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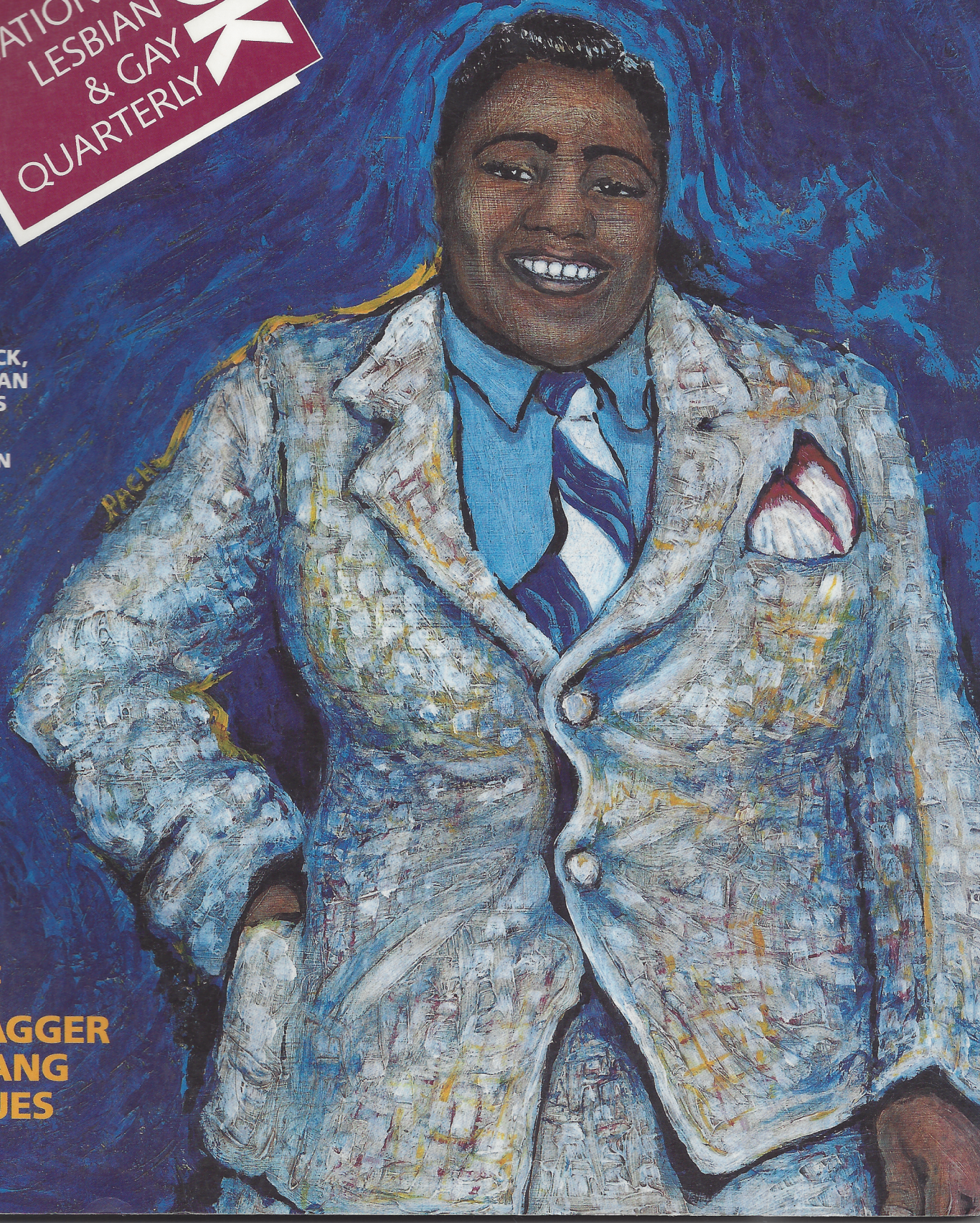
OUTLOOK

NATIONAL LESBIAN & GAY QUARTERLY

WHAT WAS WRONG WITH THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON



ROBERT GLÜCK, JOANN LOULAN ON SEX LIVES

THE LATEST IN LESBIAN FASHION

COMING OUT IN THE AGE OF AIDS

GLADYS BENTLEY:

BULLDAGGER WHO SANG THE BLUES

The march showed the straight
power brokers of the capital, and
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Paul Horow

In ancient times, all the women's vaginas used to wander about. Today,
vaginas stay in one place. One woman of ancient times, Tukwi, had a va
was especially foolish. While Tukwi slept, her vagina would crawl about
of the house, thirsty and hungry, looking for manioc porridge and

from Mehinaku legend of the Wander

Esther Newton

The lesbian sense of style is in a state of transition, fr
1970s political puritanism, to a 1980s butch-fem revival
punk influence. Dykes in their 20s... are looking less lik
and more like motorcycle club members and their

Lisa Duggan,

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[redacted] is a painter who lives [redacted] in Oakland, California, [redacted] at Cabrillo College in [redacted]

[redacted] is an artist who [redacted] films and makes [redacted] lithographs, and artist [redacted]

[redacted] has exhibited her [redacted] and drawings throughout [redacted] and Europe, and currently [redacted] in Oakland, California.

[redacted] scours the land for [redacted] and in between [redacted]

[redacted] helped found [redacted] gay community's [redacted] newspaper in [redacted] has been annoying people [redacted] her camera for close to 30 [redacted]

[redacted] regularly creates the [redacted] comic strip in *The* [redacted] his book *Dancin' Nekkid* [redacted] came out recently.

[redacted] Cottrell, whose work [redacted] consistently appeared in [redacted] is a photographer/ [redacted] in San Francisco.

Rick Fiala was the founding art director for *Christopher Street Magazine*, and is currently designing a new magazine to premier in the summer of 1988.

Scott Lifshutz is an artist living in New York City.

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Paloma Negre has been a poet and an artist since the age of five.

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Annie Sprinkle is a feminist-porn activist and performance artist seeking enlightenment in Manhattan.

Pacha Wasiolek is a Bay Area artist and free lance illustrator whose most recent cover illustration was for *Different Daughters*, edited by Louise Rafkin. She also troubleshoots for the local utility company.

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WELCOME

To the thousands of readers who responded to our promotion at the March on Washington, who bought subscriptions sight unseen, who made financial contributions, and who are purchasing this first issue at a bookstore or a newsstand, **thank you for the vote of confidence, and welcome.**

All of the people who worked to produce this premier issue of OUT/LOOK, the national lesbian and gay quarterly, invite you to join us in a conversation of national scope.

OUT/LOOK was born out of the need to bring together the diverse elements of the lesbian and gay communities. We come from all races, ethnicities, social classes, and political commitments. As men and women, we come out of different experiences and needs, but we also share a sexual stigma and history of resistance.

OUT/LOOK is committed to providing a bridge between worlds which have often been quite separate. We need a national "town meeting" in which we can hear a wide range of voices engaged in serious (but not always solemn) dialogue about the issues that touch our lives as lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people. *We hope OUT/LOOK will be that forum.*

What's our line? We don't think we have one. In fact, if you can find one in the next 108 pages, please let us know what it is. A few things we *are* committed to: gender balance in subject matter and authors; reflecting the diversity of cultural, racial, geographic, and political traditions that shape the contemporary lesbian and gay experience; and thoughtful, provocative, creative writing and art.

We're proud of this debut and look forward to tinkering with the magazine over the coming months, searching for ways to best fulfill these goals for OUT/LOOK.

We're counting on you to send us your ideas. If you—or your friends—have a bone to pick, a manuscript on the shelf, or some research in need of a national audience, please contact us. Write us letters when you disagree with something we publish, or if you think something else needs to be said.

Are we nuts? We've spent months of volunteer time getting this magazine off the ground. Launching OUT/LOOK has involved hundreds of tasks—many resembling community organizing. It takes endless hours to establish databases, design specifications for desktop publishing systems, obtain mailing permits, launch promotional campaigns, not to mention finding and working with authors and artists. All this with no paid staff (yet!).

What has kept us going is our sense that this is a critical time in the history of the lesbian and gay communities. It is a time of challenge and hope; there is a resurgence of activism. Our cultural and intellectual maturity demands new forums for self-reflection and discussion. Conservative political attacks and the AIDS epidemic require a national arena for lesbians and gay men to assess the state of our movement and give full expression to the richness of our culture. We believe OUT/LOOK can play a critical role in meeting these needs.

Who are we? The five founders of OUT/LOOK are: Peter Babcock, a graphic designer and political activist in

Berkeley, California; Debra Chasnoff, a former editor of *Dollars and Sense*, and co-director of *Choosing Children*, a film about lesbian parenting; Jeffrey Escoffier, a gay activist since 1970 and recently editor of *Socialist Review*; Kim Klausner, business director of *Mother Jones* magazine and co-director of *Choosing Children*; and Michael Sexton, computer programmer and Berkeley gay activist. In August, E.G. Crichton, an artist, technical writer, and political activist since the late sixties, joined us as our coordinator. Many, many others have played crucial roles in starting OUT/LOOK. They have contributed much more than just time, money, talent and enthusiasm.

Who is paying for all this? Hah...well, so far no sugar daddy or mama has ventured our way. And it *is* expensive to publish a magazine. We've raised several thousand dollars in donations; the rest of the money has come from subscriptions. This is a non-profit publication, which means we are not going to get rich off this project.

After you've read through this first issue, we hope you will take a moment to send us a note with your reactions, suggestions, and financial support by subscribing, giving a gift subscription, or making a tax-deductible donation. With your involvement, OUT/LOOK can become a community institution.

Once again, welcome, and enjoy the issue.

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Brian Williams
Women's Educational Media

and especially, the OUT/LOOK "widows" who not only contributed work and time, but also lost the company of a partner:
Lauren Church, Mark Leger, and Susan Schuman.

OCTOBER 11, 1987

by Meredith Maran

■ For love and for life, we're not going back. That slogan pulled me to Washington over and through seemingly impassable roadblocks. We're not going back. I'm not going back...

■ To being curled up in myself, to being unseen, unrecognized. Suspicious, mistrustful, caught up in the picayune evidence: I'm not safe with her, with him, with them, here, there, anywhere...

■ I was safe there. Standing in a crowd of 2,000 couples, surrounded by 5,000 others watching over us, on a government street in streaks of sunlight. Holding the woman I love, searching her weeping eyes for the truth of what we have: reaching deeper inside than the fear, further back than the past...while all around us 4,000 others do the same in total privacy and total community—weeping and speaking to each other, smiling and kissing, making only one vow: we're not going back...

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PHOTO BY MARILYN HUMPHRIES/IMPACT VISUALS

Meredith Maran is a freelance editor and mother of Peter and Jesse.

BEYOND THE GAY NATION: WHERE ARE WE MARCHING?

by Paul Horowitz

THE OCTOBER 11, 1987, March on Washington was a historic watershed for the lesbian and gay movement in the United States. The march and the events associated with it were [illegible] spirited, and imaginative. Thousands of people from every region in the country were mobilized and the national media [illegible] the notable exception of the newsweekly [illegible] this notice.

The success of the march has raised the [illegible] question, "What next?" Of course, to [illegible] the future requires an accurate assessment of the present and past. The march thus [illegible] a convenient occasion for assessing [illegible] of the lesbian and gay liberation [illegible] as well as discussion and debate [illegible] strategies.

The brief reflections on the march that [illegible] are certainly not intended to answer [illegible] questions. They are not even a full and [illegible] "report" on the march itself. Rather, [illegible] are intended to help stimulate and continue a much-needed dialog on political [illegible] organizational strategies for the lesbian [illegible] gay movement by expressing one [illegible]'s perceptions of some of what the [illegible] did and did not accomplish.

Inside the Gay Nation

The march showed the straight media, the power brokers of the capital, and the country at large that the lesbian and gay movement is much stronger than had been thought, capable of assembling the largest demonstration since the heady days of the sixties. Moreover, the willingness of so many to be arrested during the Tuesday protest at the Supreme Court showed this same public our depth of commitment and the widespread anger that has been brewing in the lesbian and gay community during the Reagan years. But I think it would be a mistake to overestimate what was achieved. The huge turnout may mask some significant political and organizational weaknesses in the community as well. Furthermore, as significant as this mobilization was (and it was very significant, indeed), it seems to me that comparisons to the August 1963 civil rights march at which Dr. Martin Luther King gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech are unrealistic.

One reason for the tremendous impact of the August 1963 march was that it shattered the silence and apathy of the 1950s and ushered in an era of mass participation in politics

Paul Horowitz lives in New York City and has written previously on Latin America. He is active in Lambda Independent Democrats in Brooklyn and worked on the NYC organizing committee of the March on Washington.

[illegible] 1988.

JOURNAL

■ I'm not going back. To shame. To measuring my value in dollars, achievements, the approval of others. To believing I deserve only what I earn...

■ In the Metro Center subway station throngs of marchers cheered and applauded each entering marcher. The new one would look around for a moment, wondering why, then smile in recognition of this recognition. Along the march route marchers stood aside and cheered and applauded: for San Francisco's 20,000; for Arkansas' 20. For People Living With AIDS and people wearing Silence=Death black shirts. For men twirling batons and women pounding drums. For love and for life...

■ The faces. Beaming, determined, loving. Purple gashes of Kaposi's sarcoma muted under makeup; skeletal skulls, the walking worried. But fully present. Fully seen and recognized. To be celebrated here, one only need be present. To be present here, one need only *be*...

■ Looking into Ann's eyes as the wedding proceeded, I thought: I only need to let go to really feel this love. Over Ann's shoulder, a man emaciated by impending death smiled through his tears and married his partner. Two black women in white tuxedos, baby's breath threaded through their french-braided hair, turned to congratulate us with hugs. Forgive the past, the woman on the stage urged us. Now everyone hold hands and take one step forward, together...

■ Silver balloons floated past the granite buildings, and brown rice cascaded from the sky. A piece of sidewalk chalk was passed; we wrote our names in hearts we drew on the tar. The next day the names were still there: Regina and Sue; Tom and Larry...

■ Congratulations, we beamed at each other, hugging tears into denim jackets, satin tuxes, pinstriped wool. Later that day, walking through the city, we passed men in suits enmeshed on park benches, women in gowns stroking each other's faces. Washington, D.C., was a honeymoon sweet. Did you get married today? Yes, did you? Congratulations. Congratulations. We're going forward. We're not going back...

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PHOTO BY DONNA BINDER/IMPACT VISUALS

[redacted] seen since the labor upsurge of [redacted]. It made protest legitimate in a certain era and helped spark the anti-war mobilizations in the late sixties and early seventies. [redacted] today could reproduce that effect of the 1963 civil rights demonstration. Despite the right's best efforts, we've never quite gone home again to the enforced conformity of the Eisenhower years; so much so that by now, much of Washington and the national media view these events as purely ritualistic exercises. Moreover, we cannot yet claim for our movement a spokesperson as singlehandedly eloquent as Dr. Martin Luther King. His speech certainly contributes to the unique historical importance of the 1963 march.

The march was indeed enormous. A police estimate of 200,000 is a fantastic turnout, and it felt good reading the next line in most press accounts: "March organizers claimed that 500,000 people participated." Toward the end of the main rally, the M.C.s and march leadership were telling the assembled throng that 650,000 or more had participated (partly in response to "official" National Park Service estimates). But as heretical as it may be, I think the police estimate was more accurate. Furthermore, I think there's no need to be "size queens" about all this. Two hundred thousand or, splitting the difference, 375,000) is an excellent showing.

It seems to me that the overall experience of the march was far more powerful in its effect than in the specifics of the demands, the speakers list, or the speeches. People came because of one or two key ideas, for example, gay rights and to end AIDS. Similarly, the media picked up on just a few themes. Complex ideas and subtle shadings are just beyond the competence of the national media, especially radio and television.

In contrast, among many activists involved in organizing the march, especially early on, there was too much controversy about just such subtleties. The various points of view in these debates were heartfelt and honestly expressed, and the distinctions themselves were frequently, if not always, intellectually or theoretically important. But it seems to me that the activists involved in these debates often lost sight of the fact that in such a massive popular organizing effort, the fine points and subtleties would be lost on everyone but themselves. In the end, I don't think nine out of ten participants in the march could have named the official demands. If the yardstick in these debates was "will this significantly impact the potential for mass outreach?" hours of frequently sectarian rancor could have been minimized and unnecessary divisions avoided.

Within the lesbian and gay community, supporting the march became equivalent to patriotism; something like supporting apple pie and motherhood in other arenas. Again, the support was, for the most part, for the broad aims of the march, for its major themes. But the major themes clearly resonated in the lesbian and gay world, and thousands of lesbians and gay men decided that one effective way to advance these goals was to go to Washington. It's hard to say to what extent this was the result of highly effective organizing and to what extent it was the result of the already heightened consciousness of lesbians and gay men: the cumulative effect of the AIDS crisis, the political onslaught of the Reagan years, the day-to-day experience of our lives. No doubt the mixture of these elements varied from place to place.

Within the lesbian and gay community, supporting the march became equivalent to patriotism; something like supporting apple pie and motherhood.

A similar process did not occur outside the lesbian and gay community. March participants were overwhelmingly lesbians and gay men, perhaps up to 90 per cent. Of course, as Magnus Hirshfield put it at the turn of the century, "The liberation of homosexuals must be the work of homosexuals themselves." Or, as Hillel put it long before that, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" In almost any historical conjuncture it would make sense that a demonstration for "lesbian and gay rights" and to "fight AIDS" (given its vastly disproportionate impact on our community) would mobilize a disproportionately lesbian and gay crowd. But I believe that even in terms of size and certainly in terms of breadth, the march fell short of its potential.

The march weekend seemed too internally oriented (internal, that is, to the lesbian and gay community). We didn't seek allies, or

PHOTO BY DONNA BINDER/IMPACT VISUALS

■ On march day we got up early to witness the unfolding of the quilt. As Ann and I had known months earlier that we had to go to Washington, we knew without discussion we had to be there for the quilt. Approaching the mall we heard the droning litany: Bobby Reynolds, Dr. Thomas Waddell, Jim, Fred... as the amplified voice filled the morning silence, the volunteers unfolded the panels like flowers in sun, a graceful dance of death...

Raymundo Cruz, Billy Campbell... staring at the Capitol in the distance I held Ann close to me and we cried together as name after name, panel after panel, death after death was revealed. A moment of silence was called for; the thousands who surrounded the quilt took each other's hands; we breathed together. The volunteers whose lives have been about the making of this monument for the past year walked out slowly, signed their names inthe midst of all those names, then hugged each other and wept before us. We applauded them; we thanked them for giving us this way to grieve and rage our losses together... for life, we're not...

■ Welcome to the Names Project, the big voice said, and we walked carefully upon the muslin walkways stitched between the panels. A man in a three-piece suit searched the panels, found the one he sought and collapsed in sobs. A Names Project volunteer rushed to him, engulfed him in her arms and told him it was good to cry. No one wasn't crying. A young man walked slowly through the football field of names, stopping at several to gently touch the cloth: Hello, Bobby, he said softly. Hello James. Hello Brian.

Rock Hudson. Liberace. A few women. One with seven names on it, inscribed, "Thank you all for loving my big brother." One that said, "Our family wouldn't let me name my brother, but he would want his name here." Many with dates of birth and death. Almost all with birthdates later than mine. I'm not going back...

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we didn't try hard enough. This internal orientation is an important political project, yes, of pride and affirmation (like black pride of the sixties). But after a time and when other tasks are ignored, it's defeatist and holds back progress. It's internalized homophobia—we expect rejection, so we don't even ask, we don't even pose the challenge of asking.

This took many forms. Why didn't each of us ask six straight friends to come? How many people asked co-workers to join them, or at least told co-workers where they were spending a beautiful fall weekend and why? Why, when we organize, do we immediately say, "Who's gonna cover the bars?" but not also, "Who's gonna speak to the council of churches and the reform synagogues?" Why didn't we expect or demand all the straight media to write editorials like the glowing endorsement in the *Village Voice* just prior to the march? Were presidential candidates (except, perhaps for Dukakis) other than Jesse Jackson asked to speak? Why not? We would then have had a very clear way to measure all of their respective claims to be in favor of rights for all and to be capable of exercising leadership in the battle against the epidemic raging in our community.

Seeking allies doesn't necessarily mean broadening the laundry list of demands. And it doesn't mean directing our efforts only at people involved in "other movements" (just this kind of rhetoric reflects a certain inability to think broadly). Although lesbian and gay issues for many years have been even more on the political margins than other liberal/left issues in this country, we can and should reach beyond the too-small left, beyond the Free South Africa movement or the anti-intervention movement, with our concerns, with our demands. We have to reach out to everyone. Just as Hardwick and the AIDS crisis has raised the consciousness of thousands of people in the lesbian and gay community, it has had a similar, albeit lesser effect among straight people. Of course the left is a proper and natural place to look for allies. But as a movement for democratic rights, and as a movement demanding compassion for people dying in the worst health crisis in decades, we can reach people who the left has not reached.

Essential or Constructed Communities?

All this fits into an ongoing debate about the lesbian and gay movement which has thus far been largely confined to intellectual circles: the debate between "essentialist" as opposed to "social constructionist" interpretations of the lesbian and gay present and future.* Briefly stated and vastly oversimplified, the essentialist viewpoint sees a fundamental and immutable difference between the straight world and the lesbian and gay world. The development of an autonomous lesbian and gay community and culture is understood to reflect some essential difference between lesbians and gay men on the one hand and non-gays on the other, a difference that is perhaps rooted in biology, but in any case is permanent and fixed. The essentialist perspective turns the negative stereotyping of lesbians and gay people by bigots on its head. It values the way in which we are different from straight world. It validates assertiveness in women, and camp in men. This perspective implies that efforts to modify an individual's sexual orientation are doomed to failure since the difference is an essential and fixed part of the person. Such an understanding, it is argued, is the best theoretical defense against attempts at conversion of lesbians and gay men to an enforced heterosexuality.

Politically, a slight parody of the essentialist argument might go, since we are essentially different, we can't trust anyone but ourselves. Therefore, we should concentrate on building our own strength and defending our separate culture. The essentialist perspective highlights community solidarity and institution-building; what in the sixties used to be called the alternative institution or counter-cultural strategy, a kind of lesbian and gay nation-building. It provides an intellectual justification for separatist politics and even for anti-political attitudes, and for a myopic and paranoid vision of the straight world. But this analysis enjoys a great deal of spontaneous

The essentialist perspective turns the negative stereotyping of lesbians and gay people by bigots on its head.

*For a much more thorough and provocative discussion of the essentialist/social constructionist debate, including its political implications, see Steven Epstein, "Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism," Socialist Review, No. 93/94 (May-August, 1987), pp. 9 - 54.

■ I could die on an airplane or a city street, but it wouldn't be genocide. Crying at quiltside I remember 1982, hearing of this strange gay cancer, my brother wondering what weird things his gay co-workers did in bed to get these weird diseases... They have always wanted us to disappear, and until this epidemic began to lap at them they must have thought their prayers were being answered. We were disappearing; they watched and moralized. Watching the men at this memorial I wonder how they wake and live each day: going to work, going to buy groceries, going to the doctor, going to funerals. I see their creativity in the quilt and their resilience in their existence, going forward...

■ We walk to the gathering point for the march. The sidewalks are moving with people. I've been to Washington marches before, big ones that changed history. My god, I tell Ann, this is gonna be big. I mean big. And it is. Big, and joyous. Big, and determined. Big, and theatrical. Big, and fully human. We wait for three hours to leave the park, singing—We're here because we're queer, because we're here because we're queer—chanting, chatting. I commend Art Agnos for being here; he says quietly, I wouldn't be anywhere else. Nancy Pelosi is here, too, he tells me, and I see Harry Britt in the crowd.*

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*San Francisco politicians. Agnos was elected mayor and Pelosi congressperson in 1987. Britt is a County supervisor.

PHOTO BY HONEY LEE COTTRELL

support among lesbians and gays. It seems consistent with the common personal experience of having to drop out of or separate, in time and/or space, from straight society in order to create a zone of personal comfort. It raises this oppressive necessity into a sense of fixed limits to emancipatory possibilities. It celebrates the gay ghetto as a liberated zone, and is blind to the limits of ghetto life.

Of course the popularity of this viewpoint owes more than a little to the persistence of reified thought and behavior. This kind of ideological expression of overriding loyalty to group, whether among lesbians and gay men, or among "womyn" or racial, national, or ethnic minorities is always a reaction to the oppression of the majority. But it seems to me to be a dead-end, even if it is "their" fault. What I have been arguing about the march being too internally oriented seems to me to grow out of precisely such a common knee-jerk essentialism within the lesbian and gay community.

The social constructionist viewpoint on the other hand sees the emergence of lesbian and gay identity as part of a more general social construction of sexuality. This process, which is inescapably historically and culturally specific, has not only defined our own emergence as a community but also a general sexual regime that, for instance, prescribes that women should be nurturing and passive, while men be assertive and strong. This perspective, articulated much more clearly by Jonathan Katz, John D'Emilio, Jeffrey Weeks, Nancy Chodorow, and Carol Vance, among others argues that biological or "natural" sexual desire is a false, artificial notion; human sexuality only exists in concrete human beings living in a specific time and place. From the moment of birth a separate sphere of "the sexual" is created and our sexual desire is shaped by the social world which provides limitations, permissions, and prohibitions for actions and even thoughts, for behavior and for the imagination. But contrary to some crude distortions of this argument, that sexual desire is socially formed does not for a moment suggest that lesbians or gay men can arbitrarily choose their sexuality; for starters, heterosexuality is as much socially determined.

In terms of politics, this social constructionist perspective provides an analytical foundation for the direction I've been advocating here. It underscores the degree to which the oppression of lesbians and gays is but a moment in the general oppressiveness of the sexual order as a whole. The social constructionist perspective suggests ways of expanding our audience. For example, the oppressive experience of abiding by the socially constructed norms of gender-appropriate behavior speaks to everyone. This doesn't mean that all are equally oppressed by the sexual order: clearly the hierarchy of power favors men over women and straight people over lesbians and gay men. But the emphasis on the malleability of the sexual order provides a firm foundation for our conviction that things can be different, that the ideas and institutions which hurt people don't have to go on because "it's always been that way" (which revealed the essentialism upon which the Supreme Court majority grounded its decision in the Hardwick case).

"Natural" sexual desire is a false, artificial notion; human sexuality only exists in concrete human beings.

Breaking Out of the Political Closet

Of course lesbians and gay men cannot take sole responsibility for the small turnout of non-gay allies. By now, any caring person should know the justice of our cause. And any reasonable person should know why, at least in the advanced industrialized world of the late twentieth century, any general emancipatory project ignores sexual politics at its own peril. For any to attempt to bypass sexual politics limits political possibilities (by impeding the mobilization of large numbers of people, women and gay people in particular), and makes any efforts toward a progressive politics more vulnerable to attack. If the left doesn't speak to sexual politics, the right will have an open field to prey on ignorance and whip up prejudice and chauvinism. Our recent history demonstrates this point: the power of the populist new right, whose ascendancy has been based so much on social issues like fomenting bigotry against lesbians and gays, has not been limited to these issues but it

PHOTO BY HONEY LEE COTTRELL

■ Gay kids from Ivy League colleges, gay elders from everywhere. Gay Hispanics and blacks and Asians. Deaf gays, disabled gays from Anchorage, Dubuque, Tulsa. Twenty thousand from San Francisco. Two days later my ex-husband says quietly, if 20,000 people did something, anything, in San Francisco that would be a big deal. I am grateful for his acknowledgement. The *New York Times* has sliced our numbers in half but we have done what we came to do. We have put a marker in time—civil rights, anti-war, gay rights.

■ For love: in three days of close contact with 600,000 people every single interaction is loving. We help each other on and off curbs, we look for the buttons in the subway; on the streets, we smile and watch each other. Today Cori in New York tells me a friend was in D.C. that weekend on business; he told her he was amazed by the demonstrators he saw in the subways: they were so orderly, he told her, so determined, so—loving. The night of the march Ann and I were eating dinner in a restaurant; she began to cry. I was embarrassed, as I always am when she cries in public, until I looked around us. Other marchers were smiling at her, at me—understanding, not questioning, loving.

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has clearly shaped the direction of economic and foreign policy as well.

It would be wonderful if this political reality was sufficient to mobilize as huge an outpouring from outside the lesbian and gay world as from inside it. But I think we must, unfortunately, start with two truisms: first, spontaneous support for any struggle against someone else's oppression will always be weaker than that against your own oppression; and second, we lesbians and gay men are not a majority or even close to a majority: we must get support from outside our community to achieve our aims. The key is to, yes, raise consciousness and mobilize our community but also, at the same time, to break out of the political closet and challenge and mobilize the majority of the country that is not gay.

There were some examples of this strategy to mobilize and socially construct the largest possible public through the march. Lesbians and gay labor activists, building on years of quiet patient efforts, got our allies in the labor movement (including such big names as John Sweeney, president of the Service Employees International Union, one of the largest unions in the federation) to sponsor a reception in support of the march at AFL-CIO national headquarters. And I think the Names Project brilliantly embodied all at once what I am suggesting here about mobilizing our own and reaching the majority. The massive quilt of panels devoted to individuals who have died from AIDS was simultaneously eloquent in its simplicity and incredibly powerful, incredibly moving. It was visually expressive and its message was accessible to everyone; it didn't require special knowledge of our community's political agenda or cultural style. But what was really powerful was the way in which its direct appeal for simple compassion both fed and was fed by the march's more specific political tone. We have to combine such simple straightforward symbolic action that clearly points the finger at those responsible for the extent of this epidemic with political action.

I think that emphasizing what will win support for our important and life saving demands from the majority of Americans would resonate within our own community as well—rather than making it more difficult to mobilize lesbian and gays. Yes, we loved seeing our own up on stage, both speakers and entertainers, and loved being spoken to in that knowing, we're-all-members-of-the-same-tribe, way (for example, by Tom Ammiano, Lea Deloria). But the crowd also responded to the small effort made to seek and demonstrate wider support. Whoopi Goldberg and Robert Blake, Eleanor Smeal of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and of course the Rev. Jesse Jackson, all got a warm response.

Leadership and Legitimacy

Just who was it that was responsible for some of the mistakes in organizing the march that I've been talking about? Well, it was all of us, of course; by omission all those who did nothing or just showed up, by commission, those who planned the events, wrote the literature, directed the outreach. And, of course, the national leadership of the march set the overall tone and bears the most responsibility. It should be unnecessary to add that it also deserves the credit for all that was right, too. Who were they?

The national leadership of the march was an arbitrary, unrepresentative group. By this I don't mean that the leadership was dictatorial in intent or practice. But first, from the outset it was responsible only to itself. And second, it was selected by a body that was hardly representative of the community for which it claimed to speak, namely a November 1986 conference, held in New York. This conference debated and set the official demands and elected a national steering committee for the march.

The conference call was issued in response to the Hardwick decision (which was handed down the day after Lesbian and Gay Pride/Freedom Day on June 30, 1986) and the ongoing health crisis. The call was signed by many with genuine national or local stature in the lesbian and gay community. But anyone who stated that she or he represented a lesbian or gay group of any size could be a voting delegate at the conference. I believe that

The national leadership of the march was an arbitrary, unrepresentative group.

■ For life: in this avalanche of death our community has created a way for us to be fully ourselves, fully alive, and in the guts of our country. The quilt gave us a physical place in which to fully feel our grief and rage; the rally gave us a place in which to fully feel our power and strength. We could come and go from quilt to rally—from the loss of our loved ones to the victory of a presidential candidate appealing to us for help; from the anguish of our holocaust to the ecstasy of our courage and organization.

■ We have trouble letting go of this world we have lived in for three days. In the airports traveling home we find each other, sit in fluorescent glare and talk about the next time. Next time, we'll bring a balloon for each person we left at home. Next time, we'll take numbers so they can't lie about how many of us there are. Maybe we won't need a next time, says a teacher from Davis. We wave goodbye as marchers depart for Detroit, Cincinnati, Seattle.

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PHOTO BY RICK REINHARD/IMPACT VISUALS

NGLTF and the NOW lesbian rights project were the only national lesbian or gay organizations with significant budget and staff to take an active part in the conference, although some seed money was provided by national fundraising networks. Thus, those who attended were by and large rank and file activists who believed (ritualistically and genuinely) that the time was right for a large mobilization. Naturally, at this early date, such a group was bound not to be representative of the lesbian and gay community as a whole. Furthermore, the conference lacked the participation of significant geographical chunks of the community as well (for example, San Francisco was barely represented).

The conference was very much ad hoc, and democratic only in the most formal sense. How could three days of madness, of frantic politicking, and endless meetings among people invited on the basis of the crudest of mailing lists and informal consultations be anything but democratic in only the most formal sense?

The attendees were among the most dedicated and committed people within the community. Many of those who attended went home to provide leadership at the local level in the organizing for the march. But they also acted at this initial meeting very much as if they were starting with a clean slate. The conference just assumed it could speak for the community, set the demands, and elect the leadership. There was no sense of modesty, little recognition that the cumulative personal preferences of the body gathered in New York might not be a guide to what would be appropriate for organizing others. And there was little recognition that national political organizations with significant track records on AIDS and civil rights exist. The proposal for a "National Lesbian and Gay Congress," which first emerged at this time, was perhaps the worst expression of the organizational arrogance, the collective will to power of the November 1986 conference.

Of course, as is often the case, beyond the personal ego-tripping, there was a substantive political disagreement buried within the organizational conflict. The political center of gravity at the conference can be defined by a series of broad propositions. First, that lesbian and gay oppression is part of a system of oppression, a system which oppresses other groups in this society as well. Second, that the other structural oppressions with the most significance for lesbian and gay liberation are, causally and analytically, those of gender, and politically, those of gender, race and class. While these ideas (which might be labeled "left") may not be widely held among all lesbians and especially not among white gay men, to me they are on the money, almost obviously so. The idea that our fate is inextricably connected to that of women and racial minorities in particular is an idea worth fighting for: a general commitment to this proposition would make it easier to build the kind of political coalitions that are needed to defeat the Robert Borks of the world, to win government funding for this health crisis, and to accomplish the rest of our agenda.

But the average conference participant would have argued further that all or almost all of the traditional institutions and levers of power and influence in our society are building blocks of this systematic oppression. They cannot be vehicles for fighting it. Only "grass roots" institutions of the oppressed can be trusted. In classical left terms, the state in particular is perceived to be the the one-dimensional instrument of the ruling class; in contemporary political terms "the Republicans and Democrats are all alike," implying, "so why bother with either one of them?"

The pessimism and skepticism toward mainstream institutions of the organizer's perspective dovetails with that of the essentialist politics.

The Left Bias

The activists who spearheaded the march had an almost single-minded commitment, consistent with what I consider ultra-left politics, to large national mobilizations as the key tactic for the lesbian and gay movement. The average march organizer at the conference would have argued that demonstrations are always more important than lobbying, or heaven forbid, electoral work; that local "grass roots" organizing only needs to be "coordinated" at the national level rather than

PHOTO BY HONEY LEE COTTRELL

■ I'm not going back. The next day I'm at work; people I've allowed to know me a bit want to know how it was. I can't not be fully me. I tell Suzann about the quilt; she closes her eyes and tells me she can feel it. We cry together; she thanks me for showing her. I tell Lauren about the wedding; she cries and tells me, that's what a community is for: to take care of people, to protect them. I offer to tell a closeted co-worker in private, but she asks to hear in the hallway and soon several people are gathered. Is the quilt coming to San Francisco again? one woman asks quietly. There are tears in my eyes, my face is glowing, this is inappropriate professional behavior, and I am fully me and cannot be otherwise. I'm not going back...

■ Kathi and I talk; we have issues to resolve between us and we do. I feel this humanity in me and it's not about being gay or angry or proud. It's about what human beings are capable of, what is true about us and what is important for us to do. I tell Kathi about the march then; she cries and says she has friends who died, a friend who made a panel for the quilt and went to the march. I feel so human and it's not just about marching. I'm holding doors for people who aren't wearing pink triangle buttons and smiling at people who aren't gay and feeling with Ann without the erosion of internalized heterosexism and feeling hope, at last...

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...the "top-down"; that "militance" is to be ...over "savvy."

In an odd way the pessimism and skepticism toward mainstream institutions of this perspective dovetails with that of the essentialist politics I described earlier. It is not only the non-gay world which is not to be trusted, but any institution outside those of other marginalized groups as well. It brings a superficial perspective of the "privilege of the oppressed" to the lesbian and gay movement, a variant of crude new left "third worldism" from the 1960s translated to the arena of sexual politics.

It is the simplistic instrumentalist view of the state which most damages the politics of this variant of left thinking. For, while we all want the desired revolutionary political rupture, real reforms can be won, with hard work and strategically directed energy. We can pass civil rights legislation, get more funding for AIDS, even have our relationships recognized without the thorough-going structural transformation of society we might all agree is necessary.

Moreover, entering the Democratic Party as one terrain of struggle, for example, does not necessarily mean abandoning one's commitment to far-reaching change, to broad politics, or even to our own interests. What San Francisco Supervisors Harvey Milk and Harry Britt, City Council members David Scondras of Boston and Tim Mains of Rochester, Minnesota state legislators Karen Clark and Allan Spear, and others, many of them self-proclaimed socialists, have done is to try to transform the Democratic Party and electoral politics while they work within it. They have also forged deep links between lesbian and gay liberation and the battles against racism, sexism and economic exploitation within that arena. The mainstream national lesbian and gay organizations have similarly labored to win friends within the Congress. For example, years of work have borne fruit in that almost all of the members of the Congressional Black Caucus are co-sponsors of the federal lesbian and gay rights bill.

Merely because the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force can work within the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights doesn't mean that all lesbians and gay men are sufficiently sensitive to issues of racism, either within our own community or in the country at large. It would be a mistake to exaggerate the depth of commitment on the part of rank and file to broad politics in any single part of this too-frail multi-issue coalition. Nor does it mean that all racial minorities are sufficiently supportive of our struggle for legal rights or do enough to fight homophobia in their communities. Similarly for issues of sexism, for issues of class, or those concerning seniors, or the disabled. But the issue is not the need for a broader politics, from every particular community of the oppressed: about that we all agree. The issue is how such a politics might be constructed, to what extent can and should we work in the existing institutions of state power, and how much space is there for immediate reform? These disagreements about political strategy and tactics, about what might or might not be accomplished through the existing structures of power, go way beyond the lesbian and gay movement.

In the end, the left's disproportionate influence didn't really matter, the broad themes were more significant than the fine points.

Distrust of the existing national organizations or acting as if they didn't exist, arose because they are perceived as being informed, not only by "politically incorrect" ideas but also because they are seen as being wedded to conventional and inherently ineffective tactics. On the contrary, I believe that the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and other organizations are doing vitally important work of monitoring legislation and the behavior of executive agencies and the courts, dealing with the national media on an ongoing basis, and forging working alliances with the nationally organized representatives of the entire progressive (for lack of a better term) community.

Their command of resources and their experience should have been more formally recognized, and the organizing for the march should have been informed by a concern that these existing national organizations need to be nurtured and strengthened. Sure, their roots to local organizing should be deepened. But these aims could have been integrated into the march organizing. NGLTF, perhaps the

■ For love and for life, we're not going back. This is what I want to hold on to: this vision of how people can be, how life can be, how I can be. This is what I want to let go of: the curling into myself, the worrying about who to tell, how to tell them: that my lover is a woman, that I feel, I ache, I lust, I love...

■ I'm not going back. As this march was built on Stonewall, coming into myself is built on years not ended yet of taking risks. Silent and screaming nightmares and therapy sessions, fears and tears, glimpses of how it might be to live in the present, moments of peace. For my love, for my life—with this march and those behind me—forward is the only way to go. ▼

PHOTO BY RICK REINHARD / IMPACT VISUALS

strongest and most broadly based and broadly defined of the national groups, has 10,000 members. If all of them were at the march, then somewhere between 1 out of 25 and 1 out of 65 marchers belonged. That number has to go up—we all need to take support of our national organizations seriously.

In the end, this left's disproportionate influence didn't really matter, the broad themes were more significant than the fine points. Its influence did not become an issue, and there was no serious effort to left-bait the march. Any such attempt would have proved fruitless.

Community and Solidarity

Precisely because of the resonance of the broad themes the size and impact of the march underscored the validity of the tactical perspective of those activists who helped spearhead the march: at least in this particular historic conjuncture lots of people were ready for precisely this kind of event.

But the details of this left's influence were lost on most participants and most of the media. The left won at least a short-term victory at the level of tactics but not at the level of politics. In other words, the "masses" believed in making lesbian and gay rights, and increased funding for AIDS research, care, and education a cause for loud protest and resolute anger, but didn't necessarily support Jackson as opposed to other options, or support solidarity with other movements as opposed to single issue politics, or support demonstrations as opposed to electoral campaigns. Thus, it cannot be fairly claimed that the masses of people who participated in the march and the related events adopted the strategic objectives of the march's "left" leadership for example, breaking with the two parties becoming part of the "rainbow." Nor did they march because they agreed with this left's belief that a large national demonstration was the best tactic to pursue at this time and at all times (and that other kinds of political activity—electoral activity being the most common example—inevitably compromise the aims of the movement).

For most people the march was a deeply positive experience, one not without political significance. At the most general level, the march accomplished what all events of this kind aim at: it energized those there, boosted morale, and made people feel good about themselves. But beyond that, it allowed people a profound experience completely at odds with day-to-day life in a competitive-capitalist, racist, sexist, and homophobic society: the power of an incipient political community-in-action, of human solidarity. It created at least a momentary reality that prefigured the society we are struggling for. We experienced a liberated zone for lesbians and gay men in the midst of the fundamental institutions of state power in this country.

This doesn't mean that real issues shouldn't be dealt with: racial discrimination by lesbian and gay businesses, the disproportionate influence of white men in organizational affairs because of their greater financial clout, occasional interpersonal insensitivity. Even on lesbian and gay issues, in the midst of tactical militance, some backward political ideas found resonance in the crowd: for example, "privacy," "that the government should just leave us alone." On the other hand, the defiant parting invocation of Kate Clinton to the crowd to "be bad" was met by an enthusiastic cheer.

At the level of the "rank and file," there was a great rapport between men and women and between whites and people of color; perhaps the direct experience will be a healthy antidote to the rancor of the debates about sexism and racism in the movement. Demonstrating together, mourning together, celebrating together, I have to believe that many white people deepened their sensitivity to what racial minorities have felt about life in the United States, and that many men were moved by the tremendous and powerful outpouring of lesbian anger and determination about the health crisis which might affect them so much less directly than it affects us. The real, people-to-people solidarity and expressions of good will are things to build on. ▼

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TOKYO: SEXOPOLIS

by Paul Shimazaki

Collages by K:

BOYS IN TOKYO are alright. But as far as Asians go, "Thai boys are the most beautiful," the American across the table informs me with the authority of a seasoned traveler. He takes another bite of his hamburger. No explanation, no qualification is offered. (I'm Japanese-American. Should I take offense?) Before I can properly feel insulted by this sexual tourist, he begins a story of circumcision, involving a Japanese boy (a minor, I cynically note).

We are sitting in an American restaurant. The ketchup bottle, the sugar dispenser, the standard salt and pepper shakers with rounded tin caps, are all familiar. Outside, it is the dead of winter and traffic slushes down Meiji Avenue. Jonathan (not his real name) is finishing his story: the doctor shows him a surgical instrument "made in Chicago." A couple of deft snips later and the boy is ushered out into the reception room, skinless. "And the whole thing cost only 2,000 yen. We got on my bike and I took him home." Apparently, the boy's foreskin had grown closed and was difficult to keep clean. Jonathan adds a postscript, "That was many years ago and he is now the owner of several successful restaurants in New York." Sitting beside him is his friend Sam who has lived in Japan for many years. A practicing Buddhist, a former tripper with Timothy Leary's controlled acid experiments at Stanford, he originally came to Japan to live in a mountain monastery, but now teaches English. Sam is telling us what happened to the Zen philosopher Alan Watts' ashes. (Watts' widow in Marin county [illegible] ashes in a Chinese urn on her house[illegible] mantelpiece. The boat was broken into a[illegible] urn stolen—Zen irony.)

I have been in Tokyo less than a [illegible] Disoriented and suffering from a cold br[illegible] on by jet lag. Any advice? Jonathan sa[illegible] lucky I look Japanese; I can get into the [illegible] houses. We finish our hamburgers a[illegible] good-bye.

1. Two-Town

Eight months later, I am working in a ga[illegible] in *Nichome* (the main gay area of T[illegible] loosely translated as "two-town"). Two-[illegible] is densely populated with two or [illegible] hundred tiny bars, many of them gay [illegible] lesbian), their signs stacked maybe si[illegible] outside ferro-concrete buildings. Sinc[illegible] great Tokyo earthquake and fire of 1923, [illegible] ings have been constructed out of the [illegible] flame-resistant and uniformly ugly mate[illegible] Add a criss-cross of telephone wires and [illegible] linoleum walk-ups and the illusion of T[illegible] as a modern *wunderkind* of cities is suffic[illegible] erased.

The bar I work at can be called, i[illegible] strictest sense, a disco: records are spun[illegible] there is no dancing allowed, zoning laws [illegible] one of the largest bars in *Nichome* (a typica[illegible] has five or six stools and a tape deck). The[illegible] a long wooden counter running the leng[illegible] the bar, opening up at the end of the room[illegible] a small area. At peak hours, the crowd [illegible]

Paul Shimazaki was born in California and has lived in Tokyo for the past two years, where he has worked in a gay bar.

...down the narrow *vas deferens* along the ... to the back where they form a sluggish ... sucking in everything: video moni... revolving mirrored ball, colored lights, ... smoke. The tables are plexiglass and, from ...-violet bulbs underneath, the drinks are ... radioactive. Campari-soda, mango-or... papaya, violet fizz are noted for their ... color. This is a young crowd. The ... gentlemen stick to beer or *mizuwari* ...sky and water). Although the drinking ... smoking age in Japan is twenty, it is not ...arent by the crowd.

"Where's the scene? Is this it?" the gay ...eler wants to know. Tokyo lacks the tribal ...mity of disco and leather. It is a social ... and introductions are made through ...ds or the bar master. A Japanese-Ameri... tells his lover that next time it will defi...ly be Rio. After all, he learned Spanish in ...ol, and Spanish is closer to Portuguese ... to Japanese. "Lovely, warm people, the ...lians. And they like to party." The alternative is *gaijin* (foreigner) bars where you can sip Buds with Japanese who speak English. Then again, these bars are disappointingly not much different from any western bar.

Bar talk: "What's your blood-type?" is commonly asked. In other words, what are you like? A-type people (40 per cent of Japanese) are diligent, hard-working, punctilious, and methodical. Specifically, their strong points are responsibility and endurance. On the other hand, they are prone to indecision or opportunism, the cog in Japan's corporate machinery. O-type people make up 30% of the Japanese population. You've got to watch out for O-types. Sociable, likable, underneath they are motivated by a strong sense of rivalry as well as a longing for fame, high position, and property. And they are not above victimizing or sponging off others in order to accomplish their desires (invasion of Korea, China, trade-wars—they are out for blood). Twenty per cent of the Japanese have B-type blood. The B-type is basically an egoist, "changeable as the

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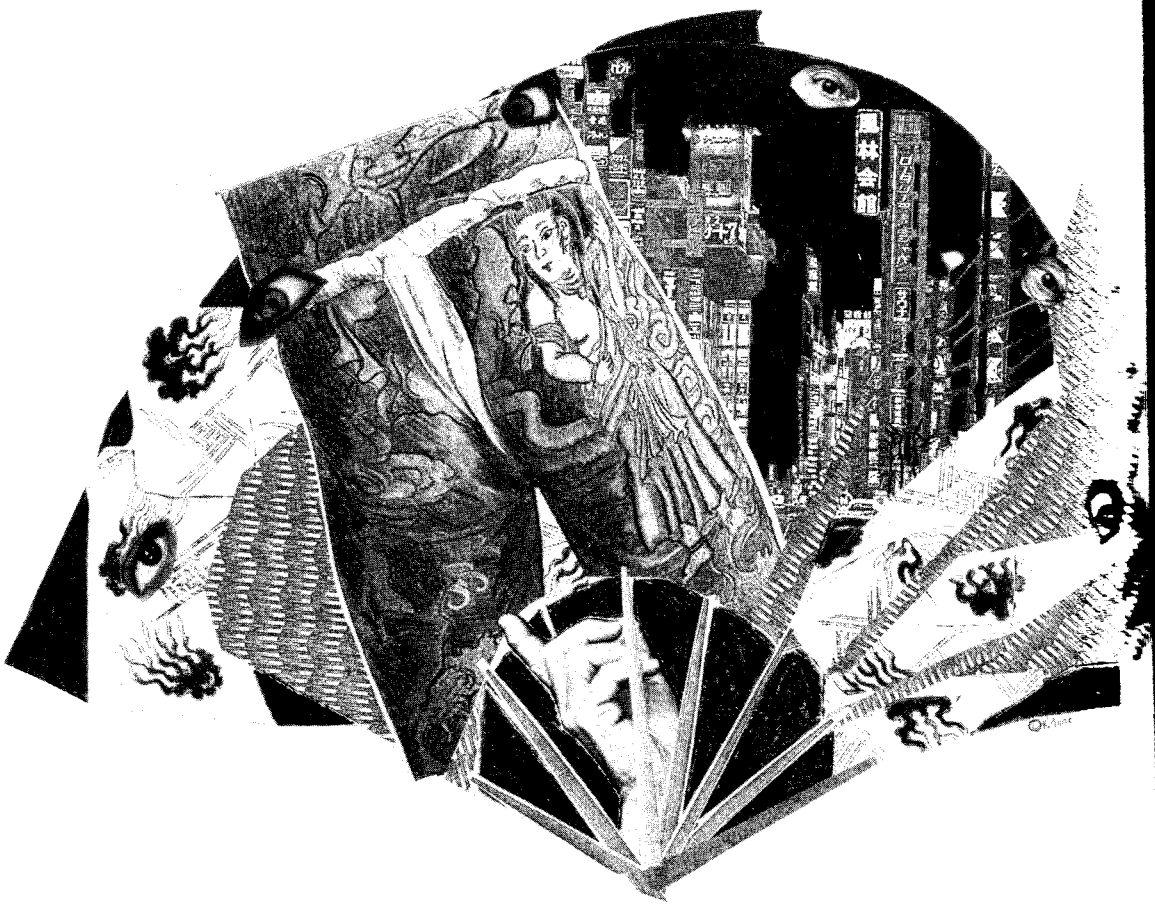

Another magazine shows young junior high school boys and 'dear older brothers' —incest is built into the language.

weather in April." But the saving grace of a self-centered person is that, with disregard for everything and everyone else, he can afford to be funny and direct. The last 10 per cent of the Japanese are AB-type. Realistic, eccentric, they honor theory above instinct. Their hearts are warm and cuddly, but they have difficulty expressing their feelings. So what kind are you? Let's get serious.

Blood type is not the only type, of course. There are also sexual types. Here they are well-delineated into *shumi*. *Shumi* is "hobby." In gay parlance, as a Japanese friend puts it in perfectly droll St. Marks' School of Design English, it means "What's your fancy?" Your *shumi* may be younger boys, older businessmen, heavy guys, crew-cuts. (In a Japanese porno magazine there may not be a rock-hard muscular body but an overweight businessman-daddy stripped to his horn-rim glasses and support socks, and trussed up with ropes. Another magazine shows young junior high school boys and "dear older brothers"—incest is built into the language.) If there is a type, there's probably a bar that partially caters to that type and its pursuer. Your type is not [illegible] to be bashful about. The question will be pu[illegible] you directly, and foreigners caught off-gu[illegible] are likely to say: 1. It's none of your busi[illegible] (but it is really everybody's business). 2. W[illegible] it depends on the person. Even if 2. is true [illegible] tends to sound shoddy, evasive. A prepar[illegible] answer would be "*dare-sen*"—"I take anyth[illegible] I can get" is a rough translation. In Osaka, Ka[illegible] sai region or western Japan, where bar int[illegible] course is often less exquisitely subtle ("*Ya[illegible] yo*"—"Let's do it!") this answer may be w[illegible] received.

2. Shower Boy: The Cult of the *Bishone*

Late-night Fuji TV: A show begins with s[illegible] music and fifties graphics while a woma[illegible] poses by a fern. The camera tilts and zooms [illegible] for the frozen smile. Cut. The show is a Tok[illegible] magazine of pop chart, new restaurants, a[illegible] soft porn. And guest artists: tonight will a[illegible] pear Swing Out Sister and Simply Red. Swi[illegible] Out Sister does appear, looking disoriente[illegible] and uncomfortable since little of the hos[illegible]

[illegible] is translated. Now a starlet of a porn [illegible] (we are shown a brief scene) is [illegible]ewed, *yokozuwari* (reclining on her side) [illegible] bed.

"Do you think doing this kind of movie [illegible]h, typecast you?"

"No, not at all." The bed spasms as it is [illegible] off-camera, throwing the interviewer [illegible]-balance.

Next, a behind the scenes look at the most [illegible] unusual porn movie. A nude woman is [illegible] by her wrists and ankles and swung from [illegible]opter. In the following clip, the camera-[illegible] is shown swinging with her, right-side [illegible]. One of the hosts admires the cameraman's [illegible] "*Cameraman, taihen desu ne.*"

Maybe this is nothing new. Travel guides [illegible] likely mention businessmen on com-[illegible] trains reading sado-masochistic news-[illegible]. porno dispensing machines on the [illegible], an elaborate sushi dinner eaten off a [illegible] woman, the thematic "nurse" or "nun" [illegible]. Or "no-pants" bars. This is all old sexism, [illegible]culine tyranny. What about boy-treated-[illegible]-sex-object? Who would buy that on net-[illegible] TV?

Girls. The studio audience is entirely [illegible] up of giggling teenage girls who have [illegible] to see videos of teenage boys in the [illegible]wer. The show is unimaginatively called "Shower Boy." For a half-hour, we are treated [illegible] shots of soapy bottoms and steamy glass. The studio audience picks who will be the [illegible]ing Shower Boy until next week. He [illegible]es out sheepishly from the wings and is [illegible]arded with polite applause. The cult of the [illegible]*nen* (beautiful youth) is not just restricted [illegible] older men. In the Takarazuka theater, roles [illegible] reversed, in which women play the glam-[illegible]rous male roles to an audience of primarily [illegible]ng girls. In pop music, young "idol" sing-[illegible] boys and girls, are picked from hundreds [illegible] young hopefuls each year and groomed to [illegible] stars, taught dance steps. You can see ven-[illegible]rs selling their concert photos on busy [illegible]eets or in the park on sunny days. By the [illegible]e they turn 19 or 20, they are has-beens. In [illegible]kyo, the production of *bishonen* must keep [illegible] with the demand, or even create it, and [illegible]erybody gets to be a connoisseur.

3. In the Realm of the Senses

Roland Barthes writes that Tokyo exists around "an opaque ring." A kind of "nothingness" which is the site of the Imperial Palace, a central traffic detour. "An evaporated notion, subsisting here, not in order to irradiate power, but to give to the entire urban movement the support of its central emptiness." Sex, too, as it is commercially proffered, feels empty at the core. A not-so-profound nothingness.

Forget the officious censorship in Japan that employs schoolboys to scratch out with razors or magic markers the pubic hair in imported magazines. This is just a by-product of modernization, Meiji Era westernization. The average Tokyoite is, in fact, quite comfortable with sexual matters. There is a poll in a leading young men's fashion magazine. Of the reader response, 70 per cent are uncut. And a portion of this number have a condition which is known as *hokei* (phimosis) like Jonathan's young friend, to varying degrees, and duly noted. A Japanese businessman studying English may think nothing of asking his blond teacher: "What is the color of your pubic hair?" or "What is your breast size?" (The proper response is, of course, "What is your penis size?") Sexual harassment? Never heard of it.

Sex as entertainment: every major city has it. The massage parlors, peep shows, strippers, hookers. In Tokyo, however, land of recorded bird sounds in shopping malls and plastic seasonal flowers hanging from street lamps, it is all rather mawkish, Disneyland gone haywire. You may have read about the Love Hotels (rooms rented by the hour, some thematically rendered as Arabian Nights or an MGM space fantasy, or simply equipped with a heart-shaped bathtub) or the ubiquitous massage parlors known as "soapland" (their motto: come clean). In Kabuki-cho, barkers stand in front of strip joints to lure you in, pull you in physically, if necessary. Once inside, please notice the red draperies, the stage where it all happens. A heavily obese couple is tirelessly going through the motions, but there seems to be a little difficulty. He jokes about the frequency of her demands, her endless positions. She is oblivious. She rubs her breasts

In Tokyo, however, it is all rather mawkish, Disneyland gone haywire.

and occasionally throws the audience an open-arm embrace, as if she is riding down Fifth Avenue in the Macy's Day parade. His labors end and there is polite applause (again). Girls come out and a few salarymen are coaxed onto the stage by their co-workers. Each is given a condom, and their contretemps, enhanced by an alcoholic stupor, is the source of much amusement to the audience, which includes young couples on dates. If the preceding seemed like a circus, the final act is classy, simplicity itself. A woman enters onstage and kneels in front of the first row. She is shaven, pure. She spreads her labial folds with her fingers. A Polaroid camera and flashlight is passed around, compliments of the management, for *omiage* (souvenir).

Of course, there are male hustlers, "boy bars," bathhouses. There is also a gay bar in which customers are flattered into breaking chopsticks with their erections, and then pay for the privilege. A French friend tells me about a bar where the waiters "do tricks with their sex" (giggling teenage girls are also welcome). The waiters wear short folding coats and nothing underneath. After serving you a drink, your waiter says, watch this. The ball sac is pulled upside down and two matches are stuck under the foreskin: a snail. (Japanese believe that the uncut penis looks like the shy head and neck of a *suppon*, a soft-shell turtle that waits patiently outside restaurants in glass aquariums, to be made into soup.) Next, a kind of gas is pumped under the foreskin and a match is lit: a fire-breathing dragon. At this point, my friend asked the waiter to stop —out of acute empathy, being French Catholic himself. This bar was asked to stop these practices formally by the police, because of the "noise." But how about sipping sake from a stretched scrotum? Regarding all this, you realize that sex is, well, so silly. Empty of meaning in itself.

They return dressed, wave goodnight to everyone, and possibly go home to the wife and kids.

4. Machismo

What is macho? Sniffed out, signified, decodified, endlessly played out and exaggerated by the American gay male, it is a stance or a uniform. Maybe just Speedo swimsuit gym body. Macho is a superficiality that can be bought and assembled, the packaging of dreams. Japanese have their dreams, too. One obvious erotic tropism is the Way of the Samurai. Yukio Mishima was the chief modern proponent of this hard school. The way is ascetic, nationalistic, homoerotic. Mishima worked out his private S/M fantasies, ultimately, by disemboweling himself in the office of the head of the National Defense Force.

The contemporary inheritor of the samurai code is perhaps the *yakuza*, a gangster class of organized criminals, popularly and affectionately called *'ya-chan'*, although not in their presence. The folklore surrounding the *yakuza* is in great part created by *yakuza* films, and in turn, copied by the *yakuza* themselves. Like a member of other sub-groups in Japan, a *ya-chan* can often be pointed out on the street for his distinguishing characteristics: a tan even in December, neat curl-permed hair, blouson jacket with matching slacks in pastel colors Porsche sunglasses, masculine gold jewelry and a self-assured bravado backed with money. In search of ever masculinizing their image, some *yakuza* tattoo their bodies or have pearls surgically inserted under the skin of their penis, to heighten, presumably, a woman's pleasure. One woman remarks her boss has twelve pearls: "It must look like corn on the cob!" The pearls are circularly placed below the head of the cock; it more resembles cauliflower.

In the movies, at least in the old-style school of films loosely based on American Westerns, the *yakuza* embody the old feudal values of *gaman* (perseverance) and *giri* (obligation), although later films have given way to nihilism. One popular macho ex-actor in *yakuza* films is known to be gay, now in his fifties, and a customer in a bar told me, "Do you see him in that commercial? He was great when he was younger but *chotto nah* (please), somebody tell him to keep his shirt on." In the movies, the life of the hero is doomed to end tragically, as a character points out, "There are only two roads for a *yakuza*, prison and death." The stoic and fraternal code reflects a larger Japanese respect for pain-enduring and self-humiliation, a code which is, in a word, masochistic.

At a Japanese S/M bar in Ikebuku

marked by a sign with an "X," the sexual locus of masochism is more self-consciously observed: a basement lounge paneled in wood veneer, barstools and one low-slung couch at a right-angle to a TV. A video on rope-tying with a mild pot-bellied master and his Latino slave, shown with the sound turned off, is casting light into the room. The customers are mostly businessmen having an after-work whisky, joking and familiar. There is no hint of leather, except the vinyl-covered bar stools. The fetishism of leather is a rather alien concept in Japan. One by one or in pairs they ask the master for a *fundoshi* (a loincloth wrapped between the buttocks and tied off at the waist) and enter the backroom of ropes and other equipment. They return dressed, wave goodnight to everyone, and possibly go home to the wife and kids. Work, sexuality, and home are neatly traversed in a single uneventful day.

In its present diluted form, we see the bridal spirit at *matsuri* (festival) throughout Japan. A naked festival, an erotic celebration of life. Men wear *fundoshi*, a *hachimaki* (head cloth) and often a short coat and thigh-length underwear. Here it is a minimum of clothing that attracts—stripping down, rather than covering up, but the effect is the same as a western uniform: anonymity. *Que es mas macho?* The crowd of men, and sometimes women, bear the weight of one-ton Shinto shrines on their shoulders, making a large circuit through the streets, obstructing traffic. In the country, the crowd may, depending on the rules of the game (not always clear to even the participants, it seems), at a designated spot, destroy them — joy-roll them, set them on fire, trample the smoldering coals, maybe float them in a wintery river. Mishima called the *matsuri* a "vulgar mating of humanity and eternity, which could be consummated only through some such pious immorality as this." Now often televised, you can watch "the expression of the most wanton and undisguised rapture in the world" and not leave your living room.

5. Sex-on-a-Shoestring

A New York club hostess was recently asked by an English magazine what she thought about safe sex. She replied to the interviewer, "You go back to London. I'll stay here in New York. What could be safer?"

This was the attitude of virtually all Japanese: unsafe sex is sex with a foreigner. That is until January of this year when a Japanese woman in Kobe was diagnosed as having AIDS, and wrote that she had had sex with over 100 men. (She enjoyed a respectable degree of privacy. A Filipina prostitute contracted AIDS and her name and address were printed in the newspapers, and she was escorted out of the country.) Then there was genuine concern, as well as phone calls to radio stations: can you get AIDS from train straps? The bathhouses in Tokyo are still open; sorry, no *gaijin* admitted. The concern, obviously, is misplaced. It is not surprising that recently there was a bill proposed in the Diet that would require foreigners entering the country to be tested for the AIDS virus, while men here, gay and straight, have done little to change their sexual habits.

So you are not a Japanophile? All you want is sun and the possibility, not that you'd do anything unsafe, of uncomplicated sexual adventure. The choices are getting not so endless. Over here, the main exodus is for Thailand (including "sex tours" for the Japanese businessmen), and an occasional detour to the Philippines.

In Thailand, a boy can be had, speaking in the adopted tourist patois of Jams and Ray-Bans, for around 100 baht (three or four US dollars)—the average yearly income in Thailand is equivalent to $800 US dollars—maybe for nothing, if he likes you. As returning travelers may tell you, the native people are: warm, sexually-free, and available. In this assessment, there is perhaps a whiff of the colonial brute, the modern capitalist pig. Just a word to the wise guy: wherever you end up on vacation this winter—Tokyo, Bangkok, Phuket, Rio de Janeiro, San Francisco—remember, our friend Jonathan was probably there first. ▼

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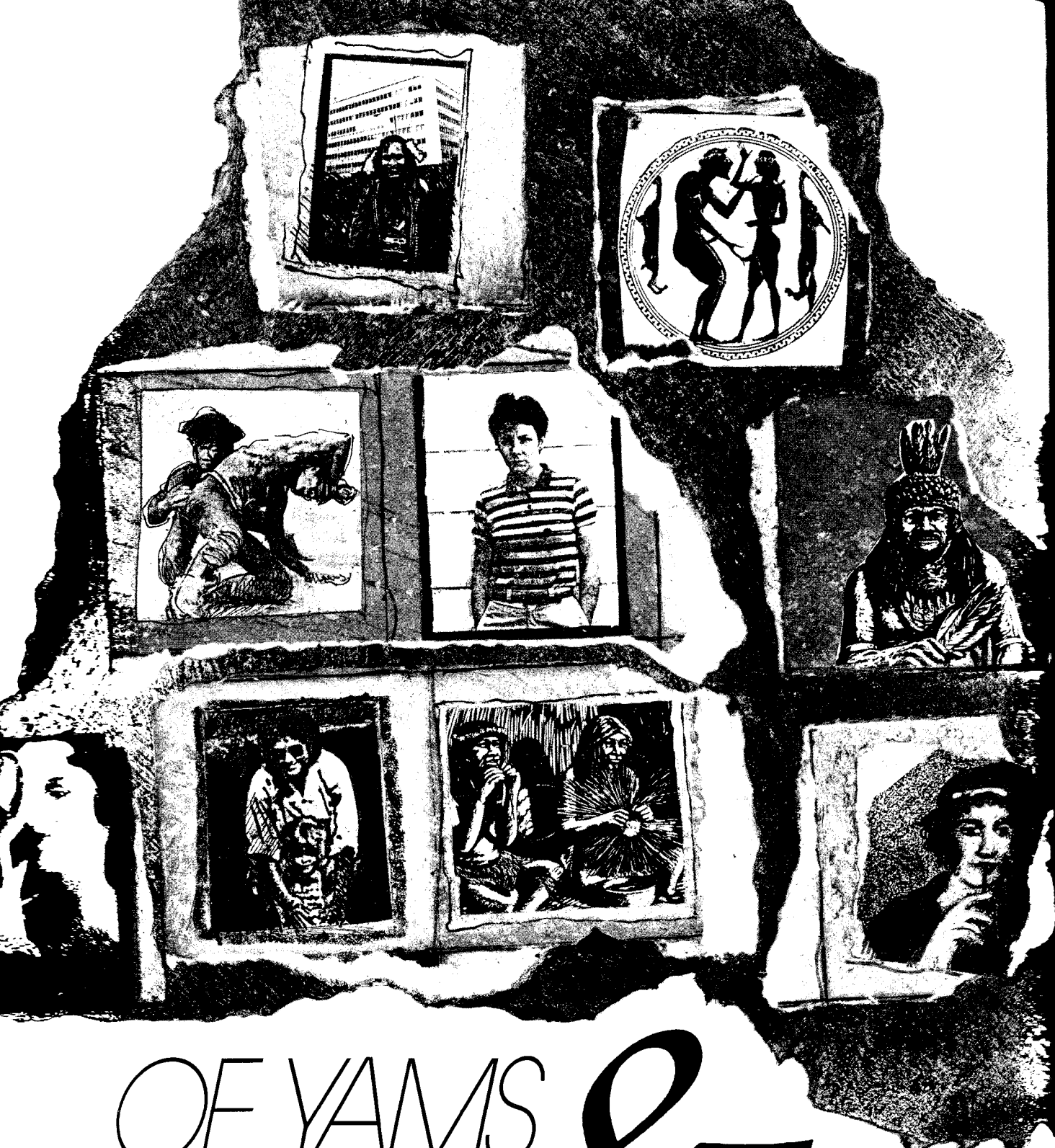

OF YAMS, GRINDERS & GAYS

The Anthropology of Homosexuality

Anthropology and Sexuality

by Esther Newton

This paper was read at the Gays, Lesbians and Society lecture series at the 92nd Street Y, New York City, October 17, 1987.

ANTHROPOLOGISTS, with a few lonely exceptions, contributed very little to our understanding of sexuality before the 1970s. Because sexuality is a taboo topic in our own culture, field workers didn't ask other peoples about sex either, or if they did, they didn't write up what they saw and heard. Most of what was done in earlier years was marred by an all-male perspective, as male anthropologists conferred with male members of other cultures. Moral judgments and evasiveness like "marital relations are unhappy," or "people indulge in sexual license," were the rule if any mention of sex was made. Although in general we were supposed to interact with the "natives"—being there is the only way to learn another way of life—*sexual contact* was a no-no; we knew only by the rare confession or by professional gossip that it sometimes happened, regardless.

No, as hard as we anthropologists have tried, in politics or religion, to see past our own cultural noses, when looking "down there" we have shown the same ignorance and done the same name calling as most other Westerners. We too are members of a society tied up in knots over everyone's "sex life," in which many people would literally rather let others die—they assume it will be others—than have certain sex words appear in public. Even the great chronicler of the Trobriand Islands, Malinowski—one of the few who took sex seriously enough before the 1970s to publish a scholarly book about it and who also recorded in a secret diary his sexual contact with the Trobriand women, whom he referred to as niggers—was accused by the French feminist scholar Briffault of being an "Adam and Eve" anthropologist for saying that "marriage is regarded in all human societies as... a sacred transaction establishing a relationship of the highest value to man and woman."[1] Marriage as we idealize it is no more universal than is man-on-top heterosexual intercourse.

Gender and Desire

To describe the shapes that marriage or desire take in other traditions we have to take off our Judeo-Christian glasses. When missionaries decreed that masturbation was "immoral," they drove it underground but did nothing to understand other peoples' morality. Unfortunately neither missionaries nor anthropologists see with the naked eye, but always through the lens of culture. The best we can do is a kind of correction, which means that Western words and concepts have to be extracted from their connotations before they can be packed in the anthropologist's intellectual luggage.

Development of a metacultural language—one that transcends our own time and place—is what the anthropological enterprise is all about. The early anthropologists found that some groups reckoned their close kin, for instance, only through women. So the idea of "kinship" had to be stripped of the assump-

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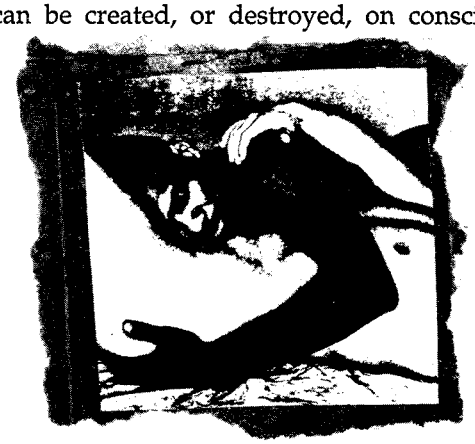
tion that English kinship names are simply biology writ large. An "aunt" can be our mother's sister, but she can also be our father's brother's wife. Other people don't have aunts, not even by another name, because "aunt" is an idea, not a biological link. As the French anthropologist Levi-Strauss concluded, "Kinship does not consist in the objective ties of descent or consanguinity"—meaning genetic links—"between individuals. It exists only in human consciousness; it is an arbitrary system of representations."[2]

Desire, we began to think, is less like a heart, throbbing the same everywhere, and more like music, and every culture has its own—not only songs, but tonality, instruments, and occasions.

Because anthropologists already accepted the necessity of suspending Western assumptions to look at the "respectable" areas of culture, when the energy of feminism and gay liberation propelled some of us toward previously submerged questions about sex and gender, we were a jump ahead.[3]

Desire, we began to think, is less like a heart, throbbing the same everywhere, and more like music, and every culture has its own—not only songs, but tonality, instruments, and occasions. To borrow a good metaphor from anthropologist Carole Vance, it is not our ears that compose symphonies, nor is it our genitals or our hormones that determine the erotic. Genitals, like ears, are just receptors. It is the brain that activates (or fails to activate) hormones that produce sexual excitement. This is not to say that sexual excitement can be created, or destroyed, on conscious



command. Far from it. But desire, like music, is inscribed in a particular tradition—the medium from which our eroticism takes shape.

In *Sex and Temperament*, Margaret Mead showed that what is considered manly or womanly depends on which society is doing the considering. In "The Traffic in Women," an influential 1975 essay, Gayle Rubin proposed the idea of the sex/gender system, "a

set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity and in which these transformed needs are satisfied."[4] By *gender* anthropologists mean cultural categories to which males are assigned when adults first inspect the child's genitals. In our hospitals, when the genitals are ambiguously sexed, the baby is called a girl or a boy anyway, and nature is surgically altered to fit. Biology is even less the determinant of human sexual response; it is not flesh, in itself, that "makes people hot," as we say, but flesh infused with beliefs and ideas. In the domain of the erotic, actions, fantasies, pictures, games, rituals, or simply words lead, or are supposed to lead, to genital arousal. Anthropologists and historians who share this approach call themselves "social constructionists."

When we try to find out what other people's sexual beliefs and actions really are, as opposed to supposing they are like ours or at least a reflection—"primitive" or "liberated"—of ours, the results are unsettling. Let me give you an example from the Mehinaku people, forest-dwelling Amazonian Indians. Mehinaku men told this story:

The Wandering Vagina

In ancient times, all the women's vaginas used to wander about. Today, women's vaginas stay in one place. One woman of ancient times, Tukwi, had a vagina that was especially foolish. While Tukwi slept, her vagina would crawl about the floor of the house, thirsty and hungry, looking for manioc porridge and fish stew. Creeping about snail-like on the ground, it found the porridge pot and slid the top off. One of the men awoke and listened: "Aah, nothing but a mouse," he said, and he went back to sleep. But as the vagina slurped up the porridge, another man awoke and took a brand from the fire to see what was happening. "What is this?" he said. To him it looked like a great frog, with a nose and an immense mouth. Moving closer, he scorched the vagina with his torch. Oh, it scurried back to its owner, slipping right inside her. She cried and cried, for she had been burned. Then Tukwi called all the women and lectured them: "All you women, don't let your genitals wander about. If they do, they may get burned as mine were!" And so, today, women's genitals no longer go wandering about.

It is not flesh in itself that "makes people hot," but flesh infused with beliefs and ideas.

Recorded by anthropologist Thomas Gregor in *Anxious Pleasures*,[5] an extraordinary book about the sexual life of the Mehinaku, this story exemplifies the "thick" descriptions we need most; not simply international Kinsey reports—"x per cent of Mehinaku have masturbated by age 10"—but acts embedded in their significance.

In medieval Europe, heterosexual intercourse was seen as agricultural: the male peasant plowing a female field and sowing seeds to harvest a crop of children. Such metaphors both reflect and guide action—in this case, the correct position for intercourse, its legitimate purpose, and the right relation of the genders. The Mehinaku see intercourse as being like food preparation and eating. Intercourse is said to resemble the process by which women prepare the manioc root for cooking—both sex and scraping are done in a squat. Male and female genitals are also likened to mouths, and at orgasm a man is said to "vomit" semen. It is hungry genitals that seek intercourse; babies are made from semen, and a vagina has to "eat" a lot of it. How do women and men experience desire when the penis is a mouth or

an edible rather than a tool or a gun? When vaginas go adventuring at night, even if they are punished for it, what notion of women's sexual initiative is supposed? If heterosexuality means genital contact between biological males and females, this is an example, but not as we know it.

Homosexual Desire

There are too few studies like Thomas Gregor's. And if the evidence on sexuality in general is scanty and distorted by moral judgments, that on homosexuality is worse. Edgar Gregersen's 1982 update[6] on the pioneering cross-cultural work of Clellon Ford and Frank Beach[7] found anthropological sex data on 294 societies. (Out of a possible 3,000, that's a measly 10 per cent.) Of these, about half mention male homosexuality and one-third female homosexuality, though in most cases there was no information on the culture's attitude toward it. The usual combination of taboo, male anthropologist, and male informant has left lesbian behavior so unexplored that all generalizations are provisional only.

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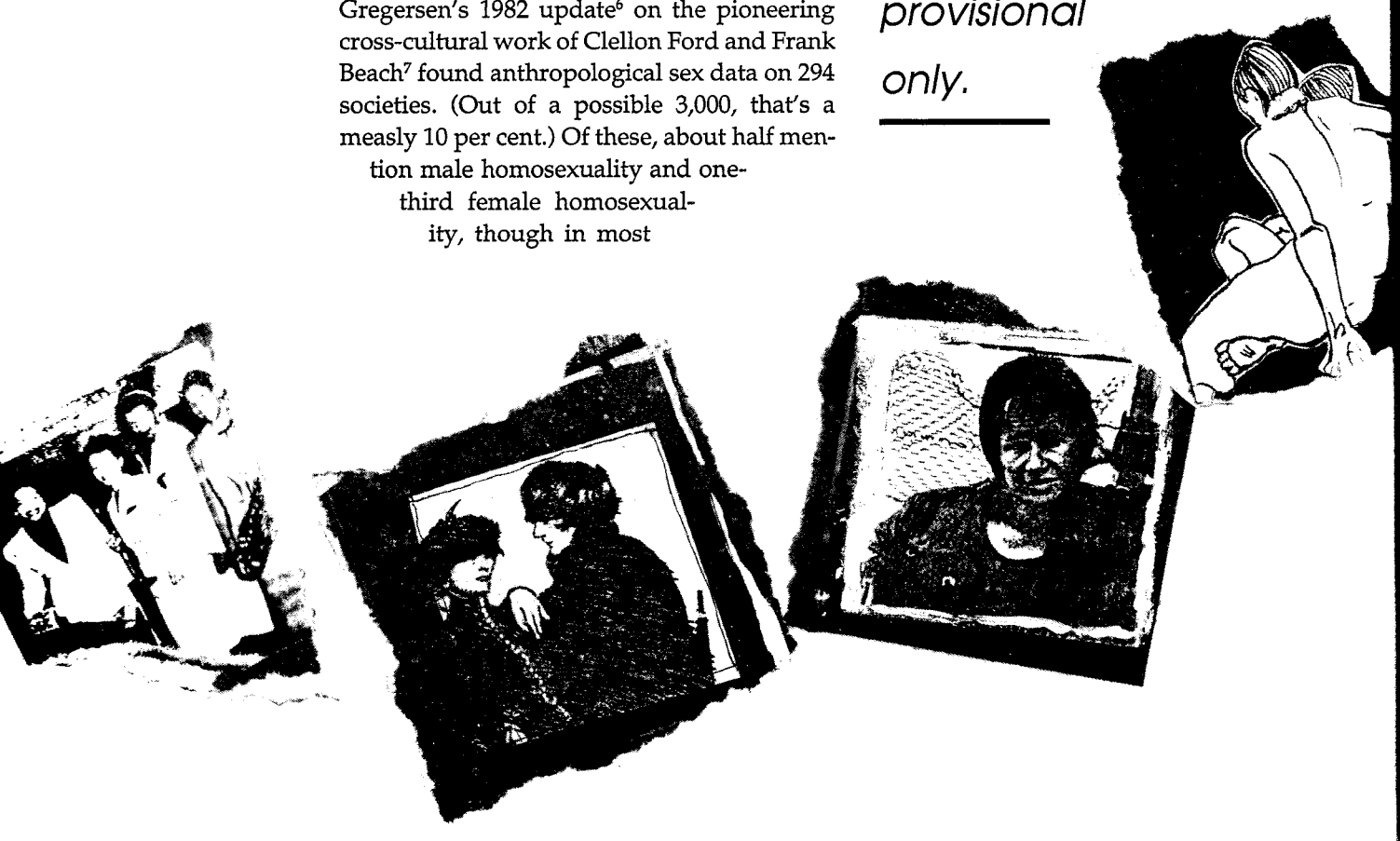


But what *do* we know? Homosexual relations take a profusion of shapes that fall into four main types suggested by Gregersen and Barry Adam, which may or may not eventually fit lesbian behavior. (The fact that no such preliminary classification has been done on heterosexuality worldwide shows just how taken for granted, hence unknown, heterosexuality is.) First, many groups practice *juvenile* homosexuality, sex play among children

and youth. This tends to be premarital, casual, and generally not a cause of great social consternation. Even our homophobic, sexually anxious culture has the "circle jerk," the "school-girl crush," and playing "house" or "doctor."

Boys are initiated into manhood by elaborate rituals, among them, "eating" the semen of older males, fellatio, anal intercourse, or absorbing sperm through cuts in the skin.

Secondly, there is *age-structured*, or intragender, homosexuality. A younger partner, usually a preadolescent or adolescent, has sexual relations with an older partner or partners of the same gender. Many or all members of a society may be involved, but generally at a defined stage of life. Age-structured homosexuality was legitimate for men and some women in classical Greece; these were essentially student/teacher bonds, as celebrated in Plato's *Symposium* and in Sappho's poetry. It is also common among Australian aborigines and the tribes of New Guinea, for men and perhaps for women. Boys are initiated into manhood over a period of years by elaborate rituals, among them, "eating" the semen of older males, in some societies by fellatio, in others by anal intercourse, or absorbing sperm through cuts in the skin. Like the Mehinaku—whose passion is male/male wrestling, but who shun homosexual relations—the New Guineans equate semen and saliva. Yams are smeared with saliva to make them grow big, just as boys are "fed" semen. The sexuality is a ritual vehicle. This work done on Melanesia by Kenneth Read, Gil Herdt,[8] and a number of others, by the way, is wonderfully rich and sophisticated, and calls into question every preconceived notion we have about sexual orientation. Boys spend years fellating their elders, further years being fellated by juniors, and still wind up, as expected, married fathers. In Greece, Melanesia, and Japan, male homosexuality was associated with masculinity—in varying degrees with masculine beauty, core identity, or martial valor.There are two well-documented in-

stances of age-structured homosexuality among women, and in both cases women are relatively powerful and autonomous. In southern Africa, women from the Basotho tribe form what are called "mummy/baby" relationships—sexual, sensual, and supportive—with adolescent girls.[9] The older partner is generally married, but husbands work as migrant laborers and are away for long periods of time. There are also socially accepted lesbian couples and social groups among Muslim Africans in Mombasa, even though all girls must marry young. Writes their ethnographer, Gil Shepherd:

> The word in Swahili glossed as "lesbian" is m*sagaji*—"a grinder." The verb *kusaga* [to grind] is commonly used for the grinding of grain between millstones, but the close interplay between the two usages is illustrated, perhaps, by the fact that the upper and lower millstones are known as *mwana* and *mama* respectively: "child" and "mother," strictly speaking, or simply "young woman" and "older woman."[10]

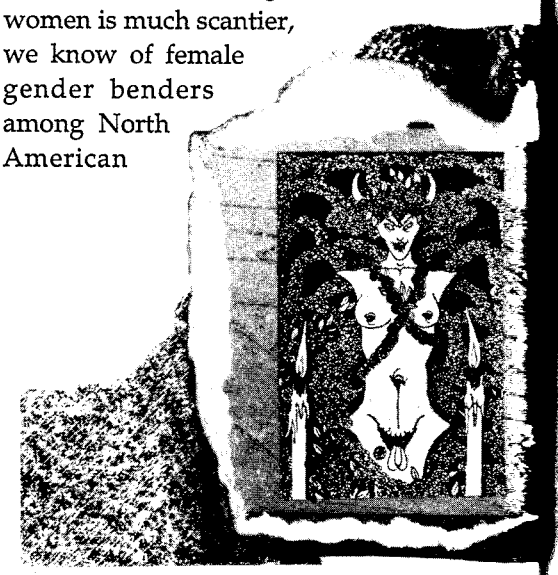
Of course all these relationships obey a culture-specific logic. While in New Guinea male/male sexual relations are an aspect of interaction between kinship groups and so are forbidden between certain types of kin and expected between others, in Lesotho a "mummy" may have several "babies," but a "baby" only one "mummy." In age-structured relations, it is usual for the former baby/student/initiate to become the mummy/teacher/initiator as an adult, in addition to marrying.

A third homosexual context is trans-gender or *gender bending*, in which ordinary men or women can appropriately have sex only with special people belonging to variant genders, which often have a supernatural dimension. We know of instances in Africa, Siberia, Polynesia, Indonesia, and Brazil. Especially well documented are gender benders among North American Indians[11] and an East Indian caste, the Hijras. In Hindu tradition, the Hijras are born males or, in rare cases, hermaphrodites who live in urban communes under a guru and devote themselves to the worship of Bahuchara Mata, a mother goddess. The Hijras tell this story about their origins:

> In the time of the Ramayana, Ram...had to leave Ayodhya (his native city) and go into the forest for 14 years. As he was going, the whole city followed him because they loved him so. As Ram came to...the edge of the forest, he turned to the people and said, "Ladies and gents, please wipe your tears and go away." But these people who were not men and not women did not know what to do. So they stayed there because Ram did not ask them to go. They remained there 14 years and snake hills grew around them. When Ram returned...he found many snake hills. Not knowing why they were there he removed them and found so many people with long beards and nails, all meditating. And so they were blessed by Ram. And that is why we hijras are so respected in Ayodhya.[12]

The dharma or caste obligation of the hijras is to castrate themselves and live an ascetic asexual life devoted to the goddess Bahuchara. However, alongside their ritual duties and religious disciplines they sometimes prostitute themselves to and/or marry men. Not surprisingly, different people put forward different explanations for this apparent contradiction. Some hijras say that they are driven to prostitution only by desperate poverty. Others insist that boys become hijras just to have sex with men. The older hijras bitch that the conduct of some young *chelas* or disciples brings a bad name on the caste. Their ethnographer, Serena Nanda, adds that Hindu culture is more flexible than ours; asceticism and sexuality are not necessarily opposites to the Hindu way of thinking.

Although, once again, information on women is much scantier, we know of female gender benders among North American



Indians and Brazilian cult worshippers and of so-called female husbands in certain African tribes.

The fourth and most familiar type of homosexual relation, *homophilia*, is distinguished from the others by involving adults of approximately the same age and social status. Homophilia is primarily modern and Western, although we do know, for instance, of lesbian marriage resisters who worked in the silk factories in southern China.[13] Lesbianism in the West sometimes has a gender-bending aspect ("roles") and male homosexuality has both gender-bending ("drag") and age-graded elements, but the ritual and spiritual dimensions found in so many other cultures are lacking here. On the other hand, only in the West has a large articulate community developed around a supposed exclusive homosexual orientation. Which of the non-Western, traditional contexts will merge with the West-

Identity is a complex mosaic—fragile, contested, changing, and fuzzy around the edges.

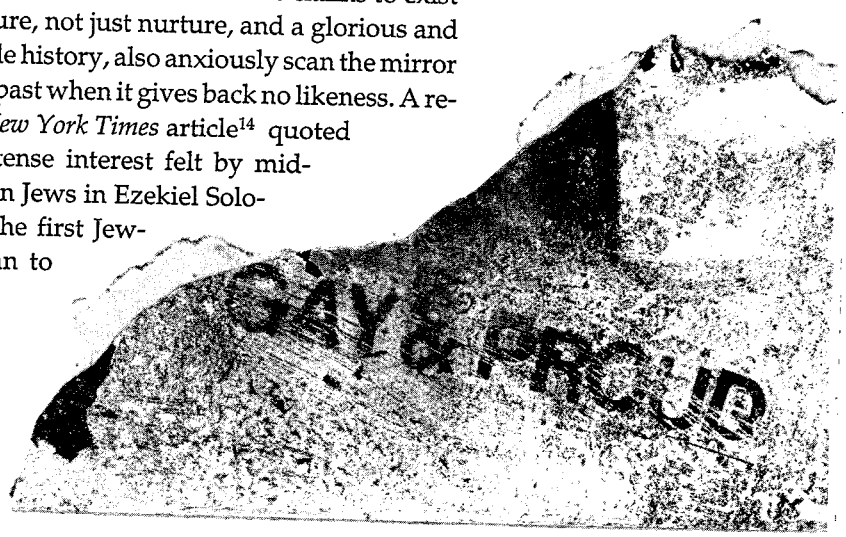
oriented gay subculture remains to be seen. We know that some of the gender benders such as the American Indian berdache, are beginning to think of themselves as "gay." Both berdache and gays have special life-shaping identities that set them apart from other people.

The Social Construction of Homosexual Identities

So what can anthropology tell us about homosexuality? Clearly homoeroticism is not just a product—decadent or liberating, depending on your point of view—of Western culture, but occurs among many peoples with an infinite range of meaning. On the other hand, anthropological evidence contradicts the notion that hetero- and homosexual—concepts that were invented only in 1869—are actors everywhere on the world stage. Western lesbian and gay anthropologists, for the most part, have not run around the world looking for other lesbians and gay men. Instead, we have taken the lead in comparative studies of gender and especially of sexuality. Among us, there really is no essentialist position on sexuality, no notion that people are born with sexual orientations. The evidence, fragmentary as it is, all points the other way.

There is an anthropological axiom that says that, if people believe a thing to be real, that belief has real consequences. Our society is certain that heterosexual orientation is human nature. For contradicting or flouting that "law," gays are hated. Our defense against being called unnatural is to make our own appeal to nature. Either we were born gay—so gays must be born everywhere—or homosexuality is a universal form of desire that others have repressed. To my mind neither of these arguments is necessary to justify a profound identification with gayness and the gay community.

No American group has members in all other societies, and none—with the exception of Jews—existed 2,000 years ago. Even Jews, with one of the most seductive claims to exist in nature, not just nurture, and a glorious and durable history, also anxiously scan the mirror of the past when it gives back no likeness. A recent *New York Times* article[14] quoted the intense interest felt by mid-western Jews in Ezekiel Solomon, the first Jewish man to

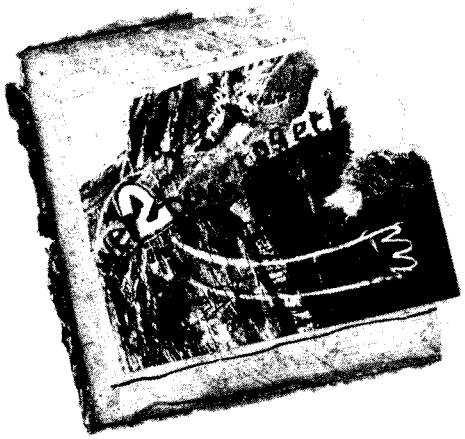


Our identities are more than metaphorical legs. They are our psychic and moral bodies—which explains why people are willing to give birth and to kill in order to preserve them.

settle Michigan and the Northwest Territories. "It's amazing just to imagine his being here," said a Jewish lawyer who spent last July at the site of Solomon's 18th-century house, "bringing some small touch of 'yiddishkeit' to what must have been such a strange world." Like gays who expect to find gay liberationists in the past, or who must know for sure if two famous women friends actually had sex, the contemporary Jews were disappointed because "not a single artifact reflecting Mr. Solomon's religious faith has yet been found." Even Jewish identity is a complex mosaic, fragile, contested, changing, and fuzzy around the edges. Only eastern European Jews among the world's Jews would be looking for *yiddishkeit*, and Ezekiel Solomon married a Catholic girl. They had five children, who in the absence of a larger Jewish community most probably ceased to be Jews. The truth is, all identities have to be created and recreated by us, the living.

I am writing a history of the gay community of Cherry Grove, on Fire Island. The Grove, a small but notorious and wonderful colony of summer houses, has had gay settlers since the mid-1930s and has been almost exclusively gay since the late 1940s. One of my most useful models has been anthropologist Barbara Meyerhoff's *Number Our Days*,[15] a fascinating study of a southern California Jewish senior citizens center, which, like Cherry Grove, draws adults from a larger world of members. Like me, Meyerhoff was both a member of and an outsider to the community. At the heart of her work is the question of identity. What is *yiddishkeit*? What does it mean to be a Jew in America? The lives of old people in the senior citizens center, like those of gays, have not turned out as expected. Their children are Americanized, apolitical, and mostly absent. If anything, in Cherry Grove which represents traditional orthodoxy in the spectrum of modern gay life, identity issues are more taken for granted, less up for grabs.

Humans are social animals. From inside our darkest closets to the most routine chores of daily living, we exist and can only exist in a dense web of connectedness. Who shares our web determines what values we hold sacred which in turn shapes our connectedness. The process is the same, whether we are Jewish, Mehinaku, or gay. My students often say that "labels are limiting." Using the word *labels* shows that they feel these identities—gay, Jewish, whatever—as external to themselves, glued on. This is partly an American illusion they share with their elders, that freedom means no limits, no definition. But it also signals their powerlessness as young people



identities *are* limiting if you play no active role in relation to them, if they are simply received. Legs must be limiting if you simply drag them around in a wheelchair or on crutches. But if you can walk, what sense does it make to say legs restrict us? We will never grow wings, so we must use what makes us human. Our identities are more than metaphorical legs, they are our psychic and moral bodies, which explains why people are willing to give birth and to kill in order to preserve them.

This aspect of our human nature has its dangers in an interdependent world. As an antidote to all excessive nationalisms, we must recognize that no identity is a given, by god or nature—while defending our right to be who we are here and now, and to organize for communal survival. The gay community is a proud creation, worth running great risks—even dying—for. Half a million people, including some who were gravely sick, travelled to Washington last October and stood for hours in the cold to affiliate with and show their allegiance to the gay community. More than 900 people defied arrest to protest the homophobic actions of the Supreme Court. As a people, we have special gifts—of resilience, of humor, of sexual expression, of sensibility. The causes we embody (the right to be different without being persecuted, the right to a greater measure of sexual freedom and choice, and the challenge we pose to rigid gender systems), have meaning beyond today's circumstances.

Recently Toni Morrison was asked if she saw herself "simply" as a writer or as a black woman writer. Did she resent those labels? She replied that what others called limitations—African or southern roots, a history of slavery, a female perspective—were the very elements of her creative vision. Far from seeking to escape them, or explain them away, she wanted to explore and shape their meaning. So, too, for me as a gay woman anthropologist. History has placed gay people *here*. From here we are making history. ▼

Illustrations by Janet Bogardus

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[1] M. F. A. Montagu, ed., *Marriage, Past and Present: A Debate Between R. Briffault and B. Malinowski* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1956), p. 37.

[2] Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 51.

[3] Two overview articles on the new thinking in anthropology are Barry D. Adam, "Age, Structure, and Sexuality: Reflections on the Anthropological Evidence on Homosexual Relations," in Evelyn Blackwood, ed., *Anthropology and Homosexual Behavior* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1986), pp. 19-34; and Pat Caplan, "Introduction," in Pat Caplan, ed., *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* (London: Tavistock, 1987), pp. 1-30. A summary of the lesbian material can be found in Evelyn Blackwood, "Breaking the Mirror: The Construction of Lesbianism and the Anthropological Discourse on Homosexuality," in Blackwood, ed., pp. 1-18.

[4] Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," in Rayna Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), p. 159.

[5] Thomas Gregor, *Anxious Pleasures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 72.

[6] Edgar Gregersen, *Sexual Practices* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1983).

[7] Clellon Ford and Frank Beach, *Patterns of Sexual Behavior* (New York: Harper, 1951).

[8] See, for example, Gil Herdt, *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[9] Judith Gay, "'Mummies and Babies' and Friends and Lovers in Lesotho," in Blackwood, ed., pp. 97-116.

[10] Gill Shepherd, "Rank, Gender and Homosexuality: Mombasa as a Key to Understanding Sexual Options," in Caplan, ed., pp. 240-270.

[11] See Walter Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

[12] Serena Nanda, "The Hijras of India: Cultural and Individual Dimensions of an Institutionalized Third Gender Role," in Blackwood, ed., pp. 35-54.

[13] Andrea Sankar, "Sisters and Brothers, Lovers and Enemies: Marriage Resistance in Southern Kwangtung," in Blackwood, ed., pp. 69-82.

[14] October 1, 1987, p. A14.

[15] Barbara Meyerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1978).

I LOST IT AT THE MOVIES

by Jewelle Gomez

This story is excerpted from *Testimonies: A Collection of Lesbian Coming Out Stories*, edited by Sarah Holmes. The book will be available in bookstores in June for $6.95 or for $8.00 (postpaid) from Alyson Publications, 40 Plympton Street, Boston, MA 02118.

MY GRANDMOTHER, Lydia, and my mother Dolores, were both talking to me from their bathroom stalls in the Times Square movie theater. I was washing butter from my hands at the sink and didn't think it at all odd. The people in my family are always talking; conversation is a life force in our existence. My great-grandmother, Grace, would narrate her life story from seven a.m. until we went to bed at night. The only break was when we were reading, or the reverential periods when we sat looking out of our tenement windows observing the neighborhood—which we naturally talked about later.

So it was not odd that Lydia and Dolores talked non-stop from their stalls, oblivious to everyone except us. I hadn't expected it to happen there, though. I hadn't really expected an "it" to happen at all. To be a lesbian was part of who I was, like being left-handed. Even when I'd slept with men. When my great-grandmother asked me in the last days of her life if I would be marrying my college boyfriend, I said yes, knowing I would not, knowing I was a lesbian.

It seemed a fact that needed no expression. Even my first encounter with the word "bulldagger" was not charged with emotional conflict. When I was a teen in the 1960s, my grandmother began a story

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COURTESY OF JEWELLE GOMEZ

Jewelle Gomez with (left to right) her grandmother Lydia, great-grandmother Grace, and mother Dolores, 1948.

about a particular building in our Boston neighborhood that had gone to seed. She described the building's past through the experience of a party she'd attended there 30 years before. The best part of the evening had been a woman she'd met and danced with. Lydia had been a professional dancer and singer on the black theater circuit; to dance with women was who she was. They'd danced, then the woman walked her home and asked her out. I heard the delicacy my grandmother searched for even in her retelling of how she'd explained to the "bulldagger," as she called her, that she liked her fine but was more interested in men. I was struck with how careful my grandmother had been to make it clear to that woman (and in effect to me) that there was no offense taken in her attentions, that she just didn't "go that way," as they used to say. I was so happy at 13 to have a word for what I knew myself to be. The word was mysterious and curious, as if from a new language that used some other alphabet which left nothing to cling to when touching its curves and crevices. But still a word existed and my grandmother was not flinching in using it. In fact she'd smiled at the good heart and good looks of the bulldagger who'd liked her.

Once I had the knowledge of a word and a sense of its importance to me, I didn't feel the need to explain, confess, or define my identity as a lesbian. The process of reclaiming my ethnic identity in this country was already all-consuming. Of course, later in moments of glorious self-righteousness I did make declarations. But they were not usually ones I had to make. Mostly they were a testing of the waters. A preparation for the rest of the world which, unlike my grandmother, might not have a grounding in what true love is about. My first lover, the woman who'd been in my bed once a week most of the years of high school, finally married. I told her with my poems that I was a lesbian. She was not afraid to ask if what

she'd read was about her, about my love for her. So there, amidst her growing children, errant husband, and bowling trophies, I said yes, the poems were about her and my love for her, a love I'd always regret relinquishing to her reflexive obeisance to tradition. She did not flinch either. We still get drunk together when I go home to Boston.

During the 1970s I focussed less on career than on how to eat and be creative at the same time. Graduate school and a string of non-traditional jobs (stage manager, mid-town messenger, and so on) left me so busy I had no time to think about my identity. It was a long time before I made the connection between my desire, my isolation, and the difficulty I had with my writing. I thought of myself as a lesbian between girlfriends, except the between had lasted five years. After some anxiety and frustration I deliberately set about meeting women. Actually, I knew many women. Including my closest friend at the time, a black woman also in the theater. She became uncharacteristically obtuse when I tried to open up and explain my frustration at going to the many parties we attended and being too afraid to approach women I was attracted to, certain I would be rejected either because the women were straight and horrified, or gay and terrified of being exposed. For my friend, theoretical homosexuality was acceptable, even trendy. Any uncomfortable experience was irrelevant to her. She was impatient and unsympathetic. I drifted away from her in pursuit of the women's community, a phrase that was not in my vocabulary yet, but I knew it was something more than just "women." I fell into that community by connecting with other women writers, which helped me to focus on my writing and on my social life as a lesbian.

Still none of my experiences demanded that I bare my soul. I remained honest but not explicit. Expediency, diplomacy, discretion are all words that come to mind now. At that time I knew no political framework through which to filter my experience. I was more preoccupied with the Attica riots than with Stonewall. The media helped to focus our attentions within a proscribed spectrum and obscure the connections between the issues. I worried about who would shelter Angela Davis, but the concept of sexual politics was remote and theoretical.

I'm not certain exactly when and where the theory and reality converged.

I was more preoccupied with the Attica riots than with Stonewall.

BEING A BLACK woman and a lesbian unexpectedly blended like that famous scene in Ingmar Bergman's film "Persona." The different faces came together as one, and my desire became part of my heritage, my skin, my perspective, my politics, and my future. I felt sure that it had been my past that helped make the future possible. The women in my family had acted as if their lives were meaningful. Their lives were art. To be a lesbian among them was to be an artist. Perhaps the convergence came when I saw the faces of my great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother in those of the community of women I finally connected with. There was the same adventurous glint in their eyes; the same determined step; the penchant for breaking into song and for not waiting for anyone to take care of them.

I need not pretend to be other than who I was with any of these women. But did I need to declare it? During the holidays when I brought home best friends/lovers, my family always welcomed us warmly, clasping us to their magnificent bosoms. Yet there was always an element of silence in our neighborhood and, surprisingly enough, in our family, that was disturbing to me. Among the regulars in my father, Duke's, bar, was Maurice. He was eccentric, flamboyant, and still ordinary. He was accorded the same respect by neighborhood children as every other adult. His indiscretions took their place comfortably among the cyclical, Saturday night, man/woman scandals of our neighborhood. I regretted never hav-

ing asked my father how Maurice and he had become friends.

Soon I felt the discomforting silence pressing against my life more persistently. During visits home to Boston, it no longer sufficed that Lydia and Dolores were loving and kind to the "friend" I brought home. Maybe it was just my getting older. Living in New York City at the age of 30 in 1980, there was little I kept deliberately hidden from anyone. The genteel silence that hovered around me when I entered our home was palpable, but I was unsure whether it was already there when I arrived or if I carried it home within myself. It cut me off from what I knew was a kind of fulfillment available only from my family. The lifeline from Grace, to Lydia, to Dolores, to Jewelle was a strong one. We were bound by so many things, not the least of which was looking so much alike. I was not willing to be orphaned by silence.

If the idea of cathedral weddings and station wagons held no appeal for me, the concept of an extended family was certainly important. But my efforts were stunted by our inability to talk about the life I was creating for myself, for all of us. It felt all the more foolish because I thought I knew how my family would react. I was confident they would respond with their customary aplomb just as they had when I'd first had my hair cut as an Afro (which they hated), or when I brought home friends who were vegetarians (which they found curious). While we had disagreed over some issues, like the fight my mother and I had over Vietnam when I was nineteen, always

Soon I felt the discomforting silence pressing against my life more persistently.

when the deal went down we sided with each other. Somewhere even deep inside I think I believed that neither my grandmother or mother would ever censure my choices. Neither had actually raised me; my great-grandmother had done that: she had been a steely barricade against any encroachment on our personal freedoms, and she'd never disapproved out loud of anything I'd done.

But it was not enough to have an unabashed admiration for these women. It is one thing to have pride in how they'd so graciously survived in spite of the odds against them. It was something else to be standing in a Times Square movie theater faced with the chance to say "it" out loud and risk the loss of their brilliant and benevolent smiles.

My mother had started reading the graffiti written on the wall of the bathroom stall. We hooted at each of her dramatic renderings. Then she said (not breaking rhythm since we all know timing is everything), "Here's one I haven't seen before—DYKES UNITE." There was that profound silence again, as if the frames of my life had ground to a halt. We were in a freeze-frame and options played themselves out in my head in rapid succession — say nothing? say something? say what?

I laughed and said, "Yeah, but have you seen the rubber stamp on my desk at home?"

"No," said my mother with a slight bit of puzzlement. "What does it say?"

"I saw it," my grandmother called out from her stall. "It says —lesbian money!"

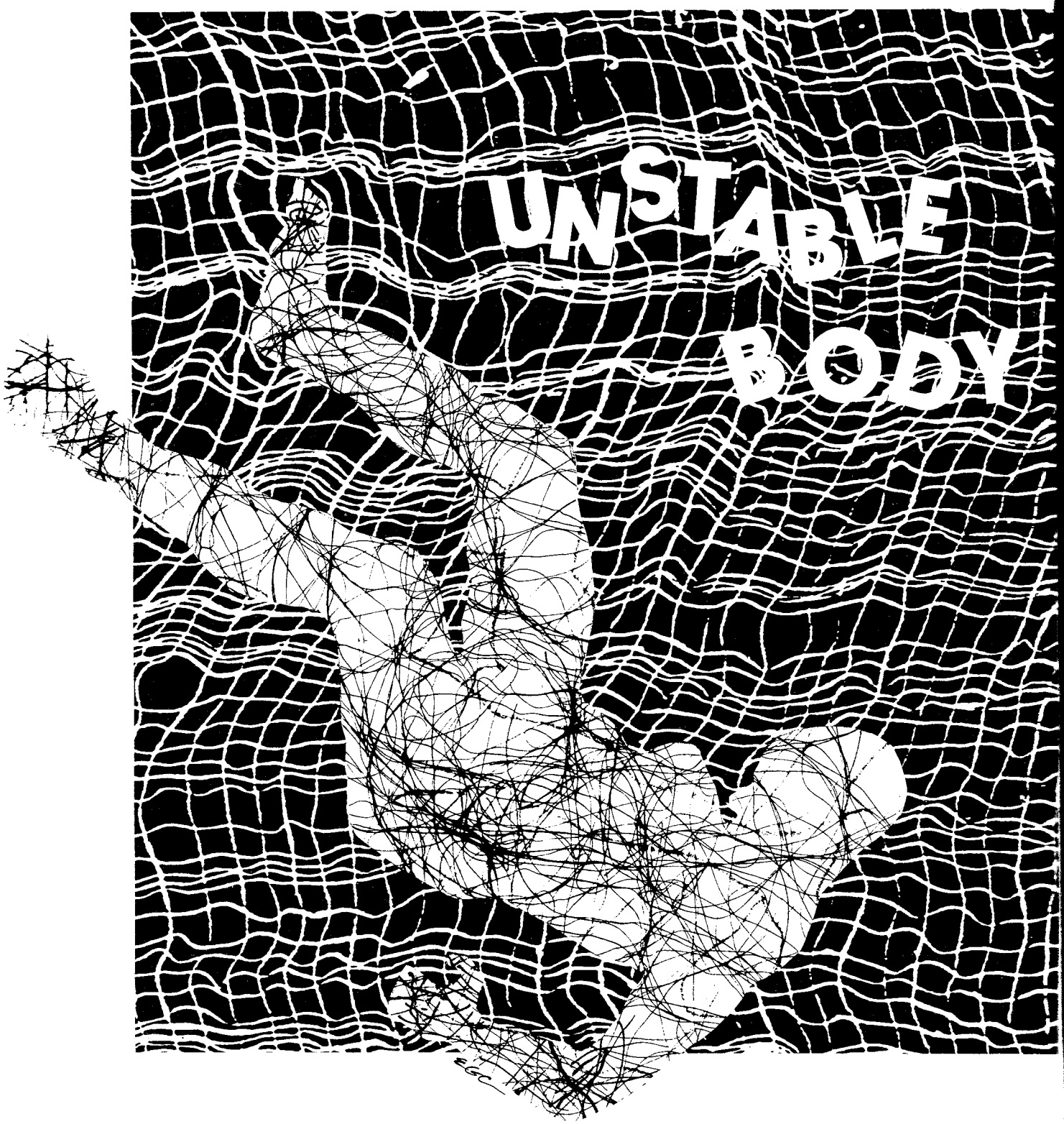
"What?"

"LESBIAN MONEY," Lydia repeated.

"I just stamp it on my big bills," I said tentatively, and we all screamed with laughter. The other woman at the sinks tried to pretend we didn't exist.

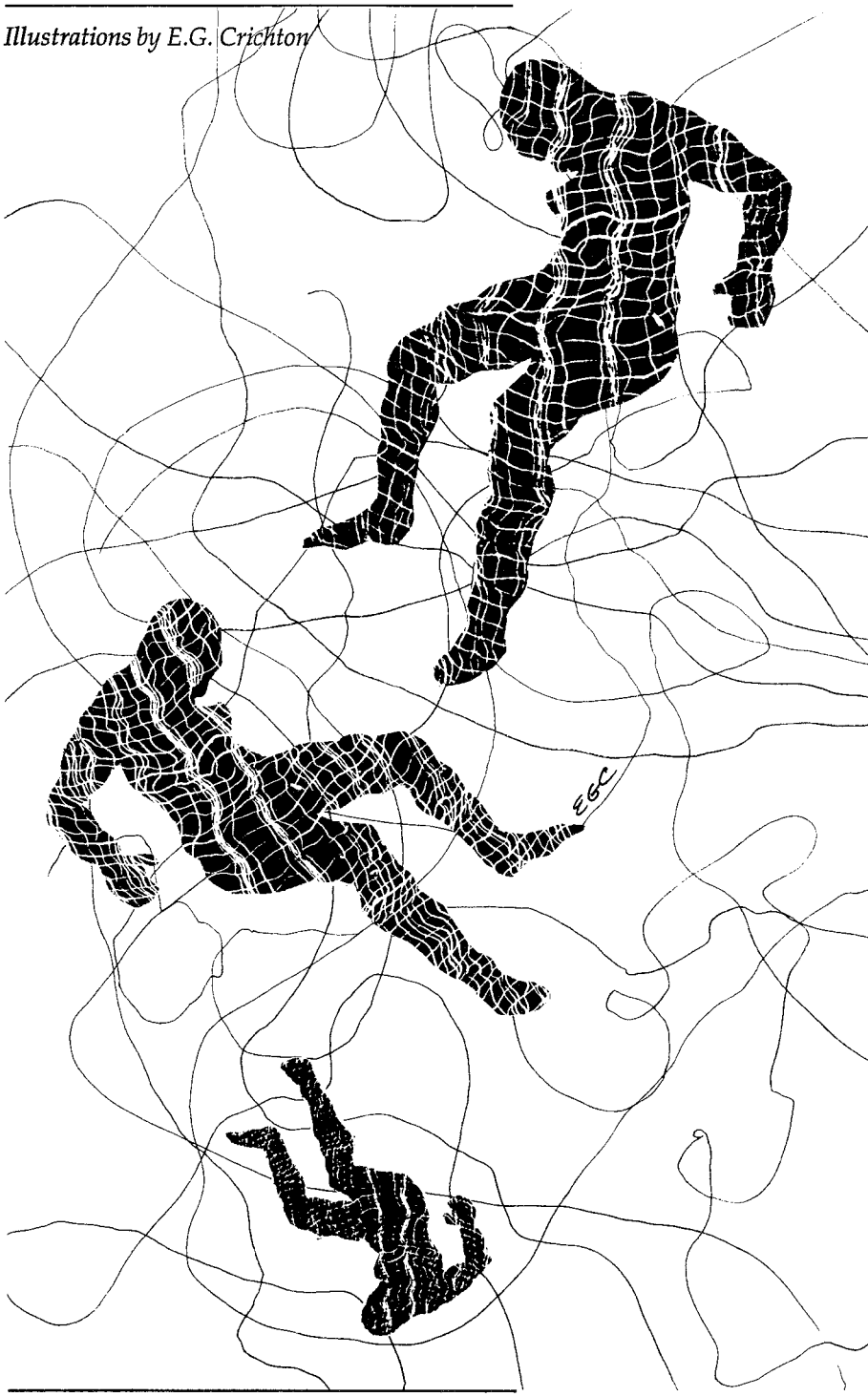
Since then there has been little discussion, yet. There have been some moments of awkwardness, usually in social situations where Lydia or Dolores feel uncertain. Although we have not explored the "it," the shift in our relationship is clear. When I go home it is with my lover, and she is received as such. I was lucky. My family was as relieved as I to finally know who I was. ▼

LIVING IN AN



by Barbara Rosenblum

Illustrations by E.G. Crichton



MY DOCTOR PUT it to me very clearly: I had to have chemotherapy, surgery, and radiation, in that order. I had to have chemotherapy for three months before surgery because the tumor in my breast was too large to remove surgically. It had grown too quickly and was now virtually inoperable. Chemotherapy would shrink the tumor, permitting surgery without skin graft. There was another reason for chemotherapy first: the cancer had spread to my lymph nodes, including a supraclavicular node near my collarbone. That was an indicator that metastatic processes were already occurring throughout my body. It was a serious, aggressive cancer and I would require the most aggressive treatment available.

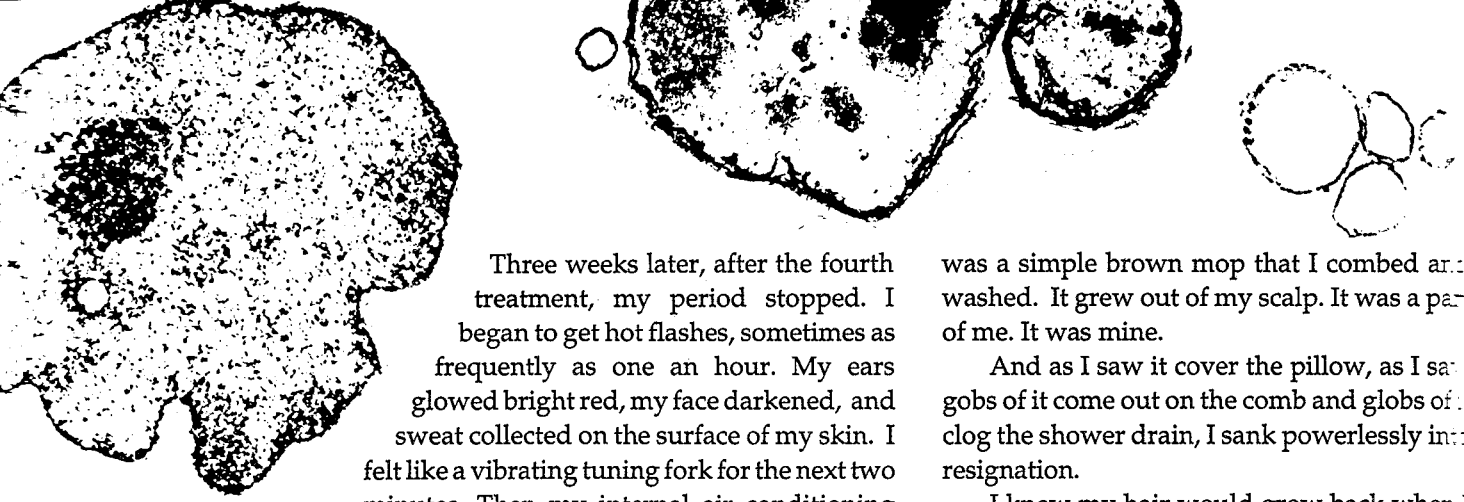
Before the first treatment, my doctor prepared me for the various side effects I might experience. My hair would fall out, I'd have mouth sores, I'd vomit, and I'd lose my period. So, after the first treatment, I vomited about 30 times in 48 hours, had tired muscles, and aching joints, and was exhausted from spasmodic vomiting. Even if you didn't have cancer and just vomited that much from a flu, you'd be exhausted. And that was just the first week.

The second week, I had low blood counts, extreme fatigue, and breathlessness from the lack of sufficient hemoglobin—and consequently oxygen—in my blood. Almost exactly on the twenty-first day following the first set of three injections, my hair began to fall out. Not just on my head. I lost my pubic hair as well. But I still had my period.

After the second treatment, I had all the side effects again. And I still had my period. I thought for sure I'd beat this: I wouldn't go into menopause.

Following the third treatment, I had all the same side effects but, this time, I had a shorter period. Still, I didn't attend to it much because, by this time, my nose and anus were bleeding from chemotherapy and I grew alarmed. It seemed like I was bleeding from new places and losing the familiar bleeding from familiar places.

Since her diagnosis, Barbara Rosenblum has added personal non-fiction to her academic writing. With her partner, Sandra Butler, she is writing a book, entitled "Cancer in Two Voices," which looks at how life-threatening illness has changed their relationship.



Three weeks later, after the fourth treatment, my period stopped. I began to get hot flashes, sometimes as frequently as one an hour. My ears glowed bright red, my face darkened, and sweat collected on the surface of my skin. I felt like a vibrating tuning fork for the next two minutes. Then my internal air conditioning took over but didn't know when to stop. I got cold; I'd quickly cover myself to avoid the chill of perspiration. I could never find the right amount of clothing because my internal thermostat was completely off. I no longer had any sense of what "room temperature," that euphemism for a sharable external reality, was. I had no reliable information from my body about the temperature of the outside world. My only information came from deep inside my body and I knew that was distorted and unreliable.

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All the hair on my head fell out. Frantically, I searched for a good wig before this occurred but nothing fit my small size head. I found a hairdresser who worked for the opera company who used his connections to get a wig for me. The wig fit but felt foreign and made my scalp hot and itchy. I decided, like many other women who become bald from chemotherapy, not to disguise my loss.

Hats now hang off any available hook in my apartment. I have cotton hats, wool hats, berets, hats with brims, ski caps. Friends have knitted caps for me. And, even now, every time I go into the street, I am still aware that people look at me. A vital aspect of my social identity has been taken away. In the last six months, I've lost my hair twice. And, before that, three times. Practice does not make it easier.

Losing my hair has been much harder than losing my breast. No one can see underneath my clothes. But everyone can see my hair. I never thought my hair was beautiful: it was a simple brown mop that I combed and washed. It grew out of my scalp. It was a part of me. It was mine.

And as I saw it cover the pillow, as I saw gobs of it come out on the comb and globs of it clog the shower drain, I sank powerlessly into resignation.

I knew my hair would grow back when I went off the powerful chemotherapy to another combination of chemicals. It did but thinly. And then I went off chemotherapy completely and all my hair came back, thick and spikey. But, during that time when I didn't take chemotherapy, the cancer spread to my liver and then my lungs. I had to have chemotherapy again, the strong stuff again. Now it is clear that I will never have a full head of hair again. I now lose my hair once a month. I will always look like a Buddhist monk until the day I die.

My pubis is as smooth as a fig. Even a peach with its infantile fuzziness is too hairy to describe my pudenda. It is bald, completely smooth except for one Fu Manchu-like hair, straight and long, that resisted decimation. It is a dark sturdy branch that extends from my skin. It is my mysterious hair, this proud survivor.

LOSING MY pubic hair, I felt naked and embarrassed, like a pre-pubescent child. I was too exposed and didn't want to be touched.

My vagina was changing too. The vaginal tissue was thinning and becoming more sensitive to pressure and friction. It began to hurt when Sandy and I had sex. I then noticed that my ordinary levels of dampness seemed to be changing: I was becoming less moist. Worst of all, I stopped lubricating when I became sexually excited. That single physiological fact made me realize that the agreements and understandings I had with my body were no

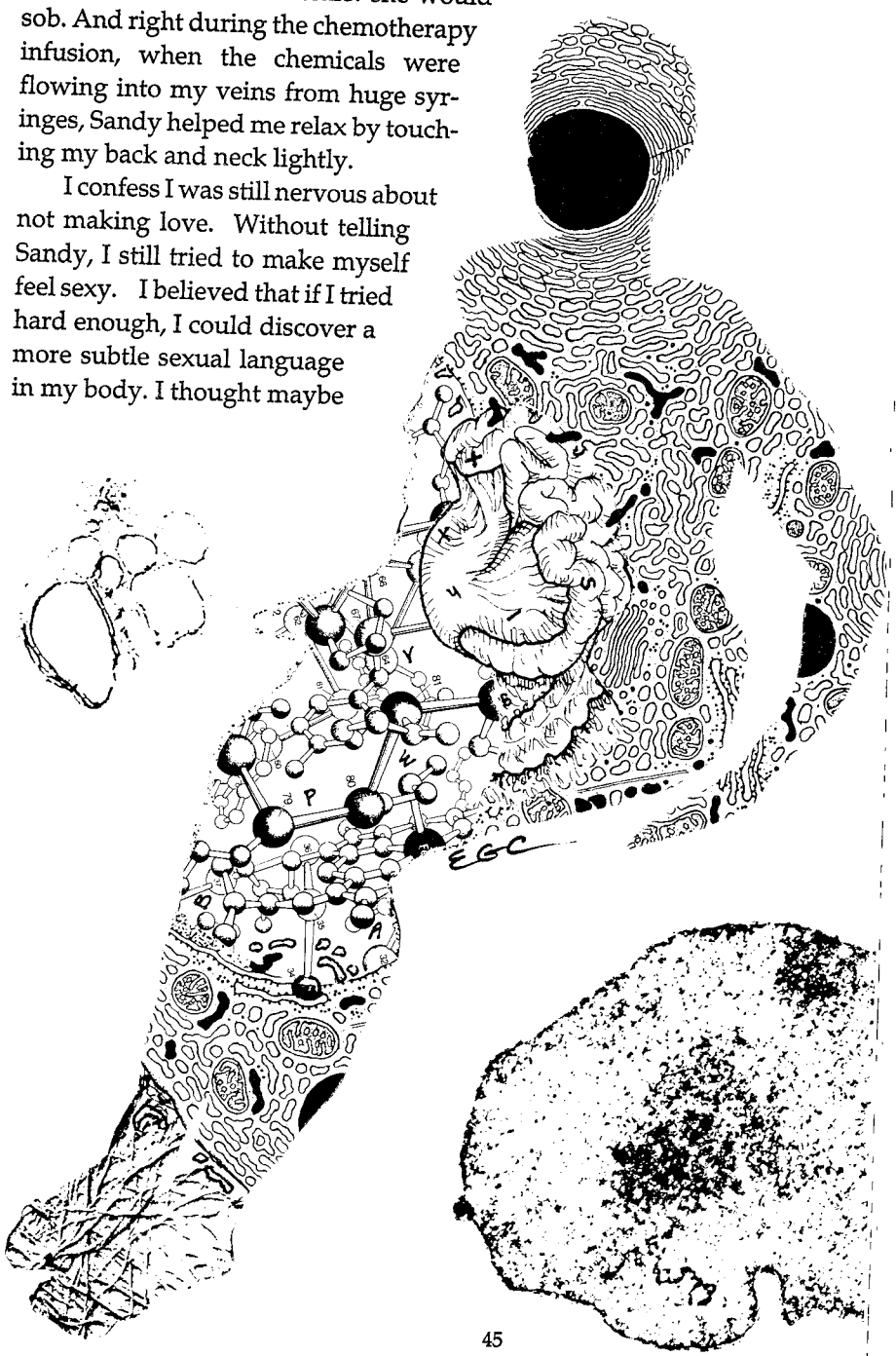
longer in effect. If I no longer lubricated when I got sexually aroused, then how could I know I was feeling sexy?

Until I began chemotherapy, my relationship with my body was simple, direct, and uncomplicated. I had a friendly, warm, and pleasurable relationship with my body. Sex was always fun and untroubled. The cycles of my ability to become aroused were exquisitely dependent on my hormones. Ten days before my period, like clockwork, I would begin to feel sexual. This would continue for the next ten days and, when my period came, the urge would fizzle out. In other words, I had a physiologically based definition of my own sexual excitement: if my body produced some of the sensations which, through experience, had become my standard set of signals for sexual excitement, then I knew what to do with my behavior. But when chemotherapy induced an early and rapidly onsetting menopause and my hormone levels dropped dramatically, I was no longer on a monthly hormone cycle. I could no longer tell when I felt sexy or pre-menstrual. I got very confused about what I was feeling and when I was feeling it.

These questions of semantic meaning were urgently preempted by the necessity of finding practical solutions. Without body clues to signal me as to when and how I was feeling sexy, I consulted my head. Sandy and I recreated situations that had a proven record of creating the right mood in me. We purposefully incorporated the old reliable environmental cues that had worked so well in the past: excellent food, candlelight, intimate conversation, music. I felt as close as could be but nothing was happening in my body. We tried romantic meals at cozy restaurants. Nothing. Massages with scented oils. Nothing. Morning hiking in the country followed by steaming coffee and good pancakes. Nothing. Everything in my head told me this should be the right moment to make love but there were no signals coming from my body. Sandy touched me in all the loving, familiar ways. It was soothing, pleasant but not sexy. Nothing. The conclusion: for me, sex does not work in the head.

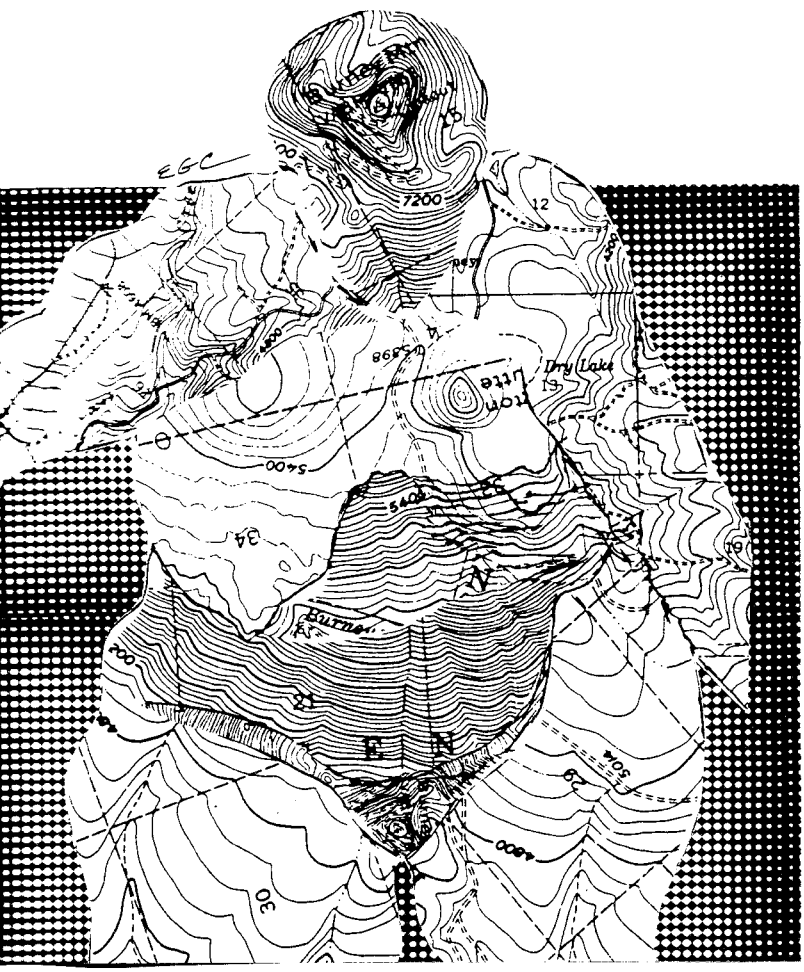
We stopped making love. Instead, we found new ways of being intimate. Sandy, who is a very light sleeper and consequently sleeps far away from me so as not to be disturbed by my twists and turns, now held me through the night. Our hands found new ways to console each other. I was reminded of how animals touch, lick, and chew each other. They pick at and groom each other, making the other feel secure and loved with their paws. I would touch Sandy's throat in a spot I knew contained all her tears: she would sob. And right during the chemotherapy infusion, when the chemicals were flowing into my veins from huge syringes, Sandy helped me relax by touching my back and neck lightly.

I confess I was still nervous about not making love. Without telling Sandy, I still tried to make myself feel sexy. I believed that if I tried hard enough, I could discover a more subtle sexual language in my body. I thought maybe



I could pick up these signals when alone. So, when Sandy was busy and out of the house, I tried to get in the mood to masturbate. Nothing. But our new intimacy helped ease the passage: I accepted this non-sexual period as part of my life. Ultimately the rock-bottom question remains: when facing one's own death, what happens to one's sexuality?

I suppose, for some women, sexual feelings become intensified. They become hungry for life, hungry for life through sex. Erotic energy keeps them alive. I suspect Sandy would have liked it better if I experienced the life force as erotic energy, as libido. But I don't. My life energy comes in another form, in the passion to learn everything, to feel everything, to live every moment with presence and intensity. To study new things. To master new areas of knowledge. To write: alone and with Sandy. Together, we have developed a new form that can accommodate our individual and unique voices into a dialogue. We write about things that are important to us. We make love at the typewriter, not in the bedroom.



AS I WRITE now, I see that I was learning a new language of the body but it was the language of symptoms, not of sexuality. I became sensitive to when my body was retaining water. I could glance at my various parts, my legs, arms, stomach, and chest and notice a puffiness that had not been there the day before. I learned that when I became puffy, my metabolism was off and that meant my liver wasn't functioning properly. I calculated the ebbs and flows of my energy because my activities, like taking a walk, depended on an exact calibration of that energy. I observed how it wavered, how much time I had between the waves, how it disappeared all at once, without forewarning. I discovered how close I could come to throwing up without actually having to do it. I studied the gradations of nausea and their sub-divisions and how to assess when nausea would pass or when I had to take an anti-nausea pill. I learned how to move quickly to the curb while walking the dog, emptying the contents of my stomach there, not on the sidewalk, and how to look reasonably dignified afterward. I learned how to run fast while compressing my anal sphincter muscles, so that I wouldn't shit in my pants from the diarrhea that chemo induced. Sometimes I didn't make it.

In the last two and a half years, I peed in my pants three times. Chemotherapy irritates the bladder. That's why doctors tell you to drink half a gallon of liquid whenever you get chemotherapy. The chemicals are so strong that they can even cause cancer of the bladder. On the few occasions I couldn't control my urine, I noticed that I didn't get the usual signal that told me it was time to think about going to the bathroom. It didn't begin as a small pressure or urge, as it normally does, and then build up. No, rather, it came on with a burst of urgency, as if I'd been holding it for hours. I had to learn this new language too.

The form of my body changed too. I lost a breast. Two years ago, when I had a mastectomy, I was too worried about my life to worry about my breast. I hoped the doctors would "get" all the cancer in my breast, that post-operative radiation would control any errant cells that had not been excised by surgery.

Losing a breast did alter my body image, as well as my body, but I never felt a diminishment of my femininity. My breasts were never the center of my womanness.

I knew from the responses of other women in my support group and also from my cancer counselor that losing a breast was very hard for some women. In my cancer support group, most women were concerned about reconstructive surgery. They swapped names of good plastic surgeons. They talked about aesthetic criteria for evaluating a good job, such as the surgeon's ability to make breasts match in color, tone, weight, density, shape, and identicality of nipple placement with appropriate tones of darkness. They expressed a fetishistic quality in their talk; they were desperate and afraid.

One woman in the support group told the story of someone whose husband left her from the time of the mastectomy until she got her reconstructed breast. He couldn't bear the sight of his wife, she explained matter-of-factly. And then there's the letter I got from a distant acquaintance who told me that she, too, had had breast cancer. She wrote that it wasn't so dangerous, now that they could control it with early detection. She also wrote that, since her surgery a few years before, she, herself, never got undressed in front of her husband and that, when they made love, she always wore her bra with the prosthesis tucked inside.

I couldn't even imagine how these women might feel about their partners. I would feel enraged. I cannot count the number of stories I've heard about couples, both gay and straight, breaking up. Illness places enormous strains on couples and many separate. Each person may feel guilt and abandonment simultaneously.

I'm very lucky. Sandy has been exceptionally steadfast and easy about the changes in my body. She did not compel me to pay attention to her needs, her anxieties, her worries. She never made me feel inadequate or freakish. Her face never revealed shock or terror. She was easy with my scar, touching it delicately. She always got the bucket during vomiting bouts, never cringing or complaining. She was always softly, gently there, through everything.

Ultimately the rock-bottom question remains: when facing one's own death, what happens to one's sexuality?

SIGNALS ABOUT hunger also got confused when I began chemotherapy. Up until that time, food was one of the great pleasures of my life. Over the years, I'd become very sophisticated about food and very knowledgeable about its preparation. Eating was a supremely aesthetic experience for me. I always tried to eat well and cook well for myself. Unlike many people who don't cook for themselves when they are alone, I didn't need the company of another person to stimulate me to cook: my own pleasure was sufficient. I would cook sweetbreads in a cream sauce or chicken with lemon and tarragon. Tastes would explode on my tongue, clear and definite tastes.

So when chemotherapy caused painful sores in my mouth and the only thing I could consume was a blenderful of fruit and yogurt, I became despondent. It hurt when I put solid food in my mouth. My appetite and desire for particular flavors and sensations was annihilated. I could no longer tell when I was hun-

gry, or when I wanted a specific texture or flavor. All I wanted to do was to get the food down and keep it down and to make sure it didn't hurt as I ate. I treated myself like a hospital patient, making an eating schedule and sticking to it, making sure I had enough protein, liquid, and caloric content.

There is never a time in my treatment cycle when my mouth isn't sore or sensitive. I can't have spices, I can't have hot Chinese food, I can no longer savor my favorite cuisine, Indian food. My diet resembles that of an ulcer patient: bland and creamy. My relationship to food has been permanently altered and I grieve this loss every day.

I can't drink alcohol because of my liver. Ironically, I had developed a very fine palate and sophisticated tastes for drinking wine. I can't smoke marijuana because my lungs are sensitive. I can't take cocaine or other recreational drugs because it might hurt my liver. I now have a very excellent relationship to coffee.

In the last two years, I gained three sizes. My legs filled with fluid and were puffy and large. My feet became swollen. My arms and shoulders, usually slender, looked bulky and strong. I remember the time Sandy and I saw a beautiful pair of shoes in a shop window in Amsterdam. They were the first expensive European shoes I ever owned. With delight, I began to break them in but, in a few weeks, they felt just a bit tight. And a few weeks later, they were impossible to wear. My feet had swollen with fat and fluids and stayed that way. Shortly thereafter, I consulted Shizuko Yamamoto, a well-known macrobiotic practitioner in New York. She slapped my thighs and said in a thick accent, "Water jugs, your legs are like water jugs."

In 1987, 41,300 people in the United States died from breast cancer (99% of whom were women); 130,900 new cases were diagnosed last year. As a reference point, in 1987, 4135 deaths due to AIDS were reported. The total number of reported cases of AIDS between 1981 and 1987 is 49,743.

Sources: American Cancer Society; Center for Disease Control.

I watched my body stretch to accommodate all the fluid that was collecting in my tissues. I could not believe how rapidly my body shape was changing. I needed new clothes immediately but going shopping was a horrendous experience. Sandy was kind and patient. She had reached her full height of six feet by the age of thirteen and shopping for clothes that didn't fit was a familiar experience. Turning what was humiliating into an adventure was an old defense for her and served us both well now. I'd be crying from frustration in the fitting room and Sandy would quietly leave and cheerfully return with a few items in the next size.

One day, I stopped going to department stores. It was too hard. I decided to go to a shop for larger women. While walking to it, I passed a maternity shop and thought that these clothes might fit me. They did.

The surface of my skin changed. My veins became more prominent because the fluid in my tissues pressed them against my skin. Even the tiniest capillaries started bursting and my skin became marbled with designs. Where the pressure was greatest, on my inner thighs, the capillaries looked like calligraphy. The oiliness of my skin disappeared and became parched and crusty. Skin fell from my face almost as often as my eyebrows and eyelashes, leaving a white layer of flakiness. My fingernails first turned black from chemotherapy and, then, they became ridged with white bands. My fingernails became like alum, soft and whitish and they ripped rather than broke.

IT IS NOW TWO and a half years since I first got the diagnosis of breast cancer. And now here I am, getting chemotherapy six days a month. For two days I'm in the hospital where I get adriamycin and for four days I'm attached to an ambulatory pump filled with Velban, another type of chemotherapy. It hangs from my waist on a velcro belt, buttressed by a safety pin. It looks like a Walkman; tubes extend from its square form into a one inch needle that is inserted into my chest. It is attached to a portacath, a plastic container that is surgically placed in my chest, the purpose of which is to receive chemotherapy. My veins are too fragile. They've stabbed me too many times and missed. They have had too many veins blow on them, that is, burst open with gushing blood. My veins roll around too

much and they don't stay still. The chemo has burned my veins too many times, making them fibrotic and painfully sensitive.

When I wear the portable pump, I am bombarded by images: of being attached to a bomb, having an artificial limb, having additional plumbing, like there's a giant opening in me, like it's a bionic extension. It's like having shrapnel inside you, like an artificial hip or a metal plate instead of your skull.

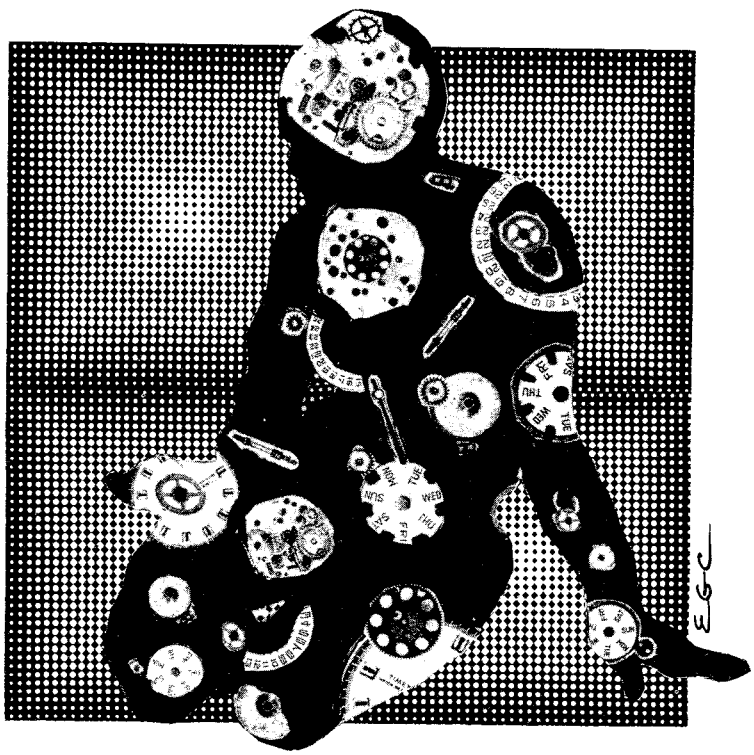
My hand rests on the pump: I sense its vibrations and hear it churning along. I sleep with it, this Walkman tied to my waist, with the aid of Valium and sleeping pills. It runs on batteries. It is saving my life. Other people wear pumps too: diabetics get insulin, older people get liquid nutrition, people with AIDS get antibiotics, and people with intractable pain get a continuous infusion of pain killing drugs like morphine. I have cancer and I get chemotherapy. I hate the pump.

Yesterday, I called a woman who is on the pump all the time, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, getting chemotherapy for liver cancer. She was helpful and gave me words of encouragement. Maybe I can learn from her.

WHAT IS IT like to live in a body that keeps on changing? It's frightening, terrifying, and confusing. It generates a feeling of helplessness; it produces a slavish attention to the body; it creates an unnatural hypervigilance toward any and all sensations that occur within the landscape of the body. One becomes a prisoner to any perceptible change in the body, any cough, any difference in sensation. One loses one's sense of stability and predictability, as well as a sense of control over the body. It forces you to give up the idea that you can will the body to behave in ways you would like. Grieving over the loss of that predictability complicates the process of adjustment to an unstable body. Time becomes shortened and is marked by the space between symptoms.

In our culture, it is very common to rely on the body as the ultimate arbiter of truth. We consult our bodies like an oracle. While every

In our culture, it is very common to rely on the body as the ultimate arbiter of truth. We consult our bodies like an oracle.

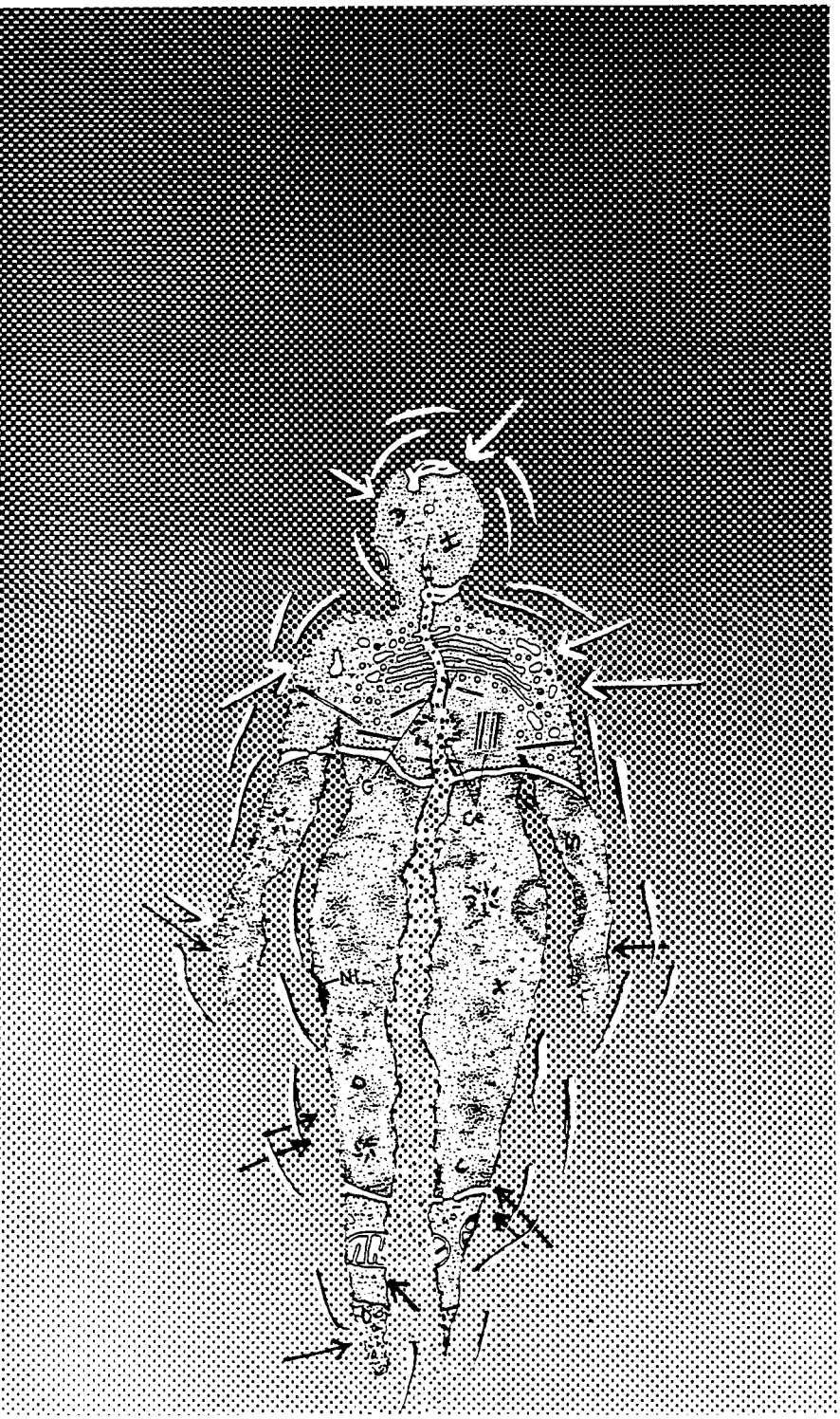


emotion may not be consciously available to be experienced, the body knows the truth. We cannot conceal the truth from the body.

We turn to the body to decipher its coded language, to apprehend its grammar and syntax. By noticing the body's responses to situations, we have an idea about how we "really feel about things." For example, if you get knots in your stomach every time a certain person walks into the room, you have an important body clue to investigate. Or if you weep excessively during a yawn, you might suspect that you may be experiencing some deep and underlying sadness that has not yet come to the surface or, as Wordsworth put it, "a thought too deep for tears."

We trust that the body will tell us the truth about emotions that are hidden from consciousness. We trust that the body knows things before the mind does. Our job is to mind the body, to mine the body, to interpret its language.

I was thrown into a crisis of meaning. I could no longer assess and evaluate what sen-



sations meant. I could no longer measure the intensity of sensations. I was no longer fluent in the language of my body, its signs, and symbols, and I felt lost.

The world has become an existential problem for me. How to interpret my very existence is problematic. Am I living because I am alive? Am I dying because I'd be dead in three months without chemotherapy? Am I living and dying? Are all of us living and dying except that I'm doing it faster?

And all of this confusion is predicated on time, because the human mind can experience the simultaneity of the past and the present and can project into the future. The human mind has memory and time past can color the present and the future. If there were only present time, I could joyfully embrace my body and delight in whatever it is, whatever form it takes, whatever is given to me. If there were only the past, I would remember swimming naked six months after my surgery. It was in the Pacific waters, off the coast of Australia's Great Barrier Reef. It was 5:30 a.m., it was nearly 80 degrees, and Sandy and I were the only ones awake and walking on the beach. As the sun became higher and more intense, I walked from the water to a spot on the beach where my clothes were piled. The sun shone on my body, bronzing it in the Eastern morning sky and my body, without breast, without much hair, looked whole healthy and perfect.

If there were only time past, I would remember the time Sandy and I went away with our friends who were fighting all weekend. We were at a loss; what could we do to make them stop? Distancing myself from their anger, I put on some old Motown music and started dancing immediately following a hot tub. There I was, naked as a jay bird, having a wonderful time, laughing, singing, and dancing unselfconsciously to rock and roll. There I was, with one breast flopping, and one big body dancing. My friends, stunned at what they called "the life force," stopped fighting and started dancing.

But there is not just the past and not just the present. There is future. And I can imagine worse scenarios with just as much vividness

as I can remember the past. I can envision more chemotherapy, more tubes, more degeneration of body function, more loss of energy and loss of control, more desperation. There may be more physical pain, more ambiguous sensations arising from a body I can no longer interpret, more confusion.

When you have cancer, the body no longer contains the old truths about the world. Instead, you must learn a new language, a new vocabulary and, over time, as symptoms converge and conflate, you learn the deeper structure of its grammar. The patient's task is to learn the new language, hoping that the body will remain stable enough. You can no longer rely on the previous systems of interpreting the body you have used before. When you have cancer and the ground is pulled from under you, you must look for new, stable ground.

You have a new body each day, a body that may or may not have a relationship to the body you had the day before. When you have cancer, you are bombarded by sensations, which come from within, but which are not anchored in meaning. They float in a world without words, without meanings. You cannot call a particular sensation a "symptom" or a "side effect" or "a sign." It is extremely anxiety producing to be unable to distinguish those sensations which are caused by the disease and those which are caused by the treatment. Words and their referents are decoupled, uncongealed, no longer connected. You live in a mental world where all the information you have is locked into the present moment and the past, what the doctors may call "your medical history," is useless and irrelevant for your construction of meanings.

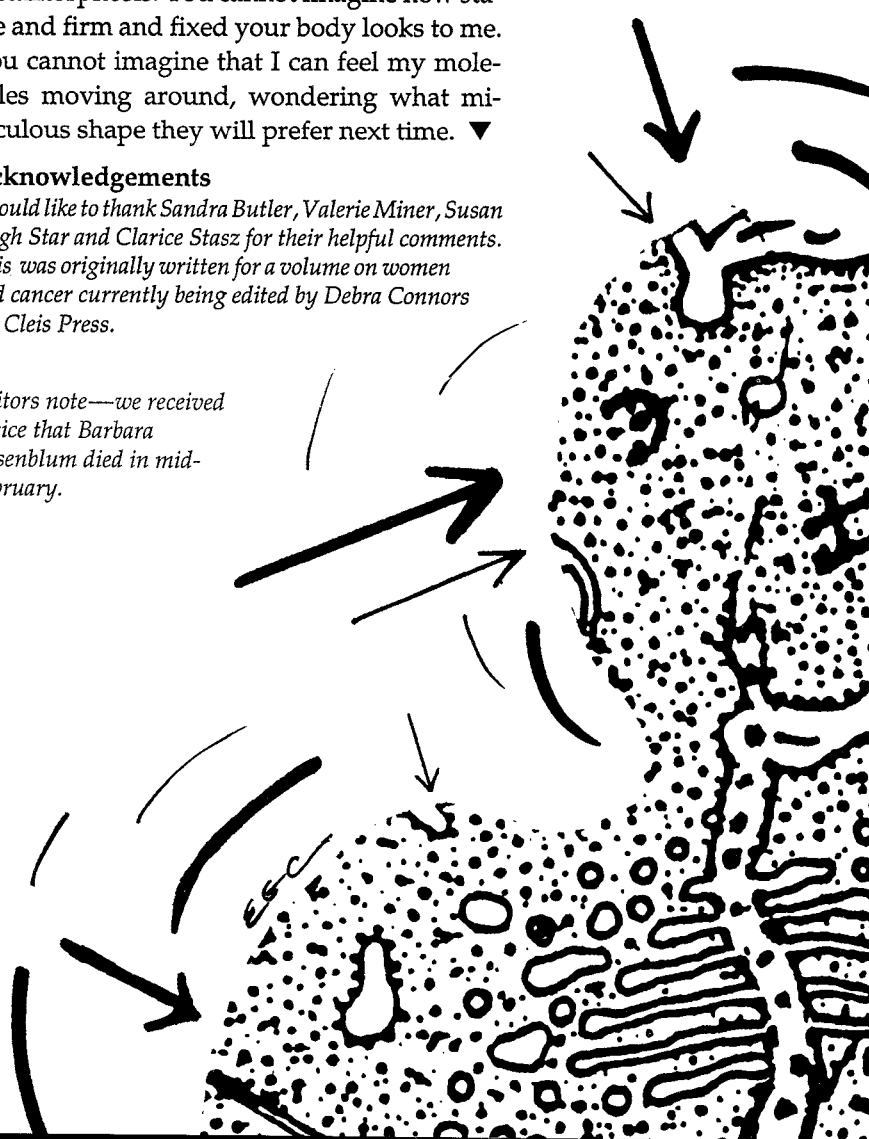
Sensations come and go; they disappear for a while and they return; they change. They may add up to something, they may not. That pain in my stomach may mean something or may not. I must wait until something else happens, until I have an accretion of evidence, until a pattern may emerge, if I'm lucky enough to have a pattern. Interpretation of a sensation always depends on having at least two bodily events close enough in time to make meaning of seemingly random events. And, most of the time, I live in a world of random body events. I am hostage to the capriciousness of my body, a body which sabotages my sense of a continuous and taken-for-granted reality.

Sometimes I can hardly use human language to tell how I feel. When I am frightened, feel alone and can't sleep, need to take sleeping pills because I think about dying, I explain to Sandy, "If I were a dog, I'd be shaking and trembling." Animals don't use words, their bodies speak for them. While I am not mute, I am often frustrated by how the limits of language circumscribe my ability to communicate events in my body. But I am not an animal. I am a human being, an articulate one at that, who is challenged to find words to apply to sensations I've never had before, challenged to find meaning and stability despite a changing body. I am caught in a relentless metamorphosis. You cannot imagine how stable and firm and fixed your body looks to me. You cannot imagine that I can feel my molecules moving around, wondering what miraculous shape they will prefer next time. ▼

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sandra Butler, Valerie Miner, Susan Leigh Star and Clarice Stasz for their helpful comments. This was originally written for a volume on women and cancer currently being edited by Debra Connors for Cleis Press.

Editors note—we received notice that Barbara Rosenblum died in mid-February.



GLADYS BENTLEY: THE BULLDAGGER WHO SANG THE BLUES

by Eric Garber

Eric Garber has presented his slide show, "Tain't Nobody's Bizness: Lesbian and Gay Life in Jazz Age Harlem," to enthusiastic audiences across the country. He is co-author of Uranian Worlds: A Reader's Guide to Alternative Sexuality in Science Fiction and Fantasy, *and an editor of* Worlds Apart: An Anthology of Lesbian and Gay Science Fiction and

Gladys Bentley has disappeared. During the 1920s and 1930s, she was one of the most successful and notorious black women in the United States. She performed at some of the fanciest New York nightclubs, had an active recording career, and socialized among trend-setting socialites and visiting European notables. She was mentioned in national newspapers and made appearances within best-selling novels. Yet for all her success and fame, her career crumbled and her memory has faded from the public mind.

Why did this happen? Unlike her lesbian contemporaries in the entertainment field, Bentley proudly acknowledged her lesbian sexuality. She packed her 250 pound frame into a tuxedo, flirted with women in her audience, and dedicated songs to her lesbian lover. This openness led to problems that would eventually ruin her livelihood and obscure her memory. Her story vividly demonstrates how the different oppressions of race, sex, and sexuality can sometimes become intimately intertwined.

LIKE MANY of the classic blues singers, Gladys Bentley came from inauspicious beginnings. Her parents were George L. Bentley of Philadelphia, and his Trinidad-born wife, Mary C. Mote. There were four children in the family. Gladys, the oldest, had been born on August 12, 1907. Turn-of-the-century Philadelphia was not an easy place to be black and raise a family. Unemployment, overcrowding, and low living standards were common conditions. White racism was unavoidable. Like many of Philadelphia's Afro-Americans, the Bentleys were poor, and they undoubtably relied upon the black church for much of their emotional and spiritual support. Bentley would eventually return to the church in her later years.

By her own admission, Bentley was a "problem child." In an autobiographical piece for *Ebony* she recalled:

> It seems I was born different. At least, I always thought so.... From the time I can remember anything, even when I was a toddling, I never wanted a man to touch me.... Soon I began to feel more comfortable in boy's clothes than in dresses.

Her schooldays were marked by her classmates' taunts about her weight and unfeminine behavior. When her parents pressured her into wearing girls' clothes, she refused. Adolescence brought an even more complicated problem: her lesbian sexuality. Bentley was aware of her attraction to other women at a very early age. Later, she recalled with affection a schoolgirl crush on a teacher:

> Sometimes she would let me comb her long, beautiful hair. In class I sat for hours watching her and wondering why I was so attracted to her. At night I dreamed of her. I didn't understand the meaning of those dreams until later.

Her parents, hoping to change their daughter's troubling habits, began taking her around to doctors for consultations about her "problem."

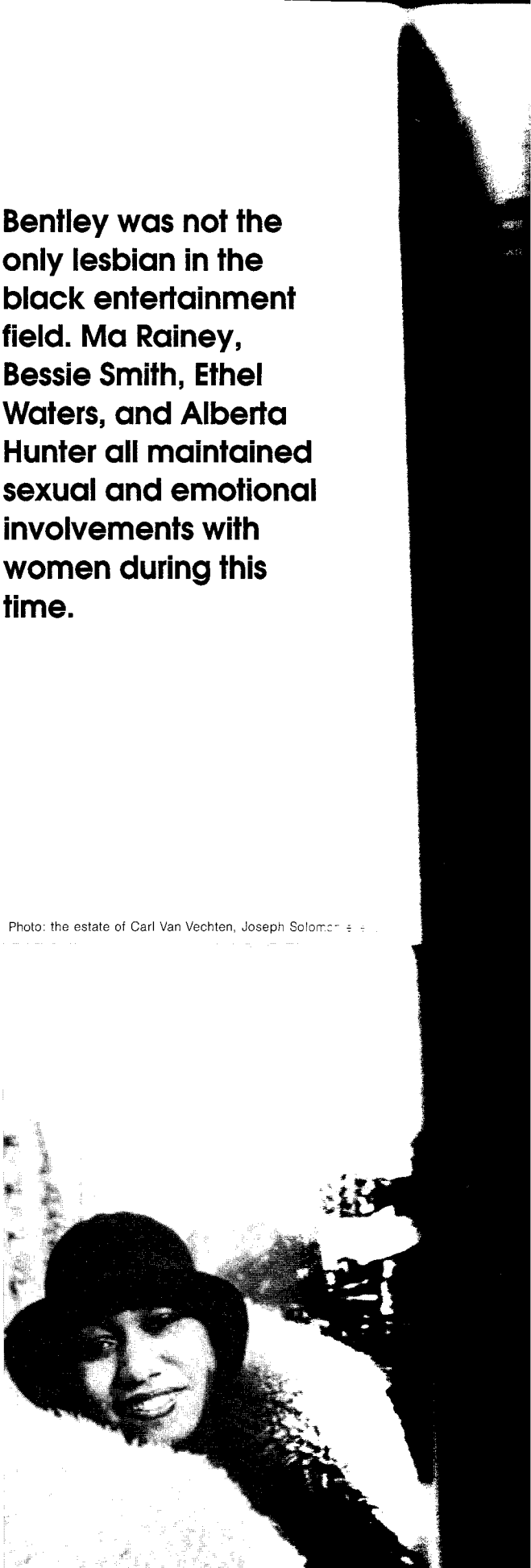
Finally, at the age of 16, Bentley had had enough taunts, arguments, and questioning. She ran away from home. Like so many young Afro-Americans of her generation, she trav-

Harlem during the Jazz Age must have seemed a wonderful place for the young runaway from Philadelphia. Blocks and blocks were populated entirely by Afro-Americans. There were black grocery stores, black theaters, black beauty parlors, and even black police officers. Born of the massive northern migration of southern blacks in the early decades of the 20th century, Harlem was in the midst of an enormous explosion of Afro-American culture. Its fame as the "New Negro Capital" drew talented and famous Afro-Americans from all over. Boxer Jack Johnson could be seen in the local cabarets. Bert Williams and Bessie Smith performed in the theaters. The "mahogany millionairess," A'Lelia Walker, owned an immense apartment on Edgecomb Avenue where she threw lavish parties for one and all. Marcus Garvey led enormous parades down Seventh Avenue exhorting his message of Pan-African solidarity and empowerment. Equally visible were W.E.B. DuBois and the NAACP, and their politics of radical integrationism. A sense of pride and militancy was unmistakable. A feeling of hope and progress was in the air.

Bentley was not the only lesbian in the black entertainment field. Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, and Alberta Hunter all maintained sexual and emotional involvements with women during this time.

Photo: the estate of Carl Van Vechten, Joseph Solom[illegible]

THERE WAS another side of Harlem as well. As an underprivileged and disenfranchised community, it was an easy target for exploitation. The vice industry was a strong force in the community. Organized crime had made Harlem into a virtual "free zone"—protected from most official harassment by Mayor Jimmy Walker's lenient administration. The numbers racket flourished throughout the neighborhood. Speakeasies could be found on every streetcorner. They ranged from posh nightclubs catering to white tourists, to earthy jazz halls for interracial sophisticates, to smoky basement dives frequented by hoodlums, prostitutes, and female impersonators. For those in the know, there were rent parties and dance halls, with pretty girls and jazz music. For the jaded, there were scores of brothels, some offering elaborate erotic tableaus and "sex circuses." The residents of Harlem were



called it the "sporting life." Though it was shunned by Harlem's established middle class, many Afro-Americans earned their living in the marginal occupations of pimp, prostitute, entertainer, saloon owner, and petty criminal.

It was within this nocturnal milieu of illicit sexuality, gambling, and drugs that Gladys Bentley found a place where she could be herself. The sporting life was one of the few arenas where homosexuality was both acknowledged and accepted. She survived by playing piano at raucous, all-night rent parties. Her growling, blues singing voice complemented her boyish appearance. She proved particularly accomplished at inventing scandalous lyrics to the tunes of popular melodies. According to *New York Age* correspondent Bill Chase, "Those were the days of double entendre songs with much ennui and if ever there was a gal who could take a popular ditty and put her own naughty version to it, La Bentley could do it."

For example, under Bentley's embellishments two popular Broadway tunes, "Sweet Georgia Brown" and "My Alice Blue Gown," were combined to become an ode to the joys of sexual intercourse:

> And he said, "Dearie, please turn around"
> And he shoved that big thing up my brown.
> He wore it. I bored it. Lord, how I adored it.
> My sweet little Alice Blue Gown.

In the 1930's, Wilbur Young, a writer for Works Progress Administrations, remembered:

> Some of these lyrics would be so rank that the nurse lady would look on in despair while Gladys, not content with merely singing them herself... would encourage the paying guests to come in on the chorus, which they did willingly. At this stage, it was just matter of time before the house got raided.

Bentley did well as a transient piano player and entertainer, but she had set her sights on 133rd Street, between Lenox and Seventh Avenues, an area known as "Jungle Alley." This was the center of Harlem's sporting life. Billie Holiday began performing there in the early 1930s. "One hundred and Thirty Third Street was the real swing street," Holiday recalled. "It was jumping with after-hours spots, regular hour joints, restaurants, cafés, a dozen to a block." Bentley soon got her chance. When the pianist at the Mad House left for Europe on tour, Bentley rushed to the club for an audition. At first the owner was reluctant, but he was soon convinced to take a chance on the young lesbian. "When I had finished my first number, the applause was terrific.... I was offered $35 a week and began to work on the spot."

"If ever there was a gal who could take a popular ditty and put her own naughty version to it, La Bentley could do it."

Bentley was lucky to have entered show business at this time. Music historian Eileen Southern has called the 1920s "the era of the black female blues singer." Between 1920 and 1930, over 200 black women made recordings, and thousands more found employment as performers in nightclubs, theaters, and tent shows. Among the successful were Bessie Smith, Ida Cox, Ethel Waters, and Ma Rainey. Bentley was entertaining and titillating, something the audiences of the Roaring Twenties craved. After Carl Van Vechten and other white downtowners became regulars at the Mad House, her salary jumped to $100 a week. She played many of the most fashionable

clubs, including the Cotton Club and Connie's Inn. As writer Langston Hughes remembered, Bentley "was something worth discovering in those days."

> For two or three amazing years, Miss Bentley sat, and played a big piano all night long, literally all might, without stopping—singing songs like "The Saint James Infirmary," from ten in the evening until dawn, with scarcely a break between notes, sliding from one song to another, with a powerful and continuous underbeat of jungle rhythm. Miss Bentley was an amazing exhibition of musical energy—a large, dark, masculine lady, whose feet pounded the floor while her fingers pounded the keyboard.

Columnist Louis Sobol remembered Bentley coming over to his table one night and whispering, "I'm getting married tomorrow and you're invited." When Sobol asked who the lucky man was to be, she giggled and replied: "Man? Why, boy, you're crazy."

For several years, Bentley was the hea[d]lined entertainer at Harry Hansberry's [T]Clam House where she performed in a wh[i]tuxedo and top hat. The Clam House was [t]favorite watering hole for a select crowd [o]sophisticates. Eslanda Robeson, wife of ac[t]Paul Robeson, once raved to a friend, "Glad[y]Bentley is grand. I heard her three nights, a[n]will never be the same." Harlem schoolteach[er]Harold Jackman noted, "When Gladys sing[s]'Saint James Infirmary,' it makes you wee[p]your heart out."

White sophisticates found her equal[ly]fascinating. *Vanity Fair*'s Charles Shaw de[-]scribed The Clam House as "a narrow room [in]Jungle Alley catering to a large white patron[-]age and featuring Gladys Bentley, pianist an[d]torrid warbler. A popular house for revelers but not for the innocent young." He added tha[t]it was best after 1 a.m.

By the 1920s, Bentley's name and reputa[-]tion had become synonymous with "Hot Har[-]lem." She was mentioned regularly in Louis Sobol's gossip column in *The New York Evening Graphic*. She appeared, unnamed but unmis[-]takable, in Van Vechten's best-selling novel *Parties* and in Clement Wood's roman à clef *Deep River*. In Blair Nile's 1931 gay male potboiler *Strange Brother*, Bentley appears as "Sybil," the black lesbian entertainer at Harlem's "Lobster Pot."

"Soon I was living on Park Avenue in a

A Night Club Map of Harlem. "Gladys' Clam House" is at Seventh Avenue and 136th Street, immediately above the map's title.

$300-a-month apartment," she later remembered. "I had servants and a beautiful car. The club where I worked overflowed with celebrities and big star names nightly.... I had made my mark in show business."

IN AUGUST 1928, Bentley began a recording career which would span two decades. Over the next eight months she cut eight titles for the OKeh recording company. Possibly because of copyright restrictions, Bentley didn't sing her notorious parodies. She appears to have accompanied herself on the piano, and was joined for two sessions by the white guitarist Eddie Lang. A year later she recorded a side with the Washboard Serenaders on the Victor label.

None of the material Bentley recorded dealt with lesbianism, but some of her songs reveal a subtle feminist perspective. She threatens to leave a wayward lover in "How Long, How Long Blues," asserting a strong sense of sexual and emotional independence. A similar independence can be found in "Moanful Wailin' Blues."

> Had a good daddy,
> He wouldn't treat me right.
> Checked him out on Thursday,
> Took him back on Friday night!

"How Much Can I Stand?" was Bentley's strongest recording. It describes a violent, exploitive relationship between Bentley and a male lover, her thoughts of murder, and her resolution to avoid such relationships in future.

> I've got a man I've loved all the while,
> But now he treats me like a darn stepchild,
> How much of that stuff can I stand?
> One time he said my sugar was oh, so sweet,
> But now for his dessert he goes across the street
> How much of that stuff can I stand?
> Said I was an angel, he was born to treat
> me right,
> Who the devil heard of an angel that gets beat up
> every night?
> How much of that stuff can I stand?
> Went down to the drugstore, asked the clerk for
> a dose,
> But when I received the poison, I eyed it very
> close,
> How much of this stuff can I stand?
> The next man I get must be guaranteed
> When I walk down the aisle, you're gonna
> hear me scream,
> How much of that stuff can I stand?

A large part of Bentley's popularity was due to her novel appearance. Bentley personified the one identifiable black lesbian stereotype of the period: the tough-talking, mannish acting, cross-dressing, and sexually worldly "bull dagger." This stereotype was widespread in blues lyrics and contemporary discussion. Blues singer Lucille Bogan observed in her 1935 recording "B.D. [Bulldagger] Woman's Blues":

> B.D. Women, they ain't gonna do me right
> B.D. Women, they ain't gonna do me right
> They can lay their jive just like a nach'l man
> B.D. Women, you know they sure is rough
> B.D. Women, you know they sure is rough
> They have drunk up many a whiskey and gin
> sure can strut their stuff.

Bessie Smith puzzled over "mannish acting women" in her "Foolish Man Blues" and Gertrude "Ma" Rainey confessed she likes to "wear a collar and a tie" in her remarkable "Prove It On Me Blues." Best-selling novels such as Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*, Wallace Gilmore Millen's *Sweet Man*, and Blair Niles' *Strange Brother*, used black bulldaggers as negative characters.

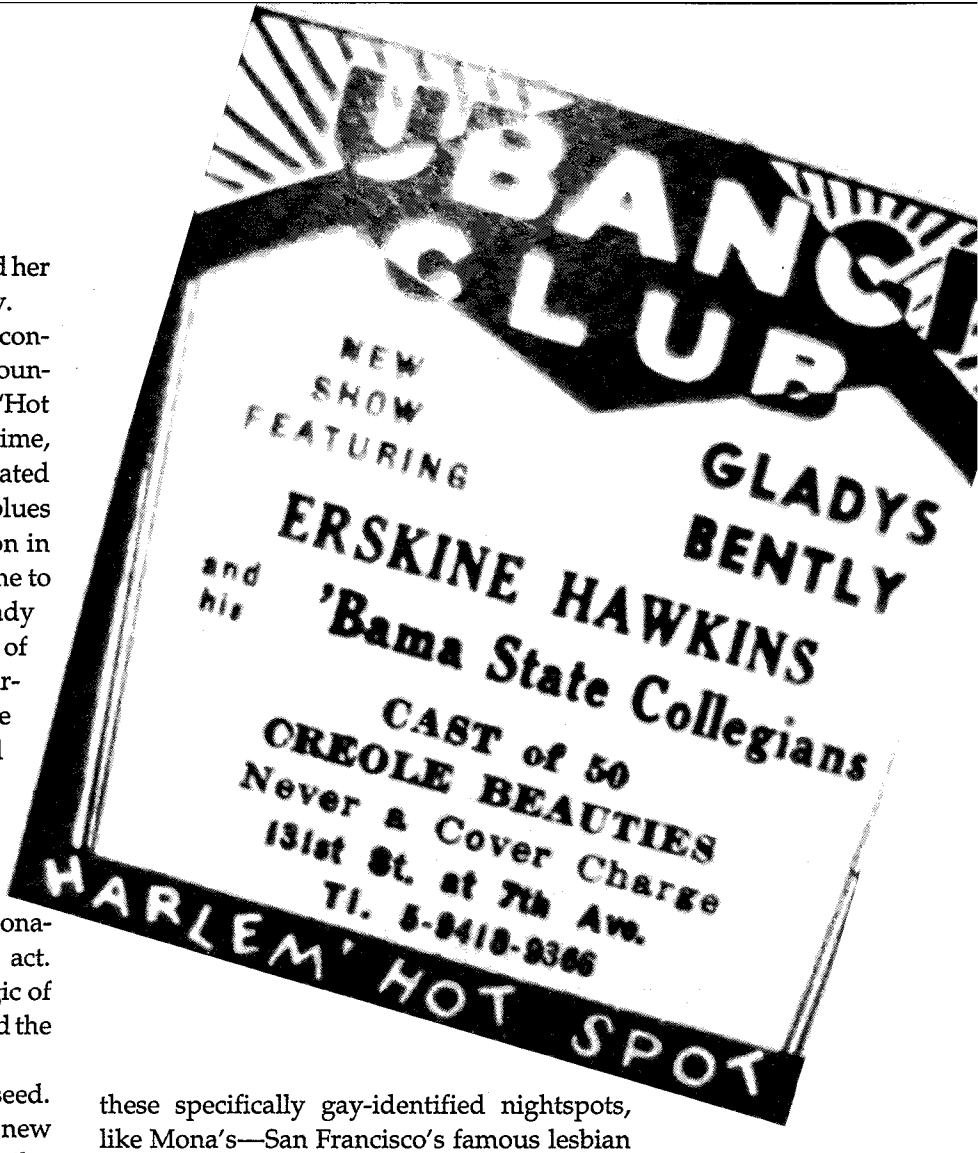
Of course, Bentley was not the only lesbian in the black entertainment field. Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, and Alberta Hunter all maintained sexual and emotional involvements with women. But the homosexuality that others hid, Bentley exploited to its advantage. "She could be seen any day marching down Seventh Avenue attired in men's clothes," remembered writer Wilbur Young. "She seemed to thrive on the fact that her habits were the subject of much tongue wagging." Columnist Louis Sobol remembers Bentley coming over to his table one night and whispering, "I'm getting married tomorrow and you're invited." When Sobol asked who the lucky man was to be, she giggled and replied: "Man? Why boy you're crazy. I'm marryin'—" and she named another woman singer. Bentley later lived openly with

lover and eventually married her publicized wedding ceremony.

The stockmarket crash of 1929 put a conomic crunch on the entire coun- took most of the glitter out of "Hot s" prosperity. Around the same time, began preferring the sophisticated rowing; the craze for the classic blues was over. The repeal of Prohibition in the shift of New York's jazz scene to Street further depressed an already borhood. But throughout most of Bentley continued her career, sur- by changing with the times. She to cultivate her large homosexual ing. She was the featured enter- the Ubangi Club, a Mafia-run on 133rd Street, where she the bill with Jackie Mabley, Bill and a chorusline of female impersona- Observers noted a change in her act. Hughes recalled, "The old magic of man and the piano and the night and the being one were gone."

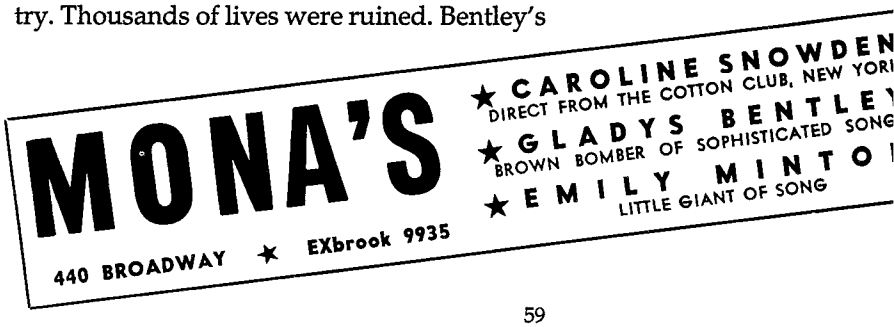
In 1937, Jungle Alley had gone to seed. again Gladys migrated in search of new cities. This time she moved 3000 miles in her mother in a small bungalow on Central Street in East Los Angeles. She was in that house for the next 23 years. Her continued with some success. She was by a "small, intimate and beautiful San Bernardino club," and in 1945, she re- five more discs on the Excelsior label, ing "Thrill Me Till I Get My Fill," "Find What He Likes," and "Notoriety Papa." she was continually plagued by profes- problems and an uncertain economic In February 1940, for example, she countered legal complications during her at Joaquin's El Rancho in Los Angeles. The club was forced to obtain a special police to "allow Gladys Bentley, 250-pound entertainer, to wear trousers instead of during her act."

During World War II, the number of sexual bars across the country mush- ed, particularly in urban coastal areas, as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Increasingly, Bentley performed at



these specifically gay-identified nightspots, like Mona's—San Francisco's famous lesbian bar.

A decade later, women and ethnic minorities were being forced from the jobs they had acquired during the national war mobilization and Senator Joseph McCarthy found subversive and deviant elements lurking everywhere. Homosexuals became a particularly targeted group. The Kinsey Reports on human sexuality had alerted the public about the extent to which homosexual behavior pervaded American society. Like the stigmatized and socially feared communist, a homosexual was an invisible enemy. The same paranoia which fanned McCarthy's anti-communist campaign fueled anti-homosexual purges, witchhunts, and gay bar raids across the country. Thousands of lives were ruined. Bentley's



Bentley's ultimate capitulation to social norms and her subsequent repudiation of lesbian life should not be allowed to overshadow her immense accomplishments.

public image, once the source of her fame and prosperity, had suddenly become a dangerous liability.

THERE WERE some black lesbians who resisted the repressive and virulently homophobic climate of the decade. Several black women were early members of the Daughters of Billitis, the nation's first lesbian organization. Unfortunately, Gladys Bentley was unable to find this kind of support. She had a livelihood to maintain and an aging mother to care for. Ultimately, Bentley was forced to do something that she had consistently refused to do for 25 years: she conformed. She sanitized her act, she began wearing dresses, and she wrote a sensationalized autobiographical sketch which was published in *Ebony*.

Entitled "I Am a Woman Again," Bentley's exposé uses nearly every cliché imaginable to describe the "hell as terrible as dope addiction" which Bentley experienced while she lived as a lesbian in the "half-shadow, no-man's land...between the boundaries of the sexes." She proudly recalls her illustrious career, but then claims that her private life was a "heart-twisting existence." She tells of finally confiding in her physician and, upon medical examination, being told that she had "infantile" genitals. "They [hadn't] progressed past the stage of those of a fourteen-year-old child," she claimed. Her treatment, injections of female hormones over a six month period, supposedly worked a miracle. Her heterosexuality finally blossomed. She claimed to be happily married to newspaper columnist J.T. Gibson and to be experiencing the "joy of knowing that, after all, I [am] as much a woman as any other woman in the world." She concluded [illegible] article by "vehemently condemn[ing] [illegible] denounc[ing] those who defend deviat[illegible]

Numerous elements of this au[illegible] graphical account ring false. Her claim[illegible] love-starved emotional life ignore her [illegible] documented, long-term lesbian marriage [illegible] treatment which allegedly cured her [illegible] homosexuality was known, even at the ti[illegible] be worthless and ineffectual. Even her h[illegible] marriage turned out to be a fabrication. A[illegible] time later, J.T. Gibson publicly denied that [illegible] ever wed. Bentley's article can only be see[illegible] a desperate, last-ditch effort to salvage [illegible] floundering career.

She was finally able to find a husban[illegible] August 1952, at the Santa Barbara C[illegible] courthouse, Bentley married Charles Ro[illegible] a cook 16 years her junior. She lied abou[illegible] age on the marriage certificate, claiming [illegible] was 36 instead of 45.

In the years following the publication [illegible] Am a Woman Again," Bentley continued [illegible] perform in the Los Angeles area, most [illegible] appearing at the Rose Room in Holly[illegible] She made two appearances on Groucho Mar[illegible] television show. She recorded a single for [illegible] obscure Flame label. Despite her attempts [illegible] burying her lesbian image, Bentley never [illegible] gained her former popularity.

During the last years of her life, Ben[illegible] divorced from Roberts, continued to live [illegible] her mother and became a staunch chur[illegible] worker in the Temple of Love in Christ [illegible] "No matter how late she had to work at nig[illegible] remembered Dr. Bernice L. Smith, "she [illegible] always at church at 12:30 on Sundays. She [illegible] one of the mainstays of my church." Ben[illegible] was about to become ordained as a minis[illegible] when, on January 18, 1960, she died peace[illegible]

in her home, a victim of the season's raging flu epidemic. She was 52.

Gladys Bentley's downfall was clearly due to society's fears and prejudices of homosexuality. The United States cold war society could not tolerate a strong, uncompromising, Afro-American bulldagger; her image and identity had become a threat. But Bentley's ultimate capitulation to social norms and her subsequent repudiation of lesbian life should not be allowed to overshadow her immense accomplishments. She had earned her living—as an openly black lesbian—for decades. She had insisted on being herself during a time when others hid their difference. She had increased public awareness about sexual variations and spoken for the many who could not speak for themselves. The biggest tragedy is that the lesbian and gay movement, which could have supported her through the difficult times and saved her from her ultimate co-optation, just did not come soon enough. ▼

EXCEPT WHERE INDICATED, ALL PHOTOS AND GRAPHICS ARE COURTESY OF ERIC GARBER

This article is part of an on-going study of lesbian and gay life in Harlem during the Prohibition period. A version of this research was presented at the National Women's Studies Association, June 13, 1987, Atlanta, Georgia. Many thanks to Angela Davis and Bruce Miller for their valuable criticisms of earlier drafts of this article, and to Martin Bauml Duberman, Ann Allen Shockley, and Marian Kerr of the El Camino College Library for providing new, important pieces of information.

For More Information...

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Most of Gladys Bentley's songs were never recorded or are unavailable today. A few have been preserved, though, on three different albums produced by Rosetta Records, 115 West 16th Street, Suite 267, New York, New York 10011. They include "How Much Can I Stand?" on Mean Mothers, *"Worried Blues" on* Piano Singer's Blues, *and "Before Midnight" on* Boogie Blues. *We thank Rosetta Records for its help with this article.*

The Anguished Cu

PHOTO BY ANNIE SPRINKLES

Of an 80s Fem:

"I WANT TO BE A DRAG QUEEN"

by Lisa Duggan

TEN YEARS AGO, gay men and lesbians used to argue over the political meanings of style. Gay men often claimed that too many lesbians sported the Drab Dyke look, which the fashionable fellows interpreted as indicative of simple tastelessness or a more complicated, coded kind of sartorial hostility. Lesbians went after drag culture, which they assailed as misogynist—the gender equivalent of a minstrel show.

Now we're all a little embarrassed, and things have changed a lot. This past summer in a little cottage in Cherry Grove, the boys and girls were disagreeing again. But this time, our politically advanced gay male compatriots were complaining that the drag culture, which still predominates in public life in the Grove, was a dinosaur, an apolitical holdover, boring, and dying. We dykes were at a loss—we were going to Drag Search every Sunday night, we planned our schedules around the drag teas at Cherry's and the drag mock-invasion of the Pines on July 4. The fems had taken to borrowing boas from the boys to go dancing on Saturday night. We defended drag as gender theater, as subversive fun. We didn't see why the guys had to be so goddamned serious.

Let me put it another way. A charming and debonair butch lawyer of my acquaintance recently received a camping catalogue in her office mail. Her gay male associate received a copy of the Fredericks of Hollywood catalogue. The camping catalogue was quickly discarded into the circular file, as the lawyer, her associate and another gay male staff member began to fight over the Fredericks catalogue. It had to be xeroxed so everyone could be satisfied—the two boys, and the lawyer's girlfriend.

The point here is that the lesbian sense of style is in a state of transition, from 1970s political puritanism, to a 1980s butch-fem revival with a punk influence. Dykes in their 20s in the major urban centers are looking less like nuns and more like motorcycle club members and their molls. Even more pastoral college campuses are not immune from this shift—the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Yalie lesbians were divided between the "crunchies" (the familiar 1970s college women's center look) and the "lipsticks."

Of course this transition does not apply evenly to all. It is partly a marker of age (younger), geography (urban), politics (sex radicals rather than anti-porners) and culture (Rocky Horror rather than Olivia Records). But the semiotics primarily communicate a new eroticism, a deliberate resexualization of the lesbian image. You can tell by looking that these lesbians may very well do their woman-bonding with a dildo and a pair of handcuffs.

Even though I'm a little older than 25 myself, I've been an enthusiastic fan of the new eroticism. I wanted to be a slut at 16, but the costs were too high. Now, I can at least dress like one and hope. I've bought

I wanted to be a slut at 16, but the costs were too high. Now, I can at least dress like one and hope.

PHOTO BY ANNIE SPRINKLES

every issue of *On Our Backs* and *Bad Attitude*, gone to the strip shows in New York and San Francisco, donned bustiers and borrowed boas. But I have noted a persistent difficulty—lesbians are having a hard time building an eroticized public culture.

Signs of the problem include the closing of San Francisco strip shows, as well as the closing of various lesbian night spots in New York. A symptom can also be found in the developing lesbian drag-envy out in Cherry Grove.

The growing dyke population of the Grove goes to the drag shows, though these are events by men for men. We go because we like the public erotic performance, even though it isn't meant for us. Drag performers present an image which emphasizes display and access a traditionally fem sexual semiotics, in a setting which is fundamentally, indisputably gay. The thrill is a vicarious one but powerful enough to incite fem envy and butch fascination.

So why stop at envy, why not develop our own public erotic culture? We've tried. So far it hasn't worked very well. When lesbians sponsor strip shows, or other fem erotic performances, it is very difficult to "code" it as lesbian, to make it feel queer. The result looks just like a heterosexual performance, and lesbian audiences don't respond to it as subversively sexual, specifically ours. So the regular strip show lost its audience; eventually only tourists attended for the thrill of novelty, not sex.

New York strip shows have performed to indifferent audiences as well. Only one per-

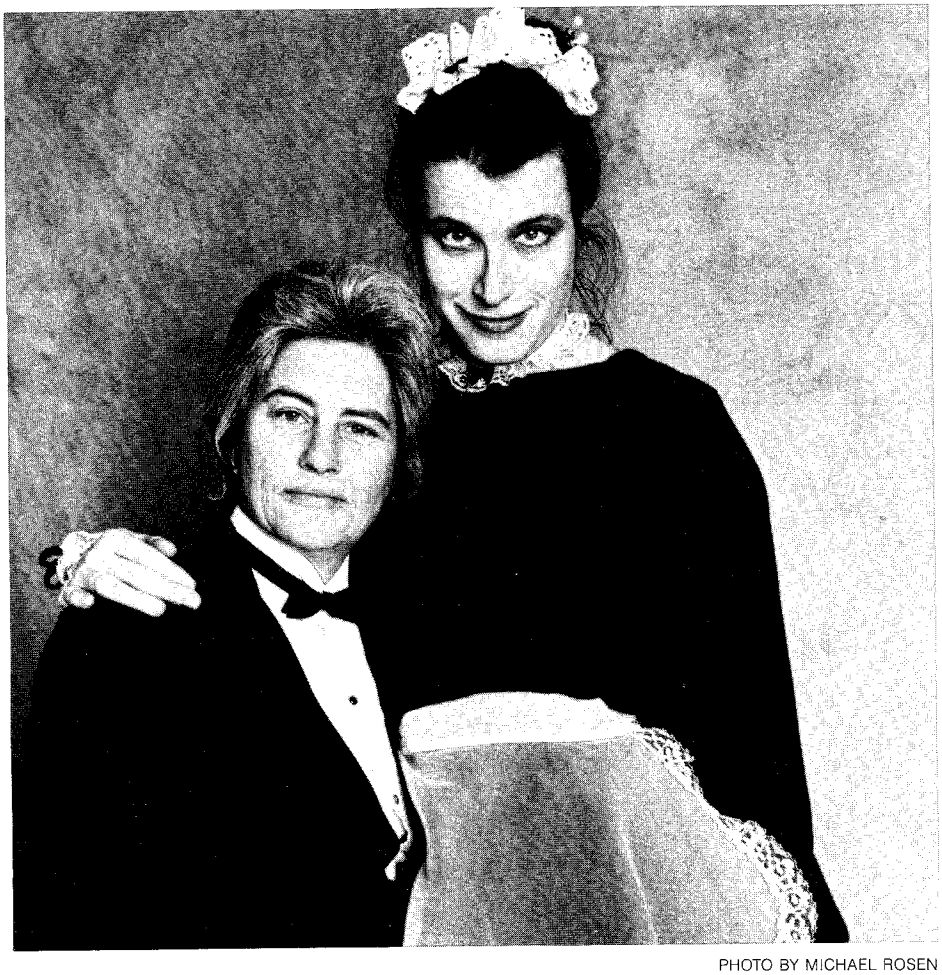


PHOTO BY MICHAEL ROSEN

formance incited unrestrained enthusiasm—a butch/fem lingerie show. The interaction made it queer, and the girls went wild. The implication here is that the butch/fem erotic style (unlike drag) requires a butch or a pair to communicate lesbian sexuality. The problem with this solution lies in the butch style. Butches don't signal display in their dress, they don't generally gravitate to public performance. Trying to get most butches on stage requires a level of coercion even most fems won't stoop to.

I've seen one direction of change which may point a way out of this quandary. A small grouping of dykes have begun to develop a mode of dress which is explicitly sexual, but which transcends the erotic language of butch/fem. We call one of my friends the High Pervert—a designation of a new category. Her dress denotes a particular kinky erotic style, the language of which is more about particular practices than about playing with gender codes. I'm talking spandex, plastic, rubber and metal, a few chains or a leather collar, and a nipple clamp on the belt. If this new style continues to develop and can be coded as specifically lesbian, we may find a way to have our fun and watch it too. Maybe.

In the meantime, I'm still stuck on butch/fem—waiting to see if anyone will show for a James Dean look-alike contest on the Grove this summer (which I will altruistically volunteer to judge), planning my new lesbian photo calendar (having trouble getting models for vol. 1 —Butches in Bondage). If all else fails, maybe the guys will let me be a drag queen...I'm saving up for the dynell... ▼

Lisa Duggan is really (really) a very serious journalist and historian, whose articles on sexual politics have appeared in the Village Voice, Ms. Magazine, *the* Washington Post, Gay Community News *and other periodicals, as well as in anthologies including* Caught Looking: Feminism, Pornography and Censorship *and* Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public.

COMING OUT IN THE AGE OF AIDS

THE NEXT GENERATION

by Robert Marks

AIDS IS A WORD that makes me shiver. But this was not always the case. The first time I heard about AIDS was three months before I came out, while I was waiting tables in a New York restaurant. Another waiter mentioned the "gay plague." She said the whole gay community was buzzing about the disease; she was surprised when I said I hadn't heard of it.

Terrified through my own homophobia, I wondered why this woman thought I could have heard of a plague that only gay people knew about.

I did not come out until I had moved to San Francisco, and by then had forgotten all about the gay plague. Seated snugly, on a couch in a crowded room in Berkeley, I listed to the gay a cappella singing group, the Choral Majority, parody Protestant hymns. It was then that I felt, for the first time in my life, the approval of people who assumed that I was gay. And it was more than their approval, it was their delight. I was buoyed by this revelation for weeks afterward.

But it was not easy for me to find the sexual relationships I felt I needed to confirm my gay identity. Frustrating as this was then, it was fortunate. By the time I consumated my coming out, safe sex was a common prescription.

Many people think that the AIDS epidemic is shutting closet doors, discouraging men from coming out. Why choose to live a life threatened by increased homophobia, and the spector of death and disease? Journalist Robert Marks shared these assumptions until he interviewed psychologists and newly out gay men from different parts of the country. The desire to claim one's true identity is still an enormously powerful force, and, for some men, AIDS has actually made the coming out process easier.

Robert Marks is a free lance writer who has written extensively on AIDS for San Francisco Bay Area papers

"Would it surprise me, if we had a drought, that the wild flowers would open a little later?"

— Don

The AIDS Generation

Now, six years later, AIDS is a word that almost makes me shiver. So much so that when I first thought about the effects the disease might be having on men coming out, I forgot my experience and predicted that the epidemic would discourage the emergence of a whole generation of gay men.

I interviewed 15 gay men and as many therapists who help gay men come out. The response contradicted my knee jerk reaction. The men ranged in age from 19 to 52 and had come out in places all over the country. All but one were white and all were college educated. I mention this to acknowledge the limitations of my conclusions.

I used a variety of channels to reach the men I interviewed, including gay therapists, friends, friends of friends, the rap groups at local gay organizations, the California Men's Gathering, and gay and lesbian organizations at local universities. Most of the psychologists have had a wide range of experience counseling about AIDS and coming out.

San Francisco psychologist Ken Charles stated the obvious truth, "Gay history is the history of oppression and struggle. Not the Pope...nor the police nor McCarthy nor Reagan or AIDS can stop it."

"The mind does amazing things. If you are ready to come out you can take the whole topic of AIDS and say, 'Oh, I can deal with that,' and come out. Whereas, if you're terrified of coming out, you can take the smallest thing—'What if my tailor finds out I'm gay?'—and not come out. AIDS is probably amazingly irrelevant."

But Charles believes that while AIDS may not keep someone in the closet, it will surely color his experience once he comes out. The shape of the community, the way people relate sexually, the way people come out, the political and social situation, all have been affected by AIDS.

Don Clark, the "dean" of gay-affirmative therapists agrees with Charles. He said AIDS has "slowed down the opening of closet doors," but that it will never stop people from coming out. "Would it surprise me, if we had a drought, that the wild flowers would open a little later? It would surprise me if the[y] open at all."

Barriers and Losses

The coming out process affirms a p[erson's] sexual identity through his associat[ion] other gay people. In the past, when [the] community was defined to a large e[xtent] sex, sexual activity provided the lin[k]. has not stopped people from having [sex]. has sex been replaced as the central [ex]ence. But increasingly, being touched [emo]tionally by the epidemic is an important stone in the process of coming out.

Albert Park is having a particular cult time. "My feelings about the ep[idemic] prior to coming out were vague. I kn[ew] clinical things, but it was still very un[real] some degree, it still is. It sounds horr[ible] feel like I need to be directly touched [by] that someone is going to have to die [for] When you ask someone how they ar[e] expect them to say, 'Okay,' 'Not so g[ood]. got in fight with my boss,' or 'I got a r[un] nylons.' Instead, I'd hear, 'A friend [of] died yesterday. Two more were dy[ing] today.' I'm much more aware of the ep[idemic] what it's done to the community, but feel touched by it. In a sense—it sour[ds] lous—I feel disconnected."

Albert, 24 years old and 10 mon[ths] the closet, grew up on Long Island New York City. He said he was aw[are] sexuality long before he came out to else, and put it off through high sc[hool] college. "I went about it very meth[odically]," he said. "I had done a lot of readin[g] very consciously thinking: I'm read[y] self. I was taking things very slowly. I I would come out when I moved to San cisco." He took a class in lesbian [and] literature because he thought it w[ould] him to more gay people. One night [at] he met a friend from the class who [took] a tour of the leather bars, "South of After the tour, they went back to [his] apartment. "He made a fire and [we] Albert said with a grin that told the [rest] first sexual encounter, and then a "Ta-da!"

Albert and his friend dated for about a month and are still on good terms, he said. "In my mind I had established a scenario. I expected a simple one-night stand. When I got something more, with someone I like and respect, that sort of threw me...I expected it to be confusing, kind of horrible. I wasn't expecting something particularly warm."

Albert practices safe sex with a sense of loss. "I think if it was the 'good old days,' that for all the intimidation I feel now, I would feel intimidated [by the sexual freedom]," he said. But, he added, "The exchange of fluids is in itself a very precious thing," and he regrets having come out after AIDS became a danger.

For Albert, who is the son of two Korean psychiatrists who moved to the United States during the Korean War, his ethnicity plays a much larger role in his life than does his reaction to AIDS. White people see their culture as being the norm and all other cultures as foreign, he said. If white people appreciated the fact that they have their own culture, they would more readily appreciate the cultures of other racial and ethnic groups. "Because of my heritage, I'm on the fringe."

The barriers facing Albert sometimes seem insurmountable. "The disease, the disease. After a while, everyone I saw who was a victim of the disease was white. Is it a white gay disease, I asked? It's not a white gay disease. Thank god I saw that. I was living here three months before I saw any reference to people of color. There was a certain sense of alienation even there. I wasn't sure it affected me."

Albert's experience focuses attention on what may be the most profound effect of AIDS on people coming out. The disease in itself has not seemed to daunt these men, but the community it has created may be as intimidating as the heavy sexuality of a decade ago.

People, like Albert, whose coming out is shaped by their connection to the community, may be left out if they do not define their relationship to AIDS.

The Generation Gap

Men who came out before AIDS are different from the men who came out during the epidemic. Those of us who came out before have been living with AIDS, the precariousness of our own lives, and the deaths of our friends. Our assumptions about AIDS and its effects stem from that.

By now I am old generation, and my assumptions are those of one who has spent too much time around people who are dying. Albert taught me that you can ignore AIDS until it damages the lives of people you love. But when nascent gay men hear about AIDS, they hear it as if from outside, they know it is horrible, but they do not feel the horror. For them, the exhilaration of coming out is greater than AIDS. And yet, for some, AIDS offers a route into the community, and an incentive to explore gay sexuality. The image of the community coming together to fight AIDS, nurturing those of us who are sick, honoring those who care, can be welcoming and comforting.

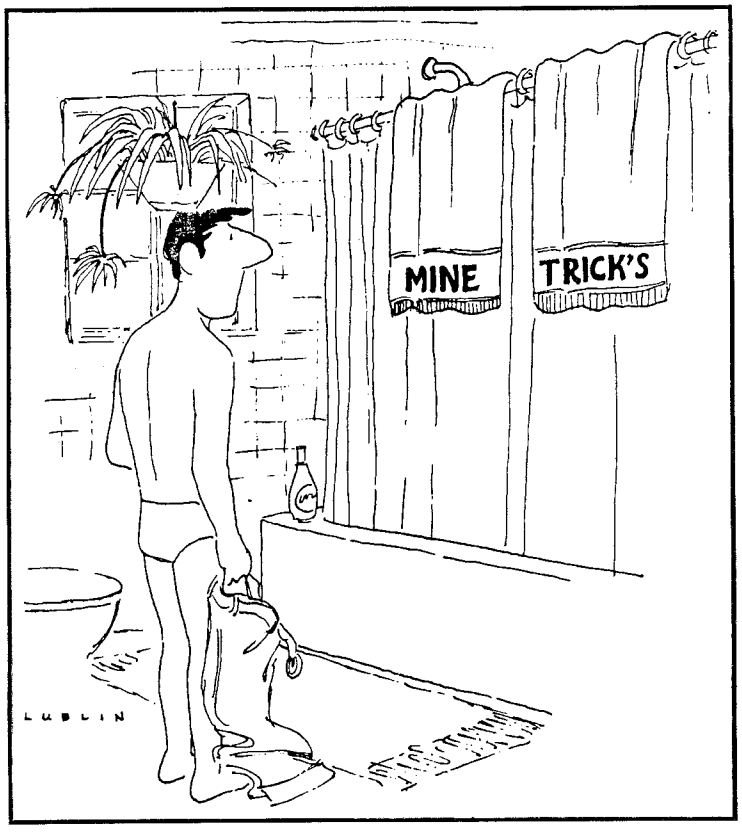
Terry, a 24 year old pre-med student, was encouraged by this image. "One of the things that has made me feel so awful about being gay is that I'll be a pariah," he said. "For me AIDS has helped me to notice gays acting together to do positive things. I'm a little less worried about the prospect of being gay." Since he was 18 he has fantasized about men, but has had sex only with women. He is still uncertain about his sexuality, but said with a grin I could feel through the telephone receiver, "There's a strong basis for wondering."

Terry was the only man to whom I spoke who wavered between defining himself as gay and defining himself as straight or bisexual. His experience was the closest I got to that of the unknowable numbers of people who are choosing not to come out because of AIDS. But his comments confirm that the epidemic is only one of many influences for those who are coming out, and in some ways a positive one.

"Whether people perceive gays as being awful or good doesn't matter. That people are perceiving gays is important, perceiving the true nature of gays," he said. He listed the three effects of AIDS on these perceptions that help him dealing with coming out. "First, AIDS will force people to see gays as they are, that they exist. Second, AIDS shows people taking care of their own." His final point,

"For me AIDS has helped me to notice gays acting together to do positive things."

— Terry



1978 CARTOON BY LUBLIN (RICK FIALA)/COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER STREET

which he called the least important, was that sexual behavior was changing. He said, "Promiscuity disturbed me."

Ken Charles maintains, "Being gay is totally different from what it used to be. Coming out used to be a time of tremendous sexual experimentation. Even therapists would encourage people to go to the baths. I know therapists who hung their heads when AIDS came out, [saying,] 'What have I done?' Peer pressure encouraged sexuality and exploration."

In the earlier days of the epidemic, five years ago, when AIDS was known as GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency), little was known about who was being affected, why, and what was affecting them. People believed they would be not be infected as long as they limited the amount of sex they had and refrained from more extreme sexual practices, such as fist-fucking.

Still, it was apparent that AIDS was an STD (sexually-transmitted disease). Don Clark explains, "Before ever calling it safe sex, there was consensus that we'd have to practice safe sex." What developed over the next five years was a change in the way people m[illegible] the way they had sex.

"There is more love-making and [illegible] sex. Safe sex is not limited sex. Peo[illegible] more expressive in their love-making [illegible] the 'get-it-on-and-get-it-on-fast sexu[illegible] lete.'"

"Everyone is looking to couple up[illegible] Charles said. "People are coming out t[illegible] down instead of coming out into an [illegible] phere to be wild."

Instead of bars and baths, gay me[illegible] each other through volunteer work a[illegible] organizations, safe sex forums, and [illegible] talks. Ken Charles joked that the mos[illegible] mon venue for coming out now is the [illegible] benefit. "Those are the social events in[illegible] people are involved...And funerals [illegible] added with an apology for the "blacke[illegible] mor."

Out of the Big Cities

Tony Phillips grew up in a farm town i[illegible] ana, went to a small Illinois college, and [illegible] summers at the University of Indi[illegible]

Bloomington, a place that he calls the gay mecca of the Midwest.

"I've always been gay. I've always known it. It's just that it wasn't an option," he says. "I thought in the best of all possible worlds I would be gay but I never thought it would happen."

In the summer of 1984, when he was 20, Tony came out. "That was when I was in the situation where I saw it was possible to be happy, to be successful, to be normal. It was also the first time I told anyone else about my feelings."

Tony met John that summer. When Tony found out that John was gay, he struggled to confide in John the truth about his own sexuality. "It took me a long time. It was very hard to tell him. I just remembered how powerful it was, how hard it was to say that." Tony said that weeks later, he was still having trouble saying the words "I am gay," even to John.

Confiding in John, the moment that Tony considers the beginning of his coming out, was a great relief for him. "I felt in fear for so many years that someone would divine my true feelings, that to say them or write them down was terrifying. I knew homosexuals were reviled. I was afraid of rejection from society, family, friends." Compared to the fear of being discovered and the joy of being out, AIDS was a minor issue for Tony. "I was living in the Midwest. It just didn't intrude on my consciousness out there. You just didn't hear about it in the Midwest...I can't remember if we knew what was safe sex. I don't think it was something we thought about. It was not an issue."

In the summer of 1986, Tony moved to Berkeley. He said, "Even as late as the spring of 1986, it didn't change my behavior. But when I moved out here, it did, instantly, and it still is. Just because I was no longer in the sanctuary of the Midwest."

"When I first came out here, I'd get really angry sometimes that I was coming out during this epidemic, that I was finally free of the internal shackles and now there is something else preventing me from doing what I want to do...On the one hand, it's okay that I missed the seventies; on the other hand, there's still desire."

AIDS has affected the way Tony thinks about relationships. "I want to go out with this guy. I wonder if he'll get AIDS or whether he's been exposed to the virus. I think about that and it might change how this relationship progresses." He joked gloomily about being able to determine whether someone is infected by knowing his zip code. Insurance companies have allegedly used this method to weed out those living in gay areas, men whom they consider to be at high risk of contracting AIDS.

"There are a lot of positive aspects that the epidemic has engendered. I don't think it's doing much positive for me," he said, almost grumbling. "Positive, maybe to the community at large, but not to me. I never had time to develop bad habits that need correcting."

"Coming out used to be a time of tremendous sexual experimentation. Even therapists would encourage people to go to the baths."

— Ken

The Obstacle Course

I spoke to six men who came out in places other than the Bay Area. AIDS was not a factor in any of their decisions to come out. All but one, who lives in Los Angeles, echoed Tony's sentiments: AIDS has been a relatively minor concern in their communities.

Psychologist Stephen Morin, who advises San Francisco Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi on AIDS-related issues and is the first openly-gay president of the California Psychological Association, concurs that geography rarely determines whether or not a person comes out.

"People come out where there are supportive people and institutions around [them]," he said. But, even where these are absent, "they come out anyway."

"If circumstances are sufficiently harsh, they never come to feel good about themselves." Institutions like the Mormon church or the fundamentalist churches of the South are "controlling and negative," but not strong enough to stop a man from realizing his sexuality.

"Most people react to new barriers by responding to the challenge," Morin said referring to people isolated in parts of the country where AIDS is one more factor in an already negative environment for gays. "In cities with

"If I consider coming out my second birth, I came out fighting and kicking."

— David

large gay populations, where being gay is a typical experience, it becomes 'normalized.' But when you're real atypical, it becomes a more painful process."

To further gauge the effect of AIDS outside the Bay Area, I spoke to therapists in Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, and New York. Their responses did not differ from those of the San Francisco therapists. They predicted a similar range of effects of AIDS. None said that his experience showed that AIDS was an inhibiting factor in coming out. If anything, the consensus was that the greater visibility of the gay community was encouraging more men to come out.

Jeff Perrotti, a Boston therapist with a private practice who also sees clients at the Gay and Lesbian Counseling Center, said that 40,000 people showed up in June to Boston's gay pride parade compared to 30,000 at last year's parade. "People feel safe. The community is more visible. AIDS education is often gay education."

One young Los Angeles therapist, who asked not to be named, has led four coming-out rap groups over the last two years. He observed that an increasingly visible gay community is "accelerating coming out." He has noticed that his groups are comprised of a greater proportion of young professionals in their late twenties and early thirties. The men who are now coming out are "more thoughtful, a little more serious."

"They are willing to talk about issues in their lives: sexuality, sexual practices, feelings, and fears. Two years ago, they came to establish friendships; they wanted to visit. We would have to bring AIDS up two years ago. Now they bring it up."

Armand Cerbone is the supervisor of the emotional support system for people with AIDS at Chicago's Howard Brown Memorial Clinic, and a volunteer therapist at Horizons Community Services, the city's principal gay social service agency. "I don't get any sense that [AIDS is] dampening the coming out process, but it's complicating it," said Cerbone referring to his own coming out and comparing it to today's less sexual process.

"In Chicago, we now have just under 1000 cases of AIDS. By the end of 1987, there w close to 1200. But two years ago, we had fe than 200 cases. Chicago is seen as a 'safe' c Bars are still the principal social outlet for g in Chicago. In the Midwest, we had our he in the sand about sex. That's changing a changing fast."

Impulse Versus Inhibition

Older men may face additional difficulties coming out. "Older people have establishe whole range of relationships where one is perceived as gay," noted psycholog Stephen Morin. "Coming out creates con with the existing support system."

For the three older men to whom I spo the years of hiding their sexual feelings o weighed their concerns about AIDS

Casey Scott, 52, came out in early 1984 a was euphoric for weeks. "I came out wi bang. I was feeling so good about it—just g ting out and exposing myself to the gay co munity."

"I have known all my life, since my ea est recollection, that I was attracted to me Casey said. "I knew I was gay, or at le different."

Casey was married for 18 years before wife died in 1981 of complications result from diabetes. "I was devastated," he said January 1984, Casey went to a gay thera and came out. Four months later, he ha heart attack, which he attributed to the ac mulated stress of being in the closet.

"After that I came out in earnest. My tial reaction was joy and relief. A weight lifted from my shoulders."

"The gay friends I've gained have be incredible," Casey went on. "We knew ab AIDS. It wasn't a big concern at that point. F me, it was more of a concern to be out. My fear was rejection by friends and family. father had died. My mother was alive. S respected my decision."

Casey said he has not lost a straight fri since coming out. But he does not see the much anymore. The first person he told of sexuality was the wife of an old army bud He wrote to her. She called him, cry

1983 CARTOON BY HOWARD CRUSE / COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER STREET

moved, and pleased that he had told her first.

"The need to be myself is far more important than my fear of associating with people with AIDS. I have no fear of associating with people with AIDS. I try to stay informed. Losing friends and seeing what they go through is the worst."

Al J., a 45-year-old patent attorney, followed his impulses to experience his sexuality, but not without some hesitation. "I've done an awful lot since I've come out." Al has had sex with 35 men over two years, but that number would have been higher if he had not been worried about AIDS. He said he practiced safe sex in all of these experiences.

"The first person I knew who came down with AIDS died three weeks ago. Then two others were diagnosed. I'm beginning to question whether safe sex is safe. I'd like to take the [antibody] test but I'm not ready for a positive."

Al blames his late coming out on the control exerted by his father and ex-wife. "I've let people control me," he said. "I didn't rebel. That's probably what held me back."

Although Al hoped to major in history, his father told him to get an engineering degree because it would lead to better-paying jobs. "Then he decided it was time for me to get married so he could have grandchildren." Al was married for 19 years to an older woman, who made the decisions for the couple.

He has not told his father yet, even though his parents are supportive of a brother and sister who are both gay, but his two daughters, who are 18 and 20 years old, know and accept his sexuality. "At first, it was difficult to get together with anyone because of my fear of AIDS. If I wasn't already in a dating situation, I probably wouldn't be looking," Al said. "It's depressing...It's put a damper on things. If I knew someone was a positive, I probably wouldn't sleep with him."

In a study of 1000 gay men in San Francisco that he conducted, Leon McKusick found no correlation between gay men's feelings about AIDS and their perceptions of themselves as gay, their developmental history as gay men, or their relationships. While this was not directly related to coming out, McKusick said it is indicative. "I haven't seen

one study that shows AIDS has an effect on one's identity," he said.

"AIDS comes on the back of several resistances that gay men have used to avoid intimate contact with each other," McKusick relates. "Ten years ago we said, 'I don't want to get involved because he'll find out I have low self-esteem.' Now it's because, 'I'm seropositive or was promiscuous in 1981.' The resistance to getting close has changed, but the resistance is still there."

McKusick said that ten years ago people would have a paralytic fear of sex. "Then it was, 'Will he rape me?' Now, it's 'Will he kill me?' I treat people with a real contagion fear."

Boston therapist Jeff Perrotti said that for most people, "the natural reaction is denial. For a lot of gays, there is tremendous anxiety. They are either denying their sexuality—'I'm not going to have sex until they find a vaccine. My sexuality is not that important. There are other things to being gay than sex'—or they discount AIDS." For others, safe sex ruins the spontaneity of sex. Perrotti said that men just out of the closet are often in the "honeymoon stage" of coming out. "Usually they're so excited about coming out that there is nothing bad."

One of Perrotti's clients was suicidal before coming out. The client imagined that being gay would be horrible. "Now he doesn't think about death at all," says Perrotti. "Death is being in the closet. This man says, 'I want to be concerned [about safe sex], but I can't. I spent so much time thinking about death. I'm not going to now.'"

Recalling conversations from his stint at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation hotline, Felix Smith, who has just finished a certificate program in Gestalt therapy, summarized the scenario best. "AIDS is a natural substitute for a lot of other anxieties: to have partners or not to have partners; sex; coming out. When you ask hotline callers, 'What have you done to put yourself at risk?' you get absurd reactions. I remember a woman who was having trouble with her marriage. She kissed another man. As a result, she had terrific AIDS anxiety for months. She called the hotline. You tell her that there is no risk and she doesn't want to hear it. She does have a problem, but it's the problem in the marriage that she doesn't want to face."

Before writing this article, I had a sense that AIDS would diminish the ranks of the gay community, through the discouragement of nascent gays, as well as through death. I think what is clearer now is that AIDS is only one of the myriad of obstacles to coming out.

David Morris, a 24 year old music student at the University of California, Berkeley, has found that coming out is still an empowering rite. "[Coming out] was like being in love and not having an object of affection; it was elation for months."

He remembers sitting in a lecture on Benjamin Britten. The professor spoke of how Britten's music was about the individual versus society and that, in fact, Britten was gay and felt pitted against society. The professor announced, "As a gay man, it's interesting to study this." David said, "It really moved me. It was the first time in my life that I felt someone I respected who was not only not ashamed to be gay but proud of it."

"If I consider coming out my second birth, I came out fighting and kicking. It was a challenge for the generation before us to be out and aware. I'm standing on their shoulders." ▼

"WHY AREN'T YOU OUT DANCING?"

by Hunter Pearson

MY FIRST meeting with Ed. A week into his diagnosis he is lying back in his hospital bed, staring at the television when I come in. He looks confused when I identify myself. Although we have spoken on the phone, I can tell he expected someone older – at least someone who looks as though she's been around the block once. He is 44, and I am 23. I breathe deeply, push a chair up beside the bed, and park myself. Without speaking, I try to let him know that I am there for him if he needs me, and that unless he wants me to, I'm not budging. In all, a tentative first meeting.

I hold his hand as he tells me how the nurse had difficulty finding a vein for his IV. Ed is afraid of needles. He recounts the story again and again until it seems to have lost its sting. When he's explained every miserable detail several times, he seems to have mastered the morning's events. He looks at me for the first time, really. Weeks later he will tell me this was the first time since he had been put in the hospital that someone had listened to *him* talk. He fixes me with a challenging look and asks me "Why do you do this work, anyway? You're only 23, why aren't you out dancing?" So, before Ed tells me his story, I tell him mine.

I came out of the closet like a bat out of hell in September, 1985. That Christmas, I hoped to go home knowing my family still loved me. I wanted their support during that most difficult of times. Instead, I got an almost stereotypical phobic reaction and one clear message: this is not your home.

I spent that Christmas with my lover's family. They all welcomed me warmly, but most important was the greeting my lover's cousin Dave and his boyfriend, Joe, gave me. They were several years older than I, and their kindness made a crucial difference then. Instead of drowning in bitterness over being rejected by my family, I looked at my lover and at Dave and Joe and thought, "OK, here is your family. When the chips are down, these are the people who will care for you."

I extended this arguably naive faith to the gay community at large. Out there somewhere were people with whom I share an experience. This common denominator, I reasoned, would make me feel at home wherever there were other gay people. Somehow, during that visit I got myself back on my feet. I also learned that Dave had AIDS. He looked perfectly healthy to me; not knowing much about the disease at the time, I suppose I just stored the information. But my involvement in AIDS work had already begun. I didn't think much of it at the time, but

Hunter Pearson is a volunteer for a Bay Area AIDS support services organization.

my introduction to gay people had been an introduction to AIDS as well.

Time passed. My lover and I broke up. Dave died. I became involved with another woman, and in June of 1986, we found ourselves in San Francisco. I thought nothing of the fact that I was really a stranger to the city. For months prior to my arrival, I had been thinking of the people I would be surrounded by in San Francisco as my family. As far as I was concerned, I was home at last. But just as the first gay men who had taken me under their wings had been living with an illness, so was my new city. My first gay pride parade was as much an AIDS parade as anything else, and it seemed clear to me: just as my new family had cared for me when I was in trouble, so should I care for members of my family who were ill.

Every AIDS patient I've met as a volunteer has needed something different from me. Most of all, Ed wanted a chronicler, someone new who would listen to his stories, someone to bear witness to a life lived. He left me a lot of stories to tell.

One of the first big differences between us that Ed and I had to deal with was the gap in our ages. I didn't remember either Kennedy assasination. I had to ask who was in *Barbarella.* I was eight when US troops pulled out of Vietnam. Ed was 19 when he was drafted to fight there. Ed took it upon himself to educate me, and be educated by me. Between discussions of the afterlife and AZT, Ed and I compared notes on generations. He asked me a lot of questions. Sometimes I wondered if he was trying to learn all he could about people my age because he saw our friendship as his last chance to get all his questions answered about us kids before he died. I also know things about his age group, now, that I never would have tried to find out: Jackie Onassis was their model for grieving graciously; lots of them thought they were going to Vietnam to fight communism, but changed their minds when they got there; gay people sometimes had great fun before Stonewall. News to me. After Ed died, *Barbarella* came on TV. My new lover groaned and went out for pizza. I watched it, and against my better feminist judgement, I fell in love with that film.

Ed was not a feminist, but he was never disrespectful of me. I went over to his house a few weeks before he went into the hospital for the last time, and he greeted me at the door with a wide grin. "I masturbated today," he told me proudly. It had been months since he had been able to be at all aroused. I congratulated him happily, but a familiar urgency had crossed his face. "I was thinking of you," he told me earnestly. I was startled, and didn't know what to say. Sexual tensions had never existed between us, and I was trying to think of how to handle the situation. He continued, "I was thinking, what is it like for a woman, you know, an orgasm? I never thought about women before, but it must be different. Is it? What is it like for a woman?" He didn't seem to notice my relieved laugh, and would not be satisfied until I sat down and began to describe how an orgasm felt to me. I still wonder at that conversation. I was very touched that he, a gay man with what he knew then was a limited time on this earth, should spend an afternoon getting clear on how a woman experienced orgasm.

In the end, the long talks weren't possible. The last time I saw him, I just sat by his bed, holding his foot lightly. He went in and out of a shallow sleep, sometimes looking at me.

ILLUSTRATION BY JANET BOGARDUS

Did he recognize me? I still don't know. When I had sat for an hour, I left, kissing his forehead, telling him, "I love you Ed." He died later that afternoon.

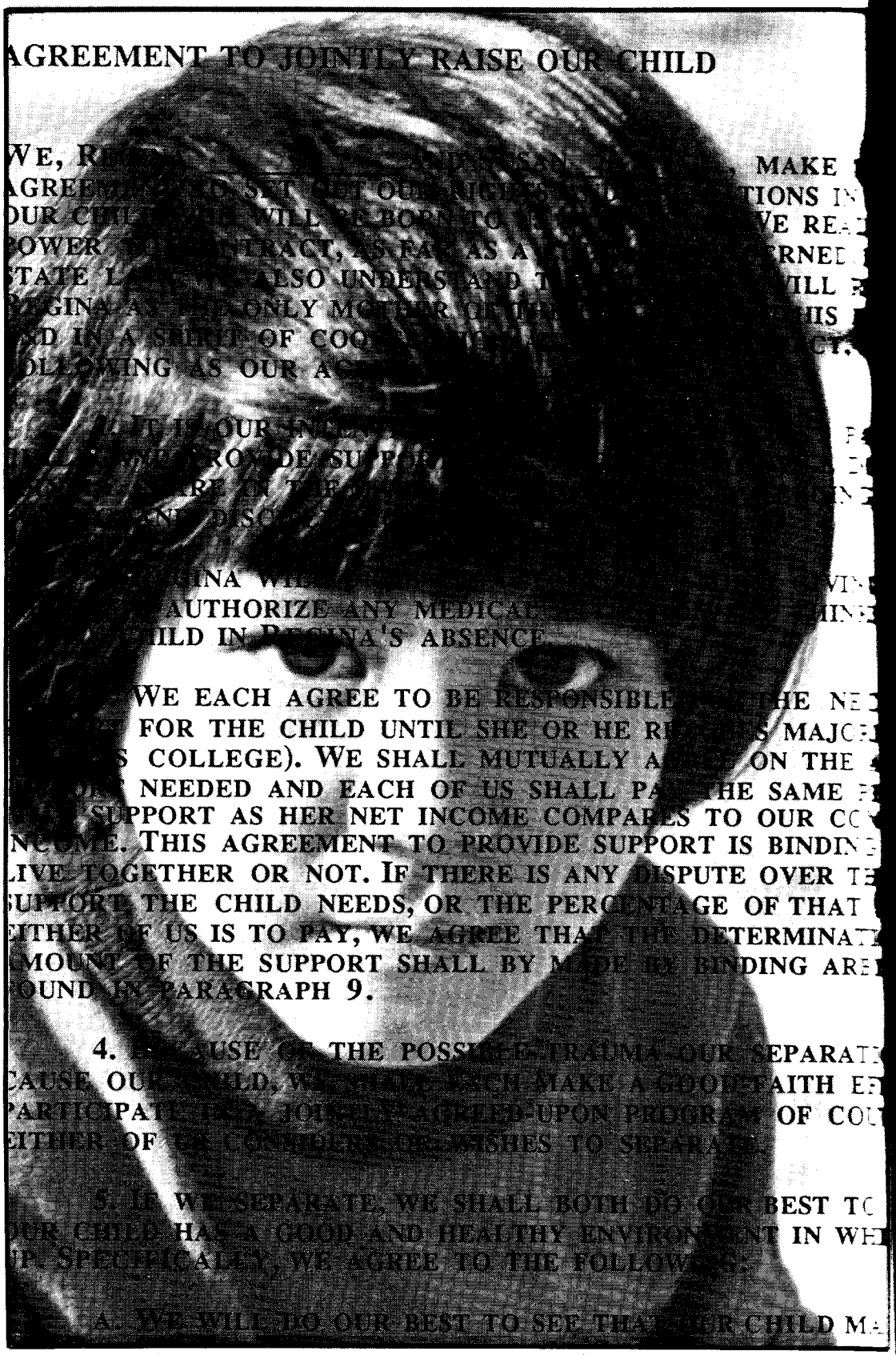
A lot of people, even some lesbians, still seem to think that a non-IV drug using lesbian doesn't have a lot to worry about with regards to AIDS. Hearing this reminds me of what my mother used to tell me about the second World War. "It was awful," she would say. "All the young men we knew were dying." Today, the men I love who die leave friends and lovers uncomforted, terrified of being diagnosed, and often suffering from survivors' guilt. My mother lost beaus, and I am losing fathers, brothers, friends. For this non-IV drug using lesbian, there is plenty to worry about with regard to this disease. But I have to do more than worry.

One thing I've done is to become an emotional support volunteer. If my brothers *are* going to die, I don't want them to do it alone. If my friends must lose their lovers, I want to help them bear that pain.

But another thing I do is get frustrated by the kind of gratitude I have just expressed. I heard a Metropolitan Community Church minister say once that AIDS was a blessing because it would lead to a cure for cancer. And there are always the people who say AIDS has made the gay male community "grow up." I hear these things sometimes, and think to myself that the world can *keep* its cancer cure, and its "grown up" gay male community. None of these "hidden blessings" will bring back Dave, or Ed, or any other of my friends. It's hard to find comfort in them.

Just a few days before he died, Ed turned to me, from staring at his hospital TV screen, and said, "Well, I suppose that if it hadn't been for all of this, I never would have met you!" I smiled and told him that, although I thought a lot of myself, I didn't think I was quite worth getting AIDS for. He laughed until he coughed, and when he finished, we sat quietly, both of us smiling, a little sadly. ▼

PHOTO BY SMOKEY CORMIER
COLLAGE BY SMOKEY CORMIER AND E.G. CRICHTON



BABY M & THE GAY FAMILY

by Cheri Pies & Francine Hornstein

THE RECENT COURT case involving the future of Baby M brought national attention to some of the legal, social, and ethical questions raised by the new ways in which people are bringing children into their lives. Although surrogacy arrangements are not a common way for lesbians and gay men to create families, the circumstances and judicial rulings surrounding this case will have an impact on the increasing numbers of gay people who are choosing to become parents with the assistance of new reproductive technologies.

There have always been lesbian and gay parents. Some people raise children conceived in previous heterosexual relationships, while others have or adopt children after coming out. Over the last ten years, there has been a virtual baby boom in the lesbian and gay community. Lesbians are having and raising children on their own, with a partner and/or with their donor, while increasing numbers of both lesbians and gay men are becoming foster and adoptive parents. For many, these processes involve donor insemination, contracts between biological and non-biological parents, attempts to adopt openly as same-sex couples, and occasionally, surrogacy agreements. Between 1,000 to 3,000 children in the United States and Europe have been conceived by lesbians using donor insemination, according to Roberta Achtenberg, Directing Attorney of the Lesbian Rights Project in San Francisco. Gay men have often been the sperm donors in these conceptions.

Cheri Pies, M.S.W., M.P.H. coordinates AIDS education in Alameda County, California, and is the author of Considering Parenthood: A Workbook for Lesbians. *Francie Hornstein is a health educator and mother of two children.*

The process of building a family can be challenging, exciting, and frightening—all at the same time. As many of us are well aware, the decision to parent is not an easy one. However, for lesbians and gay men, in addition to the usual issues which must be considered, there is a wealth of profound and puzzling questions to address, as well as complex and exciting choices to make.

We are often plagued by the demons of internalized homophobia, voices which cause us to ask whether it is "okay" for us to have children or whether, as gay people, we could even be "good" parents. We question if it is fair to pass on to our children the burden of pioneering new family forms—forms which can be as different as the people who make up the family.

We ask ourselves whether we will have the courage to come out to our relatives or on our jobs, so that we do not pass on the message of internalized homophobia to our children. Then we wonder, often with unquenchable curiosity, what effect our coming out will have on our children. How will others, who find out about our sexual orientation, treat our children? How will our families of origin react, especially if our child is their non-biological grandchild, niece, or nephew? Our choosing to become parents may relieve our parents' fears of never having grandchildren, but will it be to their chagrin, or to their delight?

Along with these concerns, we ask ourselves if our new families can survive the constant scrutiny to which they are subjected from the outside world—not only from our families of origin, but from many segments of society, including the legal system. [illegible] dren become an integral part of more [illegible] and gay families, we are made po[illegible] aware of how this culture defines "[illegible] families—and what the consequences [illegible] you fall outside this definition.

Our new family configurations threa[illegible] basic unit of our culture—the nuclear [illegible] Gay people are creating families in the [illegible] of a larger culture undergoing major c[illegible] in family formation. Unmarried hete[illegible] als are having children by choice. Oper[illegible] tion, in which birth parents maintain s[illegible]

What can we learn from the experiences of others who seek to create families out of what some might call "unusual circumstances" or "delicate arrangements?"

volvement with adoptive parents and [illegible] biological child, is increasing. Surroga[illegible] ranged both commercially and infor[illegible] among friends or relatives, is on the [illegible] These are all practical solutions to e[illegible] people, who might not otherwise be able [illegible] so, to bring children into their imme[illegible] families.

WE ARE NOT alone, however. Wha[illegible] we learn from the experiences of others [illegible] seek to create families out of what some [illegible] call "unusual circumstances" or "delicate [illegible] rangements?" Mary Beth Whitehead and [illegible] liam and Elizabeth Stern had such a situa[illegible]

In 1985, Whitehead signed a contra[illegible] which she agreed to be artificially insemina[illegible] with semen from William Stern for the s[illegible] purpose of carrying a pregnancy to term a[illegible] giving the baby born from this pregnan[illegible] the Sterns, a married couple who felt [illegible] were unable to have children in any o[illegible] way.

Within 48 hours after the birth of this baby, later to be known as Baby M, Whitehead decided she wanted to keep the child, refused the fee, and took the baby home to be raised as part of her own family. She had a change of heart, and no longer wanted to relinquish custody of the child to the Sterns. The Sterns, seeing this as a violation of the contractual agreement they had with Mrs. Whitehead, subsequently took her to court for breaking her agreement. What began in the Baby M case as an intent to create a new family became a media blitz and an all out battle between two families.

In the spring of 1987, a court in Hackensack, New Jersey, upheld the contract, awarded William and Elizabeth Stern full custody of the child, and stripped Mary Beth Whitehead of all parental rights. Since that time, the New Jersey Supreme Court has agreed to hear Whitehead's appeal and at the present time has granted her two hours visitation per week with Baby M.

The Baby M case was one of the first court battles to focus public attention on the conflicts which can arise from many of the new reproductive technologies and parenting arrangements. Regardless of the final outcome in this case, the Baby M decision demands careful attention and analysis, especially as growing numbers of lesbians and gay men pursue various new options in their efforts to become parents. At worst, the Baby M decision could prove to be a menacing one for lesbians and gay men. At best, we can learn some useful lessons from this case.

MANY LESBIANS who began having children by donor insemination used gay donors. These men either were friends or acquaintances who agreed to be known to the mother and child, or men who donated semen anonymously in arrangements facilitated by friends or physicians. After the first few years of informal arrangements between these women and their donors, some attorneys in the lesbian rights movement suggested that it might be wise to write contracts to clarify the specific intent of the arrangements. It was thought that these contracts would delineate the rights and responsibilities of each party as well as limit those rights and responsibilities.

The advent of AIDS has had a tremendous impact on the choices lesbians and gay men are making about conception through insemination—and indirectly, on the use of contracts. Many gay men who wanted to donate sperm have been unable to do so because of their positive antibody status. Others are finding it exceedingly difficult to donate semen without repeatedly taking the AIDS antibody test to confirm their negative antibody status.

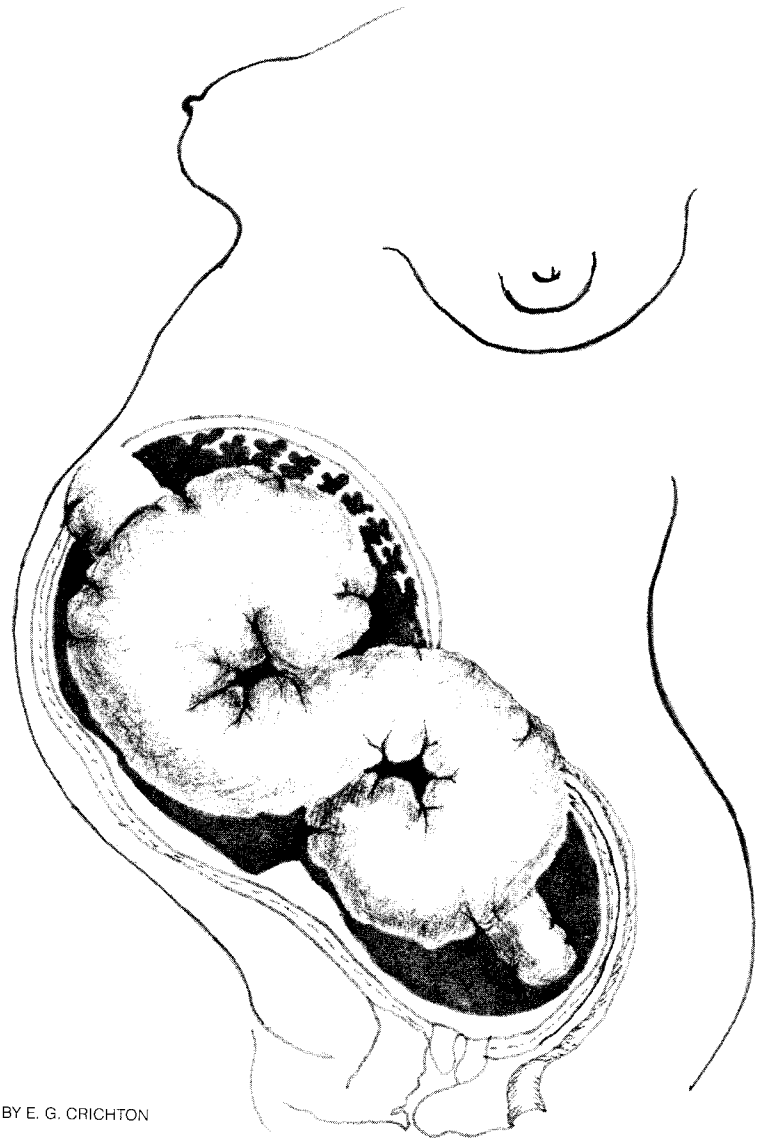


ILLUSTRATION BY E. G. CRICHTON

The growing shift away from using gay men as donors has meant that many lesbians have been choosing heterosexual men as donors and relying more heavily on the use of contracts in order to protect their rights and the rights of their co-parent. In some states, a licensed physician must arrange artificial insemination to provide the necessary protection. However, many lesbians are turning to contracts in the event that the donor may have a "change of heart" and threaten to take the child or file for joint custody.

As Donna Hitchens, an attorney who has litigated many gay parenting cases, has explained, "Judges understand contracts better than they understand artificial insemination." In addition to speaking the language of the court, contracts are useful tools in helping to clarify the relationships among the adults and children involved in conception through insemination. Simply writing up the contract provides a valuable forum for exploring the complex issues that need to be addressed in planning to have children.

In the Baby M case, the court upheld the legal contract as a binding agreement—even in the face of conflicting laws and rights. Some lesbians and gay men feel that the court's decision to enforce the surrogacy agreement in the Baby M case was an affirmation of the value of contracts in new parenting models. Does this mean that the contracts between lesbians and gay men who are their donors will be honored in courts? And if a dispute arises between a lesbian mother and a donor, will the courts now be a safer place to seek resolution?

LET'S NOT FOOL ourselves. This was not a decision designed to benefit anyone who appears remotely different from what society deems normal or acceptable. It was a decision which enhanced the legal system's authority when it comes to determining who is fit to be a parent. Do not be misled by those who see this as a victory for contracts. In many ways, the Baby M decision speaks to our greatest fears.

For years, the courts have been arbitrarily denying child custody to men and [illegible] who came out after they had their [illegible]. The Baby M decision goes further and [illegible] particularly potent sting to it. In no [illegible] terms, it says that if society thinks [illegible] person is doing is wrong to begin with [illegible] Whitehead's decision to bear a child [illegible] other family), then that person is at [illegible] being punished by losing some basic [illegible] biological, reproductive, parenting, or [illegible]

If the first surrogacy case to go to [illegible] involved an agreement between a gay [illegible] a gay couple contracting with a woman [illegible] a child for them, and if the woman changed her mind about giving up the baby [illegible] Whitehead did, the results may have been very, very different. We would have had a trial in the court and in the media that would not only delve into issues of [illegible] cial, economic, and emotional stability [illegible] also into the areas of sexual preference [illegible] and related topics. In comparison to [illegible] family, the court and the press may have thought that the Whiteheads looked like a family, after all.

Lesbians and gay men who choose to become parents (through surrogacy or [illegible] means) could be judged to be inappropriate parents solely on the basis of sexual orientation, their accompanying life choices [illegible] friends, activities, or motivation for wanting children. Certainly a judge's decision [illegible] be influenced by his or her personal opinion, experience, and education regarding [illegible] sexuality, previous court decisions in [illegible] parenting matters, and the community [illegible] mate regarding gay rights.

The contract in the Baby M case was [illegible] upheld simply for the sake of upholding a written agreement between two parties. [illegible] tracts are not iron-clad documents. A contract can be nullified on the grounds that it violates someone's constitutional rights. But no one made a skillful argument that parts of the contract may have violated Whitehead's constitutional rights (although the judge did validate the part of the contract which would have compelled Whitehead to have an abortion if any genetic diseases were discovered).

Katha Pollit pointed out in an article in [illegible]

Nation, the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Organization for Women did not assist Whitehead in her case. Feminist and civil rights advocates have not yet clarified a collective stance on the civil rights questions posed by surrogate arrangements or the reproductive rights of surrogate mothers who find they want to change their minds.

Clearly, Whitehead, and all women involved in surrogacy arrangements, must take responsibility for their actions. But often in this kind of agreement, there is no room to retrace your steps. In Whitehead's contract with the Sterns, there was one glaring omission—no clause allowing for a grace period in which Whitehead could change her mind, were she to have a change of heart.

When Whitehead realized that she could not give up the baby she carried for nine months, she fought simultaneously to defend her right to make a mistake and to keep her baby—both honorable positions. Yet the woman was vilified; she found little public sympathy. The prevailing social attitude seems to be that any woman who would use her body to carry a pregnancy and give the baby away deserves to suffer the consequences.

It may serve us well, if surrogacy arrangements are to continue in any form, to learn from the experiences of birth mothers who have relinquished their babies for adoptions. Many of these women look back on their decisions to give up their children and now feel it was not what they wanted to do, but what they had to do given the situation at the time. Many say that could never have imagined the pain and grief they would feel over the years from giving up a child for adoption—especially when they have no knowledge of the child's whereabouts or circumstances. We cannot begin to predict how a woman who chooses to be a surrogate may feel following the birth and consequent delivery of a child to another person or couple. But we can begin to include clauses in surrogacy agreements that allow for a change of heart, or some kind of relationship if the birth mother so chooses.

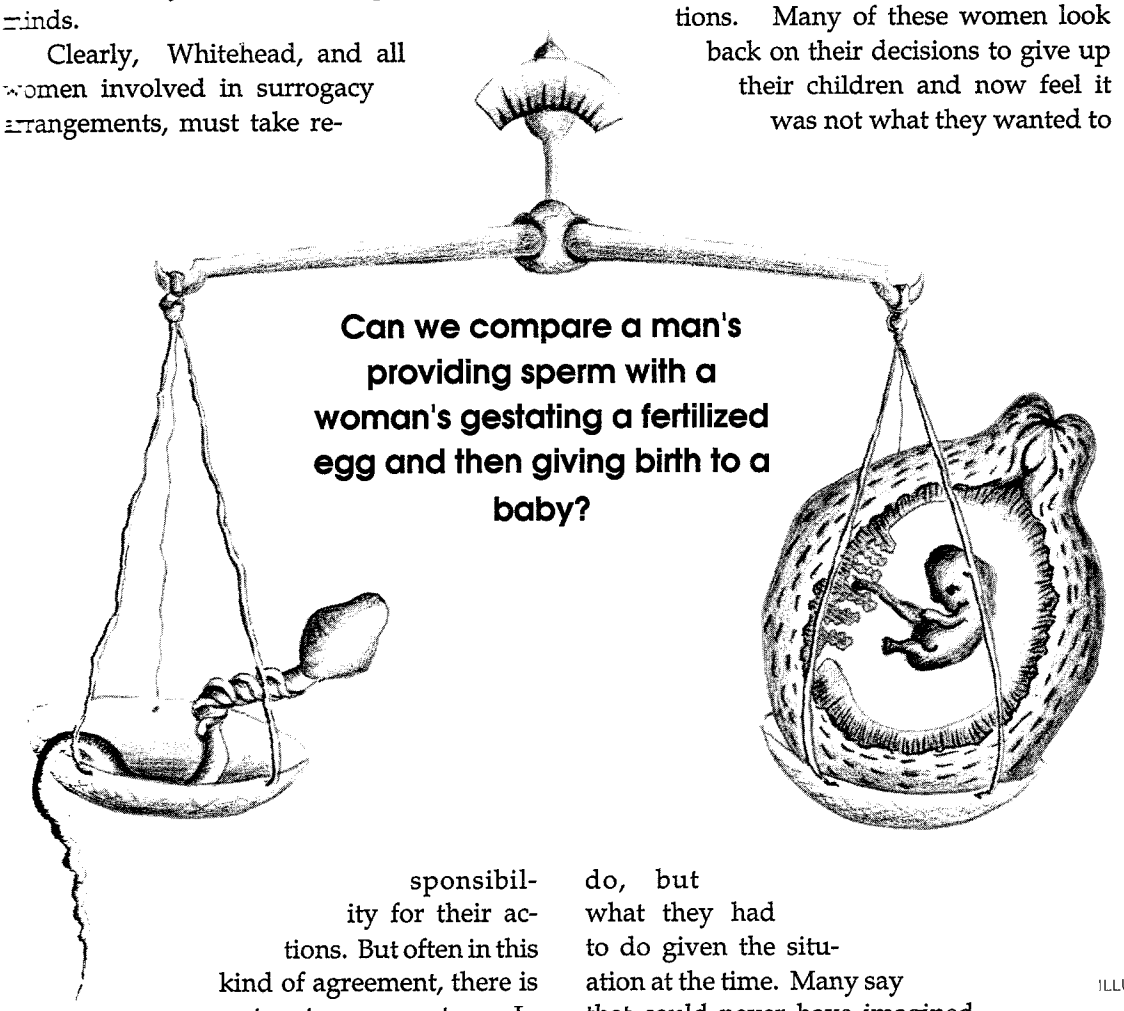
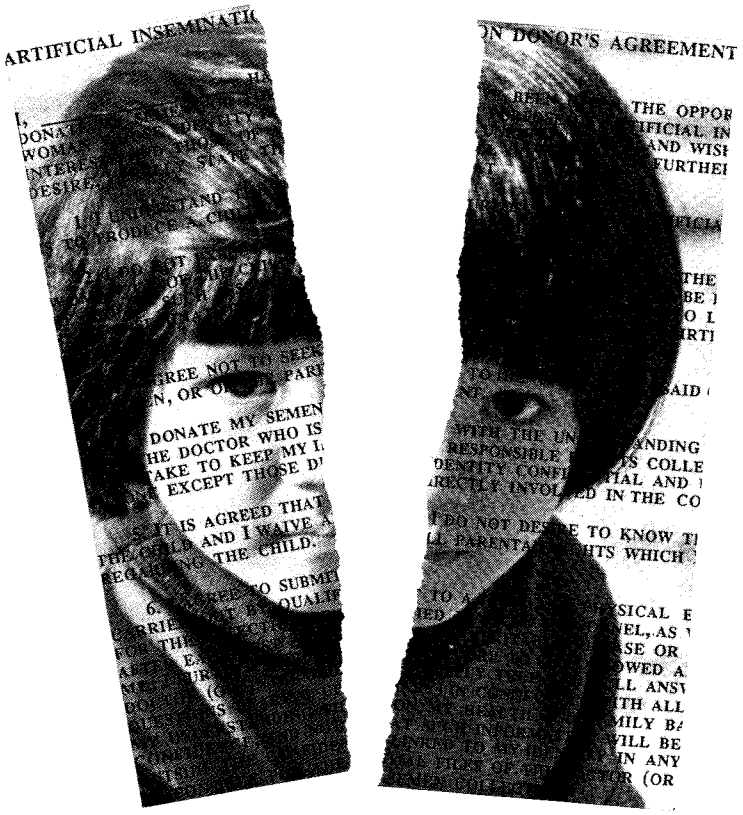


ILLUSTRATION BY E. G. CRICHTON



The question of what to do about a change of mind can surface with regard to donor insemination as well. Having children can change people in ways they had never before experienced or anticipated. After the birth of a child, the issues about custody, parenting, and parent-child bonding are more complex and unpredictable. We must ask ourselves how much weight do "intentions" bear when we are discussing decisions for which there are no readily predictable outcomes. Can we compare a man's providing sperm with a woman's gestating a fertilized egg and then giving birth to a baby? How does Mary Beth Whitehead's change of heart compare with the change of heart on the part of a man who donates his sperm, relinquishes all paternal rights and responsibilities, and then discovers later that he truly wants to have a relationship with his biological child?

In California, the case of "Mary K." brought attention to just this kind of situation. A lesbian had a verbal agreement with her donor, who was an acquaintance. He agreed to donate sperm so that she could become pregnant. He indicated no interest in co-parenting, and she wanted no involvement from him in this capacity. After the birth of the child, however, the donor had a "change of heart" and took Mary K. to court to secure his parental rights. The donor won his case, and, despite several appeals on Mary's part, he maintained joint custody of the child. will we react if and when other sperm d change their minds? If women are cha by parenting, aren't men also open to d felt emotions and change as a result c birth of a child?

THE BABY M decision may lead to situations in which lesbians and gay men themselves in adversarial roles vis-a-vis enting and the legal system. In the shadc this decision, gay men may feel they have edge over lesbians because the father (ir Baby M case) was granted greater than e rights over the child. This decision imp that paternal rights will be upheld in cust cases involving donor insemination—rega less of what the contract between donor a mother(s) says. We could find ourselves courtroom battles slinging our internali sexism and homophobia at one another i effort to be the one who wins the child.

As people pursue new ways of crea families, we are at risk of finding ourselves the hands of a legal system which is using standards for addressing new issues. The standard of what constitutes an accepta family—a mother, father, and children liv

in the same household—often no longer applies. The legal tradition of deciding disputed family cases "in the best interest of the child" remains a worthy goal. Yet, it continues to be open to judicial misinformation, ignorance, and prejudice.

Rather than deny the existence of new families or condemn the potential good that can come from them, we need to advocate for support of all those involved in new family evolution. In addition, we must look within our own communities to establish other areas for the discussion and resolution of the legal, social, and ethical questions new parenting configurations have raised.

Over the past few years, discussions of some of these questions have occurred among feminist and gay rights attorneys and activists, lesbian and gay parents, and others concerned about the impact of new reproductive technologies. We desperately need to provide a place for lesbians and gay men to come together to discuss and clarify the range of parenting options available to them. Many groups for lesbians considering parenthood and for lesbian mothers needing support have already been established, mostly in metropolitan areas in which there is an active lesbian/gay community. There have been few such groups for men, gay or straight, who are considering being donors and/or involved fathers. Such groups could provide an essential place for open-ended discussion of the many emotional, ethical, and complex issues men certainly face when considering being a donor. Certainly, the question of whether these men are fathers or simply donors is a highly charged one in the lesbian and gay community, and we could benefit from a community-wide focus on the concerns that such a question raises.

It may be an ideal situation for some men simply to be donors, with no paternal rights and responsibilities. For these men, the contribution of their sperm is a loving act that connects them to a generalized future. For other men, however, the donation of sperm with no parental involvement would be an unethical or perhaps an unbearable loss; for some, it might be intolerable. It is time we encouraged men to look more closely at their feelings about being donors. We can no longer hope that they will donate their semen and "forget" about the potential offspring that could result from that donation.

There is also a growing need to educate the attorneys, judges, school-workers, health care providers, and mental health workers who will undoubtedly be called upon to work with people in these families born of new reproductive technologies. They must be encouraged to explore their thoughts, feelings, values, and beliefs regarding these new family forms. We must provide them with an opportunity to see that our families are healthy outgrowths of the individuals who form them. Education for those working with our families must consider new public policies for health insurance coverage, public benefits, taxes, and other related issues as well.

In the midst of the development of new families there is great hope for the future. The Baby M decision has caused many of us to pause and reflect on what needs to be done now to avoid a future that could threaten the fabric of our families and the growing alliances between lesbians and gay men. We have been warned. We can prepare ourselves, our partners in parenting, our families, and the community in which we live. No one ever said being a lesbian or gay man would be easy. And no one ever said that parenting would be easy. Put the two together and we have a challenging task ahead of us. We have faced many tough situations in the years since the first gay rights march in New York City. We will face many more. Let us look at the Baby M decision as a way of building community unity to protect ourselves, our children, and the families we are building or hope to build in the years to come. ▼

Editor's note: as OUT/LOOK went to press, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that commercial surrogate motherhood contracts are illegal. However, it allowed Baby M to remain with William Stern with continued visitation from Mary Beth Whitehead. A new custody hearing will be held. In restoring Whitehead's parental rights, the court enjoined Elizabeth Stern from adopting the child.

WORKLOAD

by Robert Glück

In Workload, *Robert Glück continues his explorations of erotic life in the play of emotions and events that he began in his novel and stories. Pornography has entered his life — teasing meaning from fantasy and haunted by the catastrophe of AIDS.*

I'VE STARTED jerking off to porn; I'm allowing into my sex life some hopelessness, capitulating to loneliness, glamorizing and eroticizing it. There are three horny clerks, "American youth," regular guys—white jockey shorts, white socks, white cocks, essential jock. Larry is a baseball cap, a wiry frame, a "Good morning Mrs. Cleaver" smirk; J.T. is a blue Oxford shirt, sneakers, brown hair, brown eyes; Sean is jeans and a blond reserve. I guess it's naive to ask these simple images to contain my loneliness; I guess only these images are empty enough to contain my loneliness. The future will take this contradiction for granted.

In one photo Larry fucks J.T., the two observed by Sean, whose tilted gaze is like a peephole in a pillow book. I can't help liking J.T. for his ripe body, juicy really, fucked between tan lines between cheeks between marrow bones on his hands and knees, his body not even very manicured, but floral, generous as a peony. How flattering to all of us, his body and pleasure. I think of medieval versions of naked men and women, pink sacks with feet and the signifying appendages, insulting to the species, closer to the truth.

The still represents motion (the legend at the top of the page reads "Slam It In"), but conveys a stronger impression of immobility. I meditate on J.T.'s rosy ass, immobile receptor. If J.T.'s ass is supposed to be passive, Larry's rigid cock hardly embodies a principle of action—its motion is internal, like a TV antenna, stationary but receiving signals. "Slam It In Harder" may be one of those signals: a bat slams a load of jism into the bleachers—an outsized description of an activity that more truly resembles, in its mechanical optimism, a cuckoo clock striking twelve.

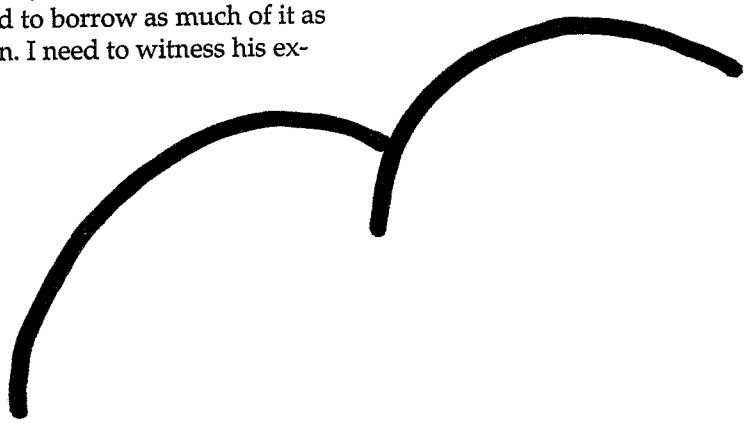
Sean is an observer in this picture; he's blond and cool.

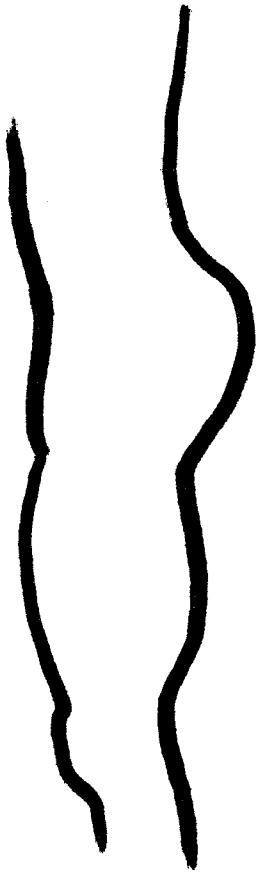
Robert Glück is the author of Jack the Modernist *and* Elements of a Coffee Service. *He is assistant director at the Poetry Center of San Francisco State University, where he teaches writing.*

Later he gets into the act. Sean lies woodenly on his back while J.T., still on his hands and knees, still getting fucked by Larry, gives him a blow job. I have to stop and consider this. I am committed to J.T.'s excitement. Does penetration at both ends really work for J.T. and me, are we saturated with providence, or is this blow job a distraction, a visual flourish? My asshole is either much farther away from my head than the distance of J.T.'s beautiful torso, or it's my center, the capital city that radiates meaning onto the empire.

It's J.T.'s excitement, and I need to borrow as much of it as I can. I need to witness his excitement and I need to be him, the one whose excitement is witnessed. His image provides access to both sides of the sexual proposition. The lack of that circuitry is masturbation's drawback; jacking off resolves physical tension but it exacerbates the imagination's need to witness and be witnessed. The only recourse is to trick myself into believing my body is an object by dramatizing masturbation, with mirrors, with contraptions, say, to provide the effect, of a keyhole or proscenium arch, a window, so to speak, a photo, in other words. My mind goes ahead talking to itself in this vein, so to speak, but runs out of material before the essay impulse has expired, in other words, so it keeps the same tone and measure almost mechanically until that wears out. . . .

I begin again: I need to borrow the excitement I feel J.T. feels. The entrance to this excitement is not only through J.T.'s body, general in beauty, but through the specifics which give the scene its particularity, its effect of the real. So "it was in the little town of X in the year of 18—" lives again in the band of underwear elastic, the white sock and inside-out denim that dangled from J.T.'s left leg, documenting this stud's eagerness; still, they could be, must be, props. The slight indentation made by Larry's hand where it rests on the skin of J.T.'s rump is more exciting. There's a patch of shine on J.T.'s inner thigh, catching the light just at the shadow made by Larry's cock. I realize it's lubricant, grease from Larry's cock; that's as arousing as J.T.'s disheveled brown eyes, as the goofy off-center expression he wears while being fucked or blown. The grease shine is still inside the controlled daydream the photos monitor; it plays a chance role and therefore con-





veys more authority. In these accidents I most exist, most take part, like the marks that suddenly become apparent on J.T.'s ass—bruises shaped like a hand maybe. There's no spanking in this photo session. A discoloration of the skin or of the magazine? The magazine is in so-so condition; it was used when I bought it, giving the images a patina, or another depth to fall into. But the other photos have this same discoloration so I say okay, it's on J.T.'s ass.

What does J.T. think when he sees his ass? Does he ground diffused global sensations in the image: slam it in harder? I bet he doesn't. He sees his ass and nods in recognition as though a secret has been divulged; it's what he would imagine in the first place, yet different, like hearing his voice on a tape recording. A reality based on glamour and distance impresses him, he's excited by the photo and this is erotic for me; he wants to be alone with it to scrutinize and love as he loves something nameless inside himself. He studies the headless image: I should have sucked my stomach in on that one (he should have but I'm glad he didn't). His ass impresses him with its generic quality, lacking the stamp of character it appears rather abstract, or mute—but *full*—not only full of cock but full of life. What does J.T. think when he sees the bruises? Does he know how they got there? Birthmarks? His big red asshole declares such nakedness that the rest of him seems dressed and composed, his cock regular, normal as a necktie. He feels moved by the image even though it's contained, orchestrated. He's all for technique and also for the unmasking of technique. He imagines writing this letter: "Dear Abby, I am a man but I want to be so extremely excited that my body goes rigid and milk spurts out of my nipples." Now the sex seems ordinary, pulled along like a dull crime show by the thump thump of its background music. He tries to sort out the limbs—that's Larry's hand. He looks for signs of extremity that document loss of control.

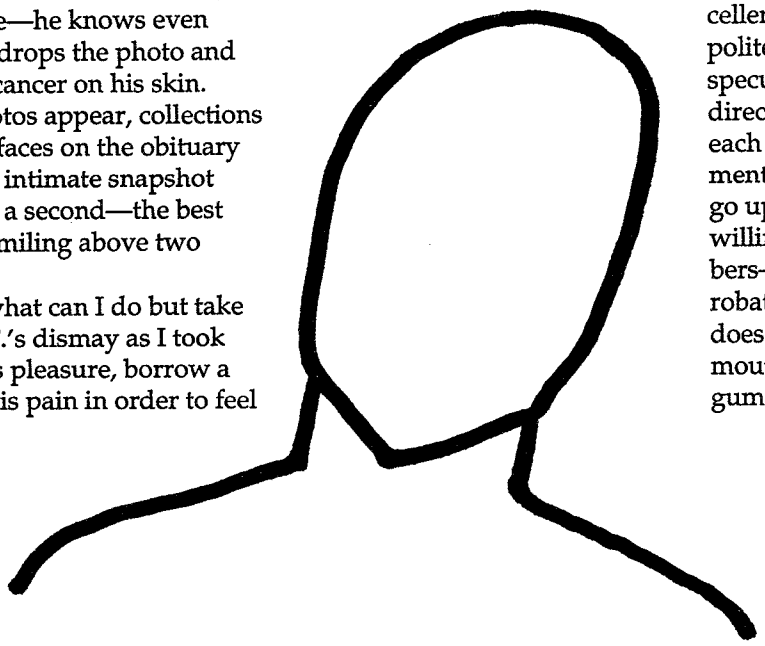
I'm assuming J.T. sees this image on June 2, 1987—I bet this magazine is old. I look for a date: it's under a photo of J.T. and Larry. Larry wears a blue baseball cap; Larry's lips purse as J.T., lowering the red nylon trunks, sucks the tip of Larry's hard cock: MCM, that's 1900, and then L, fifty, then XXX, thirty, so that's eighty, 1980, and then V. 1985. These orgasms were in 1985, my orgasm is a time traveler, an allegory, everything either didn't happen or it is in the past.

1985—J.T. had better watch out—he'd better be careful. That obviously wasn't the first time J.T. took a stiff one. Is he con-

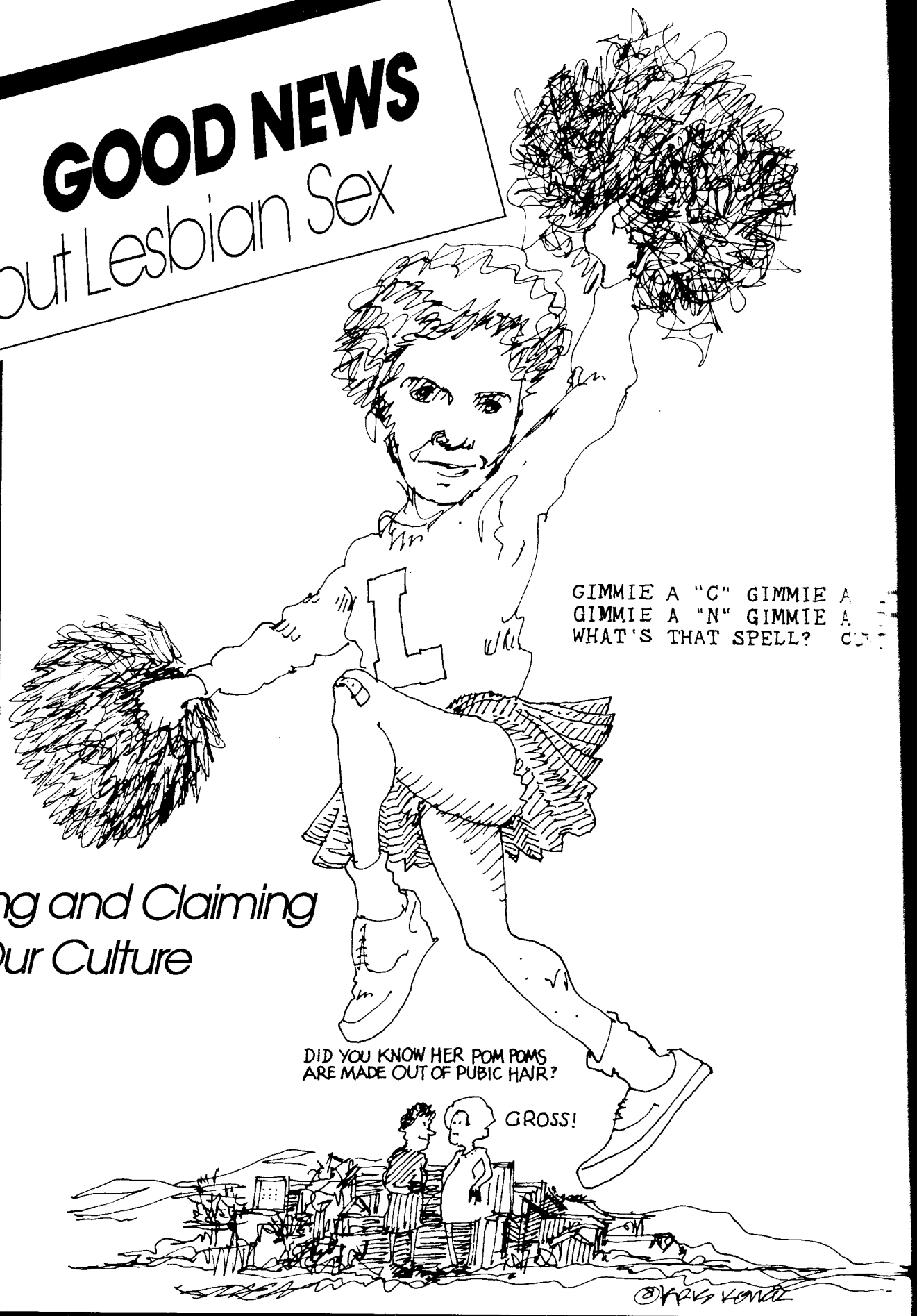
tracting the virus right in that picture? It looks like Sean and perhaps Larry come on J.T.'s chest a little later, I hope so. J.T. could have AIDS right now, I could be jerking off to the image of a man contracting AIDS—in fact, he might be dead. By now my daydream of the image is outside the controlled daydream of its presentation. J.T. looks at his picture, at the marks on his ass. A plane blocks the sun for an instant or his heart skips a beat—some physical shift divides then from now, timelessness from time. Now he knows what the fevers mean, the fatigue—he knows even before he drops the photo and finds the cancer on his skin. Other photos appear, collections of grainy faces on the obituary page. The intimate snapshot public for a second—the best likeness smiling above two dates.

Then what can I do but take part in J.T.'s dismay as I took part in his pleasure, borrow a share of his pain in order to feel the grief that accumulates in my own life. Like myself, J.T. is too guileless to hide his unhappiness; maybe he doesn't understand the implications, his nature being fluid spilling over rather than drying up. Even with the evidence before his eyes and in his body, he can't imagine a wasting disease. He dwells on the impossible accumulation: Ken left us recently—passed on to glory—Mark fought bravely—Ty succumbed —never afraid to die—fondly remembered—John died peacefully—deeply missed— I pass through the curtain of a dusty web, the spider's skeleton jumps and trembles like a dry leaf.

Meanwhile J.T. visits me after this article is published — things like that happen. My pain does not diminish; it continues as its own story read at the same time as other stories. If they all take the shape of J.T. getting fucked, then let the doctrine be mystical, that there is more content in the world than form. A knock at the door—Hi, he says, it's me. I don't recognize him in clothes. He tells me. I'm amazed, I'm awed. I am back in my daydream, controlled and unlimited. My second thought is a threatened one —have I got in deeper? Then I am overjoyed to see J.T. in excellent health, though I'm too polite—especially after all my speculation—to ask about it directly. We take a quick look at each other in the beautiful moment that quickly changes; we go upstairs; we enter a physical willingness; we don't use rubbers—the imagination is a reprobate; the bruises are gone—does he want new ones? His mouth tastes like spearmint gum. ▼



GOOD NEWS
About Lesbian Sex



Naming and Claiming Our Culture

by JoAnn Loulan

Cartoons by Kris Kovick

FINALLY, A CHANCE to write on the good news about lesbians and our passion. Lesbians and our sex. Lesbians and our loving. I don't always have an opportunity to do this. I am usually asked to write about the problems, the dilemmas. So finally, here is the wonderful news about being lesbian. Of course, this is not news to all of us. We have been out here being lesbians for a long time.

Some of you reading this have been out since childhood. Some of you may be coming out right now. There is magic in this process of becoming fully identified with our lesbian selves. It takes a while. Many of us have been working on this lesbian identity for years, but the major culture we live in is not much support.

As lesbians, we have our own mores, rules, and rituals that are not recognized by the rest of the population. (These customs can vary within our subculture according to political orientation, class, race, age, and what part of the country we are from among other variables). Most of us have never even considered the real culture we have. There has been so much oppression that we cannot see that our ways of dating, having sex, and even talking to one another have distinct and specific characteristics. When I travel around the country doing lectures for lesbians and I mention that the lesbian date is like an engagement, that once you have sex with her you get married, the lesbians laugh wherever I am—Atlanta, Dallas, Cleveland, San Francisco, Columbus, Ann Arbor. The response is the same, because we recognize our culture when someone mentions it.

We often put ourselves down for the fact that we usually aren't good at having casual sex. We feel bad when our relationships don't last for thirty years. We feel inadequate when sex becomes boring and we don't know what to do to spice it up. We forget that two women raised in the dominant culture have no positive messages about having sex at all. There are no positive messages about being lesbian except those we have created ourselves.

We don't exchange much direct information about how each of us handles sex. We do talk about dating and relationships. We don't have much support even from other lesbians about *really* dating. Our friends are always wondering if our new date is relationship material. *We* are always wondering if our new date is relationship material. If we are not wondering, then our new date is wondering. We laugh at this, and often bemoan it, thinking ourselves less than adequate. The truth is that lesbians are raised like other women in this culture. We are taught to get married. Period. Don't be alone.

When we are trying to work on long-term relationships, we are influenced by the culture as well. We aren't really supposed to have a long-term relationship with a woman. Yet, we aren't supposed to date either. We are afraid of being alone. We are afraid of being together. This is nuts.

The great news is that our own rules and rituals work. We just haven't recognized them formally. We also haven't let ourselves bask in our own cultural phenomenon of passion, sex, and loving. We haven't allowed ourselves to see the power of our lesbian culture.

Seeking sex is one of our great rituals. We have certain ways of dressing when we are looking for a date or a lover. As a friend of mine put it, "When I don't have a lover I dress in my best peacock form." We know the type of woman we are attracted to. We initiate sex in similar ways in different relationships.

We actually have quite simple rules about sex. If you invite someone out on a date, it is assumed you are sexually

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JoAnn Loulan is a psychotherapist and the author of Lesbian Sex *(1984), and* Lesbian Passion: Loving Ourselves and Each Other *(1987). Both are published by Spinsters/Aunt Lute, San Francisco, California. She travels in the U.S. and Canada giving lectures and workshops for lesbians and trainings for health professionals.*

attracted. We may not say this out loud. We may not admit to ourselves or anyone else that this is part of the dating process. We aren't supposed to objectify each other, yet the truth is we do. This is part of the reason for our fear of dating. What if we are sexually interested and she isn't? What if we look like a fool? A fate worse than death.

I think this process is different for heterosexuals. The rituals aren't the same. Someone may ask a person from the opposite sex out on a more casual note. It's not always about sexual attraction—it may be as much for companionship. Lesbians often have a lot of companions so asking a woman on a date usually means sexual attraction, or we would "go out" with our friends.

Once we have sex each woman is either wondering about the potential for a relationship, or fearing that that is what the other woman is thinking about. We either are excited about the sex and want more, more, more; or we are disappointed about the sex and want her to move to another city where we won't run into her ever again. We know the pain of feeling like a fool and we don't want to inflict that on someone else. I think this is different for men—straight or gay. Men have been conditioned to have sex—not to have to be in love; for them, sex is not always an invitation to a lifetime together.

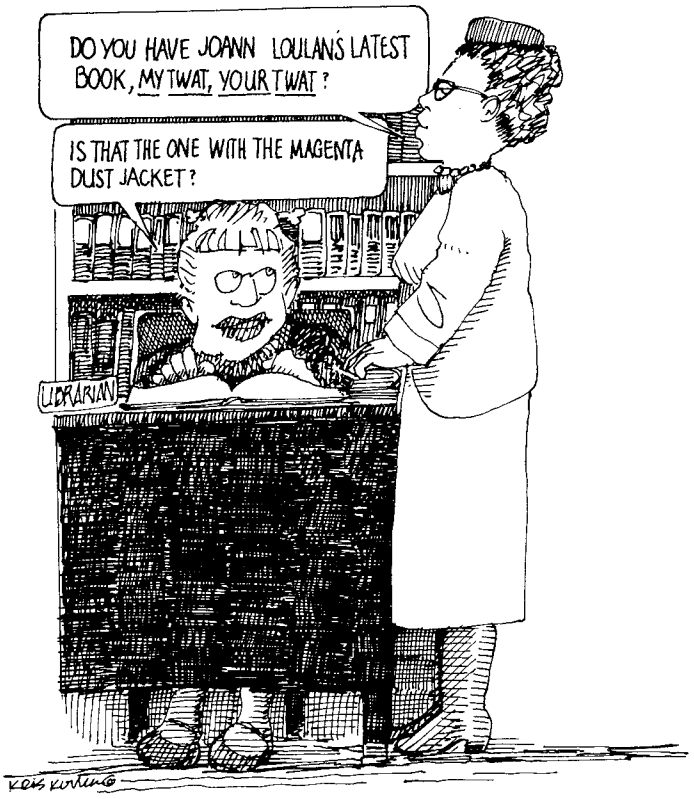
The next step is becoming partners. Obsessing. Does she like parties? Will she enjoy your ex-lover who is your best friend? Does she always wear skirts? Then of course: sex, sex, sex. We become euphoric. We can't get enough of each other. We practically become each other in our mad dash to *know* one another in more than just the biblical sense. We want to know what the cells in her little toe like for breakfast. We often sit wrapped around each other. Dance with no one else on the dance floor. Talk several times a day on the phone.

We become girlfriends in the traditional sense. Like we were in high school, only we add sex, sex, sex. Whoopee do. What could be better? In fact, it is so better we often decide that 24 hours a day of this in our own little home together, building a life (maybe the patter of little cat feet or even baby feet after a while) is the perfect answer.

It is a lesbian cultural phenomenon to move in together practically before we know if she really *is* willing to smoke outside. There is nothing wrong with this. Our heterosexual families may not understand this phenomenon. We often put ourselves and one another down when we move in so quickly. But there really is nothing wrong with this. It is what lesbians often do. We bond quickly and deeply. Loving and having eternal hope that this love will last is a wonderful aspect of lesbian culture. We are not bad people. Most all of us have hearts that want to love and be loved.

It's always amazing to me that there are laws against us loving and being loved. Isn't that the strangest idea? I mean laws against us holding, kissing, and putting fingers in vaginas. That is very odd.

We internalize this societal homophobia, and I believe there is no way to understand the full impact on our self-esteem. I think these feelings are absorbed by that place inside every human that feels inadequate, less than, and a fraud. I believe all of us have that insecurity. The problem for lesbians is that because we are both women and queer we trace our hatred to those parts of us



that are severely oppressed. All oppressed groups do this. Because our culture is not seen as valid, we are seen as pathological. We tend to want our culture to not be much different from the majority culture. We want to be accepted, everyone does.

The reality is that our lesbian culture is quite different from the majority culture. There is nothing wrong with this. While we may all sigh at the term "politically correct," I believe it is born of a wish to make our lesbian subculture different. Different from the male, heterosexual, white, middle class culture that never takes itself to task and thus we sit with the nuclear threat. We want somehow to be more holy. While we may blunder at this goal and we may not be very good at being holy, I do feel that we try our best.

The culture of women loving women is our guru. Like *bhodisatva* we are always becoming loving of women on many levels. The collective thought of women and how we would like the whole of women to be treated is often our mantra.

What a haven we have all found in this aspect of loving women that exists in the lesbian community. We have all felt a relief upon coming out. We really can show up wearing whatever we want. We can be there with our periods. We can be there with facial hair. We can be there with mastectomies. We can be there in wheelchairs. We can be there crying. We can be there dancing even without any sense of rhythm. We are in a room full of other breasts, other vaginas. We may personally have disappointment and hurt with different members of the lesbian community, but the community as a whole does protect us on a certain level.

There is nothing quite so wonderful as one of the women's festivals where we can parade in no clothes and not ever be afraid. We can look at each other's bodies without the clothes that restrict and revel in our beauty. When I wander around in one of those settings, I wonder how we could ever hate those lines of soft flesh.

There is a gentleness to the lesbian community. We certainly are factionalized. We sometimes treat each other without much respect. Despite this, there is a certain way in which the loving of one another comes through. Like individuals who eventually thaw to their ex-lovers—and indeed accept them and their new lovers into their lives—we do this in the community as a whole. We eventually enjoy our concerts with the other factions. We march on Washington with one another. We suspend our differences to join forces in our local "Take Back the Night" efforts. This ability to set aside differences in pursuit of a common cause is a gift of the community.

We are out of the closet in varying degrees, but each of us has grappled with our lesbian identity. We have fought all odds. We have stood up to all the forces. We have said we will be who we are no matter the price. Each of us with our own price as we accept our lesbianism more and more. Our joy with our lesbianism is at least equal to the internalized homophobia. The loving we experience both individually and as a member of the whole is a feeling that has no words.

I have been blessed to be a lesbian. ▼

READING ALONG THE DYKE

by Valerie Miner

WE WALK barefoot along the stone [illegible] which separates the mountains from the [illegible]. Our balance is held by poetry, engraved [illegible] the top of the wall. We *feel* these [illegible] through our soles. They give us direc[illegible] courage, and momentum. We assume a [illegible]dence beyond our experience. We *know* [illegible] collective consciousness that the wall does [illegible] belong between the water and the land [illegible] who walk on the wall are called outsid[illegible]. However, because we are in between, we [illegible] inside(h)ers. On a round earth, those who [illegible] on the margins also live in the middle. [illegible] name ourselves after the wall on which [illegible] walk, the dyke which affords us perspec[illegible] and holds our world together.

In these four recent volumes of les[illegible] feminist poetry, *Flamingoes and Bears* by [illegible]elle Gomez; *Borderlands/La Frontera* by Gl[illegible] Anzaldua; *Trying to Be an Honest Woman* [illegible] Judith Barrington; and *Beautiful Barbar*[illegible] edited by Lilian Mohin, we find poets writ[illegible] on the edge. The dyke. The border. The boundary. Sexual marginality is a lens through which to consider other margina[illegible]ties—national, racial, linguistic, econom[illegible]. From such poetry we learn about uniquen[illegible] and commonality. The writers do not den[illegible] difference. Rather they relish individual iden[illegible]tity and cultural distinctiveness while obser[illegible]ing the similarities within the differences. They articulate a context of conflict and con[illegible]nection.

At a time when "post-feminist" values are chic, these poets persist in their social protest as well as their love for other women. Not surprisingly all the books here are produced by independent houses. While mainstream publishing does offer some radical material, that work is infrequent and often tokenized. Most conglomerate editors would have us believe that engaged literature is passé, that "serious" writing has turned back toward conventional notions of family, back toward a tedious, solipsistic aesthetic. The poets in these volumes not only *come from*, but they *bring forward* a range of races and nationalities—Black, Chicana, Asian, White, Scottish, English, Indian, Irish, Australian, American. These lesbian

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Valerie Miner's All Good Women *has just been published by The Crossing Press. Her other novels include* Blood Sisters, Winter's Edge, Movement, *and* Murder in the English Department. *She is working as a writer-in-residence in Australia from January to June, 1988.*

writers live *in* the world. They write with outrage, passion, street wisdom, and elegance. Their voices keep us alert.

IN *Flamingoes and Bears*, Jewelle Gomez bridges a variety of cultures. Her work is a provocative mixture of the analytical, the sensual, and the fey. A black woman born in Boston, she now lives in Jersey City. She has emerged from a family of strong women with a forceful, delicate voice singing, wailing, laughing, scolding, commemorating.

Her politics move with clear-eyed fury in "Arthur McDuffie," the story of a black Miami man killed by four white police officers; in "Housework," the tale of a domestic worker who deserts her duties; and in "Hiroshima Red in Black and White," the description of a photo exhibit of nuclear murder. Gomez exposes the razor edge where lesbianism and feminism meet in her poems, "Oral Tradition" and "Sir Raleigh." The latter is an amusing tribute to her Raleigh bicycle.

> the only thing a man ever gave me
> that was always good
> between my legs. (p. 17)

And she does not spare women her irony as she investigates the hypocrisies of sisterhood in "My Chakabuku Mama" and "Our Feminist Who Art in Heaven."

Gomez' erotic writing is infused with tender humor and constant watchfulness in such poems as "At Night," "Love Poem for C.C.", and "Hands." In "Approach," she writes,

> The perspiration on your leg
> where it meets mine
> is a conductor. (p. 14)

My favorite of the love letters is "For Mi Osita,"

> In sleep she arches a brow
> over her dark shadowed eye,
> causing ripples
> that move out from her center
> to encircle me.
> Light sneaks into our shuttered room.
> The scented air lingers on the copper of her skin

ILLUSTRATION BY MAUDE CHURCH

and the coal black of her curls.
Her sleeping hums in my ear
closing out noise of the traffic below
and Monday to come,
harmonizing with the rustle of the sheet
as she turns her back to me.
An invitation I always recognize. (p. 22)

Gomez' title poem, "Flamingoes and Bears," is a playful excursion into the dangers and delights of perversion.

We name ourselves after the wall on which we walk, the dyke which affords us perspective and holds our world together.

Flamingoes and bears
meet secretly
on odd street corners.
Horses and chickens
elephants and geese
look shocked and appalled. (p. 23)

But the Flamingoes and Bears learn to ignore the others. What was once kept secret is now flaunted. Gomez doesn't simply come out of the closet; she leaves the house. While some lesbian writers celebrate the naturalness of their lives, Gomez questions nature.

there's room in the world
for a bear who likes palm trees
and a bird who loves honey. (p.24)

The poem is highlighted on the book cover, where bright flamingo pink stripes are crossed by a strong, bear black bar. Prison stripes are converted into festive fabric. Social stigma metamorphoses into social grace. Gomez' response to conservative outrage is to be magnificently outrageous.

GLORIA ANZALDUA traverses many boundaries in her powerful *Borderlands/La Frontera.* The reader is directly engaged in emigration and immigration through her use of Spanish and English; through her constant reminders that she is both Mexican and US American; through her passage from prose in the first section to poetry in the second. The Chicana journey is crystallized in her poignant, "To live in the Borderlands means you

To live in the Borderlands means to
put *chile* in the borscht,
eat whole wheat *tortillas,*
speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent
be stopped by *la migra* at the border check
points... (p. 194)

To survive the borderlands
you must live *sin fronteras*
be a crossroads. (p. 195)

Anzaldua writes with impressive range in the 100 pages of poetry. This second part of the book, which I found more fluid and gripping than the prose section, has the drama of a serious historical novel. Her poetry couples uncompromising social critique with homage to personal heroism. For Anzaldua, as for Gomez, the women in her family stimulate the ink in her blood. She ends the book with Spanish and English versions of "Don't Give In Chicanita," an inspiring legacy to her niece. And she pays tribute to her mother in the heart-wrenching *"sus plumas el viento."*

cutting washing weighing packaging
broccoli spears carrots cabbages in 12 hours
double shift the roar of machines inside her
head....

She vows to get out
of the numbing chill, the 110 degree heat
If the wind would give her feathers for fingers
she would string words and images together.
Pero el viento sur le tiro su saliva
pa' 'tras en la cara. (p. 118)

Her poem "Corner of 50th Street and Fifth Av.", about the harassment of a Puerto Rican by New York police, reverberates painfully with the incident described in Gomez' "Arthur McDuffie." Another vivid exposure of racist brutality is "We Call Them Greasers," a white man's account of running Chicano(as) off the land, burning their homes, raping a woman and then murdering her by sitting on her face.

Born a Chicana on the Texas-Mexican border, Anzaldua acknowledges many heritages.

In "Holy Relics," she recounts how the Spanish church exploited the sainthood of Teresa of Avila.

> The good father drew near,
> lifted her left hand as if to kiss it,
> placed a knife under her wrist
> and from her rigid arm he severed it. (p. 155)

The long, fever-pitched ballad reveals that priests continued to raid Teresa's coffin in search of first-class relics, appropriating her goodness for their own purposes. The poem is held together with a haunting refrain.

> We are the holy relics,
> the scattered bones of a saint,
> the best loved bones of Spain.
> We seek each other. (p. 159)

"Holy Relics" graphically documents the dismemberment of Teresa and testifies to the cultural dismemberment of Anzaldua's people. This poem is a metaphor for the rest of this brave book in which Anzaldua continually recollects and re-members.

ILLUSTRATION BY PALOMA NEGRE

IN *Trying to Be an Honest Woman,* Judith Barrington creates graceful, urbane poetry, claiming respect with its distilled clarity and hitting the deepest psychological nerves. While Barrington's migration may first seem less dramatic than that of the previous poets, she also finds herself crossing difficult borders—as an English expatriate in Spain and then in the States; as a middle-class, white woman reduced to modest means; as the gentile partner of a Jewish lover. Inspired by Adrienne Rich's *Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying,* Barrington attends to her ideas with scrupulous precision. Her honesty is not so much a penitent confession as a vibrant statement of liberation.

Six of her poems were included in *Beautiful Barbarians.* Under the title, "Four Days In Spain," these pieces trace a journey the poet took with her sister after their parents were killed. The Spanish trip symbolizes a passage from childhood to orphanhood. Barrington looks closely at herself, at her sister, at the two

of them together and apart. The silence between these sad women strikes louder than the words. "Today we are sisters, lost in a rare world,/ but we never mention the purpose of the trip." (p. 43)

Each time I read Barrington's book something new absorbs me. This encounter, it is the three poems, "How I Came to America 1, 2 and 3," the titles of which might be read as is or with quotation marks around the word "came" or around the words "came to" for

Sexual marginality is a lens through which to consider other marginalities—national, racial, linguistic, economic.

these are poems of movement, of sex, and of awakening. In the first, the narrator leaves a London lover, who stands open-mouthed in the rain. In the second, she settles with a new lover in Oregon. Within three weeks she is out on the doorstep, having thrown away her old, red backpack for a suitcase. The final poem is a love/hate memory of intense London feminist meetings where "they all jostled in those smoke-filled rooms." The new world, she finds, is just a little too sanitary and efficient.

> I crossed an ocean to escape the spiralling talk
> and now I scan this clean air for some verbal
> passion
> or even just an honest-to-god position (p. 67)

Barrington's scope is wide; this is the work of a woman who lives passionately: walking outdoors, reading books, making love, always watching for how to live a better life—more honest, more whole. Her last poem is well-chosen for a book which celebrates the courage of continuing.

> **"Anniversary Poem"**
> Sometimes tolerated, rarely celebrated,
> we've chosen to return over and over
> to questions of how to love decently
> in a world polluted with its own fear
> where only passion keeps the green coming
> as we circle and climb
> like the palms toward cleaner light....
> We've sung Hebrew songs in a dark car
> and changed our habits only when we had
> as we reached for enough room to be
> Our anger was like hailstones
> on new buds, too early in spring—
> yet most of them bloomed, compelled by the
> circling and climbing, climbing and circling
> (p. 7

In the context of so much lesbian literature where love flickers with phoenix-like rapidity it is heartening to witness the commonplace rewards of loyalty. The poem also marks a blessed contrast to the lack of communication in "Four Days In Spain." On this anniversary the women toast their differences, growing separately and together.

THE SIXTEEN POETS in Lilian Mohin's startling anthology, *Beautiful Barbarians*, published by Britain's Onlywomen Press, sample the integration of politics into daily life. Two-thirds of these *Beautiful Barbarians* have settled outside their native lands for extended periods. This selection reflects the cosmopolitan nature of the British women's movement as well as the editor's personal sensibilities. For Mohin, herself, is an American who has lived in England for many years. The poets write with the tough wisdom of exiles and the poignant idealism of expatriates. While this is a consistently fascinating book, I will highlight the work of five poets: Mary Dorcey, Jackie Kay, Sheila Shulman, Gillian Hanscombe, and Suniti Namjoshi.

Dorcey, a Dubliner now living in the West of Ireland, composes with a wry and elegant common sense. Her feminism is woven with unsentimental directness through "Songs of Peace," where she traces a heritage of women's anti-war activism. In "The Ordinary Woman," she responds to a reader who demands a poem about "the ordinary woman." Dorcey takes six pages to list all the ordinary women for whom she writes.

> The woman who stays at home
> The woman who has no home
> The woman who raises children

The woman who can have no children
The woman who has too many children
The woman who wants no children.... (p. 110)

The naive woman the paranoid woman
The passive woman the dominant woman
The silly woman the hard woman
The placid woman the angry woman
The sober woman the drunken woman
The silent woman the screaming woman
(p. 115)

Dorcey's love for women spans the shops, the streets, the prisons, the farms, the bedrooms. Lovingly fingering physical details, she investigates the fertile cracks in everyday contradictions. She tells us to continue beyond the despair. In "Beginning," she manages to write erotically about being abandoned.

[She] smiled at each woman she passed in the street
and asked nobody home
who might find out
that for months she still slept
in your blood stained sheets. (p. 118)

Sheila Shulman also writes about separation—of her eastern European Jewish family from their land, of herself from the New York where she grew up, as well as from lovers and friends. The writing is rich with familiar, comfortable images of books and teacups and gossip. Her often untitled poems carry an intense emotional understatement, daring the reader to touch the fire beneath the surface. I cry every time I read "For Colleen" (drowned April, 1980), where Shulman considers a long friendship with Colleen, an expatriate from an unnamed country in Africa. The women support each other through loss and loneliness. Sheila survives. Colleen doesn't.

in the warm house in big jumpers
you sat in your room I in mine
we read wrote
met for tea for scratch meals
in the evening we sat around
smoked talked

we liked each other
I think we even liked ourselves
we were easy together... (p. 147)

I went to the Scilly Isles

ILLUSTRATION BY PALOMA NEGRE

you might have gone there
not to find you but to say goodbye
in the place that used to be called
the Blessed Isles the Isles of the Dead

for form's sake I asked
if anyone had seen you
old women with kind blue eyes
wished me luck gave me cups of tea

I looked for you
not for a body but
for what you might have seen

The poets write with the tough wisdom of exiles and the poignant idealism of expatriates.

that I had seen before and loved
small gold shells elephant rocks tide pools
islands like dolphin backs edged with spray
standing out in the blue and friendly sea
if it had to be anywhere
I'm glad it was there

but birdbones I wish I knew
was the water cold and did your longing for peace
carry you or was it hard
and where are you now
and what the hell am I supposed to do
without you (p. 151)

Jackie Kay is a black lesbian born in Edinburgh, a city more dour than gay, more orderly than ecumenical. Perhaps because my own mother is from this place, I am most touched by her very Scottish poem, "Some Nights in Brooklyn and the Blood." Adopted as a baby, she was raised "on cuddles and Campsie Glens/ Burns suppers and wild mountain thyme..." Like Dorcey and Shulman, Kay is a refugee. For her the exile began in infancy.

I am like my mother and father
I have seeped in Scotland's flavours
sizzling oatcakes on the griddle

I am like the mother and father
who brought me up and taught me
not how to be Black but
how not to be grateful
and for that I am glad

we all have our contradictions
the ones with the mother's nose and father's
eyes have them
the blood does not bind confusion
yet some nights in Brooklyn
I confess to my contradiction
I want to know the blood from whence I
sprang... (pp. 40-41)

I am far enough away to wonder
what were their faces like
who were their grandmothers
what were the days like
passed in Scotland
the land I came from
the soil in my blood (p. 41)

Kay also contributes several poems to *Beautiful Barbarians* from her 1986 play, "Chiaroscuro," which traces the struggles of four black women to communicate. "Opal's Poem," about the isolation of a lesbian couple, reminds me of Kay's compassionate short story, "Since Agnes Left" in the recent Pandora fiction anthology, *Stepping Out*. At the age of twenty-six, Kay, the youngest poet reviewed here, reveals considerable talent for crossing genres.

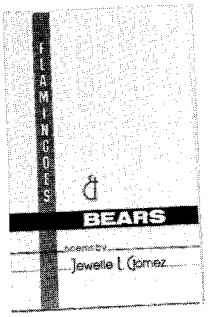
Beautiful Barbarians concludes with a stunning section by lovers Gillian Hanscombe and Suniti Namjoshi, including poems by each of them as well as four collaborative pieces. Their joint work is impressive in a literary milieu where individualism is hallowed, writers claim an ownership of ideas; the academy discounts shared work and critics personify art by identifying it by author instead of title. Namjoshi and Hanscombe have crossed over the threshold of Holy Authorship and moved beyond the myth of solitary genesis. Namjoshi, originally from India, and Hanscombe, from Australia, live and work together in Devon, England.

II
A Difference

But surely, she says, there are some
you love, some you trust?
Me, for example. Think of me
please as some sort of flower.

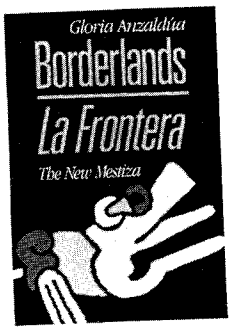
It's easy enough. We're sitting
on the grass.
She looks exactly
like a gigantic flower.
So I say to her,
but she still looks sad.
"There's a difference,"
she tells me gently,
"between a simile
and a genuine metaphor."
(p. 174)

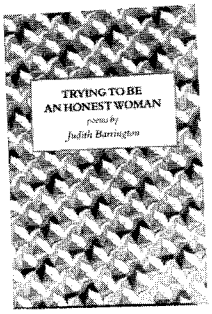
For Namjoshi and Hanscombe and most of the poets here, the lesson is that one continues to cross borders. Life is movement. Or, as Anzaldua says, "You must live *sin fronteras*." Each of these books makes important contributions to the expanding discourse about difference. Among lesbians and gay men the early, unitary notions of gay identity are more and more frequently set aside for a richer understanding about the intersection of race, class, politics, language, and nationality in our individual lives and our community interactions. Few of us any longer can afford romantic notions about simple homosexual solidarity. These poets remind us diversity doesn't dilute gay culture, but rather strengthens it. "We are everywhere" and the "we" is a kaleidoscope through which to consider a complex daily reality rather than a telescope into an idealized future order. The experience of being sexually marginalized informs our appreciation for other identities within ourselves and each other. Balancing along the wall, living along the dyke, we see many sides of the story. We live *in* a world which pretends to segregate us. The popular imagination insists that we are one thing or another. Flamingoes or Bears. But the lesbian poets discussed here resist definition, insisting on claiming all their identities, creating a communal arcade from separate roots, reaching into their histories for visions. ▼



Flamingoes and Bears
by Jewelle L. Gomez
Grace Publications
247 Liberty Avenue
Jersey City, NJ 07307.
52 pages. $6.00 (paper).

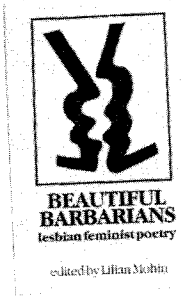
Borderlands/La Frontera
by Gloria Anzaldua
Spinsters/Aunt Lute
Book Company
P.O. Box 410687
San Francisco, CA 94141.
203 pages. $8.95 (paper).





Trying to be an Honest Woman
by Judith Barrington
The Eighth Mountain Press
624 Southeast 29th Avenue
Portland, OR 97214.
77 pages. $6.95 (paper).

Beautiful Barbarians
edited by Lilian Mohin
Onlywomen Press
38 Mount Pleasant,
London WC1X OAP,
England.
191 pages. $8.95 (paper).



AFTERWORD

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NOW THAT you've read the premier issue, you know that OUT/LOOK is making a vital contribution to the national life of the lesbian and gay communities.

This issue is only the beginning. OUT/LOOK will explore many other important topics in future issues. And we will continue to extend our outreach to many more readers, new authors and artists.

In future issues we will join the fray—pose tough questions, open up controversies, cover more culture, expand the humor, and showcase talent from more regions of the country.

But OUT/LOOK cannot grow and improve without your help. We need everything from volunteer efforts to financial contributions.

Please use this coupon to indicate how you'd like to get involved. Send it to us at: OUT/LOOK, P.O. Box 146430, San Francisco, CA 94114. Thank you.

QUEERY: WORK AND CAREER

In order to develop a better, ongoing understanding of the lesbian/gay/bisexual community, OUT/LOOK will survey readers in every issue on a different aspect of community life. Results of each survey will be published in subsequent issues of OUT/LOOK and shared with interested scholars and activists.

Circle or check the box of the most appropriate response on each item. Thank you for your participation.

(1) How old are you?_____

(2) Are you: [ ] female [ ] male

(3) Income bracket (gross):
- [ ] under $10,000/yr
- [ ] $10,000 to $14,999
- [ ] $15,000 to $19,999
- [ ] $20,000 to $24,999
- [ ] $25,000 to $29,999
- [ ] $30,000 to $34,999
- [ ] $35,000 to $39,999
- [ ] $40,000 and up

(4) Are you:
- [ ] unemployed
- [ ] underemployed
- [ ] part-time employed by choice
- [ ] employed fulltime
- [ ] over-employed fulltime (that is, over your head)

(5) Do you:
- [ ] own your own business
- [ ] work for a small company (less than twenty employees)
- [ ] work for a large company
- [ ] work for a non-profit organization
- [ ] work for an educational institution
- [ ] work for a government entity

(6) Is the nature of your work:
- [ ] manual
- [ ] office
- [ ] technical
- [ ] professional
- [ ] managerial
- [ ] other

(7) Are you a member of:
- [ ] a traditional union
- [ ] an inhouse workers' association
- [ ] a collective
- [ ] a board of directors
- [ ] none of the above

(8) How would you characterize your workplace?
- [ ] gay-owned
- [ ] gay-sensitive
- [ ] gay-tolerant
- [ ] gay-hostile

(9) What is your estimate of the percentage of lesbian/gay/bisexual people in your workplace?_____

(10) Was the person who hired you lesbian/gay/bisexual? [ ] Yes [ ] No

(11) Have you ever had a sexual relationship with a co-worker? [ ] Yes [ ] No

(12) As far as the gay straight mix, what kind of working environment do you prefer?
- [ ] predominantly gay
- [ ] half and half
- [ ] 10 per cent lesbian/gay
- [ ] more than 90 per cent nongay
- [ ] makes no difference

(13) Are you "out" at your workplace:
- [ ] to anyone
- [ ] to more than two people
- [ ] to the majority of your coworkers
- [ ] to everyone you work with
- [ ] to no one

(14) In this context, what does "out" mean to you:
- [ ] I am honest and direct when the subject comes up.
- [ ] I use certain opportunities with some people at appropriate times to bring the subject up.
- [ ] I go out of my way to bring up the subject at every opportunity.
- [ ] _____

(15) How important is being "out" at work for you?
- [ ] very important
- [ ] moderately
- [ ] incidentally
- [ ] not at all important

(16) How important is being "out" in general for you?
- [ ] very important
- [ ] moderately
- [ ] incidentally
- [ ] not at all important

(17) Are you in a supervisory position of:
- [ ] anyone
- [ ] no one
- [ ] more than five people
- [ ] more than twenty

(18) If you are in a supervisory position, is it harder to be "out" with:
- [ ] those "below" you
- [ ] those "above" you
- [ ] not applicable

(19) Has being lesbian/gay/bisexual affected your career choice? [ ] Yes [ ] No
Explain:_____
_____

(20) On your resume have you ever:
- [ ] purposely listed gay-identified experience
- [ ] purposely not listed gay-identified experience
- [ ] not applicable

(21) Have you ever been discriminated against in hiring because of your sexual preference? [ ] Yes [ ] No

(22) Have you ever been harassed by coworkers or supervisors because of your sexual preference? [ ] Yes [ ] No

(23) Would you characterize your occupation as:
- [ ] traditionally female
- [ ] traditionally male
- [ ] neither

(24) How would you describe the way you dress for work?
- [ ] business suits
- [ ] casual clothes
- [ ] uniform
- [ ] no clothes
- [ ] _____

(25) Has your sexual preference ever stood in the way of your career advancement?
[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Don't know

(26) Has your sexual preference ever enhanced your career prospects?
[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Don't know

(27) If you work in a gay-owned or majority-gay environment, did you intentionally seek it out, or just happen to end up working there?
[ ] intentionally [ ] just happened

(continued on back)

(28) If you serve a clientele, would you describe it as:
[ ] predominantly lesbian/gay/bisexual
[ ] half and half gay and non-gay
[ ] predominantly non-gay

(29) Are you "out" (in the manner you indicated above) to your clients?
[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Not applicable

(30) Have you ever been subject to hostility from your clientele on the basis of your sexual preference?
[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Not applicable

(31) If so, average number of times per year:_____

(32) Do you have a domestic partner that you consider your spouse?
[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Don't know

(33) If yes, does your partner receive health insurance or other benefits from your employer? [ ] Yes [ ] No

(34) When you are invited to a work social function and are asked to bring your spouse, do you:
[ ] bring your partner
[ ] bring a date of the opposite sex
[ ] leave partner at home and attend alone
[ ] plead a headache
[ ] other _____

(35) Are there aspects of your life that are harder in the workplace than your sexual preference ? [ ] Yes [ ] No
If yes, explain:_____

(36) Briefly, but specifically, the worst aspect of your work situation is:
_____

(37) Briefly, but specifically, the best aspect of your work situation is:
_____

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