other. We have to come together, we have to fight to overcome. Life is too short and you only get one chance that you put into it.

Name Withheld

THE HONEY CLOSET RESULTS

■ Having known Jeffrey Escoffier for many years and being an admirer of his work, I was rather sur-

prised by the ageist and classist assumptions in his essay, "Inside the Ivory Closet" (Fall 1990). By dividing gay and lesbian scholars into "younger" and "older" generations and by then classifying our ideas based solely on these categories, Escoffier implies that our ideologies and methodologies are merely by-products of our age, an offensive concept to say the least. Moreover, his assumptions about age are not even accurate. Though I have been placed with the "older" scholars, I am the same age as or younger than two in the "younger" academics. I would, however, be flattered to be associated with either group.

Escoffier also declares that we older scholars "teach heavy course loads at less prestigious institutions." I cannot speak for the others, but at Pace University I do teach a heavy course load (four courses). However, I resent the classist implications that we are at those institutions through lack of choice. Pace specializes in teaching first-generation college students, who are generally from less affluent families, and for most of my career I taught English as a Second Language, primarily to Asian immigrants. For me, my teaching career has been as much a political choice as my other forms of activism (writing, organizational work, etc.). My students offer special joys and challenges I would not have found at an Ivy League college (and I did attend one, though Escoffier implies that only my "younger" colleagues had such "privileges").

It's a shame that Escoffier mars an otherwise intriguing essay by oversimplification, ageism, and classism—three problems that we all need to work harder to eradicate.

Karla Jay
New York, New York

■ Jeffrey Escoffier's article on scholarship (Fall 1990) states that three conferences of the Gay Academic Union were held in New York City beginning in 1973; in fact four successive annual conferences occurred, at John Jay College, New York University, and Columbia University (twice). More serious is the omission of the work of pre-Stonewall scholars as seen in *ONE Magazine*, *The Ladder*, and *Mattachine Review*. This tradition continues today in ONE Graduate School in Los Angeles. Furthermore, Escoffier passes over in silence the massive accomplishments of Dutch, German, and Italian scholars.

As for the Gay Academic Union in New York, our existence has not been "shadowy." We published two periodicals, *Gai Saber* (three issues) and *Cabirion* and *Gay Books Bulletin* (twelve issues), together with five monographs. Our work has been central to two standard reference works, *Homosexuality: A Research Guide* (1987) and the two-volume *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality* (1990), which together distill the body of pertinent scholarship. As things stand today, whoever neglects to consult the last two publications is not well placed to initiate research in gay and lesbian subjects.

Wayne R. Dynes
Scholarship Committee
Gay Academic Union
New York, New York

■ As one of those "out" academics who gained tenure after a bruising political battle, I know from experience what Jeffrey Escoffier is talking about in his article, "Inside the Ivory Closet" (Fall 1990). However, while I realize it is impossible to cover everything in one article, Escoffier's piece has completely left out the first crucial stage in the development of les-

bian and gay studies in the United States. The foundations, for both teaching and research, were begun in 1952 with the formation of ONE, Inc., in Los Angeles.

Using the term Homophile Studies, ONE's group of gay and lesbian independent researchers and writers decided that education was the key to challenging heterosexist attitudes. They began developing library and archival collections that remain today the largest repositories of sources in the United States. The Blanche Baker Memorial Library at ONE Institute, the Homosexual Information Center, and the International Gay and Lesbian Archives (all in Los Angeles), all grew out of the pioneering work at ONE. Writers as diverse as Jonathan Katz, Vern Bullough, Vito Russo, John D'Emilio, Wayne Dynes, and Arthur Evans owe much of their findings to these archival sources. My own research on the American Indian berdache was initially inspired by and done at these archives. When Gregory Sprague and I founded the Committee on Lesbian and Gay History, at the 1978 meeting of the American Historical Association, many of the early members had received our initial education in the field from ONE's pioneers Dorr Legg, Jim Kepner, and Harry Hay.

ONE began holding regular classes in Homophile Studies in 1956, and also sponsored research projects. UCLA Professor Evelyn Hooker's revolutionary research in psychology could not have been done without the assistance of ONE members. In the 1950s and 1960s *ONE Magazine* and *ONE Institute Quarterly*, edited by Ann Carll Reid, Stella Rush (*pseud.* Sten Russell), and others, were the major sources for academically researched writings. In

1956 ONE published a book, *Homosexuals Today*, which is one of the main sources for understanding gay life in the 1950s. ONE also aided Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon (whose 1972 book *Lesbian/Woman* is a classic in lesbian studies) in the founding of the lesbian group Daughters of Bilitis in 1955.

Though set back by breakaway schisms in the 1960s, ONE and its research arm The Institute for the Study of Human Resources continued to hold classes and sponsor academic research. A major scholarly accomplishment was the 1976 publication of the two-volume *Annotated Bibliography of Homosexuality* edited by Vern Bullough and W. Dorr Legg. Most importantly, ONE has recently acquired title to a three million dollar estate in Los Angeles, making it the largest scholarly resource that is owned and operated by gay people today. More endowments and bequests are needed for research assistantships and operating expenses to make this institute into the true "Think Tank" that is such a crucial part of any movement for social change.

By leaving out all this, *OUT/LOOK* presents a distorted view of the field of lesbian and gay studies, and ignores a major resource for our community's future.

Professor Walter L. Williams
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, California

THUMBS UP FOR FALLING BORDERS

■ For the past year, we've been writing a book of essays about gay and lesbian Europe, including practical information for the North American traveler abroad. (The book, *Are You Two . . . Together?*

er? A Gay and Lesbian Grand Tour of Europe, will be published in early spring by Random House.) We've interviewed hundreds of people, and we've been regular readers of numerous British, French, Italian, Belgian, and Swiss gay and lesbian publications.

Although many gay Europeans we've met are preoccupied with the implications of 1992, *nowhere* have we seen anything approaching Shelley Anderson's information-packed, insightful article, "Falling Borders, Rising Hopes: Europe in 1992" (Fall 1990). Congratulations to her, and to you. We only wish we had had access to such a concise summary of the situation a year ago, since it would have made some of our research a great deal easier!

Lindsay Van Gelder & Pamela Brandt
New York, New York

HETEROSEXISM VS. HOMOPHOBIA

■ Joseph Neisen's piece on heterosexism and homophobia (Fall 1990), was a confusing and annoying bit of presumptuous twaddle. It certainly left me wondering what gay academics do when they're not redefining the redefined.

There exists a distinction between homophobia and heterosexism, one that Neisen patently ignores: homophobia is the irrational fear/hatred of lesbians and gay men; heterosexism is a calculated thought mechanism that seeks to prove that heterosexuality is a superior orientation.

The difference between homophobia and heterosexism is a subtle one: aggression. Heterosexist people are content to remain quiet or complacent in their prejudice. They know they are right. Homophobes do not reason with their hate, they do

not question it.

By suggesting that *heterosexism* could and should be substituted for *homophobia*, Neisen blurs some delicate but very real dividing lines. The moral and ethical reasonings of homophobic and heterosexist people are not necessarily the same. Certainly, the physical manifestations of their reasonings are not likely to be the same. By suggesting that heterosexism is the real problem, Neisen credits bashers and bigots with the power of logical thought and does a disservice to our community by oversimplifying the oppressions we face.

J. Patrick Collins
Binghamton, New York

COLOR, THEORY, & COLOR THEORY

■ Thank you for Jackie Goldsby's "What It Means to Be Colored Me" (Summer 1990). Her kind of principled, wide-ranging and for-real cultural criticism is a badly needed voice, not only in the gay press, but in popular and academic writing in general. Work like hers which often manages to cross that seemingly impenetrable boundary between academic and popular critical discourses is rare. I hope this kind of approach (which I also attempt) can help show academic criticism a way out of its poststructuralist solipsisms, where the most militant kinds of cultural resistance currently envisioned seem to be "oppositional readings."

People of color are doing a lot more than "reading" cultural texts oppositionally, and critics such as Goldsby, Greg Tate, and others who call for critical voices of color to celebrate and theorize this work help all of us marginal types find more meaningful

forms of resistance to the dominant culture (although hopefully not white "cover" versions of black forms).

That Goldsby additionally explores some of the thornier issues of marginality and desire from a black lesbian perspective makes this white bisexual woman grateful for her presence in the gay community.

Lisa Kernan
San Francisco, California

■ A letter to the editor in *OUT/LOOK* (Summer 1990) lambasted Jan Clausen for daring to imply that sexual identities might be, in some sense, chosen, a "myth" the writer inaccurately claimed "our" political movement has been trying to debunk for twenty years. The defense that our sexual orientations are innate and we can't "change" (even though we really want to) is certainly time-honored, but surely the Gay Pride movement liberated us from such timid pleas for acceptance, not to mention pity? To say, as many have, that no one would choose to be gay in a homophobic world, is to imply that we'd all be straight—and white, male, and owning—class, for that matter—if we only could. In her letter about Jan Clausen, Ms. Pearlman recoils from the idea that we choose our sexual identities as an act of rebellion. But does Ms. Pearlman presume, then, that we all really aspire to a conformity that our genetic fate cruelly denies us? What about rebellion as revolution, as the passionate, reasoned rejection of an oppressive society? Long before I decided to sleep with women I knew I loved gay people, loved our humor and bravery and insight and refusal to buy the world the way it was being sold to us, and yes, I think I *chose* that. And if

you ask me which stance will most upset the homophobes, I think it's the argument that we *do* choose our gay lives because we like gay sex and like queers and are happy this way, and besides, we think institutionalized heterosexuality is really pretty weird.

This is not to claim that choosing a sexual identity is as simple as snapping one's fingers and deciding to be gay, or straight, for the day. Sexual identity is undoubtedly immensely complex, and sexual desire frequently intractable. But it hardly follows that sexual identity is, therefore, "innate," or "genetic," a simple biological factor measurable in our chromosomes. When people say they didn't "choose" their sexuality, what is it they didn't choose? Their gender identification? A capacity for "falling in love" with someone of the same biological sex? A desire for particular kinds of sexual acts? An attraction to particular kinds of body parts? A certain sense of aesthetics? An ability to enjoy sexual acts with a person of the same sex? An inability to enjoy sexual acts with someone of the other sex? What does "choice" mean in the context of a concept as multi-layered as "sexuality?" Speaking for myself, I would have to say that there are elements, in this complex constellation I call my lesbianism, which I "choose" consciously, and things that I do not. I could undoubtedly "choose," if I had to, to move back to Iowa and get married to a man and have babies. As things are, I don't have to go back to Iowa and get married, and I don't want to, so I'm not going to. That's a choice.

If sexual orientation isn't chosen, does that mean straights don't have to interrogate their sexuality either? That implies that institutionalized heterosexuality

isn't really about politics or economics, power or oppression; it's just about straights doing what comes naturally to *them*—a sentiment I'm sure most homophobes would applaud heartily.

Lesbian writer Mary Renault wrote something nearly fifty years ago that seems beautifully pertinent today. Responding to the biologicistic theories of sexuality prevalent at that time, she said, "It is the fashion to find in such things a casual product of cells and environment, or a disorder to be cured. I think their roots may go as deep as the soul." By reducing sexual orientation to a supposedly immutable biological factor we deny the beauty, spirituality, and deep mystery of human sexuality, as well as its political implications. I hope more people in the community and our media will realize this, soon, and start to forge richer and more insightful definitions of our identities.

Erin G. Carlston
San Francisco, California

LETTER FROM THE HEARTLAND

■ This is the first letter I can remember sending to a magazine, newspaper, or organization other than to complain about taxes or other things concerning money.

I am a new subscriber to *OUT/LOOK*. I read the first issue I got a few days ago, including the letters. I figured I may as well write a letter even though it will be as boring as my life has been the last seven years, and probably will never be printed. I, regretfully, stopped having sexual relations as soon as word started being printed about AIDS, and stopped whatever gay life I had at all. I still have the desire, but fear of AIDS infection killed all

possibility of my having any more gay sexual activities.

I am a bisexually inclined man, sixty-three years old, who likes women enough so I had many social dates with them from age twenty-nine up through age forty-eight, and get along with women in general, including all twenty-six women in the offices where I work. My sexual experiences with men spanned from two months before I hit thirty until one month before I hit fifty-six (1983), never more than once a year.

People locally, to the best of my knowledge, have never known about my sexual relations, but I have sometimes been kidded when my cross-dressing became known, and even got publicized in the local newspaper here when two years straight I went to costume dances in full drag. I was ages thirty-six and thirty-seven when I did that.

The thing I got kidded most about over a short period of time (eight months), came about when I was thirty-five, and a lesbian couple, for reasons I could not figure out, worked on me to be score keeper for the 1962-1963 bowling season for their two lesbian bowling teams. I figured I had a way out when I said I would only do as they asked if at least three women on each team told me they wanted me to do so. That did not work, so from September 1962 through April 1963 I got kidded about my six "boyfriends."

I never came out to anyone who was not either gay or bi, so I doubt this letter will interest anyone. It's ok to use my name and address, as I doubt anyone who is not gay or bi will see it.

James Blood
Manhattan, Kansas

THE CLOSET DEFENDED

■ Thanks to "raw" publications such as yours, and the gay political movement methods of approach, many of us have chosen *not* to be associated with the term "gay & lesbian," though we know we are.

Many homosexuals feel degraded by the type of raw photographs of an ugly nature having no artistic quality to them that appear to be used for "shock value" exhibited commonly through gay publications such as yours. So much so, we'd like to publish our own magazine entitled *Closet Work* featuring opinions from *frightened* closet gays and lesbians who are very uncomfortable with the present-day gay political movement's methods of approach to society as a whole.

Only recently being exposed to gay literature, I was *shocked* at the insensitivity with which you present lesbians (*i.e.*, your most recent issue of a lesbian art show with comments such as "hit her" on the walls) that completely explains why homophobia among the police and heterosexual community has grown leaps and bounds as well as due to AIDS. I can understand why gay bashing is fashionable and, quite frankly, believe this form of vulgar and tasteless display of raw sexuality is the cause of much fear. In other words, the gay community has acted selfishly and in a rebellious fashion, bringing upon itself exactly what it has created.

Your movement has become frightening to people in all walks of life. (AIDS and death are frightening enough.) It has made it quite *difficult* for a gay or lesbian not involved in your movement to live a normal life and has forced many of us into our closets

or even into heterosexual liaisons. "Coming out" has too many negative connotations in our society today and has become life-threatening and dangerous. Your publication, as well as the *Advocate*, is irresponsible and insensitive and actually perpetuates homophobia. These pictures and images you present degrade me personally; that causes me *not* to *associate* with the term *lesbian*.

I suggest the following: that those in the gay movement get rid of these freak show parades of people who look like they belong in the movie *Clockwork Orange*, and develop a marketing strategy for presenting gay people to the public. Presently, the society in general sees homosexuals as a *burden* as the result of AIDS and these freak show parades. Great hostility has mounted against gays and yet your movement is still choosing to react in a rebellious and sometimes obnoxious fashion. I suggest sitting back and removing yourselves from the war a little while to get an objective viewpoint from a wider perspective. There is absolutely no way the present path the gay movement has chosen will have any success.

The police read your publications as the only connection they have with gays; that is a very *poor* representation. Publications such as yours appear vulgar and lack sensitivity. I look forward to either their being removed from our society or a 99 percent turnaround into responsible and sensible journalism.

Cheryl
Los Angeles, California

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QUEER/NATION

Allan Bérubé & Jeffrey Escoffier

A new generation of activists is here. They have come out into communities devastated by the HIV epidemic and into political consciousness through the struggle with AIDS. But AIDS is not their main focus.

The new generation calls itself *queer*, not *lesbian*, *gay*, and *bisexual*—awkward, narrow, and perhaps compromised words. *Queer* is meant to be confrontational—opposed to gay assimilationists and straight oppressors while inclusive of people who have been marginalized by anyone in power. Queer Nationals are undertaking an awesome task. They are trying to combine contradictory impulses: to bring together people who have been made to feel perverse, queer, odd, outcast, different, and deviant, and to affirm sameness by defining a common identity on the fringes. They are inclusive, but within boundaries that threaten to marginalize those whose difference doesn't conform to the new nation. These contradictions are locked in the name Queer Nation:

QUEER = DIFFERENCE
NATION = SAMENESS

Queer Nation meetings are thick with tensions—tensions between consensus, with its



FEATURE

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*Focus Groups of
Queer Nation/San Francisco*

ASLUT—Artists Slaving Under Tyranny. ASLUT acts on issues around censorship, puts together graphics for group materials, and holds art parties before demonstrations.

DORIS SQUASH—Defending Our Rights In the Streets, Super Queers United Against Savage Heterosexuals. DORIS SQUASH organizes self-defense workshops, antiviolence strategies, and operates as autonomous street patrols.

GHOST—Grand Homosexual Organization To Stop Televangelists. GHOST focuses on combatting the intended invasion of San Francisco by 10,000 evangelical prayer warriors, coming for Halloween to purify San Francisco of the spirit of sin. GHOST is organizing counterdemonstration/action.

HI MOM—Homosexual Ideological Mobilization Against the Military. HI MOM focuses on changing attitudes/policies of the federal Defense Department toward gay men and lesbians.

LABIA—Lesbians and Bisexuals in Action. LABIA is an autonomous group of women who plan visibility actions for lesbian and bisexual women to counter dyke-phobia and bi-phobia as well as general misogyny.

QUEER PLANET—Plans actions around international queer issues as well as international outreach.

QUEER STATE—Plans actions around state laws and attitudes toward queers.

QUEST—Queers Undertaking Exquisite and Symbolic Transformation. QUEST is a queer academic discussion group and ideological sparring ground.

SHOP—Suburban Homosexual Outreach Program. SHOP focuses on mall visibility actions. It also does outreach to suburban queers.

UNITED COLORS—Focuses on issues and experiences of queers of color. Its tactics are largely educational.

WELCOME WAGON—Does whatever it wants, but focuses largely on daytime visibility in San Francisco.



attention to marginalized minorities, and majority rule, with its efficiency in getting things done, tensions between taking sharply defined political positions and establishing an open forum for imaginative tactics and free discussion. Queer Nationals are torn between affirming a new identity—"I am queer"—and rejecting restrictive identities—"I reject your categories," between rejecting assimilation—"I don't need your approval, just get out of my face"—and wanting to be recognized by mainstream society—"We queers are gonna get in your face."

Queer nationalism's actions play on the politics of cultural subversion: theatrical demonstrations, infiltrations of shopping malls and straight bars, kiss-ins and be-ins. Rather than a strategic politics that confronts powerful institutions directly or uses lobbying and electoral campaigns to bring about change, Queer Nation takes to the street wearing "QUEER" stickers and badges on their jackets, fighting to keep queer turf safe from bashings. At times, they look like queer urban street gangs.

These queers are constructing a new culture by combining elements that usually don't go together. They may be the first wave of activists to embrace the retrofuture/classic contemporary styles of postmodernism. They are building their own identity from old and new elements—borrowing styles and tactics from popular culture, communities of color, hippies, AIDS activists, the antinuclear movement, MTV, feminists, and early gay liberationists. Their new culture is slick, quick, anarchic, transgressive, ironic. They are dead serious, but they also just wanna have fun. If they manage not to blow up in contradiction or get bogged down in process, they may lead the way into new forms of activism for the 1990s.

QUEER

Interviews by
Steve Cosson

JUSTIN BOND

I think the power that Queer Nation has is in the name because it's so inclusive. But even in its first month, so many people in Queer Nation really worked their fucking asses off to be exclusive. When they begin to exclude people they lose their power. I find that there are a lot of people within the queer movement



who are really intent on defining for other people what they are and that's the same fucking bullshit we've gotten from the straight population. It's

A QUEER NATIONALISM

Alexander S. Chee

1

Queer Nation began in New York, without a name or a charter or a statement of purpose. It began in a small room in the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center in April 1990 as a place to discuss homophobia and visibility issues. Many of the first people in attendance had been involved in the Teach-In on Lesbian and Gay Activist History that ACT UP organized for the Stonewall Celebration Gay Pride in New York. A visibility campaign focused on the frequent bashings of gays and lesbians in the East Village began with the second meeting and went from there to the "I HATE STRAIGHTS" pamphlet and then to the front page of the *Village Voice* by midsummer—from anonymity to scandal to celebrity within weeks.

The incorporation of homophobia and AIDS into a single issue was what had originally attracted many younger queers to directly involve themselves in ACT UP. Most of them were HIV-negative or untested and just beginning their involvement in political activism. ACT UP's emphasis on treatment issues left many of them baffled and disengaged: "I always felt like to be in ACT UP I needed to be educated, to know the drugs and the symptoms and the policies," explained one ACT UP member who later joined Queer Nation. AIDS was their issue because it was a *gay* issue in need of support, not because it was their *personal* issue. It was only by taking these two issues and seeing them as one that younger, HIV-negative members of ACT UP could feel as authentic as anyone else at meetings.

From its beginning, Queer Nation claimed dual constituency of young queers just beginning to define themselves in terms of community and older AIDS activists. The

group grew quickly—in New York, there are now over three hundred people at every meeting, and in San Francisco, one hundred to one hundred seventy-five. Sometimes the burden of sudden celebrity makes the weight of anger and grief that arrives every week at meetings seem insupportable. In New York, there has been a growing lack of trust, a slow death of direct action as the group has grown in intensity and size. Although it is still alive and well, there are those who are already mistrustful of Queer Nation/NY, many of them women. In San Francisco, the center still holds.

The name has stuck simply for the sake of marketing. The original idea was this: choose a name around each action, keep responsibility with the individual and not with an institution. The strength here is in acting out of the present and going out into the faces of individuals. People are tired of groups with egos, processes, personality cults, and politicking. So far Queer Nation is individuals confronting individuals. This is not about institutions yet. We do not want a budget, charter, or a history beyond our work in the street.

2

Our anger may have brought us together again but it may drive us apart again. The news coverage on Queer Nation here and in cities across the country centers largely on the events of the group, cites ACT UP as a parent, but often dismisses Queer Nation itself. Any discussion of tactics invokes ACT UP but generally dismisses much of Queer Nation's actions as "fun," as if fun could not be important, could not be serious.

In particular, the press glorifies the "Queers Bash Back" idea. But there is something more than fun and retribution here: a sense of operating within a tradition of civil-rights movements, with strategies adapted from the women's movement, Black nationalism, the peace and nuclear freeze movements.

The original idea of Queer Nation is easily

transmitted, with or without the name. At Wesleyan, in the middle of Connecticut, Queer Nation's strategies for dealing with homophobia and invisibility are put to work on campus, where queers holding Nights Out at fraternity parties have changed straight students' awareness and queer students' visibility. At the University of Texas–Austin, students organized QUEERS to promote gay and lesbian visibility on campus. The group OUTRAGE in London organizes around the same things. It's time.

3

Queer Nation/SF is as angry as it is funny. It is only as good as its strategies, which are simple ones, open to everyone. Distinctions are continually made between bluffs and threats. The group's sticker arsenal is considerable. Stickers often carry warnings—"Homophobia may be hazardous to your health." Nonviolence is practiced but conditional—something left out of the group's statement of purpose because people thought there would be less respect for the group's campaigns if nonviolence were specified.

"And what if we want to be violent?" said one member.

All Queer Nation/SF requires for membership is that you are a queer and you show up: stand up and be counted, in the street, in a bar, in the suburbs, in places of worship and places of legislation. Stand, fight, shout, laugh. Safety in numbers and in laughter are the strategies.

Queer Nation/SF's second action was a Be-In. People gathered at Pier 39 in San Francisco, factories played drums, and a circle of men and a circle of women played spin-the-bottle. Tourists began taking photographs. Three hundred queers made their way onto Pier 39 and strolled past security guards, demanding to see a leader. They surrounded the carousel and everyone stayed until everyone had ridden. Boys in slips and sundresses, women in leather and bras, long hair, shaved heads, pierced eyebrows and lips.

A woman approached my friend John.

"Can you get everyone here to sing 'We are the world'?"

"No," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because it's a lie, because this is our march, and because you're straight."

"How do you know I'm straight?"

"I just do."

"Gay people have a responsibility to educate straights. How else are we going to

completely the antithesis of what we're fighting for: *You can be gay but only if you're gay in a way that is not threatening us.* Well, I'm sorry, I *am* threatening—you're fucked up, not me. There's room for everyone. And that's what I hope will happen with Queer Nation. Right now everyone's there, but it's awfully uncomfortable, and I hope that trend doesn't continue.

MIGUEL GUTIERREZ

Queerness means nonassimilationist to me, but even so, there is a sense of conforming to being queer. It's still a privileged thing to be queer. I don't feel it's inclusive—there are race



and class issues around this. There are people who cannot afford to be nonassimilationist; they are fighting just to live and eat. As an employed, somewhat educated person I can imagine not identifying with the white gay male movement.

I worry that being queer right now is more about nose-rings than about how you feel about yourself. Then I

see *Newsweek's* article on "Today's Youth," with its token white gay boy who's decided that he's not into promiscuity, wants a husband, kids, a house, and I know that I'm not represented by him, and that I don't identify with his priorities. In that sense, I am queer.

JASON BISHOP

I don't identify with the older generation of lesbian and gay men. Very cushy—brunch on Sunday and credit-card shopping all week long. I'm not a part of that all and never have been. *Queer* is much more inclusive of my family. I know gay men

ain?"

Learn what? How to be queer? We have no responsibility to you; only to each other. We're just here."

It was a confrontation at once bizarre and typical. *Queer* is not so much a dreaded epithet as a secret password now. Those it describes are in, those it doesn't are out. At Crazy Nanny's, a lesbian bar in New York, a male friend was interrogated by the bouncer on the names of several gay porn stars before he could gain admission. "You better be a queer boy," the bouncer muttered. At the end of a recent Queer Nation meeting in San Francisco, a car passed the front of the building and the passengers shouted "Die, faggots!" Someone nudged the car with his own car and another stopped the passengers by jumping in front of them. We are developing our own rules of thumb. They are about safety and presence and boundaries.

4

It is a matter of language and a war of words.

It is also a name game. These are Queer Nation SF's focus groups at this time: African Homosexual Outreach Program

(SHOP), Lesbians And Bisexuals In Action (LABIA), Defending Our Rights In the Streets Super Queers United Against Savage Heterosexuals (DORIS SQUASH), Homosexual Ideological Mobilization against the Military (HI MOM), Artists Slaving Under Tyranny (ASLUT), Grand Homosexual Organization to Stop Televangelists (GHOST), Queers Undertaking Exquisite and Symbolic Transformation (QUEST), United Colors Of Queer Nation, Queer Planet, Queer State, Welcome Wagon. These are names that recall the glorious Street Transvestite Activists Revolution (STAR) and reaffirm that there will always be street queers.

The operant dream is of a community united in diversity, queerly ourselves. The reality works out okay so far. At the last meeting I attended, in a room of one hundred twenty people, thirty-two were women. People of color were a strong presence, with thirty heads counted. The age range was from seventeen to sixty-three and the mood was good. At the break, there was a five-minute meeting for newcomers. It was led by Miguel Gutierrez and Jennifer, who took great care to explain that everyone was welcome under the word *queer*.

One man asked how old the group is PAGE 19

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who are the age who don't want anything to do with AIDS activism, don't want to know about HIV, don't want to know transsexuals, transvestites. They're not part of their world and it's not their world. And frankly, I wouldn't want to be part of their society.

REBECCA HENSLEY

A person in the "queer generation"



is arguing for is the same stuff that was being fought for by gay liberation. So it's not "lesbian/gay" vs. "queer." It's liberationist vs. assimilationist. It's not that there are young queers and older lesbians and gays. Younger queers are following in the footsteps, and a lot of them don't know they're following, and I think they should learn their own history. The reason we don't know our own

history is that our history isn't taught to us in school. A lot of what I see from older lesbians, especially toward bisexuals and women who don't go by their rules, is, "You don't see how important all the fighting we did was." Well, if they're willing to put up with us for a little while and talk to us, if that communication starts, we can learn. And there's so much to learn about our history that's invisible to us now. I see myself as trying to learn from them, but it has to go both ways.

PEGGY SUE

I think we have much more free-

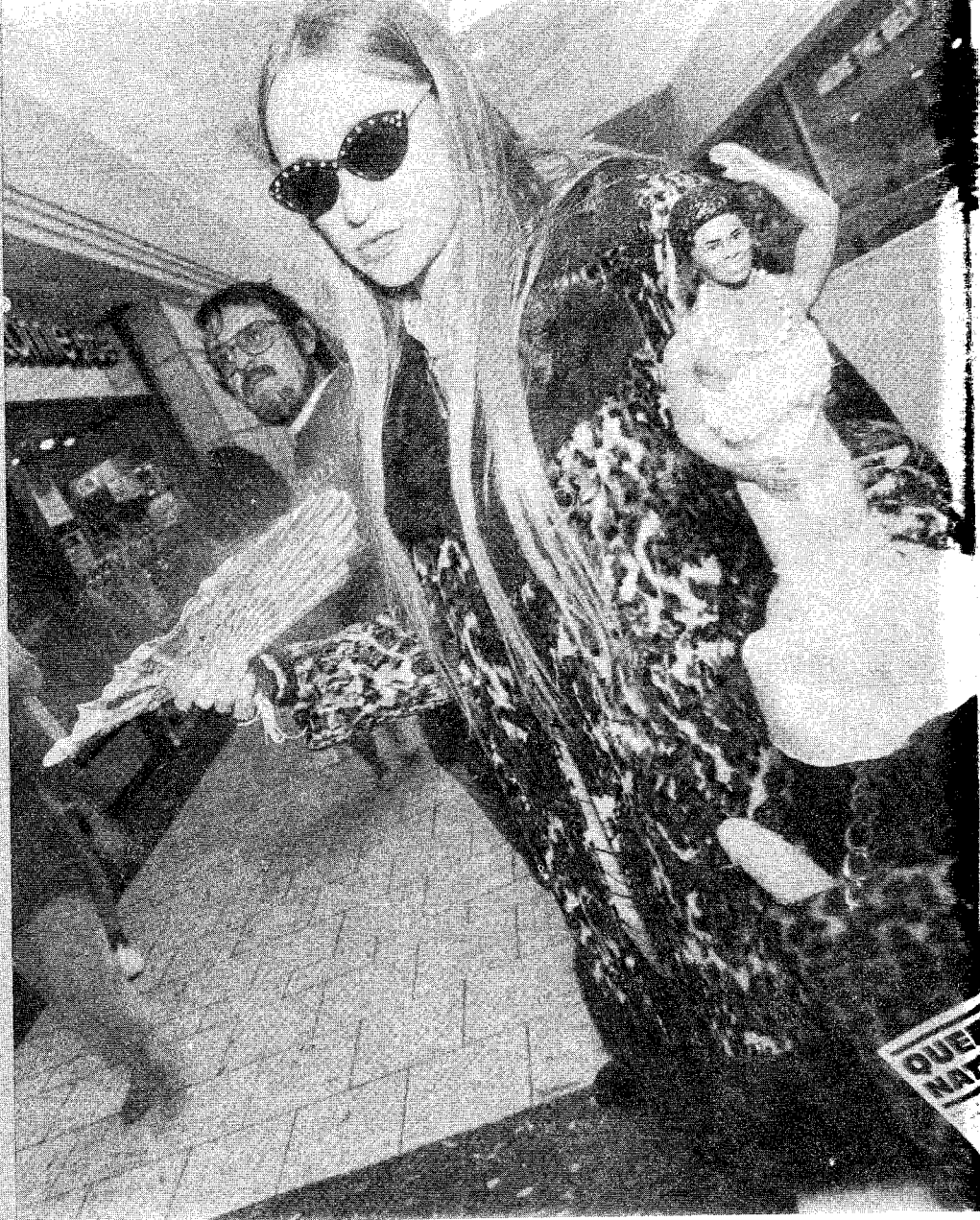
Association, the women's caucus of *Queer Nation* [San Francisco] handed out the following excerpted questionnaire during one of their street actions, "Girls' Night Out," which took place in September 1990 outside Pacific Heights heterosexual watering holes—

HETEROSEXUAL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What do you think caused your heterosexuality? 2. When and how did you first decide you were a heterosexual? 3. Is it possible that your heterosexuality is just a phase that you will grow out of? 4. Is it possible that your heterosexuality stems from a neurotic fear of people of the same sex? Maybe you just need a positive gay experience? 5. Heterosexuals have histories of failures in gay relationships. Do you think you may have turned heterosexual out of fear of rejection? 6. If you never slept with a person of the same sex, how do you know you wouldn't prefer that? 7. If heterosexuality is normal, why are disproportionate numbers of mental patients heterosexual? 8. To whom have you disclosed your heterosexual tendencies? How did they react? 9. Your heterosexuality doesn't offend me as long as you leave me alone, but why do so many heterosexuals try to seduce others into that orientation? 10. If you should choose to nurture children, would you want them to be heterosexual, knowing the problems they would face?

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dom to do what we want to do if we use *queer* to describe ourselves vs. *gay* or *lesbian*. Because already the movement is still—what? 20 years old?—and there's already the established gays and lesbians like the Harvey Milk Club and the Quilt people. It's very establishment. *Queer* implies to me, new and nonestablishment and different, nonassimilationist. They want to work from within and I just want to crash in from the outside and say "Hey! Hello, I'm queer. I can make out with my girlfriend. Ha Ha. Live with it. Deal with it. Out of my

way." That kind of stuff. I favor the direct approach.


As far as being in opposition to lesbian feminism—No. It's just a different time. I'm coming out in a



completely different world where I have more freedom in certain areas than women did fifteen years ago and less freedom in some areas.

The problem I have with older lesbians is they really hate me for the way I express myself through how I dress and I behave. Other lesbians are really angry that I have such a camaraderie with men. They tell me I'm objectifying myself. They need to get over it. Fuck em. They don't understand that the gay and lesbian movement, the queer movement, the dyke movement is about doing what feels right to you without catching any flak ever.

INGRID NELSON

I've always called myself a  PAGE 20

is. He looked bewildered at the answer: two months. His bewilderment was this: *What will this be in two more months?*

Inclusiveness is loud and defiant. LABIA is the oldest focus group, called to order at the first meeting. Their flyer includes a statement of purpose that pursues an agenda of positive visibility for lesbian and bisexual women as well as the agency to respond to lesbian-phobia and bi-phobia with "whatever means we deem appropriate." Rachel Pepper, a writer and activist who put out the call for a woman's group, said, "One third of the group is bisexual at this point and while most of us are dyke-identified and woman-oriented, many women have said they feel more welcome because of the name." The stickers for the group are energetic, in-your-face: *Dykes Take Over The World, Rape Is A Man's Issue.*

United Colors is slow to grow. Karl Knapper, an organizer for both Queer Nation media and United Colors, admits that while class prevents many from attending, he feels that until Queer Nation takes on race issues, most people of color will stay with their respective communities. "It's important to be here now at the beginning, and in general, I feel positively about being here. But I will not belong to a mixed-race gay men's group, and as a Black gay man, I have no alternative to this right now." Don Mark Chan, a writer and veteran of a number of political organizations, is enthused. "At the very first meeting I went to, I knew that if every other meeting were as mixed and energetic as that, I'd be very happy. A group is only as strong as it is diverse."

In New York, inclusiveness continues to be more of a problem. Kate Aurthur, now at Wesleyan University, is skeptical about Queer Nation NY's survival: "Queer Nation continues to have a problem of inclusion, like ACT UP does. 'Bash Back' is a slogan and campaign that alienated a lot of women last summer; women have been dealing with violence and aggression all their lives.

"Deal with women's issues and you'll bring women in. Deal with the issues of communities of color and you'll bring people of color in. These white gay men are usually feeling scared for the first time in their lives in ways that women live with every day. An apt analysis of how these violent acts are different around a matrix of gender and color has yet to honestly affect the group's actions."

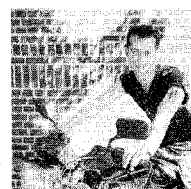
The women in New York originally resisted the idea of a women's caucus because it implicitly conceded that the floor was male.

There is something ancient about queerness. Knowledge of it seems fundamental, like breathing, or recognizing day from night and back again. *Queer* is a word that has been thrown at me since childhood—like *chink*, *gook*, *jap*, *flat-face*: those were words for my face and skin. *Queer* was then and is now to me about spirit, about a fundamental internal difference that people can see in your eye. Or not. It hangs about you like a psychic tattoo.

Other children shouted *queer* at me as if it would keep them safe. Although I hated them, I wanted nothing of their acceptance; I knew that I was different. There was something in queers that scared them. I enjoyed this. Now that I call myself queer, know myself as a queer, nothing will keep them safe.

If I tell them I am queer, they give me room. Politically, I can think of little better. Fifteen years later, I still don't care if they accept me or not; I do not want to be one of them. They only need to give me room.

Alex Chee is a writer, a cycle enthusiast, and an editorial intern at *OUT/LOOK*. He is a native of Maine, a resident of San Francisco, and hopes to be a dolphin the next time around.



© J. Michael Mariner

WOMEN AS QUEER NATIONALS

Maria Maggenti

When Karl calls me to invite me to the first meeting of a new group devoted to gay and lesbian activism, I am so excited I can hardly stand it. Yippee! A new group, lots of old AIDS activist pals, and only gay and lesbian issues on the agenda. I sit in a circle with sixty other curious people, most of them men I already know with a handful of women I also already know. This may be it, I think when I sit down, this may be the birth of the Queer Nation.

I came to that meeting as a lesbian AIDS activist with a political education developed in the academy, refined through theory, and hashed out dramatically in the usually hushed hallways of a women's Ivy League college. Those politics were refashioned, abandoned, polished, and reclaimed in the sweaty rough-and-tumble of the emerging AIDS activist movement of the late 1980s. Perhaps it was simply my decreasing level of energy

and tolerance for the gritty work of direct action—the many arguments to refine a simple idea, the desperate attempts to apportion tasks equally, the delicate diplomacy required with more inexperienced or ignorant members of the group—but I am coming to believe that what I sensed on some visceral level during that first night was instead a kind of lesbian existential dread. That, in fact, the map of the new queer nation would have a male face and that mine and those of my many colored sisters would simply be background material. We would be the demographic cosmetics, as it were, to assuage and complement the deeply imbedded prejudices and unselfconscious omissions of so many urgent and angry young men.

I believed, like many women before me, that with hard work, enthusiasm, knowledge, and skill, not to mention sheer force of personality, I would somehow be exempted from my status as girl, outsider, woman, bitch, cunt, other. I nursed this fantasy of my integral place in the burgeoning queer nation as a way to forestall my own consciousness that, in fact, it is near impossible to cross the million-year-old canyons that make men, men, and women, women. I avoided my own late-night questions about what it means to be a lesbian in a gay male universe and preferred to



lesbian or a dyke. But lately there's a purist movement to define lesbianism in a negative way—to say that lesbians are women who don't sleep with men and if you do sleep with men, you're not a lesbian. That is not what being a lesbian is about for me, and if that's what's being perceived when I say I'm a lesbian, that's not what I mean by it. So, I just want to

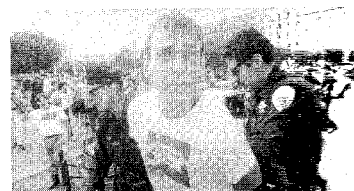
say "I'm queer." That's the only term that matters—I'm a sexual minority, I'm not straight, and my relationships are not legitimized by the straight world. I'm an outsider; I'm queer; I'm different.

LAURA THOMAS

I'm not quite sure what the political priorities of the queer movement are, other than some sort of *we're-here-we're-queer* identity and putting ourselves out there. I don't see the queer movement as being organized to do anything beyond issues of anti-assimilation and being who we want to be. It's

more on the level of accepting anyone who shows up than on the level of understanding differences and understanding why people wouldn't show up or not want to be a part of things.

There's not a lot of sophisticated political analysis and understanding about racism and classism and sexism and how they affect any political





believe in the united colors of the Queer Nation. But the fact that I could not seem to remember when the meetings were or who to call to find out bespoke my increasing sense of ambivalence. Soon it became apparent that I could not join, I could not participate, I could not sit again in a room filled mostly with men and stand up confidently to argue for or against a specific proposal. Shameful as it felt to admit it, it is as though my heart had folded over the way it does at the end of a relationship, and I wished only to retreat from the front lines. How convenient that at this same time I began an affair with a woman whose participation in the political scene was limited compared to mine. She had been flexing her

social and emotional muscles at the lesbian bars while I was at committee meetings until two a.m. arguing sentence by sentence for the right text for a fact sheet due at the printer the next morning. I envied her apparent freedom, for to me, she seemed to be searching for the queer nation in the more knowable universe of dykes whereas I had been attempting to swim upstream in a river of gay men.

As the 1980s began to congeal and created a deeply distraught social fabric, far more tormented at its underside than its surface, it became more and more difficult to imagine a lesbian nation. The possibilities seemed to have been reduced to 1980s polarities—

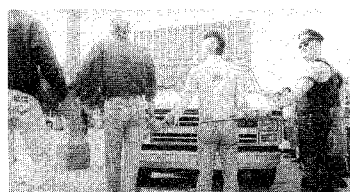
movement. I perceive the queer movement as willing to deal with these things, but not going out of its way to deal with them.

ADELE MORRISON

Queer is not an "instead of," it's an "in addition to." I'd never want to lose the terms that specifically identify me as like the whole issue of "people of color"—well, yeah, there are people of color, but I am a Black person or African-American, depending on who you talk to. Yes, I am part of the community of people of color too,

and there are those similarities we all have—being marginalized as a Black person.

Working in a very mixed or integrated group is a positive sort of thing. You have to come to coalition or you're just going to end up killing each other. I believe that's true. At the same time, I've come to a point



where I've been doing it for so long that I'm tired of fighting with people who are supposed to be on my side, people who should get it and don't. But on the other hand, I see working in groups that are coalescing with all different kinds of people together is the only real chance we all have as gays, lesbians, people of color, women. I do wonder personally how much more energy I can put into it because men who don't get their sexism and white people who don't get their racism are very dangerous to me. And how effective can I be in an organization where I do not feel

extreme marginalization as an anachronistic *up-yours* to the white male power structure or a sheepish but almost relieved dash for normalcy and assimilation through material and professional success, the consolidation of lesbian identity through monogamous coupling, joint property as an expression of mutual purpose in the world, and, increasingly in the latter half of the decade, a burgeoning movement toward lesbian parenting.

The lesbian nation could thus then be pictured as a loving female couple with a child, a dog, a house, and a Honda, or as a Wanderground of wimmin all readying themselves for the Amazonian apocalypse. But though it seemed that way on the surface, in fact it was far more creative and undefinable. Raw, contradictory energies and identities consumed the lesbians I met in New York at the exact halfway mark of the 1980s. From GirlBars and "glamour dykes" to the still-present politically correct lesbian behavior police, it seemed as though all of us were going through changes, throwing off the legacies of the 1970s to discover things about ourselves that were far more ambiguous, frightening, and perhaps even unnameable than all our feminist theory and lesbian porn put together. Could this increasing individuality actually be called liberation or was this simply the banal distillation of

1980s conformity? Was this supposed blossoming dissension among lesbians a thing boding well for our future, auguring a new way for us to see ourselves and each other, or was this shifting pattern of relations and representation simply a reflection of an anxious and shrinking middle class, a disintegration of easily identifiable political goals, and a comfortable (again, almost relieved) return to individual comfort over group advancement? I came to ACT UP with these questions still raging unanswered in my head and stayed for three years. I came to Queer Nation after those three years and stayed for three weeks. Why?

I see my lover's eyes twitch nervously. I am shifting in my seat. It feels too hot in here all of a sudden. My lover raises her hand and is called on. "I would like to say that though I am in a relationship and am very happy that I have a girlfriend—" the room interrupts her mid-sentence with a spontaneous round of rowdy applause. She is momentarily dazed but continues as though nothing has happened. "But I think that the idea that we go as couples to somehow prove our 'normalcy' is troubling and misguided. Why are we more legitimate if we are in a relationship? I don't want to be validated just because I am in a couple—some of us fuck everyone we meet and some of us are

safe, literally, physically not feel safe? What happens when male rage or white rage blows up and I happen to be in the way of it?

GERARD KOSKOVICH

I think *queer* has been adopted here in San Francisco by people who are using their experience of marginalization to produce an aggressive critique of the prevailing social system. Those people form networks in certain clubs, certain public places, certain intellectual territories like magazines or discourse. I think



we're seeing in its early stages a reorganization of some of those forces into a new community of people where the range of defining factors is rather fluid. People's limits have shifted significantly from the traditional urban gay community of the 1970s. It's not a reaction—that would be too easy a statement. As

someone in the scene who is somewhat older (I'm thirty-two), I date back to the high heyday of San Francisco clone lifestyle. I have always been aware that there were people who sought to transvalue and try life on the edge rather than trying to purchase the right goods at Macy's to demonstrate they are just like everybody else except for what they wear to nightclubs.

There are class issues in being queer. I came from a working-class background to Stanford as a graduate student on full scholarship. A lot of people that are the mainstays of

monogamous and some of us are celibate. I just want to be legitimate as a lesbian, period, not because I seem 'normal.'" The room responds with confused and timid applause. It is as though all the possibilities of our assimilation have been dashed to the ground. In addition, the stereotype of lesbians as somehow always cozily coupled has been challenged and the anxiety level of the room rises considerably. My lover sits down and looks at me with confusion. "I know," I say, "they liked the part about your girlfriend best." We shake our heads. At that moment I wonder to myself if what I had thought was brash and bold was in fact simply a more hip version of Hunter Madsen and his *After the Ball* positive-images campaign. The attire is different, there is more overt sexuality, there is a kind of no-rules-to-follow wackiness to it all, but I feel an underlying desire, an unspoken yearning it seems, to be accepted instead of liberated. I go home that night worried. How are lesbians ever going to be able to define ourselves in this group, in this decade, in this world?

The group has agreed on gender parity for the facilitators and thus there is a man and a woman at every meeting running the proceedings. One night when I am there the woman facilitator is awkward, nervous, knock-kneed. She lacks confidence and is easily cowed by the rambunctious shouts from the

floor about "process and *Robert's Rules of Order* and Parliamentary Procedure and this is important you have to call on me!" Orders fly into her face, mussing up her fine hair. She turns often to her male counterpart to help smooth things out. He takes the mike and troubleshoots to rid the meeting of those rowdy shouters. She looks young, maybe twenty-three or twenty-four. She is pale and pretty and blushes easily. She speaks too softly for the energy of this hot, crowded room. I want to tell her to stand up straight, speak loudly and clearly, refuse to be intimidated, take the room by storm. I want to tell her to stay and be a leader of the group, inspire them and make them afraid, plan actions and use a bullhorn and talk to the press proudly about the Queer Nation.

And I want to tell her to grab her female friends and run, run out into the rainy street shouting with power and anger and glee, shouting and dancing her way to some unknown place, some undiscovered continent, some still-unnamed territory.

Maria Maggenti is a graduate student in the New York University Film Program, where she is studying to be a director. She is a frequent contributor to *Windy City Times* (Chicago) and *Outweek*, the gay and lesbian weekly magazine.



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the queer social groups in San Francisco are from class positions that marginalize them: working-class, or race, or geographic discrimination. I don't want you to think I am devaluing the experience of those smaller numbers of people I have seen who have a middle-class or upper-class background and who have deliberately left behind the privilege that represents, who felt they were born on Mars and left on their own terms. It's the land of lost boys and lost girls who woke up one day and realized that not to have heterosexual privilege was in fact the highest privilege.

Steve Cossen, who conducted these interviews, was *OUT/LOOK's* editorial intern during summer 1990. He is currently attending drama school in London.

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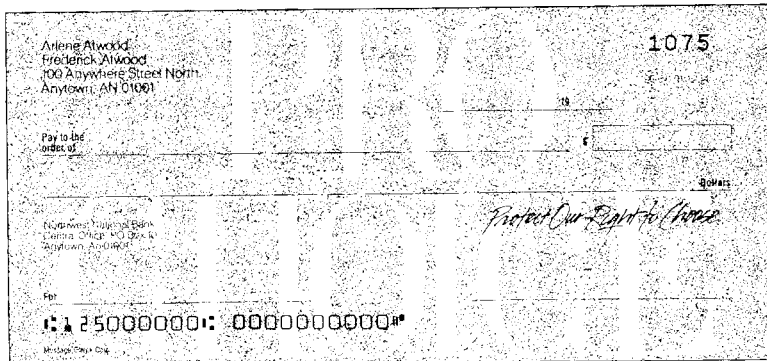
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LESBIAN SEX/GAY SEX: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

A few years ago, a picture of two young lesbians appeared in a brief presented to the Ministers of the Ontario Cabinet on adding sexual preference to the antidiscrimination clause of the Ontario Human Rights Code. The photograph was taken at a gay rights march attended by at least fifty people in 1975 or 76, in Ottawa, the nation's capital.

A friend of mine spotted it. "Is this you?" she asked, incredulous.

It was: I was sixteen, a baby dyke. And so was the young woman beside me; we stood together, smiling proudly, propping up a placard that read in bold lettering, "REPEAL THE SODOMY LAWS."

Why was I carrying this placard? One could as well ask why a gay man now might carry a sign reading, "PROTECT ABORTION RIGHTS." But while a gay man might come to his allegiance with feminist issues through learning the connections between his movement and another, this was my own movement—a gay rights demonstration. Homosexual women and homosexual men, femmes and faggots, queers, queens, butches and dykes, we all fell under the rubric of gay: not simply an alliance of differences but an identification of sameness.

This picture's current relevance for me is not simply as a badge of honor (I've since earned my purple stripes) but as the opening

to the story of my nascent political and sexual identity. And it founds the politics of my sexual identity squarely on a male paradigm. I was never in danger of being thrown in jail for practicing sodomy, yet somehow the association with an outlaw sexuality defined my identity as dangerous.

This is not to say that lesbians weren't arrested and harassed by the police for being lesbian and that there were no severe repercussions for such "gender treachery." But there never were any laws specifically forbidding lesbian sexual practices; the only lesbian case ever charged in Canada fell instead under the code forbidding "gross indecency," and this did not occur until 1981.

For Post-Stonewall lesbians in the Canadian gay rights movement, the laws against which we fought and which therefore defined us to some degree were laws made by, about, and for men. Not surprisingly, what constitutes homosexual sex in the public eye has always hung on the penis.

THE PENIS IN PUBLIC

The phallus exists as *the* symbol of desire because it represents both the presence of the penis for men and the absence of it for women. It therefore becomes a symbol of exchange. And because there is not an obvious symbol of exchange in lesbian sex (as in a penis), sex between lesbians becomes almost unrepresentable

and unimaginable for the general public.

In trying to find ways around this impasse, lesbians who produce photographic images of lesbian sex have found that the form as well as the content of visual representations of sex are so culturally conditioned by the conventions of heterosexual male desire that a seemingly in-eradicable inequity obtains between who is photographed and who is caught looking. It doesn't seem to matter that women are taking pictures of women *for* women: the phallic economy of the structures surrounding the production of lesbian sexual images results in as much displeasure as pleasure in the final product.

I don't think that it's entirely possible for us to escape this paradox. But I do think that we need to take up the discussion from another angle. What happens when we talk about lesbian representation not as lessons learned from straight men but from gay men?

"Men have taught you well," wrote several viewers on the wall of Kiss & Tell's interactive exhibit of lesbian sex photographs, *Drawing the Line* (OUT/LOOK, Fall 1990). The implication was that the work of the artists involved a betrayal of political consciousness and a lack of lesbian originality. Was this not simply a mimicry of heterosexual pornography and 'objectification'?

Male influence is clearly present in recent depictions of lesbian sex—particularly in photographs. But it is relevant and important for lesbians to ask *which* men have been our teachers and in *which* classrooms the lessons have taken place.

The association of lesbian sex images with images of gay male sex is rarely brought into view or questioned. In trying to create explicit representation of lesbian sex and to expand our sexual knowledge and techniques, some lesbians turn to gay men for instruction and alliance. To what extent have images of gay male sex influenced the establishment of a distinctive lesbian sexual iconography? Are there aspects of gay male sex imagery that are troubling? Promising?

Our impetus for using aspects of gay male

sexual culture may be an outcome of our increased interaction with gay men in recent years. Since the early 1980s, the AIDS crisis and state censorship (in both Canada and the United States) have forced lesbians and gay men to talk to each other about sex and its depiction as never before. Gay and lesbian publications are becoming more integrated, meaning that we see a great deal more of each other, literally and in media. This is equally true of lesbians and gay men of color, although the issues around which their communities organize appear to be somewhat different than among white lesbians and gay men.

For reasons having to do with capital and the relationship of freedom to one's body, lesbian sexual representations have primarily been the domain of white women. It is here that the closest relationship between lesbian and gay male representation occurs—at this point, both are predominantly white. For white women, the connection with gay men is made primarily on the basis of sexual identity, since being white is not widely viewed as an ethnicity, except among peoples of color and those whites engaged in issues of racism. This shared homosexual identity with white gay men (who have had access to the means of producing sex images) may be one of the reasons why the production of sexually explicit material has been by white women. Lesbians of color, on the other hand, are more likely to express their connections with gay men of colour on a basis of shared ethnic/racial and cultural identity than on sexual identity.

Differences of sexual representation between racial and ethnic groups are not centrally addressed here. They need a discussion of form—art, fiction, poetry, theater—and of social context much broader than my present focus on photographs. I realize that I am raising more questions than I am answering; but I raise them here so that others can take them up.²

LOOKING TO OUR BROTHERS

Why not look to gay men?

Our brothers have created institutions out of fantasies, while we lesbians are still arguing over whether to engage in fantasy in the first

place. They have not been shy about their extensive repertoire; we need only the inclination to look. They have taught us the meaning of right and left and curious acronyms; the beauty of leather, though we already knew lots about being butch. Marilyn Frye observed in *Sinister Wisdom* (Summer–Fall 1988),

I once perused a large and extensively illustrated book on sexual activity by and for homosexual men. It was astounding to me for one thing in particular, namely, that its pages constituted a huge lexicon of *words*: words for acts and activities, their subacts, preludes and denouements, their stylistic variation, their sequences. Gay male sex, I realized then, is *articulate*. It is articulate to the degree that, in my world, lesbian “sex” does not remotely approach. Lesbian “sex” as I have known it, most of the time I have known it, is utterly *inarticulate*. Most of my lifetime, most of my experience in the realms commonly designated as “sexual” has been pre-linguistic, non-cognitive. I have, in effect, no linguistic community, no language, and therefore in one important sense, no knowledge.

This is not to say that lesbians don’t have acts of sex. But even as we experience a lack of representations—images to represent or words to articulate what it is that we desire and do—we can’t help noticing that we are part of a gay and lesbian community that probably has the best developed sex distribution network of any culture. Pat Califia stated (*Advocate*, July 1983),

My male friends and lovers have taught me things that I would have never learned in the lesbian community. I can’t exaggerate my admiration for the well-developed technology, etiquette, attitudes and institutions that gay men have developed to express their sexuality. Remember, this from a woman who can’t go to the baths every night or answer fifty sex ads in the Pink Pages.)

The “tribal rites” of gay men hold a fascination for many lesbians, particularly the ease with which gay sex is apparently available with-

out emotional entanglement. Having experienced myself one too many times “lesbian bed death” syndrome and its accompanying (and devastating) emotional intensity, I find the idea of sex for its own sake refreshing.

Pick up a gay community newspaper and read the one or two articles that refer to lesbians and you will find yourself leafing through page after page of gay sex for sale or giveaway. The forms sex takes may have changed somewhat since the onset of the AIDS crisis (telephone sex has a new popularity), but the images are the same—hot, hunky male bodies offering themselves on every page. The personals are explicit and educational.

A lesbian in the gay community is exposed to more gay male sex fantasies than most heterosexual women are to straight men’s. I speculate that gay men have become fetishized sex symbols in many lesbian sexual fantasies. My lover and I, for example, played out a gay male sex fantasy one night. It surprised me, I enjoyed it, and it is now a standard part of our repertoire. I know this is not unique because friends have told me of similar experiences. As one lesbian put it, “Although I am occasionally attracted to femmes, I am primarily drawn to other butches as partners. This ‘butch–butch’ sexuality is easily fed by images of two men doing it.” Because gender-bending is a time-honored tradition in queer culture, it makes our imaginary crossing of sexual boundaries perhaps predictable in the more fluid realm of fantasy.

One photograph from *Drawing the Line* illustrates how lesbian fantasy is indebted to gay male sex. The image is shot through the door to a public toilet. Because toilets are commonly sex-segregated, they are not usual meeting places for straights, but they are fertile grounds for same-sex encounters. But is this fantasy part of popular lesbian lore or is it a borrowed one? One of the women stands with her back to the camera; the other is seated in front of her, visible only by the hand that presses against full cheeks. What is not seen but easily imagined is the tongue and the female lips it separates. But the image can as easily summon up a hard cock and a full mouth as well.

This suggestibility of the “scene” blurs the line separating public and private, gay male and lesbian sex. This fantasy’s framework is homoerotic—more commonly gay male, but now lesbian too. This is both a statement about politics and about pleasure—a newly shared appreciation of erotic space.

COMING TOGETHER

To what extent do relatively familiar relationships with gay men have an effect on emergent lesbian styles and representation? In the realm outside of explicit sexual representation, lesbians’ increased use of style has been identified by several lesbian writers as the direct result of our increased association with gay men. Madame X, an *Outweek* writer (4 April 1990), observed:

Frankly, this whole hype looks suspicious to me, dreamed up and advertised both by some guys who are happy to find (at long last!) lesbians dressed well enough so they won’t be embarrassed in their company, and by lesbians who are finally making enough money to embrace a lifestyle popularized years ago by the same people they used to despise. The nightclubber guy as role model . . .

Many lesbians choose styles for the visual pleasure that prefigures sexual pleasure, donning symbols that we hope will invite a new variant of lesbian sex. Hand in glove—latex, leather, lace—sexiness and style go together. Faded country uniforms are an increasingly marginal look; gay-influenced style rules the urban landscape.

Despite recent rapprochements, however, sexual hostilities between lesbians and gay men continue. For example, *Angles*, a Vancouver lesbian and gay paper, featured Li Yuen’s 1987 International Lesbian Week poster on its front cover. Many copies of this issue were dumped into the garbage by disgusted male bar owners, some of whom also cancelled their advertising because of its depiction of lesbian sex. Similarly, many lesbians are offended by images of gay male sex, particularly when they appear in journals catering to the “gay and les-

bian” community at large, complaining that gay male sexuality in any form is anathema to lesbian sensibilities.

While there is little resemblance or sense of community between lesbian separatists and men in the backrooms of bars, larger numbers of gay men and lesbians recognize themselves as sharing political and/or sexual proclivities. The *Leather Journal*, for example, although formerly a gay men’s publication, has recently announced a new column, “For Women, By Women.” The leather Man and Woman of the year, with matching cross-your-heart harnesses, share facing pages. Sex itself has become the common ground between leather lesbians and gay men. This doesn’t mean that lesbians and gay men are doing the same things; rather, what emerges is perhaps the first commonly shared homoerotic language. “Fisting,” for example, can involve very different parts of the anatomy for men and women; yet when understood in homoerotic argot, it speaks of a sameness in practice.

AIDS activism and safe-sex discourse have also provided a shared language and forum for lesbians and gay men. While the majority of AIDS information in the community is aimed toward high-risk male behavior, lesbians are also discussing if not practicing techniques for safe sex. From what was primarily a gay male crisis, rubber dams, latex gloves, and condoms on cucumbers have now brought legitimization and laughs to public talk about lesbian sex.

The extreme sexual imagery embedded in AIDS discourse has extended existing popular identification of homosexuality with gay male sexual practices. For lesbians who find themselves forging allegiances with gay men, the importance of gay male sexual representations to lesbian explorations of sexuality and identity must not go unexamined. And while I recognize and appreciate points of convergence between lesbians and gay men in the arena of sex, I think important questions remain. Since at least the late 60s, lesbians have been linked by one set of needs and analysis or another with both the feminist and gay movements. We will always have to negotiate

between the two (at least). The problem lies in choosing what we adopt or adapt from gay men's sexual culture and feminism's political analysis—or vice versa. What meanings do singular labels (*homosexual, gay, queer*) or even the elided connective *and* between gay men and lesbians, as Teresa de Lauretis has pointed out, have for lesbians as we begin to establish a distinctive sexual iconography?

PLAYING WITH TOYS (THE BOYS' TOYS?)

While I would defend the production of lesbian sex imagery, it seems we are emulating some practices that have developed in gay male communities with very little analysis of how they fit into structures of power. Since lesbians began talking about s/m, there has been nothing short of war among us. I am not aware, however, that comparable contestation over the meanings of s/m takes place among gay men. Discussions of racism (when it is discussed) among lesbians have been painful; interracial couples have been scrutinized for sex in bad faith. Meanwhile, gay male eroticization of class and racial differences is widely acknowledged and even promoted as pleasurable.

The most controversial choices take place around lesbian photographs and confessional narratives.³ There are no guarantees as to how such texts will be read for they are always reformulated by the reader. What meanings are made, for example, of photographs of lesbians wearing and using dildos? Here the influence of gay male culture seems particularly important. I would argue that the charges of heterosexual mimicry that we've hurled back and forth miss the point. Lesbian "maleness" may be a "gay maleness"—not a reenactment of fixed gender roles but an exploration of the very signs "male" and "female."

A lesbian photographed wearing a dildo makes a homoerotic rather than a heterosexual sensibility. It expresses desire between two women. "Heron and Lucille," a series of images from *On Our Backs* (July–August 1989), illustrates this point exactly. Heron is a large, powerful woman wearing a dildo. She is positioned behind Lucille, who is much smaller.

Lucille wears white underclothes; Heron sports a black leather cap and black gloves. The visible differences between these two women emphasize an erotic exchange—most notably, through the presence of the dildo. But these markers of gay masculinity (the cap, the dildo, the positions) could easily be exchanged, though modified by the women's physical difference. Masculinity takes the form of a masquerade and is represented by apparel to be donned or removed at and for one's pleasure. This is not heterosexual but homosexual masquerade. It is a part of a long history of gender slippage, where the appeal of difference is often expressed in terms of self-conscious parody.

Gay men have taught us a thing or two about the masquerade of femininity by their exaggerated and sometimes misogynistic drag. Might the butch lesbian serve the same purpose for gay men? Who knows? We've never asked. Sue-Ellen Case has discussed the theatrics of parody, in which both masculinity and femininity are recognized masquerades:

the butch is the lesbian woman who proudly displays the possession of the penis, while the femme takes on the compensatory masquerade of womanliness. The femme, however, foregrounds her masquerade by playing to a butch, another woman in a role; likewise, the butch exhibits her penis to a woman who is playing the role of compensatory castration. This raises the question of "penis, penis, who's got the penis," because there is no referent in sight; rather, the fictions of penis and castration become ironic and "camped up."

In the case of the Heron and Lucille photographs, there are signs that the fantasy of difference is played out in terms borrowed from gay men.

This isn't to say that "camped up" representations and styles should be received without considering their political implications. Leo Bersani, for example, is skeptical of claims that machismo in gay men is a true subversion of dominant masculinity. Rather, he says, it manifests a yearning for masculinity that is upheld

even as it is parodied. But while Bersani sees very real problems with gay male camp, some lesbians are embracing the idea that lesbian camp is potentially subversive.

LOOKING AWAY FROM OUR BROTHERS

Despite the convergences of lesbian and gay male sexual cultures and their representations, significant divergences also exist between the sexual imagery of lesbians and gay men. Overwhelmingly, photographs of lesbians by lesbians feature two women whose connectedness is visible. In most scenes, the participants are engaged with each other, inviting the viewer to imagine themselves as one or both of the actors. Body types are diverse. In contrast, much of gay male magazine culture promotes the image of the single man, willing and waiting. Gay male porn is one-dimensional, favoring ideal body types and focused on the center of excitement—the hot throbbing dick.

Gay male influence is only *part* of what comprises lesbian sex representation, however. Lesbian imagery can develop in several directions, some closer to already existing forms and some more divergent. Lesbian artists cannot help being self-conscious about the politics of producing images; this will probably lead to more interactive work like *Drawing the Line* and other experimental forms that draw attention to the dynamics of production and viewing.

But with more depictions of lesbian sex, there is a greater likelihood of censorship by larger society. When the cover of *Rites*, a Toronto publication, featured photographs of lesbians ejaculating, the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association sought legal opinions about its liability for possible charges of distributing obscenity. The magazine went on the stands, but an informal poll of the Association's board found that all of the men and none of the women found the photographs obscene. Incidents like this suggest that questions of what are legally acceptable representations of lesbian sex may become equally the focus of both feminist commentary and state censorship.

It remains to be seen how current cases of state censorship will be resolved. Despite the lo-

cal victory in Cincinnati over the Mapplethorpe exhibit, there is still state harassment—for example, Toronto's Glad Day Bookstore and Little Sisters in Vancouver are fighting indictments by Canadian Customs. Once again, gay male desire and its representation are the focus of public outcry and state suppression. But although lesbian relations vary greatly, both strategically and visually, from those of gay men, lesbians dedicated to producing lesbian sexual imagery may find that state surveillance will soon focus directly on their work. Visibility in the 1990s is at least a double-edged scene.

When a group of gay men and lesbians read this essay in draft to discuss it with me, it provoked true confessions from the men: "Those images of men do nothing for me," "They do," "They do not represent me," and "I am not responsible for them." I would like to hear more men talk about how their desire is or isn't represented. And then, perhaps, we—lesbians and gays—can start to have a conversation.

Julia Creet is a PhD student in the History of Consciousness program at University of California Santa Cruz. Her work focuses primarily on issues of lesbian identity and representation.

For editorial insightfulness and conciseness, thanks to Jackie Goldsby, Jan Zita Grover, and Lynne Cunningham; for discussions and other kinds of understanding, Nathalie Magnon and Joanna Kidd.

1. A quirk or memory; or at least that's how I remembered it. But when I checked recently, I discovered that the sign actually reads, "Police Repression Must Stop." The difference between my memory of the sign and what is historically accurate may attest to what I remembered between the lines—the ironic meaning of the photograph to me. I was protesting the policing of male desire. But beyond this photograph, the slippage between literal meaning and other associations attributed to images is at the heart of this paper. I will retain my remembered version of the sign, for that is what it said—in my mind.

2. Two writers who have both addressed and partially answered these questions are Jackie Goldsby, "What It Means To Be Colored Me" (*OUT/LOOK*, Summer 1990), and Makeda Silvera, "Man Royal and Sodomitest: Some Thoughts on Afro-Caribbean Lesbians," *Lesbians in Canada*, ed. Sharon Dale Stone, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990), pp. 48–60.

3. Much of Samois's *Coming To Power* (1981) and Jan Clausen's and Jan Brown's pieces in *OUT/LOOK* (Winter 1990) fall into this category.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH SARA LEVI CALDERÓN

Lisa Geduldig

Dos Mujeres (Two Women) by Sara Levi Calderon is a surprise bestseller in Mexico, where only two other explicitly lesbian books have been published. This love story between two divorced Mexican Jewish women, Valeria and Genovesa, was published in April by Diana, Mexico's largest mainstream publisher. The novel discusses the universal theme of coming out amidst a family, culture, and world that's not ready to accept homosexuality and the more specific one of an upper middle-class Mexican Jewish family and community. Currently number five on Mexico's list of bestsellers, Dos Mujeres just went to a second printing with a third expected this winter.

Sara Levi Calderón is the pen name of a Mexican Jewish lesbian who is fending off the ostracism of both her family and the tight-knit Jewish community of Mexico City, where she was raised. She spoke with Lisa Geduldig during a recent visit to San Francisco. While Calderón was in the US, her family discovered that she was the author of the (in many circles) scandalous Dos Mujeres. Calderón, 48, has two grown sons and a new granddaughter.

Calderón is now working on a second novel, which she hopes to publish in 1991. Aunt Lute Books has just announced that it will publish the English translation of Dos Mujeres next year.

Q: How would you describe your novel? Is it a lesbian love story? A story of two women coming of age in Mexico? Of two Jewish women?

A: I would describe it as one woman looking for the freedom she doesn't have and finding it through loving another woman. And that freedom is very connected with the possibility of Valeria writing a book. She does become a writer after coming out as a lesbian.

Q: Are you Valeria? You don't have to answer that.

A: I would love to. I am my fiction character.

It is like this other ego that I always wanted to be. And sometimes I live my life as if it were a movie of it. Valeria is also this woman that comes out when I'm at my computer and she does so many things without me knowing or wanting or deciding. She sometimes becomes herself.

Q: She's a pretty adventurous alter ego.

A: Yeah.

Q: Is this your first novel?

A: Yes. I have written some poetry and drama,

but this is my first novel—and the first thing I've ever published. I'm a sociologist. I was working at the University of Mexico City as a sociologist when I met my lover. I always wanted to write, and suddenly I had something to write about—my love with this woman. It gave me the ability to know what I wanted. I wanted to talk—to tell about the experiences I was living and feeling. It became so important for me to write that it's almost impossible to believe that I haven't been doing it all my life.

Q: How did you end up having your book published by Diana—the largest publishing house in Mexico?

A: It took me six, almost seven years to write the book. When it was finished, I showed it to many good friends who have been writing for many years—who have good names for themselves.

They told me, "Your novel is ready to go out." So, I decided to go to the biggest publisher because I wanted it to be everywhere.

They received me. And they said that they thought it was a very good novel—that it was very commercial, too—but they wouldn't publish it. So, I felt horrible. I wanted to cry. I started thinking, *I'm going to have to go to the publishers one by one, and have them receive this lesbian novel—in Mexico City.*

But I picked up my manuscript again and decided to speak to the man in charge of Diana—and I asked him why, if they thought it was a good fiction book and was going to be very commercial, were they rejecting it? So, he looked at me and looked at the manuscript and told me, "Yeah, I know this is a very good one, let me think it over for a

week and then call you." So, that week was incredible for me. I was counting every minute. When I called him back, he told me, "OK, it's accepted." It was as easy as that.

Q: Did you assume that your audience would be just a lesbian audience? Your book is being sold in Gigante, the large supermarket chain. Did that surprise you?

A: [One of the reasons Diana is] very big is because they know how to put their books everywhere. Yes, it was very strange for me to see my book in the supermarket—I thought it was something for the bookstore. I saw these two

women in the supermarket hiding this book, not really wanting to show that they were going to buy it. I think that each place selling the book has very different audiences. This is a story that I think is very interesting for

"THEY'RE SAYING THAT A LESBIAN DOESN'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO SAY ANYTHING ABOUT THE FAMILY."

many people. It's been sold to many women, some of them lesbians, some of them wives married with children—they could very easily be lesbians but because they're not and buy it, they have to have it hidden. I have heard that many of them will put a piece of paper over the cover and read it on the bus, the subway, or in the office. So, it's a hidden book.

As for the Jewish people in Mexico, the book has been a scandal because as a minority (like in the US for Latinas) Jews shouldn't speak, we should keep silent, other people shouldn't hear that we're not wonderful. And wonderful for them is being one way—other ways don't exist.

Q: Why did you write the book under a pseudonym?

A: Well, I'm a mother and I live in Mexico—and all Latinas know what I mean by that. And of course any lesbian who has lived perhaps also in a very strict Jewish family also knows what that means. I'm a Latina and I'm Jewish. For these two minorities, it's horrible to be a lesbian. They don't know what it means, but they know they don't want it. So, I thought it was enough that the book came out and was read by many people. For my family—in a way I thought they were going to be protected [by the pseudonym]. They were not, because as soon as the book came out everyone knew that it was me.

Q: How have your family and friends reacted since they've known that Sara Levi Calderón was actually you?

A: They are saying that no one should speak out about family matters. It is very strange that they are saying that. I really don't know why. My novel is very erotic, and I know that for them it is quite a shock to read these erotic parts, but they will not say a word about these two women loving each other and living together. About that they will not say one word, but they will say, "She's talking about the family, and she's ready to break it up and to break up her community, too." And they hate that about me. I think what's behind what they're saying is the belief that a lesbian doesn't have the right to say *anything* about the family.

Besides that, I know two or three men whose response to the novel was, "We're not that bad." You know, I didn't want to say anything bad about men—I'm not saying men are bad. But men are taking it personally—

that has been the most interesting thing.

Q: Being both lesbian and Jewish, do you feel like you have to be doubly in the closet in Mexico?

A: Yeah, it's exactly that. Me being lesbian and being Jewish—both things are difficult because Mexico is a very Catholic country. They have an old way of thinking, like Jewish people killed Jesus Christ. Believe it or not, that belief is so strong. From that they will start having a very strange idea about you... they think somebody back in your family killed their god. And besides, being Jewish in such a country also means living in a very small community that's always trying to show its best face—there can be no suffering, no bad words. And my family is very, very classic in that way.

Q: Your characters are Jewish. Now is that something very uncommon in a novel that has come out in Mexico—that there are Jewish characters described in a positive manner?

A: Yes, it is. First of all, here in the United States, you can see Black women talking about themselves, Jewish women talking about themselves, Latinas talking about themselves. You can see the differences coming out now and everyone's fighting for their identity. Besides being lesbian or heterosexual, each of these women is a member of some other group. In Mexico City, we haven't been able yet to address those differences. I would say that there are not too many Jewish writers, so those stories haven't been told yet. Why they haven't been, I don't know exactly. Per-

"BEING JEWISH IN MEXICO MEANS LIVING IN A VERY SMALL COMMUNITY THAT'S ALWAYS TRYING TO SHOW ITS BEST FACE."

Chapter 15 of *Dos Mujeres*, by
Sara Levi Calderón
Dan Belim, trans. (in progress)

CARE FOR A MINT?

Genovesa offered me a mint. Shamelessly I took it with my mouth. I felt the unfamiliar contact of her fingers on my tongue: a flash of lightning passed through my brain. She looked at me with astonishment without pulling back her hand. Her mouth was half-open from the surprise and I moved toward it, both of us trembling; with a heart gone mad I slipped my tongue into her mouth and circled around her teeth. She tasted like a freshly-opened

flower. Our glances parted like two birds in flight. We disappeared into the mirror in front of the bed. All around us there were thousands of eyes full of blueness and sea, maggots and human remains. Two women, one kneeling before the other, surrounded by a pantheon of eyes. We fell into an uncomfortable silence. Gulp: I could see my own insides, black entrails turning red, little grooves etched into my eyes. Genovesa was still staring into the mirror, looking as if she'd been covered with wild roses.

What seemed an eternity to me lasted only an instant. She emerged slowly from the frame of refracted light. She seemed

sorrowful, a thousand-year-old woman. I recognized in her the young woman I had been until not so long ago. I took her hand which was resting on the beige comforter. The two of us had come from such different experiences, but in some way we were the same.

"It isn't easy destroying the ghosts of our ancestors," I said. "What we have to do is break away from the oldest symbols of all, the ones we learned before we were born." She bowed her head and arranged the comforter over her legs.

"Yes," she said softly. "It's about something ancient." And seeing me pulling away, she passed her



haps because everyone's afraid to talk about themselves. When you have to talk honestly about yourself, you have to talk about your family—you grew up in a family, you grew up in a school, you grew up with friends, you grew up surrounded by an ideology. And if you are not allowed to say anything about those things, you remain quiet.

Q: It is my understanding that this is the second Mexican lesbian novel—that there have only been two—yours and Rosamaria Roffiel's novel *Amora*?

A: Yes. There is also a book of poetry. I'd call it the third book. It's called *Lunas*, by Sabina Berman. I like it very much. I think it's beautifully written—very sexy, very erotic, and very intelligent. I'm sure that lesbians are happier now that they at least have something to read.

Q: Do you know if your book has reached other Latin American countries?

A: Not yet because it is very, very new in Mexico. It will be reprinted—you can't find a single copy left anywhere. Diana has the rights in Spanish. I'm not able or allowed to do anything else. But it will make its way to some other Latin American countries. All Spanish-speaking people who want to will be able to get it here in the States too. It will travel by itself.

Q: What is the situation for lesbians who are public figures—writers or performers in Mexico who are "out" about being lesbian?

A: It's very difficult. I'm going to go back to Mexico now and taste exactly what that means. I'm afraid because I know we haven't

hand over my cheek. She asked if I was feeling worried too.

"Yes," I said. The answer seemed to reassure her. Little by little our granite fortifications were eroding and desire became transparent again.

Suddenly I realized that she would surrender her body slowly. I would have to caress her with glances, wear away the sadness that concealed her voluptuousness. It was a delicate art, like Japanese watercolor. I licked her neck, her mouth

Outside a sharp rain was beating at the windows. The music of Alan Barriere accompanied

us into new territory.

"Two women," I thought, desire rising through every pore. My mouth paused at her neck. I sunk down to her stomach, held back her hips. She moved her breasts toward my breasts, then to my face, to my mouth. She licked my neck. We returned to each other's mouths, examining tongues. The throbbing of my temples became a throbbing of my sex. Oh, God: horses galloping at the speed of wind, flashes of bright red streaming from their muzzles. Our bodies were dancing.

"I feel so strong with you," she whispered.

"I want to make you mine. I want to become yours," I murmured in her ear.

My excited tongue traveled over her breasts, her bright red nipples, her smooth stomach; it penetrated her vulva of cool moss. Silvery sparks falling into a lead-grey sea. I felt strong and limitless.

"I'm so afraid of you I'm dizzy," she said.

The earth turned liquid. We held each other fast. She recognized her taste across my mouth. The firewood crackled as our voices rhymed. I love you, a sophisticated voice cried out: it was mine and no one



won a place in society like lesbians and gay men here in the United States. I don't know, but I think it's going to be very difficult to be a public figure as a lesbian in Mexico City. But I'm ready to accept it as a torment in the sea. And I'm going to be strong, attached to the mast, and I'm going to stay with my boat. The first step is very difficult, but I'm happy because the book is going to be a way to open up things for many women.

Q: Are there other openly lesbian figures, writers, performers?

A: There are very few.

I think that I'm going to feel freer here in the US. My lover wants to come here, too. So we are going to try and come back for a while and speak out about what we have to here—because we won't be able to speak too much in Mexico City. I was not expecting to

become a public figure, but now that I know what's happening with my book in Mexico, I have to accept it as a fact. I have to face it, and I'm going to face it proudly because I am very, very proud of who I am.

Lisa Geduldig is a writer, radio reporter, and stand-up comic who also works in advertising for *OUT/LOOK* and *Mother Jones*.



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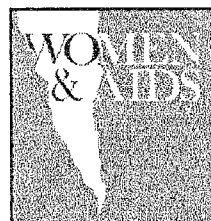
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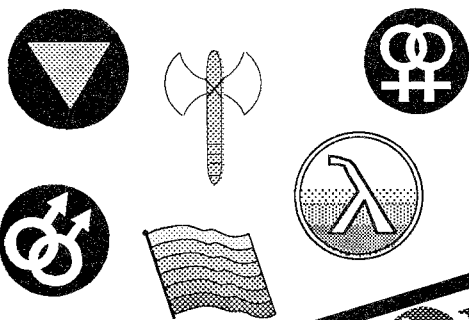
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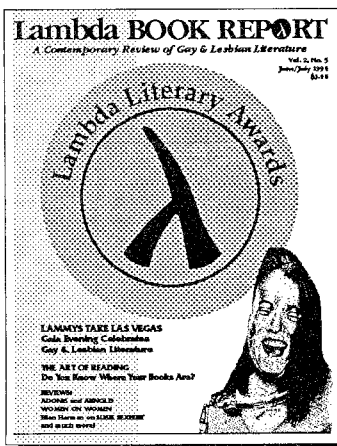
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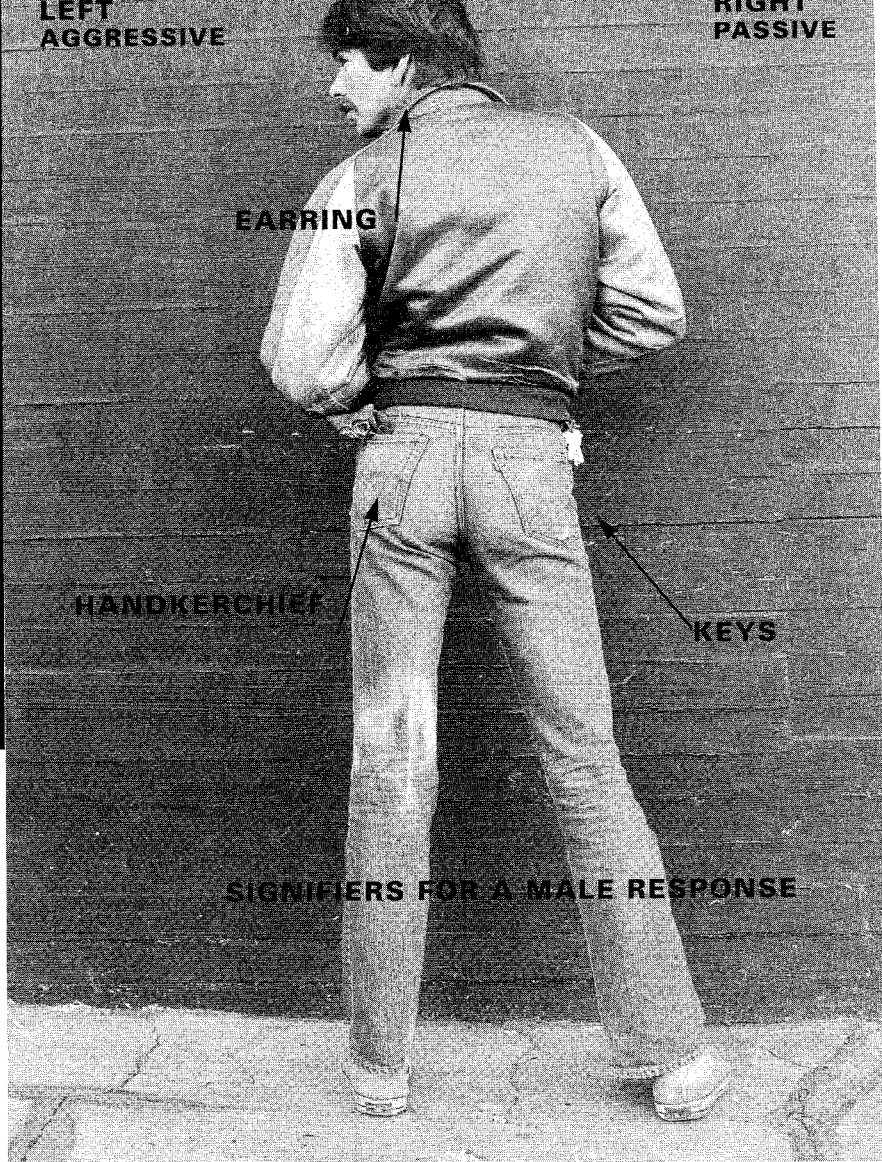
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EARRING

HANDKERCHIEF

KEYS

SIGNIFIERS FOR A MALE RESPONSE



From *Gay Semiotics* (1977), by Hal Fischer

The gay semiotic, specifically the handkerchief signifier, was created in the leather community for practicality. Patrons of leather bars wanted to know who to cruise—they needed an identification system which would label men as passive or aggressive and also signify the type of sex act in which they wished to engage.

In San Francisco, the signs began appearing around 1971. The Trading Post, a depart-

ment store specializing in erotic merchandise, began promoting handkerchiefs in the store and printing cards with their meanings. The red and blue handkerchiefs and their significance were already in existence, and meanings were assigned to other colors as well.

Traditionally western societies have utilized signifiers for non-accessibility. The wedding ring, engagement ring, lavaliere or pin are signifiers for non-availability which are always attached to women.

Signs for availability simply do not exist.

In gay culture, the reverse is true. Signifiers exist for accessibility. Obviously, one reason behind this is that gays are less constrained by a type of code which defines people as property of others or feels the need to promote monogamy. The gay semiotic is far more sophisticated than straight sign language, because in gay culture, roles are not as clearly defined. On the street or in a bar it's impossible most of the time to determine a gay man's sexual preference either in terms of activity or passive/aggressive nature. Gays have many more sexual possibilities than straight people and therefore need a more intricate communication system.

In the gay semiotic the body is divided into sides, the left representing the aggressive, the right the passive. Any sign placed on the left side indicates that the wearer will always take an active role during sexual activity. Conversely, a sign on the right side of the body indicates passive behavior. Three basic signifiers are recognized: handkerchiefs, keys, and earrings.

Handkerchiefs are assigned meaning by color. The blue handkerchief is a signifier for anal intercourse. A blue handkerchief in the left hip pocket indicates that the wearer will assume the dominant role. Conversely, a blue handkerchief in the right hip pocket indicates that the wearer will play the passive role.

Red handkerchiefs signify behavior relating to anal/hand insertion, while black handkerchiefs indicate masochistic/sadistic tendencies. Yellow

handkerchiefs represent sexual activities with the participants' urine, or in gay jargon "water sports."

Keys hung from a metal clasp attached to a belt loop are another common signifier for gay activity. While the body orientation remains constant, keys are not indicative of specific types of sexual activity.

The earring is sometimes employed as a sign, but is rather vague in meaning. While handkerchiefs and keys have either masculine or neutral connotations, the earring has strong feminine implications and at times is more an object of fashion. The earring is a somewhat confused signifier, because its uses and meanings are so varied.

While the gay semiotic mode is codified, it is not necessarily dictated by or adhered to within all strata of the gay community. For example, the handkerchief placed in the rear hip pocket is always a gay signifier, but it is not always used as a sign for a particular activity. Interestingly, the handkerchief is seen more often on the left or active side, and less frequently

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THE DEMISE OF THE ZIPPERED SWEATSHIRT:

HAL FISCHER'S
GAY SEMIOTICS
(1977)

Jan Zita Grover

Gay *Semiotics* is an historic document. It was the first photographic attempt to apply contemporary art and cultural theory to gay street culture.

"The inspiration for my gay work came from subcultural coding devices," says author Hal Fischer. "There were all those handkerchiefs, keys, and earrings. In 1977 these signs were taken seriously in the gay community. The Trading Post, San Francisco's largest leather emporium, published a semi-humorous 'hankie decoder' as well as an extensive catalogue of leather apparel, bondage devices, and the like." *Gay Semiotics*, published by NFS Press in 1977, documented these visual codes.


Viewed across time, the work reads like a map to another country, one whose inclusions and exclusions may be more obvious now because of the distance that time creates. The faces looking out of Fischer's photographs are uniformly in their mid-to-late twenties. They are all white, they are all slim. They all look—how photographs deceive!—robust and healthy. Are these the only men or sort of men to be found in the Castro? Or the only men corresponding to Fischer's own desire? Is the artist responsible only to his own desire—the slice of history he chooses to own and document? If so, how and by whom will the unchosen, silenced slices of history be voiced? Is the artist responsible only to collective pressures—the slices of history that his community chooses



Street Fashion



Street Fashion Leather

FISCHER  on the right or passive side, because gays are often reluctant to advertise their passive tendencies.

Handkerchiefs are also ambivalent signifiers because many individuals prefer to pick their roles after they pick their partners. In fact, the "switch hitter" is probably more common to the gay scene than the individual committed to a particular activity.

However, the one area in which signifiers are stringently observed is the cult in which they originated. The leather culture exists as a subculture *within* a subculture, where the more unconventional sex acts involving sadism, masochism and water sports are practiced with frequency. Due to the variety and intensity with which the leather cult participates in these activities, the handkerchief signs are taken quite seriously.

Like any other cultural group, gay people have developed a semiotics intended both for identification and/or invisibility within the larger culture, as well as communication among themselves. As economic, political and social levels of interaction fluctuate, the uses of the language will broaden and new, more evolved—overt as well as covert—terms will come into use. As the gay community is polarized on some issues and cohesive around others, the semiotic process which helps locate it in the larger culture will flourish with interesting and undoubtedly provocative results.

to own and document? If so, how and when will he be able to follow paths darker, less popular, more personal? These are questions that historical documents inevitably raise. They are not answered by an essay like *Gay Semiotics*, but they are raised.

"When I look back on it," Fischer says, "*Gay Semiotics* is a reliquary of my experience in the late 1970s. There aren't any people of color or lesbians in it. The work was very much about my own experience—a private discourse on friends, desires, and fantasies.

"My own experience in the late 1970s didn't deviate much from the popular or dominant assumptions of that period about gay male culture. The icon of gay sensibility was a white man in his late twenties. This was the promoted 'reality' of that era. It was also my reality."

Fischer came to San Francisco in 1975 as a graduate student in photography at San Francisco State. At that time, State's photography department, like those of most colleges and universities across North America, taught and supported a modernist reading of photographs: meanings were thought to inhere in what viewers saw within the image frame, and the more sensitive and "visually literate" viewers were, the deeper they were supposed to penetrate into the essence of a photograph's inborn meaning. Photographic criticism was widely viewed as the practice of this refined sensibility as it gazed across the field of individual photographs.

Fischer rejected this purist approach to photographic meaning. Central to his more complex understanding of photographs were his coming out as a gay man and joining a group of local photographers, the "photo-language" people.

The late 1970s were a time when North Americans first encountered European theories and practical criticism of cultural coding (e.g., Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Julia Kristeva, Stuart Hall) in English translation and American editions. The effect on many young artists and writers was to try applying these theories to their own circumstances. In San Francisco, Lew Thomas, a local photographer and fledgling book publisher (NFS Press), became



**Archetypal Media Image
Urbane**

the center for a group of photographers who rejected modernist, essentialist readings of photographs in favor of viewing them, as Barthes or Eco did, as culturally coded signs. Fischer became actively involved with the photo-language group; the difference between his practice and the rest of theirs was that he took semiotic theory and applied it to the Castro's affluent gay street life.

"I began *Gay Semiotics*," he says, "when there was virtually no precedent for this type of photography in relation to a gay sensibility. While magazines like the *Advocate* did publish gay photographs, there was a huge gap between that work—most of it beefcake—and art that was gay but also spoke to mainstream art-critical concerns."

Gay Semiotics was one of the first works to bring together these two strands (the other work was Robert Mapplethorpe's *X Portfolio*, published the following year). It sold 3,000 copies—a surprising number for a small-press book with very limited bookstore circulation.

In it, Fischer wove together a serious attempt to apply contemporary theories of signs to gay street life and a deadpan humor that poked fun at field studies, documentary photography, and the supposed truth-value of photographs.

When *OUT/LOOK* decided to reprint parts of *Gay Semiotics*, we hoped that Hal Fischer would complement the 1976–77 photographs with new ones that documented the vastly wider, more inclusive world of gay and lesbian culture and its coding in 1990.

Fischer sighed when I asked him to do that. "I've been asked more than once to consider updating it," he says. "I can't do it. First of all, I question whether such an investigation would even be appropriate. In the 1970s, the sign system was drawn around a simple distinction between gay and straight. Now it seems to be drawn along more intricate and varying lines—hip versus unhip, political versus apolitical, and that most American of distinctions, wealthy versus impoverished.

"The coding systems and uniforms of the 1970s are still elemental to segments of the gay community, but the vocabulary of forms today is far bigger, taking in everything from nerd eyeglasses to pierced anything. The variations are a lot more subtle—the club look, for example, versus the ACT UP look versus the Queer Nation look.

"I'm thirteen years older now and I'm no longer directly involved with the nuances of contemporary style articulated by people in their twenties. I'm getting older. Life was easier and less expensive when two pairs of 501s, a couple of flannel shirts, a leather jacket, and a zippered sweatshirt pretty much got gay men in San Francisco through a season in paradise."

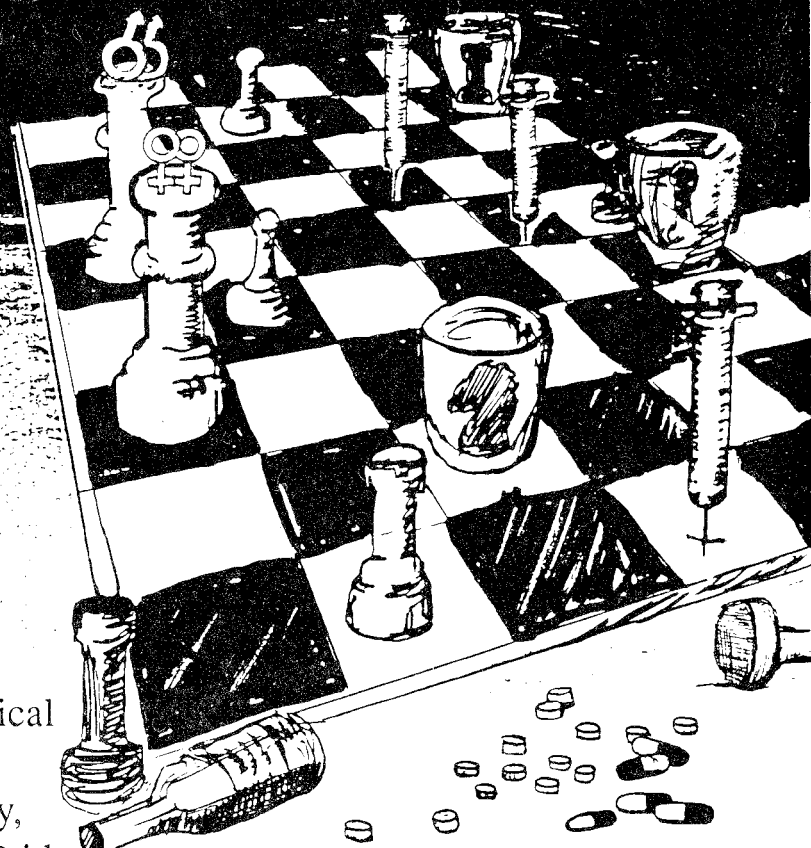
Gay Semiotics was reprinted and abridged from *Gay Semiotics: A Photographic Study of Visual Coding Among Homosexual Men*, c 1977 Hal Fischer.

What are the cultural codes in your community?
OUT/LOOK wants to update Hal Fischer's *Gay Semiotics* by featuring your own photographs. Send us your 5x7- or 8x10-inch black-and-white photographs of lesbian/gay/queer cultural codes in your own community. Please include a SASE unless you do not want them returned.
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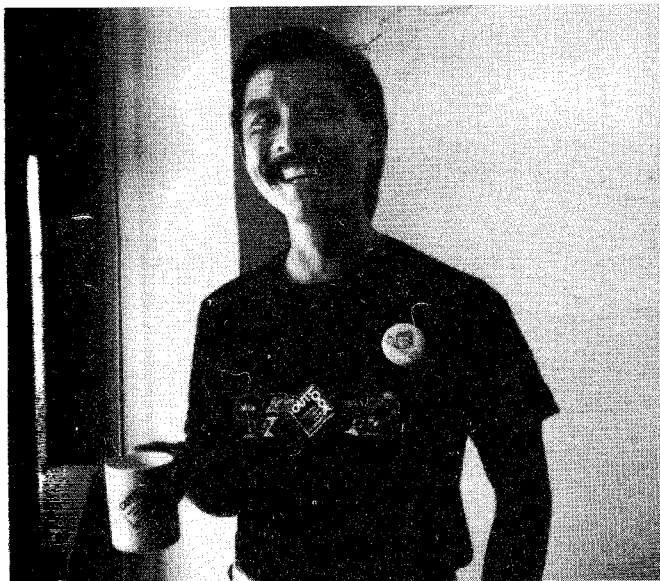
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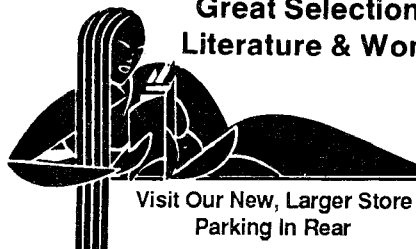
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WHAT IDEALS GUIDE OUR ACTIONS?

ARTISTS, CENSORSHIP, AND BUILDING COMMUNITY

Sarah Schulman

I believe that the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding crisis has its roots in three different areas. It is a result of ten years of Reaganism and the right-wing coalition that has kept Reagan and Bush in power. It is part of the broad homophobic backlash to the visibility that has accompanied AIDS. And it is a reaction to years of artists' isolation from other communities.

If artists really believe all our talk about racism, sexism, and class privilege, then we must articulate a clear and inclusive vision of how we want to live. This vision can include an arts-reward system that does not perpetuate the special privileges for an elite and the institutional neglect that have become normal for an increasing number of Americans. This vision means that as we oppose the exclusion of gay artists from NEA grants, we must, with equal vigor, oppose the systematic exclusion of other entire communities of artists—an exclusion that many of us have previously accepted as normal.

The organized arts community has a lot of soul-searching to do about our own history of exclusion. Before Jesse Helms, many other biases existed in the funding and presentation of artwork. Historically, the reward system in the arts has been reserved primarily for white people from the middle and upper classes whose work fits the aesthetic agendas of critics and arts administrators. Acknowledging and dismantling these exclusions is equally important and must be done hand-in-hand with our opposition to Helms and homophobia.

Marketing, nepotism, and racial exclusion have always been taboo topics for discussion in the arts. And some are saying that this is not the strategic moment to "open up this can of worms." But I would argue that, strate-

gically, this is the perfect time because this is when the attention is on funding and this is when we are all scrambling to find out what we stand for. We know we are opposed to Helms. But what ideals guide our actions? Do we want to "save the NEA"—that is, return to the status quo of exclusion that existed quietly a year and a half ago?

We are artists in a political battle and our role can be similar to the role of the left—that is, to be radical, to be challenging, to propose a vision. Look at how that structure has functioned in the gay movement. Since ACT UP came along and stretched the parameters of gay politics, suddenly we see an issue like domestic partnership given enormous credibility. Before ACT UP and gay civil disobedience, the simple request for a legalized gay family was considered absurd. ACT UP has made it seem reasonable. Why then are artists and the centrist arts establishments taking the same position—that is, a return to the status quo? True, the most funded artists have the same interests as the institutions, but what about the vast majority of us? Shouldn't we be constantly pushing for more minority representation in arts organizations, stronger community relations, and more equitable distribution of resources? Let's articulate a visionary agenda of concrete reforms that we want to see put in the place of current corruptions. Okay, we know that these reforms won't be instituted next year or the year after that, but an agenda can give us some cohesion and clarity about what we are working toward.

There will never be a fair distribution of grants as long as the arts reward system remains a white majority industry. So let's first propose that panels should proportionally represent underfunded communities and be 80 to 90 percent Black, Latin, and Native. This representation would guarantee a more



diverse collection of recipients. Secondly, how about real peer panels to look at artists' work and recommend grants? We're told that the NEA has peer panels now, but that's not really the case. Panels should be 100 percent artists. The arts administrators and critics who also at present serve on panels receive salaries and have their own agendas and their own professional debts and alliances. Administrators, critics, and publishers are also overwhelmingly white, way out of proportion to artists. Third, people who sit on panels should not be allowed to receive grants from those panels. That's where the system currently sinks deepest into corruption.

Another challenge to building a movement is to take the NEA issues out of the province of arts-only advocacy groups and instead build with other communities along the shared experiences of repressive legislation. How many times have I heard someone say, "Artists need health insurance." Don't we all need health insurance? Besides, history has shown that single-issue organizing never works because social change requires a social context. Gay art came out in the first place because of gay liberation in everyday life, not because of a small group of gay lobbyists going to Washington. Artists need to use our skills to confront the widespread lack of funding and services affecting a diverse and growing spectrum of people in this country.

Some immediate tasks have to do with reclaiming the vocabulary imposed on this event by the press. This is probably the first time in history that the media has defined a gay and lesbian issue before we had time to figure it out for ourselves. In this country, the government and the media exist in a dialectic of power. When the government takes away a grant and the media replies with millions of dollars' worth of publicity, it would be false to call this simply "censorship." Without any compromise, people who had their grants taken away should receive the money that they were awarded. But because we're facing a complicated system of "censorship" and career inflation existing simultaneously, we need, even more, to clearly articulate our

opposition to all exclusion. Just as artists should not be cut out because they're gay, neither should they be excluded because they're the wrong color, they have no friends on the panel, or their work isn't trendy enough. We fight homophobia not because we think gay people are superior, but because we follow a larger principle of equal access for all without bias. I know it is virtually impossible to get a complicated message out through the simple-minded media. But in our own territory we can use words like *censorship*, *blacklist*, and *defunded* more truthfully to describe people's different levels of access to visibility and support.

Finally, I want to say a few words about sex. Another complex issue in this debate is the role of sexual material in the funding of gay and lesbian art. While it is true that most gay artwork continues to be excluded from the upper echelons of power, the future art of this country (most of which will unfortunately appear in corporate boardrooms and on HBO) is being determined today in small community and avant-garde venues. Ironically, in a number of fields, programmers, critics, and funders are more likely to support gay sexual content than openly gay work without sexual content. This bias reflects stereotypes that the proper role for a lesbian artist is to talk about sex and the proper role for a gay artist is to talk about AIDS. As a result, many people receive no institutional support, with or without the Helms amendment, because their gay and lesbian work confronts subjects such as male power and race.

We have to build a vibrant, resonant alternative that can feed our activist movements. Right now, we're being offered two choices: Helms or The Same Old Thing. We have to say no to both.

*This paper was delivered on September 26, 1990, in New York City as part of a panel sponsored by The Publishing Triangle.

Sarah Schulman is the author of five novels: *The Sophie Horowitz Story*, *Girls*, *Visions and Everything*, *After Delores*, *People in Trouble*, and *Empathy*, which will be published in 1992.





Stan Henry

QUEER BEATER

FOR MY
RAGING
BABY
HONEY
JOSH
JOSHUA,
FURIOUS FAGGOT, ESQ.,
DEAD

Wednesday, 14 March 1990, noon.

A queer fear grabs me by the throat . . . turns my head . . . directs my gaze out the window onto 41st. Nothing. Nothing noteworthy anyway. A solitary passerby . . . a scatter of cars . . . all unoccupied . . . parked along the street. From here, two stories up, I see a lot—and nothing's out there. Zero. Zip. Nada. And yet . . . I *feel* it.

Sometimes a shadow . . . even in the noonday sun . . . like now . . . for no daylight reason . . . when nothing is discernibly wrong.

I'm kinda paranoid. I know that. But I cut myself some slack. In my world the apparent and the *real* are so often at odds that I trust the nudge of shadow. I mean, look at me. I'm in this tie, this jacket—middle class, proprietary drag. You'd think I owned this place, that I *belong* here. I run this office, after all. The Office of the Dean. I'm assistant to the dean. Yeah, I'm a glorified secretary; but I do run this place. And, at the nuts-and-bolts, here-and-there level of things, I even run the dean. But none of it's real. At least not to me.

My life's queer all over. I'm really an activist, a faggot activist. My real work is volunteer. These days, for instance, I'm on this committee—a

lesbian/gay youth project. Us older queers are trying to spare gay babies some of the violence that's beaten us up all our lives.

I'm out. The dean knows I'm a fag. She knows I'm an activist. She knows I'm on this project, the American Friends Service Committee Lesbian/Gay Youth Project. And she approves. Hell, she's an activist herself.

I really like my dean. She cuts me slack, too. Like tomorrow afternoon. She'll let me off early, about three, to do this talk. You guessed it—the topic's lesbian/gay youth.

A friend of mine—her name is Shimizu—consults every month with a group of high school social workers in a school district south of town. These are in-service educationals—very professional. Shimizu's a hotshot in social work, just the sort of person you come to meet when you're assistant to the dean. That's how I met her. And, since I'm a public fag, and an activist, who else would a hotshot social worker call as *her man in the field* when she needs a resource person to educate high school social workers about high school queers.

I've even got credentials. I'm not a social worker, but I've got myself this master's degree in counseling and . . . *family studies*. Pretty radical, don'tcha think? A fag in family studies . . . the

cutting edge of the new gay day. But I admit it . . . I didn't get the degree 'cause I was some visionary activist. I wasn't then. It was the 70s, after all; and I was a would-be bi. It's a long and ugly story. But it has a lot to do with how I think. Now. It taught me something about the shadow. About the real. And that's why, no matter how honest and up front I may be on any mainstream job, I am not a mainstream boy. However middle class and proprietary I may look, it's drag to me. However much I may like playing assistant to the dean, it's make-believe to me. My heart is elsewhere. My heart is a fist.

So I'm looking out this window onto 41st . . . and I've got this feeling . . . and I trust it . . . even though everything looks like it's just fine out there.

I'm on my way out there myself. A quick trek down the street. Four, five blocks from here on 41st, is the University Friends Meeting and, of course, the office of the American Friends Service Committee, where I'm about to go to pick up some brochures for my talk tomorrow afternoon about . . . yeah, you remember . . . lesbian/gay youth.

It's a pretty day. Sunshine, not too cold. I enjoy the walk, the breeze in my face. I say a cheery *hi* to the woman at the Service Committee desk. She gives me my brochures, a tidy packet. And, just that fast, I'm out the door, back on 41st, heading those few blocks east toward the School of Social Work.

I notice, at a corner by the Law School, these two guys. They're talking to each other . . . nothing businesslike. They're both dressed casually, too. One's in jeans and a jacket—pretty dumpy, frankly. The other, however, is one hot man.

I repeat: *one . . . hot . . . man!*

The motherfucker knows it, too. He glories in it. You know the type—they suck on the desire of fags passing by. His face, however, is not *GQ*.

In fact, as I look him over, the image that comes to mind, at least as regards his face, is one of those goons in those old Popeye cartoons . . . you remember . . . the eyes close together, riding the top of a nose overlong.

Kinda like this guy's balls . . . not that he's a long-schlong or anything—not that *I'm* a size queen—it's just that . . . well . . . it's *all* right there. Right there . . . out on 41st.

I mean, it's covered . . . he's covered . . . from neck to toe. He's wearing sweats. Loose sweats. Red. The term fire-engine comes to mind. He's in running shoes, but who cares? It's the sweats that grab my eye.

I've always said, "The clothes may make the man; but, *honey*, it's the body that makes the clothes." And, underneath this guy's red sweats . . . is nothin' but body. I mean, we are *not* talkin' jock straps. This motherfucker's naked underneath those sweats. And in those sweats, he's better than naked . . . the cops won't pick him up, and yet . . . those loose, yielding sweats of his reveal, if not caress, his every body line . . . the way, say, my hand would.

We've all got our types, and this one's mine. Call me a narcissist, but I like a guy who's built like me: a little mesomorph. And this guy's short and thick, broadchested, muscled, work-out strong. He looks to be mid-thirties; I'm a solid thirty-eight.

He looks at me. My balls tingle. He looks away . . .

Energy buzzed in his glance. Ya never know, though, about these sexy-dressing guys—they're all gamers. Exactly which game they're playing is, at the outset, hard to tell. But, from what I've seen, the bottom line of all of 'em is to rip off your lust and to pocket it for their egos like small change. But . . . big deal if he rips me off . . . I'm a public fag and my lust is free to whoever it shines on. I learned a long time ago to lust in the absolute. Lust is a fun enough game just for itself . . . within the juris-

diction of the tingle of my balls. Most of the time the politics of other people's meat just fucks things up. And, frankly, the politics of sexy-dressers' meat is not safe sex.

This one's clearly dressed for his favorite sport. So, fuck it . . . I'll play.

He looks at me again. This time longer. I look right back. Favor for favor. And then I smile.

My fag radar notwithstanding, I can't be sure that he is gay. That worries me a little bit. An out-there fag is one thing, but *some* sexy-dressers play dicier games.

He looks away again. Goes back to talking to his friend. I keep walking. But turn a glance back.

And there he is. Lookin' at me for all he's worth . . . one of those shootcha-dead salvos of a look. He sees I keep on walking. He knows I know the game. I know he wants to stop me in my tracks. He wants me to drool on the fuckin' sidewalk.

Now I don't drool for *nowhere* . . . but I stop. I hold my arms out, my left, my pocket of business in hand. I strike a casual get-down nose . . . and shoot a gut punch that at his down goes joined by the cock of my head—"OK, bro . . . your move."

Our eyes weld

I should get a public hard-on doing this. I risk the whining to take the lead. I go through what Dad Casote is rickin' here . . . but it's a hard-on. I'm gladly see it when it happens.

He doesn't even blink. My head's still bent. It is so intense I can't stop. It could, for me, come from sex to meditation. It is a hot case. But he'll get me, compensating with measure of god who don't blink.

His friend, peripheral now, is bouncing looks back and forth from Red Sweats to me like

we're athletes in the heat of sport.

It's Red Sweats who breaks it. He turns from me. Back to his buddy. They say something, low . . . their mien conspiratorial.

This I do not dig. I sense the game is shifting. I've had it. "Fuck it," I think, "this blows it big-time." Whether he's a pink boy sucking on my lust or some redneck blue boy rutting after my blood . . . I'm outta here. I've spent my tingle, shot the last volley of my wad. Time for me to collect my balls and wander back to work.

As I turn to go, I notice a clutch of college boys passing close to me. I realize they've been spectators at my sport, when one of them whispers, "Faggot," under his breath as he flexes by.

I don't look back. Nor do I hurry. Just keep on walking, straight and proud. The tingle, now, is in my back. Only when I hear the latching click of my office door do I relax.

Thursday, 10 March 1990, 0.00 P.M.

It's the day of the week. Warmest summer yet. He be any minute now to pick me up. We agreed to wait for the outside the school of Social Work on 41st.

Not ready for my talk. It's when I see my backpack. The good one. I bought it yesterday at lunchtime. The good something else in my pack too. A visual aid for a talk I'm giving to break the ice.

Several years ago I took a walk with a friend along the western shore of Lake Michigan. I was at the time at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. My friend went on ahead, while I hung back where cattails that wept its branches to the surface of the lake. Why I tarried there I couldn't say . . . just had this feeling.

And then I saw it. Bobbing up and down, floating among the stalks, riding the little waves that hit shore in some water-skier's wake, I saw a baseball bat, its handle turned my way. I soaked my shoes to get it. And, pulling it from the water, I was shocked to see it wasn't whole. It was sawed off.

A chill went down my spine. The words *sawed-off shotgun* fired through my head. How odd . . . a simple baseball bat, that friendly summer symbol of the *great American pastime*. Sawed off.

The wood was old and mostly water-logged; the thing could barely float. Clearly it'd been in the soak a long, long time. I felt the surface . . . chipped . . . cracked—the result of swelling . . . maybe . . . or the force of blows?

Turning it between both hands, I noticed lettering—handpainted, crude, black—capital letters running the length of it. Though so faded in parts that I could barely make them out, I realized they read:

“MY QUEER BEATER STICK.”

I shuddered. My spine flinched a chill. I almost dropped it, but then gripped it for dear life. It hit me: this QUEER BEATER STICK had come to me like a confession. I looked out over the water and thanked the lake. It seemed as if some spirit had hit me over the head with it . . . to get me to *get it*. Little namby-pamby I had never wanted to see it . . . didn't wanna believe . . . the danger in my every movement, my every move through life. I wanted things to be just fine . . . no shadows out there . . . except the ones you see . . . the ones cast in daylight . . . the real ones.

MY QUEER BEATER STICK is in my backpack, too. It really doesn't fit inside . . . too long. It pushes against the zipper of my pack the way my hard-on might against my fly. I didn't try to zip the pack shut all the way. I worried that, if I forced it, the zipper'd break.

Before I start my talk, I'll show those high school social workers this stick of mine. I'll pass it around to each of them, let them feel its heft and shape . . . let them read it for themselves . . . let it confess to them the danger that baby dykes and fags are up against . . . what I am up against . . . in every moment of my life.

“Faggot!”

I turn.

I don't . . . I can't . . . believe . . . but yes . . . me! . . . it's me he's yelling at. Right here in public on 41st.

He grabs me by the neck, his fist clutches the knot of my tie. His face is in my face. I feel the heat of his breath. This face flashes in my memory . . . like a goon from a Popeye cartoon. . .

. . . it's Red Sweats . . . though today he's in a tie like me.

He hits me. A punch to my cheek. It throws me back. I fall to the pavement, still gripping my pack. I taste blood. I drool blood. I see blood.

Faster than I can think I see my pack is open/the zipper's open wide/faster than I can think to stop myself I reach for my queer beater stick/grip it/rip it out/my mouth is full of blood/hot iron blood/my grip is blood/hot and iron/my body surges like a geyser of blood/rising/I spit/my fury spews like a ruptured artery from a heart boiled over/with my arm of iron/with my iron grip on my queer beater stick/in my heat/I wield/one/fell/blow.

Stan Henry is finishing a novel, *Enkidu*, and is collaborating on a musical play, *Hibiscus*. He lives in Seattle but dreams of Neptune, where the sun is less loud.



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UNIVERSITY PRESSES, QUEER BOOKS

Sarah Rosen

A majority of all current nonfiction lesbian/gay books have been published by university presses. And because of their commitment to keeping their titles in print, university-published titles remain available far longer than the average, quickly-remaindered commercial publication.

Here is a partial list of academic presses that have published either gay and lesbian titles or books incorporating gay and lesbian perspectives in the past decade:

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LIST

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OUTLOOK winter 1991

Longing is the great sea we drift on
Day and night we taste the salt of it
every inch from head to toe
No one knows how lovers come back
after going under

FOR TOMMY DOWLING

What a shock to think of my friend dead
His voice going on in my head now
The feel of his hand on my thigh 12 years ago

The flower of the hibiscus lasts
but two days and a night—
How suddenly our love
came and went

TO R.

*Wear this amulet around your wrist
where you cut yourself
Only magic can sooth love's wounds*

TO J.B.

I've been in your light for so long
my body goes on glowing
Heads turn in the street as I walk by
Your name is on everyone's lips
though they don't know it

It's true you don't want
anything more to do with me—
Still, I take my pleasure
walking past your window
every night on Haight Street

Poems don't come like they used to
I have to coax them like a reluctant
virgin
come on sweet poem open up your lovely
ass here I come

His cock his balls in my mouth
the damp musky smell of autumn in the
crack of his ass

I go on keeping secrets
Somewhere inside words don't reach me.
We lay close together at night
deciphering each other's lips

Break open the poem what you've found
is none other than yourself

Storme Weber

DESIRE'S NIGHT OUT

standin posed almost cool/45°
angling away from her half lidded eyes/
breath of jasmine honeysuckle
gardenia scented lips full and tender
a slight tremble passin through her
as she glimpsed the woman/self-assurance
emanating with no let up/feelings nameless and specific
and heated flowed through her tingled her senses
she wanted to know this one more that that
she wanted to possess her and to be possessed in turn.
diva strategy moved into action and she began moving to
decrease that 45° difference. wait. a few more moments
of examination: the woman is handsome, not a masculine but
a strong beauty her features speaking of afrika, and
native american ancient wisdoms travelled through time
and now resting before her appraising eyes in lower manhattan island.
so many lifetimes before this very land that lie far beneath the concrete
they posed upon was stolen from indian ancestors by english fast talkers
here and now they stood in this bar of shady origin/catering to women
like themselves, ironically called the duchess.
all of this history and reality seen and felt swirled around them/
just outside of their awareness. inside awareness: sounds—women's voices
loud and soft, laughter, fingersnap, "i wonder if i take you home/will
you thrill me tonight baby because i need you tonight." the pulse of new york
was not left at the door—underlying it all an energy, an urgency, a recognition
and need. but now back to our diva. she has passed in front of the object of
her fascination/givin much subtle seduction attitude & just enuf scent
of woman, fragrance, desire as she moved on through. she continued on
downstairs to spend a few minutes in the mirror/satisfied with what she saw
she moved back up towards her fantasy. the strength in her was not lessened by
her lipstick, liner, soft skin revealed and accentuated—sensuous power
emanated from each movement and the roll and gentle sway of her steps

POEM FOR A DIVA

big strong women
wit fierce attitude in the street
an exquisitely arched eyebrow
may be/all she has/for you
but she got something else to show me
behind that worldly camouflage
we was soft-to-soft
rock & water & earth shuddered
rose & fell
and that fierce strong woman
cried sweet sacred tears
i had no answer for
except to hold her:
tighter.

ANATOMY

Judith Ferguson

"... none of the funds authorized to be appropriated for the National Endowment for the Arts ... may be used to promote, disseminate, or produce materials which in the judgement of the NEA ... may be considered obscene, including but not limited to depictions of ... homoeroticism ..."

from a letter of agreement sent to NEA grant recipients.

We, each of us, have our reason,
here is mine—

I want you to press your hands
and lips to the canvas,
want you to know my love—
so if she dies before me
I will not be alone
in grief.

I pull the cloth
down from her shoulder
so you see her
as I see her
undraped—I know, it is always this way,
she has no need of it—
the frame, the posture,
the light arranged.

If I sign this agreement
I consent to the betrayal
of my own hands.
I agree to what I will not paint
what I will not love,
with the unprotected tip of each finger,
with the unabashed tip of my tongue:

First, the skin, the integument,
first line of defense against
disease, and first to rise
to my touch—
look closely—erector pili
muscle tense in unison
to my tongue along her inner thigh.

Next, the parts that go without saying:
no breasts, nipples, areola,
no clitoris, no labia, minora, majora,
no vagina, no symphysis pubis,
anus, rectum, sphincter—all out
of the question.

What if I said I was in love
with her brain,
would make love
to each convolution, each fissure and sulci,
to the pink and white and grey,
was especially
aroused by her pleasure center?
what then, if none of this
is allowed?

What of the mouth, the tongue and teeth
that nip and suck and trace?
of the clean line of the mandible?
no whispering music across her vocal chords,
no breathless ache
to her exact fingers pulling strings.

No flash electric current blue,
no voluptuous optic nerve,
no dilating blood vessels—
from the rose-flush of the cheeks
to that heaviness in her pelvis,
no impression of tension
no color of moan.

No counting each careful rib
spooned by each intercostal,
arching a perfect arc to her heart—
no velvet chambers
plush from continuous rhythm,
no ripple inward to the exquisite bone
from kisses placed in her
antecubital for safekeeping.

And finally, the absolute—
nothing organic:
no liver,
change one letter and it's lover,
one lover implies another
and here we are again—
homoerotic.

Deborah
Shea

LUCINDA

put her hands
on me
her mouth
on me
her tongue
went deep
inside of my
glide
she said
I did I
slid
her hands
in me
her mouth
on me
her fingers
did
what fingers
born
are born
to do
she rose
to kiss
she rose
to this
she could
be said
to raise
the dead
which is
what
Lucinda
did

STONEWALL AND THE MANIFESTO

Robin Renée

At the bottom of a pile of green ash
there is a woman with a banner and a guitar
and she is yelling and her head is firmly planted
in a red brick wall
and she keeps yelling when she needs to yell
and she speaks softly when it is necessary
and correct
for the trade unions that were only waiting
to get their work done
for the authors who wrote forbidden books that turned black
in the sun and went rotten in the dark and were thrown away in the
secret rivers
for the one time that New York City said it had made it possible
and that it was possible to make it women and women
and men and men and still live in a house and have running water
and a doctor and a job
for the children of color who made soup in their own
kitchens and for the ones who made soup on the street by themselves
with street ingredients
for her long legs that sat apart
from the politics and the train stations the one thing she took as
the symbol of her going away my going away our
solitude
for the Earth which was given its one sunny Sunday
day
And once she along with rows and rows
of men and women turned to smoke at the podium
and there was a great political erotic fire
and energy burning all the way from its source to a storm
to a crying to a disruption of that day's
collegiate board meeting
And she wishes she could remember more about Vietnam
but she was old enough to see the Nixon resignation and most of
Watergate

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OUT/LOOK winter 1991



(pictured: Ferguson, left and Renée, right) **Judith Ferguson** is a poet who also works as a Registered Nurse and currently lives in Austin, Texas. Some of her poems will be appearing in an anthology of Southwest women writers entitled *Dance in the Sun* (Plain View Press), due out in 1991. **Deborah Shea** lives in Vermont. **Robin Renée** lives in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and is the lead vocalist/keyboardist for the world-beat rock band, Spy Gods. Her unpublished collection of poems, *Into the Splintered Talk Show*, was the first-prize winner of the Evelyn Hamilton Award in Creative Writing at Rutgers University in 1989. **Storme Weber** is a poet, writer, visual and performance artist, and political activist. **Michael Mayo** is the author of the book of poems *All Fall Down*, and received a 1987 American Book Award for editing *Practising Angels: A Contemporary Anthology of San Francisco Bay Area Poetry*. He has been living a charmed life in San Francisco since autumn 1983.

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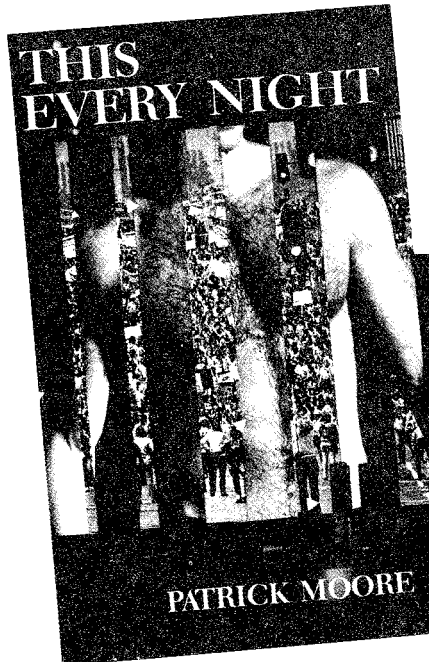
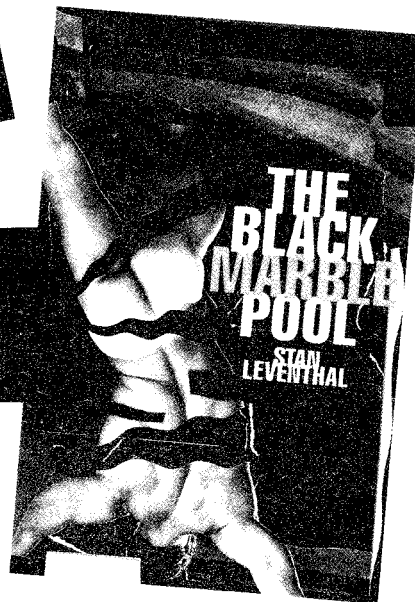
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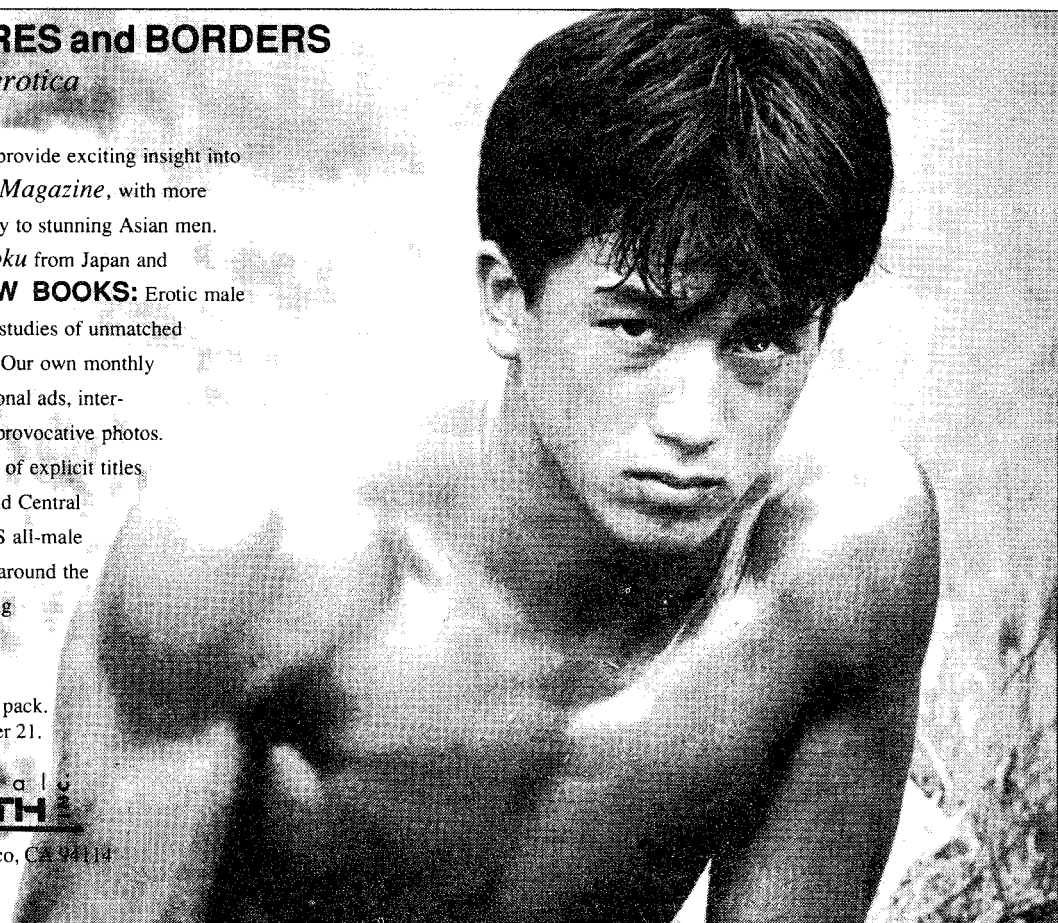
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SAFE SEX WITHOUT CONDOMS

John Wagenhauser

ODYSSEUS,

an early experimenter in safe sex, fell into it in this way: he was torn between his longing to hear the song of the Sirens and his fear. Sailors were regularly lured to their deaths by their tantalizing call. Yet Odysseus *had* to experience it, he would not shut his ears. But neither was he keen on suicide.

He found a way.

Desire, above all, desire. But desire is death, the experts urged. "So what else is new?" our hero wondered. Above all, he valued desire. "Tie me to the mast." And they did, and he heard the Sirens singing, while his muscles ached against the ropes, and he tugged and pulled in a fury of desire, but was restrained. Afterwards, he said, "That was the best I ever had it. I came without even touching myself—I *couldn't* touch myself. I bit my lip." (And there was blood clotted there yet.) "I never wanted it so bad. Every inch of my skin was reaching out for them. When I get home, I'm gonna have Penelope tie me down ..."

I remember the early years of the AIDS crisis, desire and death and fear, all mingled together. You could feel it, palpable, everywhere in the gay community. To be afraid of our desire—we thought we'd escaped that, and now we were being called back. We who

had once been afraid of going to hell, and had come out of that night, now we were afraid to die. For sex, all for sex. And the same primal responses roll into place. Old demons come to birth again: He was walking down the street when he saw him, eyes smiling encouragement, jeans sitting on his hips like a blanket folded heavy on the arm of a chair: one brush from an elbow would knock them off. Knock them off, these things on his warm brown skin, knock them off and lay bare that abdomen like a sapling stretching over the stream, that belly like a goblet, those thighs ...

But no, the response was fear. "I walked past," he told me with a shrug. "And then, you know, I turned around to get another look. But all of a sudden, I felt afraid. It was *here*," and he pointed to his belly. "I could feel it *here*, the fear."

Eros and Thanatos, sex and death, inextricably linked. ("So what else is new?")

Fear lacerates. It's a two-edged blade, without a handle. How to hold it, that's the problem, how to find a third alternative between total paralysis and complete denial of very real danger. We have to walk a tightrope, and balance is never easy to acquire. But creating the impossible third alternatives that we needed—that weren't offered to us by this narrow world—this is our history; this is what we've always done,

this is how we came out in the first place.

One must be careful how one follows desire. ("So what else is new?") We resisted desires to plunge from precipices, laugh during funerals, and put our hands on the bodies of strangers in the subway. Desire, never a sure and trustworthy guide in and of itself, is indispensable for all that. We must not feel that it suddenly became a betrayer. (It always was, Odysseus knew, long ago.) It is not a deposed god. It never really had deity, but it was a path to life and therefore the Godhead, and still is.

I met this guy, James. James held onto me, kissed me, his lips trembling so much you could tell that his mouth was his primary sexual organ: He liked nothing better than to kiss and to bite and lick, but this was early on in the crisis, and everyone was afraid of saliva even. So when he kissed me on the mouth, he kept his lips closed, like a movie star in the fifties. He sucked my jaw, and licked me behind the ear, and came all over my stomach ... but kissing my mouth he kept his lips shut firm, although his eyes—open—pleaded, begged, implored desire. Tied to our masts, never has a closed-mouth, movie-star kiss been so hot, rarely has desire stood up so firm as when his eyes were begging me, and his lips were closed.

James hated condoms, but they're not at all necessary for safe sex. We used to jerk each other off while he sucked my fingers, while I bit his nipples, while his eyes locked on mine and begged and drank—such hungry eyes he had.

He used K-Y. Water-soluble, it dries quickly when exposed to air, becomes sticky, a hindrance. So he kept a crystal bowl of water next to his bed, and all night his hand would dabble in the water, softly splashing, then come back to me, cool at first but once again slippery, succulent as the fruit with which goblins tempt virginity.

As the alchemist knows, the antidote can be a dose of the poison itself.

And it is not desire we are to fear. It is

not even sex, as the foot fetishist knows, so long as he sticks single-mindedly to his fetish: to feet, and shoes, and nylon stockings. He laughs when he hears that the preachers are saying that God's wrath is poured out on perverts. Happy pervert, he who the more purely perverted he remains, the less he has to fear.

Before anyone was aware of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, J.O. clubs existed, an odd sexual specialty, a bunch of Queer perverts practicing safe sex before being compelled to by AIDS. Some members have expressed resentment towards the new flood of men interested in J.O. "They just want to join because of AIDS. But they don't really know what it's all about. I was into it long before AIDS."

Longing for the night, invitation folded in my pocket, I go to the bathroom five or six times to look at it. (I can't unfold it at my desk because of the drawing of two guys with very large cocks and nipples as huge as thumbs.) *Eight o'clock. Get there by eight-thirty, when we lock the doors. \$10. Bring a friend, or cum alone.* My heart is turgid, heavy in fear and anticipation. I've never even been to the baths, I have no experience in group sex. Now I'm going to a J.O. club. It feels like the first night I went into a gay bar, fear and anticipation. The flip side of Eros: fear. The flip side of Thanatos: anticipation. Also like that first night, when finally I knew I wouldn't go to hell for this, tonight I know I won't have unsafe sex. They have rules, masts we all ask one another to tie us to.

THESE ARE THE RULES: "LIPS ABOVE THE HIPS" "ON ME, NOT IN ME"

Rent (or borrow) someone's loft, or maybe a theater space. Buy beer and soda (in six-ounce cans; people have a habit of leaving them around unfinished). Stock up on lubricant and paper towels, artfully scattered around the room in convenient locations. Agonize over the tapes for the stereo. Trade

...while he sucked my
fingers, while I bit his
nipples, while his
eyes locked on mine
and begged

free admission and tips for half an evening's service on clothes check, bartending, and clean-up.

Right inside the door hand everyone a hanger, and position a lot of chairs nearby, so they don't have to hobble around taking off their pants. There are always some bags to check, but never shoes. The floor gets sticky, so everyone keeps their socks and sneakers on. An anomaly, this room of near-naked men and dicks sticking out of Jockey shorts, all clodding around in their sneakers. And they can keep their clothes tickets in their socks, too.

Most guys wear Jockey-style briefs, with a few jock-straps scattered throughout. Here and there someone is naked (except for the sneakers), but on the whole there is some unspoken need to start the evening just slightly dressed in some way (which makes keeping track of your shorts a problem).

The fashion changes, evolves according to rules that escape me. One night, Calvin Klein's candy-striped briefs are in, and everyone's wearing them. Suddenly, a month later, there's a switch to those boxer-briefs, half boxers and half jockeys: the familiar white cotton knit tracing the leg, duplicating the skin, all the way to mid-thigh. All the really cool guys are wearing them. How did they know? What faint breath of the Zeitgeist am I not attuned to?

One guy, short and stocky, muscular, with an arrogant look on his face, struts around in a bright yellow bathing suit—marvelously, spectacularly ill-fitting, so tight around his high round ass that the seams pull, showing white threads. Its height reaches to only just above the cheeks, where the very top of the crack between flows out to the dimples of his lower back, and the front is so low, so inadequate, that the bulk within pulls the material away from his stomach, revealing the tangle of pubic hair just above the root of his cock.

These parties always seem to take forever to get started. Everyone stands around in their

underwear talking and laughing and drinking beer, catching up with friends. By now I'm an old timer, and still I never know what to say to anyone. I listen to their conversations, wondering what it is they find to say. But it's just conversation. It starts to get crowded. I like squeezing through the room, you can feel the heat come off their skin as you pass. Even when your shoulders don't touch, and your arm doesn't brush his back, still your body heat and his caress each other, like spirits intermingling. As it gets more crowded, passing through means more contact, a breast against an upper arm, a polite and gentle hand on the small of my back, a friendly pause of palm on warm cotton-clad ass-cheek. In conversation, someone playfully tugs at the elastic waist of my jockeys, as someone else, passing by, rubs the lump in his shorts against my buttocks.

I talk to Peter, lanky, thin, looking shy and out of place at a J.O. party—but I remember his earlier performances. He stands in his tan bikini, one arm across his chest, covering his nipples like Venus, the other clutching a can of beer. I haven't seen him in almost a year, not since he found True Love. His lover doesn't like him coming here, but lately there's a platonic third they discuss all too frequently, and Peter says, "I needed to do something real dirty again, and put it in perspective."

I shake my head understandingly, not understanding—does he want me to tell him to get out of the relationship, or to tell him that they'll pull through? He seems too depressed for sex; will he have a good time? I start to run my fingernail along the rim of elastic where it crosses his abdomen, awed I realize by the presence of one I thought out of reach and affirming the chaste path. He takes another swig, and then in acknowledgment places the icy can against my nipple.

Around the fringes, there are the grumblers: "When are they going to get started?" "I have to get up in the morning." "What do they think they're *here* for?" I have sometimes taken things in hand and been the first to begin. But when the space is not open, when

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there are other rooms, enclosed recesses, you never know who started it, you just realize it's going on already. The guys who organize these things, they try to break up the space, even if they have to hang up sheets. People come to a sex party, and they're all walking around in their underwear, or naked—hardons hanging out, banging around—but they still need there to be another place, the place where you "do it," the sex room. So just as in a non-sex party, where everyone crowds the kitchen, no matter how small, everyone eventually winds up packed into whatever "secluded" area there is—as though there were a possibility for seclusion or privacy here. But it's okay, I like the press of sweaty bodies.

The camaraderie is what chiefly strikes me—after of course the unbridled lust. (Sorry, make that "bridled lust," tied to its mast.) It's not a cruisy atmosphere as such, much friendlier. Eyes everywhere that crinkle and shine a welcome. Men still check you out, look you up and down, they're interested or they're not. But the overwhelming impersonalization of it, the absolutely uncompromised lack of commitment—not even necessarily for five minutes—adds a humaneness. The barter here is too ephemeral, so no one spends all night weighing, "Is this *the* man I want to commit my night to?" If you pause to give someone a hand in his endeavors, explore a pectoral or lat, you're still free to move on a moment later or remain for half the party. The bumblebee lands briefly on the clover flower and is gone.

(How frivolous, how fickle can you get? But the poison is the antidote.)

Saving that first orgasm for someone fantastic, someone spectacular—of course. Why come with just anybody? Yet there will be more orgasms tonight. And even when I'm popped out, no more cream in the pot, I like to wander around, linger a bit, flop my dick here and there, even if I can't get it up right now. That inter-coital downtime can be as amusingly recreational as anything life offers. Or get away from the "sex room," wander over towards the bar, talk to someone you

haven't noticed yet, or someone you've been stroking, or wishing you were stroking. Having just jerked off in a crowd can be quite an icebreaker.

This guy with dark curly hair—this Michelangelo-sculpted beauty, leaning against the wall, fingering the outline of his penis in his old frayed briefs—is teasing the blond with the overdeveloped chest (a rib cage that doesn't fit correctly over his stomach). I smile at something I overhear, and he says something in his friend's ear, nodding towards me. "Oh yeah," he answers, laughing at a private joke, stepping back to include me in a circle of three. "I was saying, 'I like your chest,'" says Michelangelo. I know he's flattering me, quite sure I don't have a chest that anyone's ever remarked on before. I answer, "I like your ..."—what? he's marvelous—"everything." I blew it, and laugh embarrassed, but he laughs with me, and starts to touch my pectoral; he seems sincere about it. His name is Ray. I put my hand on his slim ass, a swimmer's ass. The blond, Jimmie, reaches forward, slides his hand along my other pectoral, down my stomach, across my swelling crotch. Ray familiarly jerks Jimmie's Calvin Kleins down to mid-thigh. I reach over and circle his balls and the base of his cock with my fingers, while I lean my other shoulder into Ray, who starts to kiss me, but with eyes open and intent across the room. He breaks away to say to Jimmie's ear, "Now he's ditched the tall one, he's trying to horn in on the Young Lovers."

"He," I learn, is Ray's lover. Whenever I see Ray, that night or at the next party, he always knows exactly where his lover is, what he's doing, and to whom. With grim irony, he reports to Jimmie, to me. "Which one is he," I ask. "What's he wearing?" (I think I liked the idea of a rival.) The blue boxer shorts. The escapades of the blue boxer shorts on which Ray dryly comments never seem to me either out-of-place or strikingly praiseworthy. But Ray slides between exasperation and awe.

There's an acrid smell in the room, beer

So just as in a non-sex party, where everyone crowds the kitchen, no matter how small, everyone eventually winds up packed into whatever "secluded" area there is—as though there were a possibility for seclusion or privacy here.

and fresh sweat and lubricant in plastic jars.

Groups form, a threesome or foursome here and there, or a cluster around a central core, bees vibrating on a comb. These clusters form and break continually all night: someone who everyone's been keeping track of out of the corner of their eye greases up and starts whanging—everyone wants to watch, to touch, to be a part of it (and to glean what attention for themselves they can get out of being near the center). So long as the core doesn't dissuade outside participation, the accumulation can grow like coral.

And guys laugh as they pause, looking around, and someone knows what they mean and hands them the lube from where it lay hidden behind a cluster of brown and black and pink flesh.

Then there are the exclusive *pairs*—two guys who'd rather focus on one another, no inviting eyes wandering the room, no movement, no impulse, for anyone else but each other. You'd think they didn't know they were in an orgy. This magic works here too. And if someone is insensitive or blind enough to approach and offer assistance, his hand is gently deflected (a move that can happen anywhere in the party, even in the most indiscriminating groups), but other than that, his existence is ignored. (But being ignored—beware—is not confined to exclusive pairings.)

But groups are my favorite. Four or more guys, in a circle, laughing, grunting, fingers locked in armpits, touching faces, reaching forward to stroke bellies—dicks moving to the rhythm of their own hand or another's—arms around one another, body weight leaning on thigh into thigh—a palm weighing testes. Who's touching me? Oh, *him. Hi, man. It's okay if someone joins in*, even if he isn't your type, even if you wouldn't pick him out of any crowd. What's it hurt, the touch of an imperfect stranger, one more hand on your dick tonight?

And it gets awful hot (blandly, I refer to the temperature), especially in summer, with a furnace heat that under other circumstances makes me cringe from direct contact.

It astounds me, how much some guys sweat, how slippery their skin gets, this juice from inside their own bodies drenching them like a swim in a salty sea—it runs off their chest, sprinkles the floor. When they shake their heads, in laughter, in ecstasy, or just to clear vision, drops fly, splashing my face.

I worm my way into a mass of bodies, toward this black guy I was talking to earlier, Paul, who's standing behind a white man with an impossibly long, skinny penis, wearing nothing but sandals and a leather string around his neck. Paul's arms are wrapped around his torso, fingertips tugging at the nipples. Their skin smacks as Paul's body makes a wet seal on his back and separates. Paul's dick is firm between the white thighs, sliding under the balls. The other guy, his hair pasted to his forehead, doesn't see me, doesn't even see the guy in front of him, working his cock. His eyes stare into some other vision—his focus perhaps the thrust between his legs. But Paul smiles at me, nodding, and I run my hand along his skin, following the sweat that flows down his dripping chest (the lube from my hand makes a stark white smear against his black skin and nipple, outlining and accentuating the muscle, like perfect lighting), down abdomen, oiling his lunging buttocks. He releases a hand, grips my balls—too tightly—I wince—he grabs my cock out of my hand, pulling me against him—against the two of them—their wet skin slapping against me from chin to knee. (With my leg I can feel Paul's white jockey shorts, taut from knee to knee, and soaked in sweat.) Paul lets go of my dick, puts his arm around my shoulder, clenching me tightly to them both with his bicep—my dick lodges in the crack where his hip slides against the thigh and buttock of the other—to catch my balance, I drape my arm around the white guy's waist, across his stomach—I try to catch his eye, but he remains oblivious. Paul kisses me and starts nibbling my lip—I'm distracted—the white guy has begun to shudder, heaving his body back and forth—his hand blurs as it vibrates along his shaft—his eyes relinquish whatever vision held them and roll up under the lids—

It is, in large groups, necessary to communicate your orgasm widely. Everyone likes to share. "Come on man, yeah—shoot it—shoot—SHOOT!" A stinging slap on the ass is welcomed by some. So moan especially loud when you're close, something that comes from the back of the throat, the base of your gut, something that sounds like pain.

Things are slowing down. A lot of guys have left, a few groups of die-hards remain among the crumpled paper towels and cans of beer that litter the floor, the chairs.

I wonder if I got so much attention tonight because I've been working out lately. But have I been working out all that much? Are my tits all that fantastic? Or is it more the look on my face, hungry but without desperation?

Recognition here can be as shallow and pointless as any place. Or, let the need on your face cross the line into "needy," and you'll be as ignored and invisible as anywhere. My caveat, as always, is, you may find a lover here, just so long as you're not looking for one. That seems to be one of the pacts Eros has made with mankind.

Some guys are getting dressed and talking, one of them that white guy with the leather string around his neck, the one who ignored me as I pressed against him and Paul. I find myself surprised as he jokes with his friends and giggles, and I think, "Well, he can smile, huh?" Just like a normal person, approachable, amicable. As I slide behind him to put my clothes ticket on the counter, he sees me, he remembers and smiles and rubs my back. I'm in heaven now: I've made a friend for life, a buddy. I'll look for him next time, but already I know he'll either remember me then or not.

photo © Tim J. Luddy



John Wagenhauser has published pornography in *The Advocate's* recent *Fresh Men* under the name Wolfgang. He is still working on an extremely long, convoluted, and self-referential novel; don't ask him about it.

YOU GOT THE LOOK

*David
Warren
Frechette*

Jono Weiss, from the Google Series



It was a sweltering summer night in New York City, but The Paradise Garage was jumping. The mammoth, three-tiered, air-conditioned disco had opened its doors at midnight with a line of patrons that started at the King Street entrance and stretched around the block; by one a.m. it was already half full. Every weekend thousands of stylish steppers, ranging in age from fifteen to forty, took to the floor to work their bodies with their freshest moves. Saturday nights were reserved for gay men, women, and their guests. On Saturdays the crowd comprised the cream of Black and Latin gays, mostly in their teens and twenties, from New York's five boroughs and Jersey. Sometimes they even came



from as far away as Pennsylvania and Maryland. Many in this unofficial A-group were in the closet at work and school. At the Garage they took full advantage of the opportunity to be themselves.

Geo Rivers, a 19-year-old member of the Garage's unofficial A-group, and his best friend, Bingo Short, were feeling no pain at all on this particular Sunday morning. They had been smoking some dynamite reefer the night before that Bingo's older brother had laid on them with his blessing. Bingo's family, grandmother included, were all out partying none too close to the crib so it was all smooth sailing. After ninety minutes of toking up the two of them could barely board the 7th Avenue

IRT, but they managed to get to the disco without a hitch. The airport runway lights that illuminated the ramp between the front entrance checkpoint (where a metal detector and two butch security guards were situated to screen out and deter potential bad actors) and the box office were definitely helpful.

Bingo looked damned good tonight, thought Geo as he cased out his friend of ten years. He was forever bending Geo's ear with complaints about not meeting anything but bogus and ugly dudes so tonight Geo wished his best running buddy good luck. Geo, on the other hand, was definitely not on the prowl; he had come to dance. If he hooked up with somebody, cool; if not, that was okay, too. As more people took to the dance floor, it soon became impossible to tell who was with anyone else unless they were clenching. Finding himself separated from his friend, Geo danced alone and still had a good time.

As the DJ started to play a remixed version of "Stir It Up," Geo made his way into the men's room. A light-skinned guy tall enough to play for the Lakers was changing from a conservative gray suit to red and black spandex leotards next to the urinal Geo was using. He deposited the suit in a large black bag. He stopped for a full moment and blatantly fastened his eyes on Geo's cock.

The dude was too obvious. Geo frowned at him, zipped up, and turned to leave. On his way out he checked out his sweaty reflection in the mirror. He had a pleasant, square-shaped face with a strong jaw and a wide, sensual mouth. His deep-set light brown eyes, sandwiched between thick brows and long lashes, contrasted well with his dark brown skin. His chest and shoulders were broad and muscled. His torso was long and, at 160 pounds, he filled out his five-foot ten-inch frame admirably. Just to make sure his time at the gym did not go unnoticed by the world at large, Geo wore a nylon/spandex-blend yellow, black, and white speedsuit, Jackson Pollack-inspired sweat socks, and basketball shoes. He edged his way back onto the dance floor just as the DJ launched into Strafe's "Outlaw." He was getting warmed up,

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swaying in place to the rhythm, when he felt a polite tap on his shoulder.

Geo turned to face a tall, pretty, dark-skinned Hispanic with curly black side-trailed hair and a dazzling Colgate smile that stretched from his eyes to his shoulder blades. He was about the same height and weight as Geo. He wore a maroon Paradise Garage sleeveless t-shirt and a pair of skintight black Jordache stretch jeans. Geo could see the guy was beautiful but he was determined to be cool about it.

"You wanna dance, man?" asked the Latin.

"I'm already dancing," replied Geo. He didn't want to seem too easy. He didn't want to scare the cat away either so he looked straight at him and smiled, leaving him an opening for a comeback.

"I see you dancin' by yourself. I'm talkin' 'bout with me."

Good shot. The dude had some heart. Besides he looked like a cross between Spanador from Lisa-Lisa and Cult Jam and Shabba-Doo Quinones, the guy from *Breakin'*.

"Sure, let's do it," said Geo. The couple liked each other's moves enough to stick together through another two sides. When Nu Shooz's "Point of No Return" hit the speakers, the Latin guy suggested they go up on the roof garden. There Geo learned that his name was Curtis Melendez. Curtis's mother was a Black American from Washington, D.C., his father was a New York-born Puerto Rican, and his family lived not too far from Geo's in Morningside Heights. Curtis retrieved a thick, rose-colored joint from a small, clear plastic carrying case in his pocket and proceeded to light it. The boys toked up blissfully in a corner they had staked out as the strains of "Lost in Emotion" drifted upstairs. They had gotten three-quarters through the joint when Geo noticed that Curtis was standing extremely close to him. (Or was it the other way around?) With Curtis's Certs-scented mouth so close to him, Geo decided to make the first move. He pulled Curtis close to him and they embraced. Their lips met and locked in a

head-on collision as they took turns tasting each other's tongues. Geo's nose caught the scent of Patchouli, his favorite of all the oils the Muslims sold. He wanted to lick every bit of that musk off his new-found friend. "Let's go somewhere," mumbled Geo, as intoxicated by Curtis's taste, smell, and body as he was by the grass.

"Where we gonna go, Popi?"

"Anywhere. How 'bout my place?"

"Do your parents know about you?"

"They don't know but it don't matter. I got my own room. Come on, we're wasting time." As they left the Garage, Prince and his band were proclaiming "It's Gonna Be a Beautiful Night." An uptown number one train pulled into the Houston Street station a few seconds after they arrived and whisked them off to 125th Street.

Geo and Curtis had scarcely gotten behind Geo's bedroom door when Curtis stuck what seemed like a country mile of tongue down Geo's throat. Geo's hands cupped Curtis's cakes. They felt like two juicy grapefruits. Curtis sucked and kneaded Geo's nipples until they were sharp and pointed enough to open letters with. Suddenly he stopped.

"Hey, man. What does Geo stand for?"

"It's short for George, which I hate," replied Geo as he continued to explore Curtis's chunky body with his hands. "I don't like Georgie, either. Okay?" Before Curtis could say anything else, Geo pulled him close and kissed him again. The few clothes they were wearing quickly hit the floor. Curtis got on Geo's bed face down. Geo stuck his tongue in Curtis's right ear then worked his way down Curtis's back as Curtis sighed and moaned. Curtis turned over to face Geo, threw his legs over Geo's shoulders, and started to guide Geo's cock towards his ass. Geo extricated himself and got off the bed. "I'll be right back, baby. Keep it warm for me," said Geo, stepping out of the room.

Curtis sat up in bed. He was aware of the faint hum of the air-conditioner. He could hear water running in the bathroom next door, then the sound of a toilet flushing.

He thought of Geo's broad shoulders and hot mouth. He took his hefty cock in his hand and started stroking it, sliding the foreskin back and forth over the head.

"Don't do that, man. That's what I'm here for."

In his reverie, Curtis had not noticed Geo re-enter the room. Geo held a large towel which he placed on the bed under Curtis, kissing him on the thigh. He walked over to a bottom dresser drawer and retrieved a box of condoms and a small jar of Elbow Grease from their hiding place. He placed them at the foot of the bed along with a wet warm washcloth and got back to his guest. Curtis took Geo's head in his hands and kissed him. It seemed he couldn't get enough of any part of Geo's body. He felt like he could make love with this dude for twenty-four hours without coming up for breath.

They were lying on Geo's bed, naked brown bodies cutting an erotic configuration on Geo's Katja Big Band sheets. In their steamy, drug-induced delirium neither of the two teenage sexual outlaws had thought to lock the door. Geo was the first to awake. Sunlight flooded into the room through the open blinds but blocking a good deal of that sunlight was an angry, 6-foot, 250-pound, light-skinned Black man of about fifty wearing Baptist clerical garb. He was standing over the bed, glaring down at them both. His fists were clenched and he was trembling with rage. He was also yelling.

"Lord, Lord! Don't tell me my only son's a faggot! George Rivers, Jr., you get up right now!" Geo heeded his father's command, grabbed a pair of undershorts (it didn't matter whether they were his or Curtis's), put them on, and stepped onto the floor. His stirring made Curtis reach out for him.

"Where you goin', Popi? What's all that noise? Somebody got a TV on or something?" The young Latino groggily turned over to check out the source of the disturbance that had woken him and, in a sobering moment, saw the Reverend towering over him with a death stare.

"Is this who I think it is?" he asked Geo

as he stepped onto the floor. Curtis made no attempt to cover his nakedness so Geo picked up Curtis's jeans, t-shirt, and jockstrap and heaved them at him. Curtis dressed quickly.

"I can't believe I got two Godless Sodomites fornicating under my own roof! And on the Lord's day, too! The very idea!"

"Hello, sir," said Curtis, attempting to interrupt the rev's righteous tirade. He stood his ground, clothed but still barefoot with his right hand half-extended. "Pleased to meet you." Reverend Rivers shot him a stony look and ignored his hand. "You tryin' to mock me, boy? I won't be mocked by no Sodomite, not in my own house."

"No, sir. I didn't mean any disrespect."

"Just keep your mouth shut, then. This here's between me and my son." Ordinarily Curtis would have told this old sucker to kiss his ass and throw up his paws if he didn't like the suggestion. But in this case he wanted to see Geo again and he didn't want the old man to take out anything on his new-found buddy. On top of everything else, the sucker looked pretty strong (must have played football or something) even if he was old. If the old man decided to cash in any of Curtis's wolf tickets, there wasn't enough space to escape and having his ass whipped by someone nearly three times his age would be ruinous to his rep. He trotted out his patented Mr. Nice Guy routine. "I'm sorry we couldn't have met under better circumstances, sir." It wasn't the world's most original line, but it beat "This isn't what you think" by a mile. The Reverend refused to thaw even a fraction.

"I'm sorry I met *you* at all, boy! Furthermore, I thought I told you to shut up." He looked down at Geo, who was now sitting on the edge of the bed with his head bowed. He was trying to look properly repentant, an act that often worked with adults who were angry with him.

"I've gotta go preach the morning sermon but you can hurry up and believe we are gonna talk about this when I get back!" The Reverend clutched his Concordia bible and slammed the door shut behind him. If there had been a mirror on either side it would have

shattered. Then he reconsidered and threw the door open, fixing the couple with one final disapproving glance. "Another thing. I don't ever want to catch any of your boyfriends in my house again. You hear me, boy?"

"Yes, sir," answered the penitent prodigal son. Geo waited until he saw his father pass under their third floor window to let the laughter loose. Curtis laughed too, somewhat uneasily. Curtis crept up behind Geo, encircled his waist, and pressed his groin against Geo's ass. He took Geo's face in his hands and, for what seemed like the hundredth time, kissed Geo on the mouth. Geo returned the kiss and their tongues began battling for position. Geo pulled himself loose and held Curtis close to him.

"Hey, mom's here so we'd better not get into anything too deep," said Geo, stroking Curtis's hair. "Yeah," said Curtis, "let's go see what she has for breakfast. By the way, what plans you got for today? I thought we could hang out some."

"Sounds good to me, Pretty Man. Where do you want to go?"

"I don't care, Popi. Just so we're together."

"Just try to get away from me," said Geo, grinning. He playfully bit one of Curtis's nipples.

The unmistakable odors of bacon, eggs, and coffee wound their way to Geo's bedroom. "Boys, your breakfast is ready and waiting," announced Mrs. Rivers. "You let it get cold, it won't taste half as good." Geo and Curtis trailed into the kitchen and sat down at the table. Mrs. Rivers, a tall, broad-faced, big-boned woman wearing a blue house dress and an agreeable smile, and smelling of Aviance, welcomed them as she set the table.

"Good morning," she greeted Curtis, shaking his hand. "I'm George's mother as you may have guessed. And who are you, young man?"

"I'm Curtis, ma'am."

"I do assume you have a last name, Curtis?"

"Curtis Melendez, ma'am."

"I ain't plannin' to yell at you so you can both relax. I figure George's father threw

enough of a fit for both of us."

Both boys ate their food silently.

"George, you probably wonder why I seem to be taking all this commotion in my stride. You see, I've known about you for some time now."

"How long, Mama?"

"Oh, I'd say about three years now."

"How? I didn't know myself until two years ago."

"Mothers always know these kind of things. They may not always admit it, but they do know. You were never like my boys from my first marriage. Every time I looked up they'd be getting in some sort of trouble with the law, girls, or somebody. They were such messes that I left them with their father in North Carolina."

"What clued you in about me? I was always into sports."

"The sports thing fooled everyone else. I gotta give it to you. Nobody but me noticed you never had no real girlfriends. My other sons couldn't shut up about their women. You never talked about any. Girls called the house for Sly and Ben day and night. You're better looking than either one of them and women hardly ever call here for you. Plus that stuff in your room tells me a lot."

"What stuff?" Geo prayed she had not found his formidable collection of male pornography.

"The Prince poster with him tryin' to look like a Black male Brigitte Bardot, all those pictures of basketball and football players everywhere, and the Black Gold calendar with all those pretty Black men in bathing suits. Just be glad it's me and not your father who cleans your room."

"Are you disappointed in me, Mom?"

Curtis ate his food quietly, clinging to every word while trying to be as unobtrusive as possible. This was better than *All My Children*.

"No, son, I can't say that I am. I'm a little more aware of these things than your father and better adjusted about 'em. Besides, Sly and Ben got six kids between the two of them so I figure I've got enough grandchildren."

"It doesn't bother you that I'm gay, Mama?"

"Not really. Your father, though, is a whole 'nother matter. I expect he'll be foaming at the mouth by the time he comes back here. At that time I would strongly advise you to be absent. I'll try and calm him down."

"But what if he throws me out of the house?"

"Put my child outdoors? If you leave, so do I. Losing a son and a wife, not due to death or crime? It wouldn't look too good and your daddy cares about appearances. So don't worry, baby. Okay?"

"Gee, Mama, thanks a lot," said Geo, giving his mother a kiss and a bear hug. "You're the best; I mean it." She hugged him back.

She cupped his chin and brought his face so close to hers that he could smell the Sen-Sen on her breath.

"I love you very much, honey. Oceans. You know that, don't you?"

"I love you, too, Mama. Oceans."

"I also want you to know that as long as I'm alive and well, I'll be there for you. Whenever you want to talk. Whatever you want to talk about. One thing, though. I wouldn't go too public with this gay business around the neighborhood. Everybody's not as understanding as I am. Know what I mean?"

Geo nodded his head. His mother kissed him on the forehead.

"Good. Now get dressed and get moving. If your dad runs back and catches you two here, we'll all be in a world of trouble."

As Mrs. Rivers watched Geo disappear down the hallway, she felt dog tired. She and a few friends had been out celebrating Rita Hernandez's birthday the night before until two in the morning. She had had to awake at six in order to get herself together and fix breakfast for her and George Sr. It was now nearly 10:30. Sleep was calling her and she still had to do the dishes before she hit the sack.

"Boys, let's go!"

"We're ready, mom."

"Come on in here and let me see the two of you."

Geo and Curtis presented themselves

for inspection. Curtis wore a pair of Geo's form-fitting turquoise sweat pants, a dark purple tank top, wrap-around shades, and a pair of New Balance Hi-Tops. Geo wore an indigo blue Paradise Garage t-shirt and tight black acid-washed Calvins. Both boys carried large black bags full of toilet articles, sheets, towels, and a change of clothes, ready for Riis Park. Mrs. Rivers couldn't help thinking, as she admired their colorful outfits, that they looked like two young Black princes.

"You two look wonderful. Do you have handkerchiefs in those bags?"

"Mama," said Geo laughing, "We've got everything in these bags."

"Good. Now George, remember what I told you." She saw them to the door. "Bye Mrs. Rivers," said Curtis, extending his hand to her. *She shook his hand and smiled.*

"So long, children. You have a good day now, you hear?" Mrs. Rivers closed the front door behind them.

Her favorite son had escaped Reverend Rivers's righteous wrath for awhile. She knew that when her husband returned, despite his temper, he would be easy to handle. En route to her kitchen chores, she stopped in the bedroom she shared with George Sr. She found a tape marked Mellow Sounds, Vol. 1, which her cousin had made for her, on the dresser. She inserted the tape into her cassette deck, turned the power on, and pressed the play button. She turned the volume to high. Duke Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood," complete with Ray Nance violin solos, followed her into the kitchen. As she filled the sink with hot water, she thought again of the boys. Somehow she just knew they were going to have a glorious day.

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David Warren Frechette has written about film, pop music, and gay culture for such periodicals as *Essence*, *The Advocate*, *Right On!*, *Black Film Review*, *NY Native*, *Black Enterprise*, and *The City Sun*. A founding member of Other Countries, a black gay men's writing workshop, he served as an associate editor on the group's first journal and is currently working on a book of short stories.



New Data Released on Cause of Homosexuality:

THE CAN THEORY OF SEXUAL PREFERENCE

Ellen F. Klosterman

ABSTRACT: SOCIAL SCIENCE LITERATURE ON HOMOSEXUAL PREFERENCES CONSISTS OF A PROFUSION OF THEORIES RANGING FROM FREUDIAN CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF POSSESSIVE MOTHERS AND REJECTING FATHERS TO MICHAEL STORM'S HYPOTHESIS THAT CONNECTS EROTIC FANTASIES WITH AGE AT THE ONSET OF PUBERTY. HOWEVER, RECENT SCHOLARSHIP POINTS TO A MORE SPECIFIC CAUSE, WHICH IS THE BASIS FOR THE CAN THEORY OF SEXUAL PREFERENCE.

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The Can Theory originated with Simon and Lloyd's 1984 interviews with homosexuals incarcerated in the Iowa State Hospital for the Criminally Insane in Iowa City. The Simon and Lloyd data evidences that, prior to incarceration, the State Hospital inmates commonly consumed canned food while standing over kitchen sinks. According to specialist William L. Benson, this behavior reflects "a fixation in the infantile oral state of gratification" (Simon and Lloyd, 180). Leading specialists in the field of sexual deviance recognize oral obsessions as characteristic of people who exhibit abnormal sexual behavior. Simon and Lloyd were the first to explore homosexual dietary patterns in this context.

Vincent *et al.* quickly responded to Simon and Lloyd's findings by asserting that the act of eating food out of the can may not be as significant as the fact that the food is unheated. They argue that eating canned food cold leaves the consumer vulnerable to contamination from unlawful, unsterile conditions in the food-processing industry and that people who eat unheated canned food can damage their perceptions of, and physiological reactions to, the opposite gender. Evidently people who heat the contents of cans before consuming food do not suffer any

adverse effects on their sexual preferences.

Hong, Peters, and Easley suggest the ingredients in cans may in fact be very relevant to the effect on the subjects because a majority of the inmates studied in the Simon and Lloyd data had been consuming primarily Cammell's soups; some had even used a fork. Hong, Peters, and Easley report that the relatively high vegetable content of the soups consumed (FIG. 1) may lead to a protein deficiency if consumed regularly over a period of time. Without vitamin supplements, damage can occur to the consumer's brain functioning and nervous systems, both of which play vital roles in human sexual response. In a separate report, Hong cites the data from Mason's 1987 findings that a significantly higher proportion of lesbian than heterosexual female populations were vegetarian (l=22.6 percent, h=16.1 percent).¹

Representatives from the Cammell Soup Company disagree strongly with the assertions made by Hong, Peters, and Easley: "Many consumers purchase our products without turning queer" (Hedges and Starnes, 15). The Cammell Soup Company

¹It must be noted that heterosexual women who identified themselves as feminists were more likely than regular women to subsist on vegetarian diets,

claims no responsibility for mutating consumer sexual preference, and the company also denies all allegations of food-processing sanitation violations.

In related research, sociologists at Ohio State University specializing in abnormal sexuality suggest that the Can Theory could reflect the lack of options for homosexuals to live in any marital status other than single, and the tendency among singles to spend little time or effort on meal preparation when eating alone (Hampton-Smith and Smith-Hampton, 154). This conjecture is suspect, however, because one sociologist found eating Cream of Asparagus soup out of the can claimed "I like it this way."

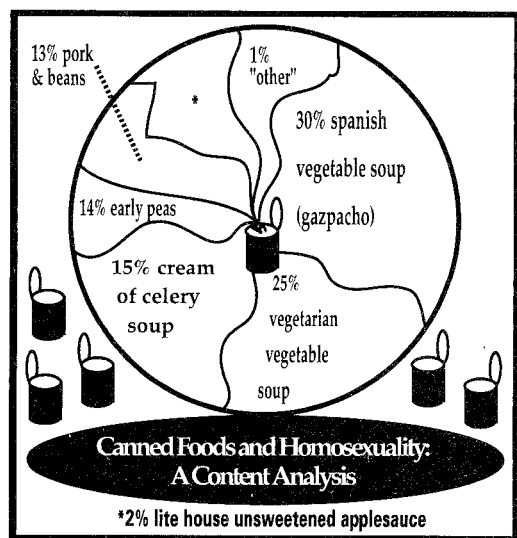


FIG 1

In summary, the recently proposed Can Theory accounts for a curious behavior observed in approximately 15 percent of a select population. Some critics argue that the sample in the original study was too small to support a theory, but question if this phenomenon may be more widespread in larger metropolitan areas of the United States where both homosexuality and crime proliferate (Lee, 386; Hedges and Starnes, 15). Several leftist critics argue that because of the

which suggests this diet may be linked with increased hostility toward the opposite gender—a characteristic common to both feminists and lesbians.

incarceration of original Simon and Lloyd subjects, the Can Theory can be applied only to homosexuals who are criminally insane (Hampton-Smith and Smith-Hampton, 152). Criminal-justice specialists are searching for another factor that may contribute to the increasing militancy and hence criminality among homosexuals, one which causes them to develop characteristics similar to those found in a group of male inmates in New York City who had developed kleptomania primarily for oysters, fine wines, and chocolates (Juarez and Douglas, 27).

A number of subsequent studies are already being conducted to distinguish why protein deficiencies cause homosexuality, especially to the degree of causing criminal behavior. Promising research is currently underway at the Triangle Research Park at Duke University, in which the behaviors and eating patterns of homosexuals in New York City, San Francisco, and Atlanta are being studied. Specialists at George Washington University in the burgeoning field of the parapsychobiology of nutrition are beginning a longitudinal study which will focus on the effect of baby-food preferences on the development of abnormal adult sexual development (Lee, 390).

In the meantime, until further conclusions can be drawn, national and state legislators are taking preventative measures to ensure that citizens receive their constitutional share of protein. Thus far these initiatives have focused on the regulation of the price of meat and dairy products and plans for expanding free cheese programs in metropolitan areas. On the local level, school-lunch programs are reevaluating their categorization of foods and have made plans to increase the proportion of protein allotted per student. North Carolina recently passed a law requiring programs and institutions receiving state monies for preventing youths at risk from becoming adult criminals to institute high-protein diets (Lee, 391). In Florida activist Anita Bryant even headed a campaign that convinced one school board to use funds designated for AIDS education to hire a

"People who heat the contents of cans before consuming food do not suffer any adverse effects on their sexual preferences."

Criminal-justice specialists are searching for another factor found in a group of male inmates who had developed kleptomania for oysters, fine wines, and chocolates.

lunch supervisor to monitor students' and teachers' consumption of protein and allow him to report those who do not clean their plates. The Board of Directors for Girl Scouts of America is experiencing severe conflict over a proposal to increase the content of dairy products and peanut butter in their cookies. NASA similarly is planning to redirect its research on nutritional needs and space exploration. At a recent luncheon for the Moral Majority committee, religious leader Jerry Falwell reportedly lambasted a waiter who served him tofutti instead of real ice cream, shouting "F--- the cholesterol; I won't let Satan turn me into a homo" (Carnes, 13).

In conclusion, the Can Theory of Sexual Preference has developed in the past few years in spite of opposing forces. Scholars and researchers on all fronts have stepped up their commitment to projects stemming from the Can Theory in a quest to discover the complete cause for criminal behaviors such as homosexuality. Lawmakers and political leaders are busily working to pass legislation that will protect Americans from the threat of contamination and perversion. Religious leaders are lending support to the political struggles, which are only in the beginning stages. Medical experts are encouraging mothers to support the changes in their local school systems by adjusting the family menu to include more protein. The entire nation is cooperating in making positive changes until further research on the Can Theory is completed. Most importantly, federal spending has been rerouted into this research so that significant progress can be achieved more quickly. Consequently, within the next five to ten years, it is hoped that the Can Theory can be altered to an even more accurate explanation of deviant lifestyles.

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Ellen F. Klosterman teaches Women's Studies at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, while working on her Ph.D. in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. She shares her life with her cats and her partner.



ANDY, WE HARDLY KNEW YOU

COMMENTARY

Howard Cruse



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OUT/LOOK winter 1991

HE died quietly in the fourth panel of a newspaper comic strip while listening to a Beach Boys tune. He stage-directed his own memorial service amusingly by videotape. A panel of his own design was quickly sewn into the "AIDS Quilt Project." And now we are left to contemplate his loss.

As losses to AIDS go, this one is not exactly a heartreder. Andy Lippincott spent more *Doonesbury* installments last May dying than he ever did living—since 1975, when he came out to Joanie Caucus. How much attention did we have a right to ask Garry Trudeau to pay to a gay character in a mere fifteen years?

Nobody expects a queer soldier to pop up in *Beetle Bailey* or a dyke tabby to share Garfield's lasagna. Most syndicated strips are about escape from any and all sides of life that straight America finds unsettling—including your existence on this planet and mine.

But *Doonesbury* is different. It rose to prominence because it engaged the gut issues of our culture that other comic strips evaded. From its inception, it was the sole comic-page voice of America's defiant 1960s counterculture—the only comic strip where getting stoned on grass was depicted indulgently, where unmarried characters had sex without being punished, where a motley

array of cartoon baby boomers regularly “spoke truth to power.”

It's hard to think of a significant social issue or cultural group for which Trudeau hasn't created an emblematic character. Feminists are represented by Joanie Caucus; campus firebrands have Mark Slackmeyer; yahoo jocks have B.D.; black professionals have Ginny; spacey hippies have Zonker. Standing in for our nation's homeless are Alice and Elmont; for the embattled Vietnamese during the war there was lovable Phred; for today's Asian-Americans, there is Honey.

And for us gay and lesbian folk, there has been, just barely, Andy Lippincott.

The now-deceased Andy Lippincott.

Don't get me wrong. I'm a *Doonesbury* fan. I've watched with admiration as Trudeau has broken through barrier after barrier over the years in his exceptionally insightful comic strip. We should all salute him for daring to introduce, back in the mid-70s, the first gay comic-strip character ever to surface on a newspaper page, and for his courage in choosing recently to deal explicitly with the ravages of AIDS.

But having saluted, I think some questions about Andy's sendoff can fairly be raised.

When Trudeau introduced Andy's gayness in 1975, I was thrilled. America was going to get to know and love a gay man the way America had learned to love Joanie Caucus. But not so. Andy was never on view long enough to love. He was never given the chance that so many others in the strip have enjoyed in abundance: the chance to reveal different sides of himself, to be vulnerable, to transgress and then redeem himself. On and off in the blink of an eye back in 1975, he surfaced again briefly in the mid-80s as an organizer of the “Bay Area Gay Alliance,” but was out the door before anyone could even ask if he'd taken a guy to the movies. The next thing we knew, it was 1989 and the organ music was rising.

It would be absurd, of course, to have demanded that Trudeau set aside his satires of Watergate or Reaganism in order to make “our” character his strip's centerpiece. But we're talking about a spread of fifteen years here, not a month or two. There was time to do more, had the cartoonist been interested.

But even if we are forgiving of Trudeau's failure to bring Andy to life when the character was healthy, it's hard to accept the artist's waste of a rare opportunity once he'd made his character ill. In giving Andy AIDS, Trudeau gave himself the chance to portray authentically, if comedically, the only fictional person with AIDS that America is likely to encounter in the funny pages.

But once he'd heaved Andy into bed, his vision went slack. He compensated with jokes.

Which is real, as far as it goes. “Andy uses humor to soften the rage he feels and to help him face the abyss,” said Andy's doctor, Rudy Klein, to Joanie Caucus last April, as Andy made jests about poultry infections by mimicking a chicken's cluck from his bed. “AIDS care is about helping people cope, helping them die in dignity.”

Wait a minute! How about helping them stay alive? By 1989, most doctors treating people with AIDS considered the fight for the patient's survival to be a fairly important part of their mission.

But by wheeling Andy onstage, giving him a doc who was measuring him for a body bag before his first dose of pentamidine had kicked in, and then validating the doctor's fatalism by blowing the patient away a couple of dozen jokes later, Trudeau reinforced the most nightmarish of assumptions about AIDS as an unstoppable juggernaut of death. For the fact that AIDS kills is truly old news. And what politically safe news it is, too.

Trudeau could have shown us an Andy engaged in the nuts-and-bolts survival struggles that people with AIDS confront daily. He

also could have shown us an Andy whose post-diagnosis life did not revolve totally around his illness. In other words, he could have told straight America something it didn't already know about PWAs.

Yet in the end, Trudeau did little with Andy beyond showing him lying in bed making wisecracks about incapacitation and death. Sometimes he was in a rooming house; once he was even in an earthquake. There was talk that he'd been to the office and taken a few depositions, but when the cameras were on him, Andy was always flat on his back.

Andy never tried to make a long-deferred personal dream happen. He never mulled over the complications of dating when you're HIV-positive. He never joined ACT UP or the PWA Coalition, never waved a placard or yelled at the National Institutes of Health, never translated any of the anger beneath his wisecracks into productive action. At a time in history when the self-empowerment movement among HIV-infected people has been a marvel to behold, Trudeau's listless Andy never behaved as if he had a grain of power to lift a finger, much less take charge of his life.

Who was Andy Lippincott that we should care that he died? He was a wisecracker with no community and no context. He exhibited no functioning anger over his situation, beyond a bitter remark or two about Reagan before "the morphine kick[ed] in." He had no visible gay friends or activist allies standing vigil at the end; no lovers, past or present, held his hand. All ties to the gay world had vanished into vapor.

How nice that Trudeau could turn to motherly, heterosexual Joanie when he needed someone to rush to Andy's bedside. How nice that Andy's family arrived and tried to cope in their bumbling way.

How nice—and how incomplete. Many a parent and straight friend has come

through with flying colors when HIV put a gay man's life in danger, but by and large it ain't the straights who've been dependably in the trenches when it counted. Where were the faggots and dykes in Andy's sick room? A few popped in at the memorial service, but if they were around before he died, Trudeau chose to keep them offstage.

When I met Trudeau a few months ago at a professional gathering, I complimented him for not killing off Andy during the initial hospital sequence.

"Yeah, I realized that he was too valuable for that," he said.

My hope was rekindled that this gifted cartoonist had plot turns in store for us of a more insightful nature than I'd seen at that point. Surely Trudeau wasn't going to simply paste some purple spots on Andy's face and milk him for gallows humor?

But in essence, that's what happened: Trudeau played this one for the folks who never want to get any closer to AIDS than a thumb-through of *At Risk* at Waldenbooks.

So Andy Lippincott shed this mortal coil. And now there are no gay or lesbian principals in *Doonesbury*, a supposedly progressive comic strip about hip young urbanites drawn more than twenty years after Stonewall and three years after 600,000 of us gays and lesbians demonstrated in Washington, DC, to demand our civil rights.

"We are everywhere!" I remember chanting.

I'd forgotten we weren't in *Doonesbury*.

Howard Cruse is a cartoonist and gay activist whose most recent book, *Wendel on the Rebound*, was published by St. Martin's Press in 1988. *Wendel Trupstock* also stars in *Wendel Comix #1*, a comic book published in February 1989 by Kitchen Sink Comix. Cruse's fourth book, *Early Barfootz*, will be published by Fantagraphics this month.



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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Flaunting It—Interdisciplinary graduate student conference on Lesbian and Gay Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 18-20 April 1991. One-page proposals by 15 Jan. 1991 to Cheryl Kader or Thomas Piontek, Dept English, PO Box 413, UW-Milwaukee, WI 53201.

Where Are The Women—Exhibition of work by women artists at Lesbian and Gay Communities Services Center, National Museum of Lesbian and Gay History, through 30 November 1990. Contact: Lesbian & Gay Community Services Center, NYC. (212) 620-7310.

Butch-Fem Anthology—Joan Nestle of Lesbian Herstory Archives, NYC, is producing Alyson Press anthology. Contributors will be paid. Contributions—poems, fiction, biography, essays, photos, &c.—for possible inclusion should be sent by 1 January 1991 to Joan Nestle, 215 E. 92nd Street, NYC 10025.

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.

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10

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RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Rüdiger Busto & Gary Rocchio

OUT/LOOK winter 1991

84

THIS issue's Queery concentrates on religion and spirituality. We are interested in learning more about the roles, if any, that religion and spirituality play in lesbians' and gay men's lives. Some of the questions in this Queery were taken from surveys conducted by The Gallup Organization and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The results from our Queery will be compared to these two surveys and reported in a future issue of *OUT/LOOK*.

As always, your answers to *OUT/LOOK* surveys are completely anonymous and will be used only in combination with other survey responses to develop a profile of our readers.

We encourage you to photocopy this Queery and ask your friends and family to participate.

1. How important is religion in your life?

- ☐ 1 Very important
☐ 2 Somewhat important
☐ 3 Not important

2. How important is spirituality in your life?

- ☐ 1 Very important
☐ 2 Somewhat important
☐ 3 Not important

3. Compared with five years ago, how would you describe the importance of religion or spirituality in your life today?

- ☐ 1 Increased
☐ 2 Stayed the same
☐ 3 Declined

4. Do you believe in God or in some transcendent spiritual form?

- ☐ 1 Yes ☐ 2 No ☐ 3 Don't know
(If no or don't know, skip to Q6.)

5. Do you ever pray to God?

- ☐ 1 Yes ☐ 2 No

6. Do you believe that people can have contact with the supernatural, such as ghosts or spirits of the dead?

- ☐ 1 Yes ☐ 2 No ☐ 3 Don't know

7. Do you believe in reincarnation?

- ☐ 1 Yes ☐ 2 No ☐ 3 Don't know

8. Do you believe in astrology?

- ☐ 1 Yes ☐ 2 No ☐ 3 Don't know

9. Do you believe nature, or Mother Earth, has its own kind of wisdom, a planetary consciousness of its own?

- ☐ 1 Yes ☐ 2 No ☐ 3 Don't know

10. Have you every consulted a psychic, channeler, shaman, or trance medium?

- ☐ 1 Yes ☐ 2 No

11. Which, if any, of the following do you use for personal spiritual practice?

- ☐ 1 Bible
☐ 2 Koran
☐ 3 Bhagavad-Gita
☐ 4 Other texts: _____
☐ 5 Rosary/meditation beads
☐ 6 Yoga
☐ 7 Candles/incense
☐ 8 Icons
☐ 9 None

12. Which, if any, of the following do you have on display or use in your home?

- ☐ 1 Mezuzah
☐ 2 Votive candles
☐ 3 Icons/statuary: _____
☐ 4 Bible
☐ 5 Altar
☐ 6 Cross
☐ 7 Other religious items: _____
☐ 8 None

13. Has AIDS increased, decreased, or not affected your belief in God or a spiritual force?

- ☐ 1 Increased significantly
☐ 2 Increased somewhat
☐ 3 Not affected
☐ 4 Decreased somewhat
☐ 5 Decreased significantly

14. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Please indicate using the scale of 5 to 1, where 5 indicates that you completely agree, and 1 you completely disagree.)

1 AIDS is meant to raise our consciousness, open our hearts and minds.

5 4 3 2 1

2 AIDS was created by a destructive lifestyle.

5 4 3 2 1

3 AIDS somehow gives our lives purpose, balance, or completion.

5 4 3 2 1

4 AIDS is punishment from God.

5 4 3 2 1

5 AIDS is a path for gay people to rediscover our ancient healing roles.

5 4 3 2 1

6 AIDS has no spiritual/religious meaning.

5 4 3 2 1

15. Do you believe that there is a uniquely gay/lesbian spirituality?

- ☐ 1 Yes ☐ 2 No ☐ 3 Don't know

16. To what extent has religion or spirituality ever been an obstacle in your relationship with a lover/partner?

- ☐ 1 Extreme obstacle
☐ 2 Very much an obstacle
☐ 3 Somewhat of an obstacle
☐ 4 Not very much of an obstacle
☐ 5 Not at all an obstacle
☐ 6 Never had a relationship

17. Are you currently in a relationship with a lover/partner?

- ☐ 1 Yes ☐ 2 No

(If no, please skip to Q19.)

18. Please indicate on the scale below the extent to which you share the same religious or spiritual beliefs with your current lover/partner. (5 indicates that you completely agree, 1 you completely disagree, and 0 that you don't know.)

5 4 3 2 1 0

19. Which, if any, of the following have you attended? (Please check all that apply.)

- ☐ 1 Divinity school/seminary college
☐ 2 Certification program
☐ 3 Language training
☐ 4 Study with a spiritual master
☐ 5 Traditional family knowledge
☐ 6 Religious primary or high school
☐ 7 Other (Please specify: _____)
☐ 8 None

20. In which of the following spiritual communities, if any, were you raised? (Use checklist below. If none, please skip to Q29.)

21. To which, if any, of the following religious or spiritual communities do you now belong?

20. 21.

- ☐ ☐ 1 Roman Catholic
☐ ☐ 2 Mainline Protestant
☐ ☐ 3 Evangelical/Fundamentalist Christian
☐ ☐ 4 Gay Christian (MCC, Dignity, etc.): _____
☐ ☐ 5 Other Christian: _____
☐ ☐ 6 Jewish
☐ ☐ 7 Muslim
☐ ☐ 8 Buddhist
☐ ☐ 9 Hindu
☐ ☐ 10 Alternative/"New Age" (Wicca, pagan, creation centered, etc.): _____
☐ ☐ 11 Recovery organizations (AA, OA, 12 Step, etc.): _____
☐ ☐ 12 Other: _____
☐ ☐ 13 None
(If none, please skip to Q29.)

22. Over the past 12 months, approximately how often did you participate in your religious or spiritual community's services?

- ☐ 1 Daily
- ☐ 2 Once a week
- ☐ 3 Once a month
- ☐ 4 Less frequently
- ☐ 5 Never

23. Are you currently in a leadership position within your religious or spiritual community?

- ☐ 1 Yes ☐ 2 No

(If no, please skip to Q25.)

24. What is your title or function in your religious or spiritual community?

25. Overall, how supportive of homosexuality is your local religious or spiritual community? (Use checklist below.)

26. Overall, how supportive of homosexuality is your religious or spiritual community's official institution?

25. 26.

- ☐ ☐ 1 Extremely supportive
- ☐ ☐ 2 Very supportive
- ☐ ☐ 3 Somewhat supportive
- ☐ ☐ 4 Not very supportive
- ☐ ☐ 5 Not at all supportive
- ☐ ☐ 6 Don't know

27. Among the people you know in your religious or spiritual community, approximately how many

are aware that you are gay, lesbian, or bisexual?

- ☐ 1 None
- ☐ 2 Less than 25%
- ☐ 3 25%–49%
- ☐ 4 50%–74%
- ☐ 5 75% or more
- ☐ 6 Not gay, lesbian, or bisexual

28. Approximately how much financial support have you, personally, given to a religious or spiritual community over the past 12 months?

\$ _____

(continued below)

✈ Detatch this page, fold in thirds, secure with tape, and mail.



OUT/LOOK SURVEY RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY 2940 16TH STREET, SUITE 319 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94103

Please
Place
Stamp
Here

DEMOGRAPHICS

29. Are you male or female?

- ☐ 1 Male ☐ 2 Female

30. Which one of the following categories best describes your sexual orientation?

- ☐ 1 Gay or lesbian
- ☐ 2 Bisexual
- ☐ 3 Heterosexual

31. What is your current HIV status?

- ☐ 1 Diagnosed AIDS/ARC
- ☐ 2 HIV-positive
- ☐ 3 HIV-negative
- ☐ 4 Don't know

32. What is your age? _____ years

33. What is your race?

- ☐ 1 Asian/Pacific Islander
- ☐ 2 Black
- ☐ 3 Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ 4 Native American
- ☐ 5 White
- ☐ 6 Other (Please specify: _____)

34. Please estimate your total personal income before taxes for all of 1990. (Please include income from all sources, e.g., salary, bonuses, share of profits, investment income, interest, rental income, etc.) \$ _____

35. Where do you live?

City: _____
State: _____

We would love to hear from you! Please use a separate piece of paper to tell us what important connections, if any, you see between religion, spirituality, and homosexuality.

Thank you!

AIDS ACTIVISM: WHERE WE STAND

Jeffrey Escoffier and Gary Rocchio

THE tactics of AIDS activism are a constant topic of debate, and intense interest of *OUT/LOOK* readers in these tactics is demonstrated by the fact that over 500 people responded to Query #9 in the Spring 1990 issue. Some of the most interesting results were found in the cross-tabulations between responses about tactics and about HIV status (HIV+ or HIV-) as the motivation for AIDS activism. Whatever their serostatus, the vast majority (84 percent) of those who answered the questionnaire believe that AIDS activists have a significant and positive impact on public health policy.

The interpretation of the

results of this survey is sometimes unclear because the questions as well as the issues themselves were often ambiguous.

ACTIVISM

Of the 549 people who responded, 32 percent do not define themselves as active in AIDS politics. Most people give money (80 percent) and attend rallies (71 percent), while roughly a quarter work on lobbying and various other forms of political activity. A small proportion (15 percent) have engaged in civil disobedience or risked arrest.

MOTIVATION & HIV STATUS

Of the 375 respondents who con-

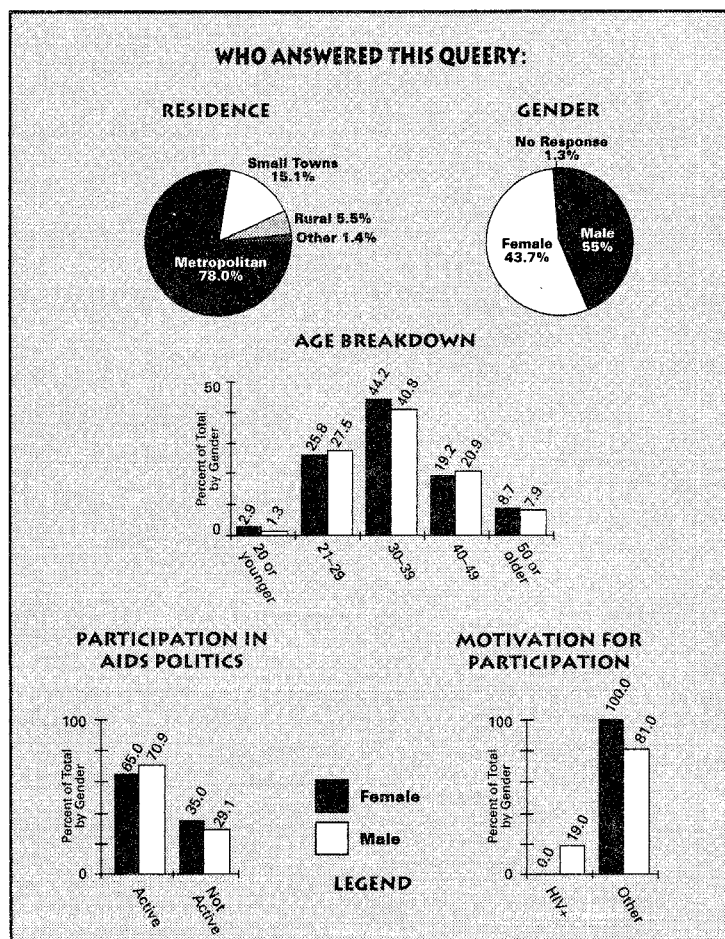
sider themselves activists, ten percent said they became involved because they were diagnosed with AIDS, ARC, or as HIV+.

Throughout the survey a considerable divergence of opinion existed between people motivated by their positive HIV status and people who were not HIV+. For instance, 37 percent of those whose motivation for political activity status was an AIDS or ARC diagnosis or who tested HIV+ had engaged in civil disobedience, 55 percent had participated in lobbying efforts, while 45 percent were involved in other AIDS political efforts. Of those not HIV+, only 13 percent engaged in civil disobedience, 24 percent lobbied, and 26 percent were involved in some other AIDS political efforts.

Of those 174 respondents who are not active in AIDS politics, 42 percent said their reason for not being active was "not enough time." Twenty-three percent objected to many of the unconventional tactics used in the AIDS movement, while another 11 percent disagree with the agendas of the AIDS organizations they knew. Some of the inactive respondents feel excluded from AIDS politics as women (16 percent) or as people of color (2 percent). All but one person in this group seem to be HIV-.

MOTIVATION & TACTICS

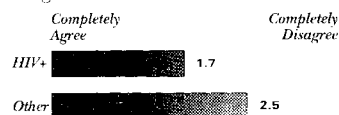
Irrespective of their HIV status, most respondents overwhelmingly favor "controversial" AIDS activist tactics such as the ACT UP/NY's demonstration outside St. Patrick's Cathedral, the heckling of President Bush, or the blocking of rush-hour traffic on the Golden Gate bridge. The only exception to widespread approval of many of these actions



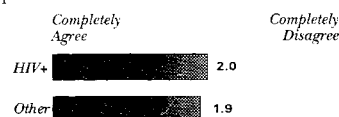
is the disruption of religious services inside St. Patrick's. Another striking divergence between people of HIV+ status surfaced on the question of whether or not it is acceptable for AIDS activists to destroy or harm public and private property. Those motivated by AIDS or HIV+ status were evenly divided between approval (45 percent) and disapproval (47.5) while those who are presumably HIV- overwhelmingly (69 percent) disapproved of the destruction of public or private property as a part of a protest action.

Respondents rated the following tactics on a scale from one to five with one signifying complete agreement and five complete disagreement. The graphs below compare the average scores of those primarily motivated to political action by their positive HIV status (i.e., AIDS, ARC, and asymptomatic HIV+) with other respondents both active and inactive.

- To draw public attention to the need for more funding for AIDS, San Francisco Bay Area activists stop traffic for several hours by sitting down in the middle of Golden Gate Bridge.

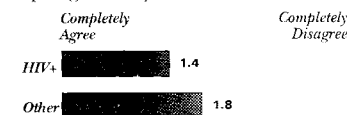


- Activists heckle President Bush as he addresses a group on the need to show compassion for people with AIDS, while offering no new commitments for federal financial support.

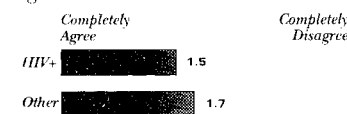


- To protest US immigration policy regarding persons with AIDS or who are HIV+, OUT/Washington, DC jams phone/fax lines of the Immigration and Naturalization

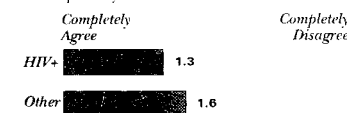
Service headquarters, effectively disrupting the day's business.



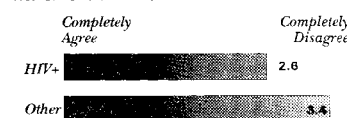
- ACT UP/Kansas City publicly criticizes its local AIDS organization for failing to endorse positive gay-rights legislation.



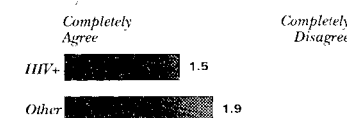
- ACT UP/New York demonstrates outside St. Patrick's Cathedral during Mass to protest the resistance of the Church to rational, inclusive AIDS policy.



- Members of ACT UP/New York, during the above-mentioned action, disrupt services inside the church; one member throws a communion wafer on the floor.

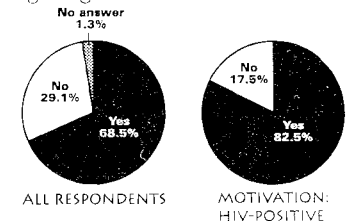


- ACT UP/Atlanta disrupts a session of the Georgia state legislature during discussion of the state's anti-sodomy law.

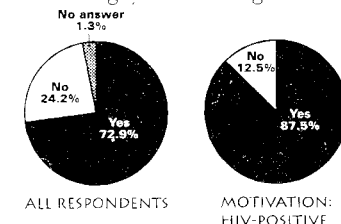


OUTING

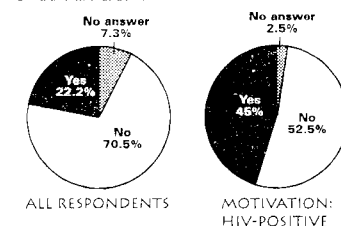
- Support outing of elected or appointed officials who obstruct fight against AIDS:



- Support outing of government officials who support policies that perpetuate homophobia & obstruct gay/lesbian rights:



- Support outing of well-known individuals (not politicians) because they deprive lesbian and gay movement of visible role models:



AIDS AND OTHER ISSUES

Issues related to AIDS, particularly issues such as reproductive rights, working with other social movements, and the creation of a national healthcare system, appeared low on the priorities of respondents: 37 percent thought that working with other social movements should be a top priority in the agendas of AIDS organizations. 29 percent felt that reproductive rights should be a top priority and 24 percent thought that such alliances would detract from the goal of stopping AIDS. Even the creation of a national health-care system garnered support from only 50% of the respondents as a top priority for AIDS activists. Thirteen percent of our respondents thought that the issue would detract from the AIDS movement's goals. ▼

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