

Number 9
Summer 1990
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OUTLOOK
NATIONAL
LESBIAN
& GAY
QUARTERLY

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**What It
Means To Be
Colored Me**

Douglas Crimp
**Art Against
AIDS**

GREED AND INDIFFERENCE DO.



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Kissing Doesn't Kill: Greed and Indifference Do by the New York-based collective Gran Fury. The ad appeared on public buses in New York and San Francisco.

INSIDE FRONT COVER

Poet Essex Hemphill speaking at OUTWrite '90, photographed by Rick Gerharter.



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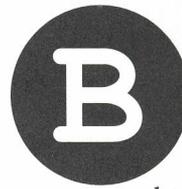
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BEEBO BRINKER (tormented paperback dyke of the late fifties) might've come up with a few excuses to desert her station at the hotel elevator and cruise the lobby instead. She would have been awkward but persistent; her voice, after all, had not yet learned to say "lesbian" (though her creator, writer Ann Bannon, had forged a new kind of dyke heroine). Phil Andros, stud hustler and hero of Samuel Steward's early pulp novels, might have braved a workshop or two, not missing the opportunity to signal a panelist's lover to the downstairs bar. Neither character, really, could have imagined the occasion where both their authors were honored: 1,200 queer writers, readers, publishers, editors, and activists gathered together in San Francisco for OUT Write '90.

Reflecting on the first national conference of lesbian and gay writers, there is a certain satisfaction in conjuring characters from pre-Stonewall fiction. No longer representing the crumbs of recognition we once had to sneak, Beebo and Phil are historical figures from a body of writing that has grown up, and well beyond the closet, to give our community a significant voice. That this voice is strongest at a time when the Jesse Helmses of the world are running amuck trying to muzzle us, a time when so many of us are ill or dying, sometimes seems like a miracle. It is, rather, the result of incredibly hard work, strong spirit, courageous activism, and many desperate survival strategies.

It was apparent before any of the panelists started to speak on March 3 that this would be a powerful weekend. By 9 a.m. Saturday morning the Grand Ballroom of the Cathedral Hill Hotel was packed with an audience eager to hear keynote addresses by veteran writers Judy Grahn and Allen Ginsberg. By late Sunday afternoon 170 panelists had spoken at twenty-nine overflowing panel workshops and two plenary sessions, and everyone was exhausted but reluctant to leave.

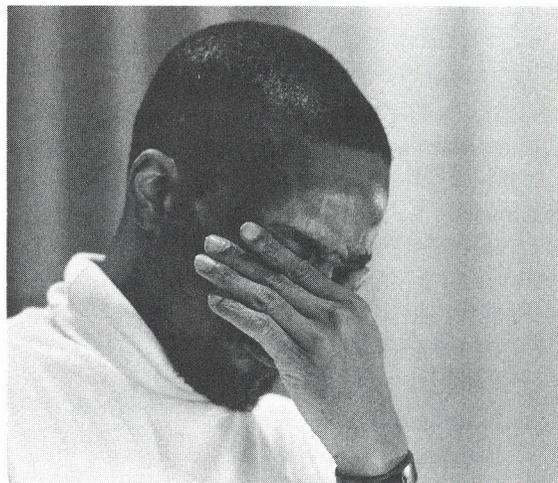
The conference covered a wide spectrum: practical topics like contracts, agents, and how to get reviewed; pre-Stonewall writing; sex writing and censorship; issues of illness; re-visioning race invisibility; writing from other cultures and borders; aesthetic concerns; political concerns; and,

of course, every genre and voice in our community, from poetry, fiction, and theater to journalism and scholarship. In this mix of the practical and the aesthetic, political concerns were raised frequently. As Judy Grahn said in her kick-off address [see page 38], "If there's any gay or lesbian writer who hasn't done any [political] organizing, then he or she has gotten a free ride." Many other speakers and panelists addressed AIDS activism, the Helms amendment, and the history of gay people struggling to tell all our secrets in one form or another.

OUT Write '90 was the result of ten months of intensely complicated planning that often appeared to have no end. The grassroots nature of the organizing—done by a group of about

"There's So Much To Say"

OUT Write '90 Makes History



RICK GERHARTER

twenty writers, editors, booksellers, and literary activists—made it unique in the publishing world, where most events are organized from the top down. The visions of this small group also reflected grassroots concerns: to build on and encourage the diversity of writing that has come out of the lesbian and gay community; to reflect the cross-pollination that has begun to happen between very different segments of our community; to encourage a new perspective on where we've come from and where we're going, new strengths and possibilities. The kinds of arguments that came up in the course of organizing the conference mirror our everyday struggles: how to be more inclusive of those who are underrepresented; how to prioritize aesthetic and political concerns; how much and what kind of sex to talk and write about; who should sit with whom on what panel.

Efforts at inclusiveness were most obviously successful with regard to gender. The overall numbers of women and men were—amazingly—matched, panelists and audience alike. Throughout the weekend attendees marveled at this feat, one that would have been hardly imaginable twenty years ago. In the opening plenary Sarah Schulman observed that this new “co-ed” organizing experience, in which women in the gay community are beginning to have access to power and money, can be both beneficial and problematic. It is interesting and significant that no panel topics were categorized by gender, though lesbian concerns were articulated often by men and women alike. Instead, the weekend was sandwiched between an all-lesbian reading Friday night and an all-gay-men’s reading Monday night—both attended by mixed crowds.

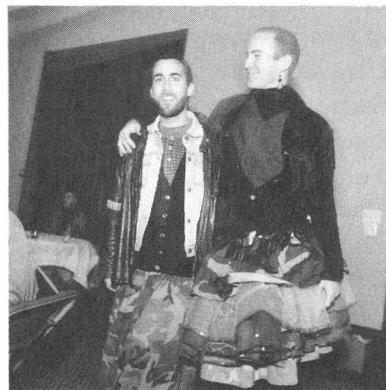
We were less successful in our efforts at racial representation: approximately 17 percent of speakers and panel members were people of color; and while we have no figures for the percentage among attendees, we know that racial parity wasn’t achieved in that regard either. Women of color caucused on Sunday about some of the issues these proportions raised. And Black poet and performance artist Essex Hemphill brought many of us to tears at the opening plenary when he spoke vulnerably about the pain and frustration he experiences in a racist gay male community. He addressed the discrepancy between the sexual and nonsexual treatment Black gay men have received: “A Black man only needed to whip out a penis of almost any size to obtain the rapt attention . . . of



ANN BANNON: “OUT WRITE ’90 WAS A TRIUMPH, A GIFT OF RENEWED COMMUNITY AND COMMITMENT.”



“WE’RE GOING TO CHANGE THE EXPERIENCE OF HETEROSEXUALS IN THIS HOMOSEXUAL WORD.” SDIANE BOGUS (RIGHT)



the gay community . . . but that same tolerance did not always apply once the sun began to rise . . . We have to be there for one another and trust less in the adhesions of semen and kisses to bind us . . .” When Hemphill paused, his voice choked with emotion, a woman broke the silence with “*We’re with you!*”

“*There’s so much to say,*” he called back before going on to offer some of the only criticism to come out of the gay community about one of our sacred cows, Robert Mapplethorpe—how Mapplethorpe’s photographs of Black men reiterate the terms of colonial fantasy and white desire without ever asking, *Who are these men?* Lesbians of color have often spoken out about racism within the lesbian and gay community, but it is rare to hear a Black gay man break such a profound silence. These issues of race highlight the segregation that still divides our community. It is still difficult for a largely white conference-organizing committee to be completely inclusive of people of color—either in lining up participants or in developing workshop content. And despite the general boom in lesbian and gay publishing, access to the

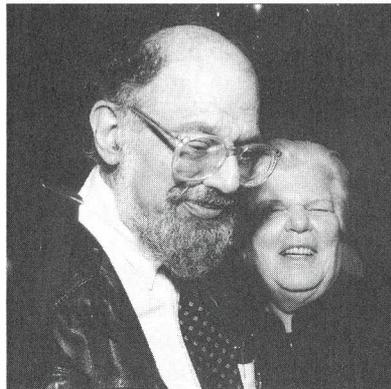
press is still more difficult for people of color in our community.

If the conference helped point out the work we must still do on racism, it also gave visibility to some areas—notably, aesthetic and cultural—where we have made significant progress. Lesbian fictional characters can finally bypass that boring phase of perfect emotional adjustment and political correctness. We are a little more secure now, and not every piece of writing has to defensively present only sweetness and light. We (lesbians) can read and write about sex more

easily now—real sex, not ideological reaction to heterosexual definitions. We (all of us) can write in different voices too—straight voices, teenage voices, voices of varying cultures—our imaginations not quite so closeted. As Sarah Schulman pointed out, we understand heterosexual culture far better than it understands itself or us, and we can paint straight characters perceptively when we need to—a far cry from the gay subtext masked in the heterosexual plots of the past.

We have emerged out of our closets too in journalism, in academic writing (often linked to the growth of lesbian and gay studies within universities), in the visibility of our poetry and number of National Endowment for the Arts grants our community's poets are receiving, in the performance of theater that openly deals with all our issues, and of course in our own media and magazines. In each of these areas our words and actions have begun to work together more smoothly, not limiting each other with restrictive boundaries. As Pat Califia cautioned in her plenary remarks, it's crucial that we not censor one another in the course of developing this large body of lesbian and gay writing.

A writers' conference might be a fairly ordinary event under more ordinary circumstances. It's not unusual for writers, who typically work in isolation, to need to schmooze and network and find out who's doing what with whom. But coming together in a context where competition for publishing contracts was *not* the goal helped make OUT Write '90 a far from ordinary gathering. And coming together out of our shared history of isolation as *lesbian and*



A PAGE OUT OF HISTORY: ALLEN GINSBERG AND DEL MARTIN.

gay writers was nothing less than thrilling. To a category of people who haven't always had the words to describe our lives, let alone the vehicles to disseminate those words, a public writers' conference in a San Francisco hotel takes on a very particular significance. This sense of making history was perhaps most clearly symbolized in the presence of several generations of writers and activists. It was our chance to honor seminal writers like Ann Bannon, Samuel Delany, Allen Ginsberg, Judy Grahn, Ann Allen Shockley, and Samuel Steward—some of the founding parents of our literary movement. And they delightedly passed down the torch they have carried, secure in the knowledge that it won't blow out.



THESE TWO LOVERS (AND GRANDMOTHERS) CAME TO OUTWRITE '90 FROM MINNESOTA TO GET SUPPORT FOR THE "GAY CHRISTIAN EPIC NOVEL." THEY'RE WRITING TOGETHER.

OUT Write '90 left many of us with renewed feelings of pride, a clearer sense of our varied histories, and rekindled hope to deal with the problems we face. The kind of energy generated felt like another kind of coming out—the emergence of a body of writing we can call our own and be proud of. It was kind of like having a public love affair; people cried and laughed and touched a lot, more like a march or parade than a conference. It was a rare situation, in the context of the past decade, when our tears were from joy and not just pain, though pain was often recognized. In an era when *glasnost*' is happening just about everywhere *but* the United States, we have truly begun to speak, and to speak eloquently to every issue. Once lesbian and gay writers break through the secret of the closet, there is no shutting us up. And this is what drives Jesse Helms absolutely nuts. ▼



—E.G. Crichton, for the editors

"Gay Lib vs. AIDS" —The Real War

■ The growing conflict between gay and lesbian progressive organizations and AIDS groups was inaccurately referred to as a "civil war" in Eric Rofes's article in your last issue ("Gay Lib vs. AIDS: Averting Civil War in the 1990s" Spring 1990). AIDS groups nationwide, often rooted in spinoffs of gay and lesbian community-service organizations, are being co-opted by homophobic straight people and closeted homosexuals. They are deliberately excluding open gay and lesbian activists from their boards, driving a wedge between multi-issue and single-issue (AIDS) activists, and actively working to undermine and destroy gay and lesbian civil-rights groups (that have become an embarrassment to them) and social-service agencies (with whom they compete for funds).

Rofes gives only half the truth when he says that about five years ago it was decided by the national gay leadership to de-gay the AIDS issue. The decision was to make AIDS the *only issue*, even if that meant decimation of the gay and lesbian civil-rights movement. Gay and lesbian groups were expected to continue full support of AIDS programs, but AIDS groups began to abandon and attack gay and lesbian programs as divisive and embarrassing. The fact is that gay/lesbian and lesbian organizations are deteriorating while the AIDS support movement is growing and prospering.

Single-issue AIDS groups should exist for those who want to work exclusively on this important public-health pandemic. But we must insist that open gays and lesbians be permitted to participate in them as such, and we must not misrepresent the fact that gays are the major victims of this disease in this country at this time. The gay

and lesbian civil-rights movement is a parallel one, not to be pushed aside, manipulated, and exploited for expediency. The issue is not whether the AIDS organizations should adopt a progressive agenda (that is, support gay and lesbian causes), as Rofes maintains, but that they should stop subverting gay and lesbian organizations and compromising homosexuals who choose to be up front about their lifestyle. The AIDS groups are crucifying their very saviors.

Claire Connelly
President, Gay & Lesbian
Resources of Ventura County
Camarillo, CA

■ Eric Rofes's article reminded me of some past encounters with the pit pomeranians of "political correctness," and vast time and energy focused on process rather than purpose. I have often wondered at the true motives of those who hijack a group with their curious abstract standards of human contact and, with all the obstructive sanctimony of one who drives precisely the speed limit in the fast lane, throw the finger at all who might dare to get around them and (heaven forbid!) try to get something done. Surely our worst enemies could not do better than to see many worthwhile organizations and goals hamstrung by philosophical debates of no practical value.

Peter L. Derksen
Los Angeles, CA

Gay Men Aren't Women

■ I found "The House That Brenda Built" by Michael Adams (Spring 1990) informative and well written, but it left me irritated and slightly puzzled as to the usage of the pronoun "she."

This article was about a boarding house for male transvestites (many with AIDS) in Brazil, and

the man responsible for running the house, Brenda Lee. Transvestites that they may be, they are *men*. Cross-dressing in "women's" clothes and taking on "women's" names, does not a woman make.

I have respect for men and women alike who do not conform to strict socialized sex roles. I fully support men who want to wear dresses, skirts, and jewelry. I consider it a bold political action to do it in this society that so enforces men's macho roles and so despises women. But I am offended when drag queens, transvestites, or gay men for that matter, refer to themselves or other men as "she."

To me it's akin to a white American wearing cornrows and a dashiki and calling themselves African. I find it insulting and demeaning to think someone can assume to take on another's identity by the simple use of semantics.

I would instead encourage men to challenge sex roles, to dress as you like and to embrace the body you were born into.

Linda Lesyna
Jamaica Plain, MA

Intergenerational Sex & OUT Write '90

My joyful experience of OUT Write '90 was shattered in the final moments of the "Before Stonewall" panel when a woman from the audience took over the microphone between speakers and said: "I need to say that not all of us support sex between children and adults. I speak both for men and for women. There's room for everyone to say that they do, and we're not censoring that right. But there also needs to be at least one statement before the conference is over that not all of us support that, and I plan to make that statement just right here."

It was a strange juxtaposition of ideas—two speakers [on the panel], Harold Norse and James

Broughton, [had just spoken] about the sexual oppression they experienced as children, enlivening their remarks with anecdotes of their own and others' experiences of intergenerational love and sex. Had it not been that [the woman who interrupted] stepped on my sexuality (not as a boy lover but as a boy who couldn't love) I would not have been so angry.

When I confronted her after the panel, she told me that lesbians and gay men had to "work this out" before we could work together. I am not sure how I can "work this out" in a situation where I must profess my belief that illegal "boy love" is okay against those who clearly can hide behind a cloak of respectability by making such remarks at public forums.

I hope *OUT/LOOK* will continue the dialogue on intergenerational love. If I learned anything from [this experience], it was the deep gap in understanding of men's sexuality, sexuality in other cultures, and a deeply rooted fear and confusion about the issues of love, power, and abuse. Something in me died that day. I wept for almost a half-hour before I could drive home.

Dan Dickmeyer
Santa Cruz, CA

■ I'd like to commend you for having the vision and taking the risk to produce such an unprecedented, ground-breaking event. I truly felt like I was taking part in history.

I deeply share your vision (both in the magazine and in the conference) of bringing gay men and lesbians together. However, I don't think it works just by putting us in the same room together. I had the distinct feeling many times that the male speakers were talking to men only and that the lesbians were speaking only to lesbians. There were some notable exceptions—and I think that shows that

those individual speakers had broken down those barriers in their own lives.

I'd like to see a little more "process" in the conference, a little more room for dissenting opinions. For instance, as an activist in the sexual-abuse field, I had trouble with the concept that because Helms lumps together homoerotic material and s/m porn (which I support) with child pornography, I have to support child porn to fight back. Personally, I can't do this.

I would have welcomed an open dialogue on the topic so I could have figured out how I, as an opponent of child porn, could also fight back against Helms. The message in several panels and workshops was that anyone who spoke out against NAMBLA or child porn was an uptight, anti-sex, p.c. rabid feminist. That's not true. I joked with one friend that we needed a coalition of "S/M Dykes Against Child Pornography" to demonstrate that these issues are more complex than censorship and anti-censorship.

Laura Davis
Santa Cruz, CA

Creating a Black List

■ I really enjoyed the OUT Write '90 conference. It was the first time, to my knowledge, that gay men and women have done anything together in San Francisco (other than Gay Day) that was festive, political, and intimate.

The usual complaint by the African-American community is that there were not enough people of color, of other minorities helping to fulfill our ranks. Even though their presence on the panels was attended to well enough, I would like to have you assist me in ending this complaint. WIM Publications wants to put together a "Black List" of people and organizations that are willing to appear, organize, and otherwise serve as

liaisons for the organizations that have little outreach to the Black community. We invite all Black gay and lesbian people to send us their names, skill or talent, addresses, and phone numbers. We will make this list available for under five dollars. Write WIM Publications, 3601 Crowell Rd. Suite 100, Turlock, CA 95380.

SDiane A. Bogus
Turlock, CA

Bisexuals: Welcome or Not?

■ There I was standing in Baily Coy bookstore reading Debra Chasnoff's "Welcome" in the Spring 1990 issue and I found the words "gay, lesbian, and bisexual." I whooped out loud. How can I *not* subscribe when you're so inclusive? Thank you for realizing that the sexual minority community is all of us.

Elizabeth Reba Wiese
Seattle, WA

■ "My Interesting Condition" by Jan Clausen (Winter 1990) was a good example of the confusion over labeling vs. identification which divides today's lesbian community—the definition of what is a lesbian.

The prevalent argument being bounced around is that the lesbian community is composed of many faces and walks of life: women for whom their sapphist awakening equals sexual-behavior separatism, women who are in the coming-out transition between two worlds, married women who identify as lesbians but for whatever reason stay married, and those women who consider themselves lesbians from the waist up but not from the waist down. It is the latter, illustrated by women like Jan Clausen, who present a danger to the lesbian community far greater than any threat by homophobes; for they refuse or are afraid to own

(continued on page 78)

What It Means To Be Colored Me*

by Jackie Goldsby



Stamella © 1985

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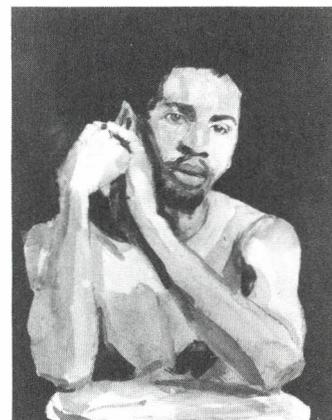
THE PERFECT MOMENT was missed. In the wake of Senator Jesse Helms's (re)action against Robert Mapplethorpe's federally funded exhibition—the artist boycotts, the congressional debates, the newspaper editorials—the public furor over the s/m images displaced what would have been an equally charged discussion about Mapplethorpe's sexual oeuvre: the late photographer's (re)presentation of Black homoeroticism. For all of the theorizing about censorship, the meaning of Mapplethorpe's racial aesthetic remained unarticulated in the analysis and protest—despite the fact that *Man in a Polyester Suit* probably bothered Senator Helms as much as the self-portrait of a leather-clad Mapplethorpe mooning his camera with a whip clenched between the cheeks of his ass.

But Man in a Polyester Suit bothers me. Mapplethorpe cuts the model off just below midtorso in a frame so still that we don't know if we're viewing a live subject or a mannequin. Striking a catalog-type pose, the model/mannequin is clothed in a freshly cheap three-piece suit whose coordinated symmetry is disrupted by an unzipped—or burst-open—seam, out of which hangs an uncut penis. Dark, thick, arching, bow bent but not broken by so much more life, by so much more sex than can possibly be restrained by the false trappings of commodified civilization. Rousseau's noble savage revisited.

Man in a Polyester Suit's reduction of Black men to their all-important cocks (a commodified construction in itself) eclipses the power of Mapplethorpe's Black nudes—the four views of Ajitto or *Thomas in Circle*, for example—where form, line, proportion, and gesture are dissociated from whiteness and located in blackness, thus subverting traditional ideas of classicism. Because the polyester itself invokes issues of class, however, the photo is finally about privilege: it's not about Ralph Lauren's pseudo-aristocratic Polo-land of blond-gentried wealth. Scaling down the ladder of "success" is precisely the camera's focus; if you don't have money, you do have sex. The satire is in the objectification. But for whose pleasure?

In his *Self-Portrait after Photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe*, Darrel Ellis deliberately places his lower torso out of the line of sight, behind and below the dizzying, entrapping height of the pedestal. His elbows rest on the circular surface, a post of flesh—his own flesh—against which he rests his face. The shadow cast by the back of his hand counterposes a gentle edge to his profile, accentuating his slim countenance. His lips pursed, his eyes searching, contemplating, looking directly at the viewer. Looking directly at me. Engagement: an erection of subjectivity.

After Self-Portrait I cannot look at Mapplethorpe's images without thinking of Ellis and other Black men. This visual disjunction and its political implications deepen my ambivalence about Mapplethorpe's aesthetic politics. Was Self-Portrait drawn after Ellis posed for Mapplethorpe? Was Ellis one of the photographer's subjects? The ambiguity is the point: does it really matter?



Darrel Ellis, *Self-Portrait after Photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe*, 1989.

¹I adapted this title from Zora Neale Hurston's 1928 essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me." Check it out. It's both humbling and disturbing to know Hurston struggled with similar problems about voice, address, and identity (dis)placement so long ago.

//.

Artists Offer 'Day Without Art' to Focus on AIDS

by ANDREW L. YARROW

In what organizers called "the largest event that's ever happened to focus on the AIDS crisis," some 600 museums, galleries and other arts institutions across the United States observed "A Day Without Art" yesterday.

The loosely coordinated events — including gallery closings, the temporary removal of artworks from gallery walls, memorial services, performances and educational programs about AIDS — were organized by a group of arts professionals called Visual AIDS.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, 12/16/89

John Frohnmayer, chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, wanted to cut funding for New York's AIDS-inspired show *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing*, where Ellis's portrait was exhibited. "The nature of the show had changed from an artistic focus to a political focus," Frohnmayer asserted. Read: the catalog notes openly criticized the implications of the Helms amendment. Frohnmayer's faux pas sharpened the irony of A Day Without Art to an even finer point.

This mobilizing of the arts establishment and the gay press to participate in this nationwide display of anti-representation struck me as tremendous. But the event stopped short of moving me to . . . what: tears? rage? because there is a kind of art I could learn to live without:

CITY IN SOUTH SAYS POSTER IS RACIST

Shreveport, La., Tourist Unit Vows to Destroy Copies

SHREVEPORT, La. Dec 28 (AP) — A poster that depicts blacks as roaches being sprayed by a white hand and as suspects running away from a white judge bore the logo of the local tourist bureau and was sold to businesses in the Shreveport area this fall.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, 12/28/89

That we rally against the censorship levied at Mapplethorpe only to remain silent on the racial dimension of his work makes this news report all the more chilling to me because it reveals the different codes by which racism operates in American culture at large and in gay culture in particular. Where one wreaks literal, physical violence against Black bodies (witness Howard Beach, Bensonhurst, and the string of bombings in the South), the other symbolically erases a Black presence: the critical silence about Mapplethorpe's Black subjects is not a simple matter of omission, nor is it just an "oversight." It suggests how, in the gay community, racism is increasingly perceived as an old story, an ever-present constant in American politics that has become expendable in the face of the new narrative of the AIDS epidemic (Who has time to worry about racism when we're all dying?).

No doubt about it, AIDS is our collective nemesis, and to that extent the crisis has prompted us to be more vigilant about defining our culture and protecting ourselves, of taking care of "our own." Openly gay and lesbian editors at major publishing houses are bolstering the efforts begun by independent publishers to sign on gay and lesbian writers. Academics are making careers out of interpreting "homoeroticism" and so contributing to "the canon debate" currently booming throughout academia. And, though the impact is sometimes hard to discern, the guerrilla information networks and direct-action protests of AIDS activists are making a dent in the way American health policy is formulated and executed. This consolidation of the gay community into institutional forms bespeaks who we are and how we see ourselves at this critical time. In short, it constitutes a discourse, one that ultimately centers on the theoretical project of (re)articulating identity and identity politics: who do we mean, after all, by "our own"?

///.

I, for one, am not sure that I have the answer to that question. It's a query that haunts my writing this essay: where do I locate myself in the "we"s and "us"es that I've invoked so far, when I don't find that these pluralities fully embrace my Black lesbian self? How can I, when both the lesbian and the gay male communities figure race in such disparate ways? Dykes politicize it, gay men eroticize it, either perception effectively neutralizing any middle ground on which I can stand and say my piece.

Lesbians of color did up the ante when, in 1981, the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back* insisted that white (lesbian) feminists must set racism at the top of their political agenda(s). And, for all its half-steps and near-misses, the critique of patriarchal power relations advanced by lesbian feminism in particular, is admirably ambitious, aiming for nothing less than to battle against all the -isms that accord privilege to difference—(hetero)sexism, racism, classism, ageism, ableism, sizeism . . .

That the list could go on signals how circumscribed lesbian politics can be even as it attempts to make broad connections between and analyze forms of oppression. Ironically, as lesbians attempt to dismantle the institutionalized illogic that assigns unequal meanings to neutral facts of identity such as color, gender, and size, we mystify those facts even more. It becomes difficult to talk about identity in any context other than oppression. Instead, we turn to platitudes: lesbians are so busy "honoring" diversity that we reify it in as problematic a way as gay men do when they sexualize it. Earning political halos becomes its own kind of fetish in the recovery process from patriarchal rule, a spoil of war that comes from toeing politically correct lines, even when those lines are nappy-edged with contradictions:

I am in love with a white woman and have been partners with her for four years. We have carefully examined our motives for taking up with each other and can safely pronounce to any and all who ask that our attraction is "healthy" and that neither of us, me in particular, is succumbing to internalized racism. We say this, even to ourselves, even though we know differently: where, in the context of lesbian political discourse on race, can we acknowledge that our knowingly crossing boundaries of race and class is part of our desire for each other?

That I am involved with a white woman is not at odds with my self-perception, my self-identification, nor my self-love as a Black lesbian. Yet within lesbian racial politics that is a contentious stand to take. White lesbians would have me search for long-buried "issues" underlying my attraction and resolve them in therapy. Lesbians of color would argue that my relationship is just a "stage," a weakness I'll outgrow when I'm ready to "come home" and accept the love of Black women. Both presumptions are dangerously stifling. They seriously undercut the authority of lesbian-feminist racial politics by insisting on essentialist codes of being that deny individual selfhood.

**Dykes
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Gay men spare themselves such angst by seemingly ignoring such questions altogether:

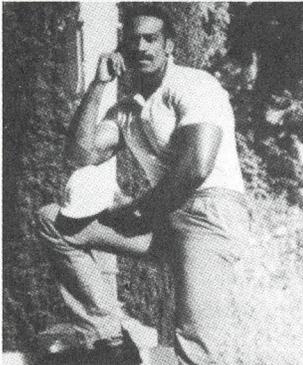
I'm White! You Black?
 Are you like me: well-endowed, very masculine, physically fit, over 5'9", over 150 lbs., and avoid drugs? Would you like to screw my lights out? Send me a photo (the nuder the better), and I'll send one of me. Then you put it inside me and we can do one of those happy-ever-after things. Please write...

Just Sex, No Entanglements
 Would like someone to play with on a regular basis. Straight, gay, bi. Prefer tall, thin white guys; however open to the rest of God's children as well. Long hair is a plus. Me: Black male, 6'1", 170lbs. What turns you on? Respond with letter and recent photo. Reply FG Box SW90.

When I read ads like these, I'm tempted to trust what my mama told me before she passed: Don't lay your hopes for freedom with a white boy—they've got too much to gain from the way things are to change anything for real. Though eroticizing difference is a nose-thumbing gesture of sorts against racial ideologies of power—when a white man specifies he wants to "service" Black cock, he is, in that moment, relinquishing the privileged status the culture ascribes to him as "top"—that reversal depends on accepting racial hierarchies as legitimate truth. Difference must be enforced, not transformed, and the privilege accorded it reinscribed if the sex is to keep its charge.

I discovered this ad in a local newspaper (and in the last issue of OUT/LOOK). Not in the Personals section but up front in the "legitimate" zone of the news. The headline and photo are smartly juxtaposed so as to invoke double readings: is this service aimed at thoughtful Black gay men who are "tired of 'GWM seeks GWM' ads"? Or is it intended for white men who are bored by homogeneous homosexuality? The clue is in the hard hat: like Man in a Polyester Suit, a class-specific reference tips the scale of power back to the viewer. In this context, appealing to "interracialists," the surveyor is revealed to be white. The racial/sexual pecking order is confirmed once again.

TIRED OF "GWM SEEKS GWM" ADS?



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- **Hot Man Profiles**—men you'll want to see
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THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY TIMES, 2/90

I would wager that it's not unconcern that accounts for the comparable absence of an anti-racism movement among (white) gay men—though at times it seems that way to me. Rather, an economy of desire (as represented by these ads) is invested in maintaining status quo racial politics; coming matters as much as overcoming the power dynamics that fix gay men of color into a peculiar status of (in)visibility, one that restricts them to being conspicuously consumed by the imaginings of gay male sexual culture.

The gay male community's relative silence on this issue speaks volumes

and takes a very deliberate toll on the community's social structure and relations, both within and outside its own ranks. But I want to disrupt my own discussion here, because I can't continue to speak as one who is "within the ranks." I don't want to appropriate the right of gay men of color to speak about their marginality in their own language any more than I have, because I do believe that the brothers have a rap the rest of us need to hear. That we've only heard or read snatches of such dialogues can be attributed in part to the tight reins held by the gay print media that have resisted and restricted the free flow of ideas on the subject of racism in the gay male community, proving once again that ignorance isn't innocent; it's organized.

Standing outside this male world, I find myself both in league with it—based on the fact of my queerness—and opposed to it—because of this kind of censorship through denial and exclusion. The ways in which white gay men can still play by and into racial rules as they've been written mirror the gender rank they can pull on me as woman/lesbian lesbian/woman, and distance me even farther from the idealized "we" I'm trying to relate to. So I make my own categories: "okay" white boys and "ofay" white boys, names that distinguish exceptions from the rule that measures political trust: who *is* the white gay man who would catch my back if I were to fall? Not the ofay.

And yet, if I'm honest, I must admit that I envy the (gay) male sexual prerogative to render differences of all sorts—hairy chests and smooth skin, swimmers' builds and chubby bellies, tight buns and bulging sacs, as well as race—into mere categories of pleasure. I find it difficult to acknowledge what the sage, James Baldwin, knew in another time: that it's unreasonable to think that those who've been without power can deny their attraction to it. So I confess: I want the gender privilege that allows men the "freedom" to flaunt their access to sexual culture in ways that my pseudo-Catholic self can only imagine.

It's the terms of that liberty I want to reconsider, though. Switching identities from objectified to objectifier is not the political freedom I'm seeking. In and of itself, my skin color means nothing. American political culture heaps its psychic insecurities onto me and mine so as to oppose us as "Other" to whiteness, as difference personified, feared, repressed, and, (so) oppressed. But yo: there's more to life than objectification. There is subjectivity in "race": I can speak first, out of the primacy of my existence; I can speak first, out of the rich is-ness of my Blackness: I think, therefore I is.

I'm at a dance with over a hundred Black dykes out by the ocean. I can bear the waves roaring onto shore, but inside it's thick with heat and the windowpanes are panting for fresh air. SHE'S BAD SHE'S BAD SHE'S BAD BUT ALL I KNOW IS THAT I WANT HER WANT HER WANT HER UMPH. Keith Sweatt is singin' 'bout our heart's desire—I WANT HER—that New Jack Swing swinging low sweet chariot comin' for to carry me home, and so we all take up the chorus and give up the funk, shoutin' for all the Marin Headlands to hear, on the downbeat: I WANT HER.

"Racism," on the other side, wouldn't let me tell this story to you. "Racism," on the other side, would make me doubt the truth of my memory and persuade me to hide this scene, to keep this experience secret so it doesn't get co-opted and belong, suddenly, to the public domain. "Racism," on the other side—that violent ideology which pegs difference into hierarchies of power and privi-

I make my own categories: "okay" white boys and "ofay" white boys, names that distinguish measures of political trust.

lege—would let stereotypes preempt narrative possibility so that subjective truths remain unvoiced:

A white South African friend and I debated Spike Lee's Do the Right Thing. He felt that the skimpily clad dancing machine in the opening sequence just fed into the image of the oversexed/lewd wench white men secretly fantasize about. I saw the movie three times, mainly to watch Rosie Perez shake it/robocop it/snake it/Pee-wee Herman it/boogaloo it to Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" because Black folk do have a way of grinding into a beat that is sexy and, given the history of our sexuality in American culture, is political as well: because when your language has been marginalized, you learn to speak in different tongues.

As the gay community counters its marginalization by institutionalizing itself, I'm concerned about the erasure of *race* from gay political culture; that is, I worry that the subjective voice of people of color is being excluded from the crosstalk of culture and politics that's regenerating the gay community. It's no small matter that entire fields of knowledge are being constructed and political machines established that are once again inscribing the absence of people of color. In the growing "canon" of AIDS literature I want to read memoirs written by gay men and lesbians of color—published by powerhouse presses—that bear witness to the power and meaning of our lives (albeit through death). In the

classroom I want to see queer academics of color step up to the lectern and recover our place in our respective intellectual histories, teaching the texts and constructing the critical paradigms that make up our traditions. In the hospital corridors I want Reaganesque funding politics to stop, so that *all* who are "truly needy" get the attention they deserve.

IV.

These are the issues that present themselves to me as I move in the world. I have to make sense of headlines like these two—reconcile and address them *both* with the resources at my disposal. Far from being a burden, my "double consciousness" as a lesbian of color powers my insight and interpretations of politics and culture; even more than bilingualism, it informs the very questions I ask. Which is why getting air time or print space in the gay press isn't just about letting the Black dyke have her say. It's not about force-feeding the minimum required/politically correct quota of colored input (four doses of guilt from the major historically oppressed groups: Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans). Rather, it's about insisting on intellectual integrity. It's about deconstructing the unfounded authority of white experience as Universal Truth and Model for Knowledge:

Lag in Approving Low AZT Doses Is Assailed

AIDS patients are suffering needlessly, their advocates say.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, 12/27/89

We're talking about the loss of generations.

In New York, with the highest incidence of AIDS in the country, 84 percent of women with AIDS are black or Hispanic, as are 90 percent of the children with AIDS. Among Hispanic and black residents, both men and women, between the ages of 25 and 44, AIDS is the leading cause of death, as it is for white men.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, 12/29/89

Of all the showings scheduled at last year's Lesbian/Gay Film Festival, the one for which my girlfriend and I purchased tickets in advance was the lecture "All-Girl Action: A History of Lesbian Erotica," curated by Susie Bright, editor of On Our Backs. Smart girls we were, because the show sold out. Fifteen hundred lesbians packed the Castro Theatre and watched porn for nearly two hours. But it only took one film clip, a two-minute snippet from a Russ Meyer sex spectacle, to alienate me from the pro-porn agenda Bright had, up until that point, persuaded me to accept:

The opening shot showed the blond-haired Eve-type wedged in the forked trunk of a tree. Her Black fuck-buddy's long, overly long tongue flicks and darts across Eve's precious torso (is this a re-vision of the Fall from the Garden? Black dyke as evil serpent?). Then the Black woman straps on a larger-than-life white dildo and proceeds to ram Eve to a fascistic orgasm—the scene concluded with a tight frame of Eve's feet, rhythmically striking out and up to the roar of mass cheers (I can't remember now: did the noise come from the soundtrack, or were blood-red anger and a blues-based sadness ringing in my ears?). The allusion to Hitler is complete when the camera cuts to two men finishing a blow job: the top pulls his partner's head out of his crotch to reveal none other than a Führer look-alike smirking in post-fellatio glee.

While Bright was thrilled by the thrusting potential of the sex toy (the dildo or the dyke?), that film clip hardly excited me. Bright's reading of it was no more than a dismissal of porn's racial politics: stereotyped images exist, but at least it shows you (who?) images of inter- and intraracial sex. This analysis, though, failed to explain the alienation I experienced watching that scene: as Bright's lecture presented it, lesbian eroticism—its icons, its narratives, its ideologies—is white.

It isn't that I expect Bright to understand Black (homo)sexuality so well that she could ask the questions that matter to me. (For starters: How has Black sexuality been historically constructed so that its representation in porn is *never* not racist, if the presumed gaze is either male and/or white? What modes of narrative and production would upend that power dynamic?) It's that her analysis gets the stage, publicity, uncritical reception, and institutional nod of a film festival. *And that no one seems to mind that she's promoting a theory with a flawed premise, because no one has yet articulated that these limits exist or has looked at what lies beyond.*

V.

An analysis of *race*, along with a commitment to eradicate *racism*, must remain on the forefront of gay theory and political activism. To argue otherwise is not only intellectually naive but politically dangerous. Such a stance decontextualizes the epidemics—poverty, homelessness, and crack cocaine, to name three—facing politically marginalized groups as a whole. For those of us whose community allegiances and identities originate from more than one source, splitting our affiliations just won't do. More important, the federal government's response to the AIDS crisis will not budge one progressive, life-affirming inch as long as gay identity is perceived as "criminal" and therefore undeserving of

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affirmation. The homophobia encoded in such an equation has its roots in racist ideology, which, along with sexism, is American culture's most cogent articulation of the theory of "the Other." Gay politics must advance anti-racism within its agenda, because homophobia is another manifestation of the same warped thinking that produces racism. As long as we allow any language and practice of oppression to remain in circulation, we can always expect to hear "faggot" or "dyke" hurled at us in words and violent deeds and watch indifference accumulate enough venom and momentum to become public policy.

Another reason why an anti-racism analysis must be part and parcel of gay critical theory and political activism is that if racism provides the language and epistemology for gay oppression, resistance to it is also the model for gay liberation—or so we all like to claim in our speeches. I don't know how many times I've heard gay politicians acknowledge that the Civil-Rights Movement inspired gay liberation: Stonewall was our Selma, drag queens our Martin Luther King. Indeed, what gay civil rights do exist often come from broad (re)interpretations of court decisions and ordinances that began as racial conflicts. If that's the case, by turning away from an anti-racist program, the gay movement would be ripping off Black politics the same way the dominant culture ripped off (among other treasures) Black music. And, as Cameo says, you can't talk out of both sides of yo' neck.

VI.

But folk are talking. Black lesbians and gays are tying up the conference lines, jamming on the word processors, and mixing it up in the editing rooms, producing some live cultures that deserve more than clinical petri dish examinations. For the third year running, the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum is sponsoring its national conference. The National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays is starting its eleventh year of publishing *Black/Out*. Black poets and writers are self-publishing or inking their contracts with the lesbian of color-owned Kitchen Table Press. A promising regional press is being birthed in San Francisco (the lesbian-produced *Ache*) and in Los Angeles (the multigendered *BLK*). And in 1989 two important, daring films were made by Black gay filmmakers: Isaac Julien's re-vision of Black gay life during the Harlem Renaissance, *Looking for Langston*, and Marlon Riggs's brilliant autobiographical musing about contemporary Black gay identity, *Tongues Untied*.

The closing of the gates to the gay cultural canon stands to replace the worn-out offense of slamming the bar door on lesbians and gay men of color. That's why it's time lesbians and gay men of color took up cultural criticism, so *we* can interrogate and articulate what these films and other primary texts mean. We need to become critical text-readers, not only to extend the vision of the gay community or to rebut the homophobia of the Black cultural establishment (the gay community should have denounced the Langston Hughes estate's yanking of Isaac Julien's film out of circulation as widely as it did the NEA's clamping down on Mapplethorpe's retrospective) *but to affirm our presence as producers of cultural texts in need of public discussion.*

The post-Iran Contragate/poststructuralist cultural message that's trickled down to me is that some of "the master's tools" are just implements used in specific ways to rationalize specific power relations. But there's nothing inherently "white" about the genre of criticism or theory—the high-flown language, the constant references to European sources, the seeming disengagement with the social world. It's that the coding white people bring to those conventions is valued and valorized over and above the ways of telling and seeing by "Others." And, given the ways in which I believe the lesbian and gay community problematizes race, I don't want to leave it solely to white lesbian and gay historians and literary and film critics to (re)define the meaning of race in the lives of lesbians and gays of color. The critical voice is as self-reflective as the poetic voice and as crucial to the establishment of a legacy. Leaving a paradigm of understanding will be as treasured as the poetry, prose, song, dance, music, and film that certainly will live beyond us, because with it not only will future generations find themselves reflected in the mirror of understanding that theory provides, but they will be able to see the larger forces that converged to make these things—that made us—possible.

VII.

Not a day passes during which I don't muse on the irony of the age we live in: that in the wake of death, in the pools of absence caused by AIDS, gay life insists on defying the odds stacked against it and is in a state of rebirth; that rather than give in to this terror, gay culture will settle for nothing less than both being remembered and advancing the state of knowledge itself. But this wasn't a simple matter of choice; the historical moment demanded this activism. What we say and to whom and how we say it—discourse—has become a political issue and turf on which decisions are made. Dig it: the notion of "the underclass" is a partisan symbol used to legitimize the elite's disgust with the poor no less than the term accurately describes the political status of the disenfranchised in American society. Don't believe the hype that "the canon debate" is full of hot air: whether Langston Hughes or Audre Lorde or Walt Whitman or Edmund White makes it to class syllabi will greatly influence how others see us and how we see ourselves. As long as the politics of Mapplethorpe's racial aesthetics remains uninterrogated by Black gay men, the meaning of his work will never be complete. Whether gay politics and culture continue to exclude people of color from their organizations and analyses will depend on our response. We know that when it comes to signifyin', testifyin', and throwin' the dozens, no one can talk our talk. Snap! ▼

Jackie Goldsby is an editor of OUT/LOOK.

About the artist: Storme Webber is a poet, writer, visual and performance artist, and political activist.

How many times have I heard that Stonewall was our Selma, drag queens our Martin Luther King?

My writing happens in revision. The support, criticism, and suggestions of Deidre Rettenmaier and the OUT/LOOK editors mattered a great deal in that process. Thanks to you all.—J.G.

**A
Monologue
by
Patrick Lee**



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Like, hi! My name is Chip, Chip Wong, okay? I'm, like, an AVB, Asian Valley Boy! You know how everyone thinks that Asians are, like, really smart in school, right? Well, I'm, like, a total exception! It's like, I don't think I'm the smartest person on earth, right? I must be the one and only Asian who can't do math, okay? I totally flunked out of Algebra 1 in junior high, right? Like, I could have died! My parents were, like, so pissed off and ashamed of me that they made me kneel in front of our ancestors' graves and burn incense and stuff for, like, eighteen generations of live and dead relatives. I could have died!

Well anyway, last Christmas I had to go to a family friend's house for dinner. This guy, the dad, he's this electrical engineer with greasy hair and a heavy FOB accent, like, totally fresh off the boat! And he has two kids, a twelve-year-old boy and a nine-year-old girl. They opened their presents and guess what they got? The boy got a space lab, a chemistry kit, a physics set, a plastic pocket pen protector, and a calculator belt; the girl got a Barbie doll, a kitchen play set, and a toy makeup kit! Like, fer sure! It's like, we have this total Asian nerd-to-be and Miss Chinatown-in-training, all in the same family! . . . You know, wouldn't it be totally awesome if he turns out to be this misunderstood, tormented and tortured avant-garde, retro-graffiti, postminimalist performance artist/bike messenger? And she becomes this Marxist-Leninist, socialist-feminist, lesbian-separatist, single, working-mother woman of color! Like, far out! I could just see their parents jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge!

Well I'm so excited, because I met this totally gorgeous guy at the beginning of the semester, in the library. His name is, like, Skip, right? And I, like, call him Skippy, okay, and he, like, calls me Chippie, okay, and it's like so precious, okay, okay? He's totally cute

and sweet; he wears bright, colorful Bermuda shorts, pastel polo shirts, penny loafers with no socks, and has nice short and soft blond hair. Such a total babe!

Okay, like one night we were making out in my dorm room, right? And he goes, "I'm so glad I, like, met you, Chippie" (we talk alike, okay?). "You're such a cutie, so totally exotic!" Exotic?! I, like, totally can't relate, like, no connection, okay? So then I think to myself, I go: Let's see, I grew up in Daly City, in a tract home; ate at McDonald's, watched Bugs Bunny and Popeye, played Little League baseball, went to Madonna concerts, don't speak a word of Chinese and can't tell mahjong from ping-pong—I'm about as exotic as Richie Cunningham! So I asked Skippy, I go, "What do you mean, exotic?" And he goes, "I don't know, Chippie, maybe it's, like, your eyes, your hair, and your natural tan." Like, wow, thank God for my natural tan!

One day Skippy goes, "So, like, how come you only hang out with white guys, huh?" Well, huh. . . Like, fer sure, when I was growing up, I always hung out with white kids 'cause I wanted to be more American, okay? It's not, like, I don't like being Asian, okay? I mean, some of my best friends, and like, relatives, are Asian, okay?! And it's kind of trendy these days to be Asian, you know, especially Japanese, with sushi and stuff. But it just seems more fun being white. You know, you watch TV and movies and stuff, and you see white people living in big beautiful houses, driving fancy sports cars, and wearing totally rad clothes. They all look so totally great; and they always get to call all the shots wherever they go. I know this

guy who went over to Hong Kong to do business, okay? And he has two live-in Chinese boyfriends and three Filipino maids! He must be some happy camper and having loads of fun! And boys just wanna have fun, right?

Sometimes I wonder what it's like growing up in a busy and exotic city like Hong Kong. Daly City is okay, okay, at least as far as suburbia goes, and we did have some nice neighbors. There used to be this Japanese-American family down the block, and I remember the parents telling me how, when they were growing up, they were not allowed to speak Japanese at all. They had to be as white as possible. And you know why—it's because it was a crime to be Japanese in those days. They were all sent to these awful concentration camps out in the desert and lost all their belongings, you know, like CDs and video players and stuff. It was so totally rude and sad. And I just don't get it, okay?

When I was in high school, I used to have this fantasy that I could just take a pill and wake up one morning with blond hair and blue eyes. One Halloween I spray-painted my hair totally blond and put blue contact lenses into my eyes, and I looked totally hideous! Let me tell you something: blond-haired, blue-eyed Asians just don't cut it, okay? I mean, I really should stick to winter colors!

Last semester, at Stanford, I had this roommate, Brandon Walker McIntyre, Jr., III. He came from Malibu Beach and used to hang his surfboard right above my bed. His major was poli sci, and he was on the swim team and a total babe. He wore bright,

colorful, knee-length Bermuda shorts, pastel polo shirts, topsiders with no socks, and had soft, short blond hair. I was, like, madly in love with him, until he started calling me his ornamental roommate, which, like, totally confused me at first. But I finally figured it out, and it pissed me off. What do you mean, ornamental? Like I'm some sort of lotus-blossom delicate flower? Well, have I got some news for him! I'm an American—an Asian-American, not oriental, and definitely not ornamental! At least he flunked out half way through his freshman year.

Besides, I may be oriental, but I only hang out with white guys, okay? Like, so what? I wouldn't want to be caught dating another Asian. I mean, what would my other Asian friends think? It's like, they'd probably think that I'm some sort of weirdo-nerdoid-jerkola who's not good enough to get a white boy.

I mean, let's be real, you know, like, have you ever seen any Asian Calvin Klein boys in GQ? And in *Top Gun* did Tom Cruise go for like, Mei-Ling Wong? No, he goes down on Kelly McGillis, like, gross me out! And when was the last time you saw an Asian on TV? Give me a break! When you did, you probably saw some Kung Ku maniac, or computer nerds, Asian houseboys, Chinese restaurant waiters, Japanese businessmen, and butlers and laundrymen. All total wimps! And I don't want to have anything to do with wimps, okay? ▼

Patrick Lee grew up in, like, Hong Kong and totally moved to California in his early teens, okay? His daytime disguise as a mild-mannered corporate slave notwithstanding, Pat is really a passionate actor/writer and resides in San Francisco.

MISSING SOMETHING? BACK ISSUES!

#1 SPRING 1988

Gladys Bentley, the bulldagger who sang the blues; strategies after the March on Washington; The 1980s fem; Tokyo Sexopolis; the anthropology of homosexuality; JoAnn Loulan on rites of passion; Living in an Unstable Body.

#2 SUMMER 1988

Do Addiction Programs Sap Our Political Vitality?; Why Gay Leaders Don't Last; Comics in the Closet; Robert Patrick's one-act AIDS comedy; Is the Names Quilt Art?; Locating Ourselves in the History of Sexuality.

#3 FALL 1988

AIDS and the Meaning of Natural Disaster; Handling the Anonymous Donor Question; a guide to young adult books with gay themes; fiction by Dorothy Allison; dyke softball comes out; an appreciation of Tom of Finland.

#4 WINTER 1989

Lesbian Style Wars: a guide to the best gay science fiction; new gay families in the South; plays by Cherrié Moraga and Sarah Schulman; homosexuality in Nicaragua; an analysis of Roberta Achtenberg's run for state office; chasing the cross-over audience in publishing.

#5 SUMMER 1989

House music's gay black roots; Lesbians working on AIDS; Messages to the Movement twenty years after Stonewall; Lesbian and gay children of politicians; The Allure of Anonymous "Straight" Sex; East Germany faces it's past.

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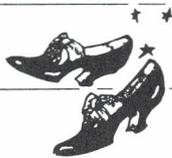
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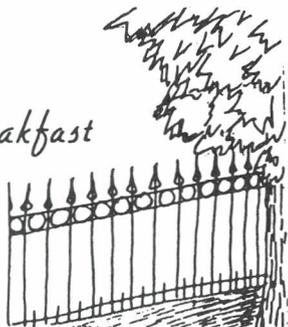
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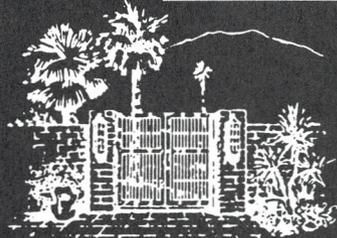
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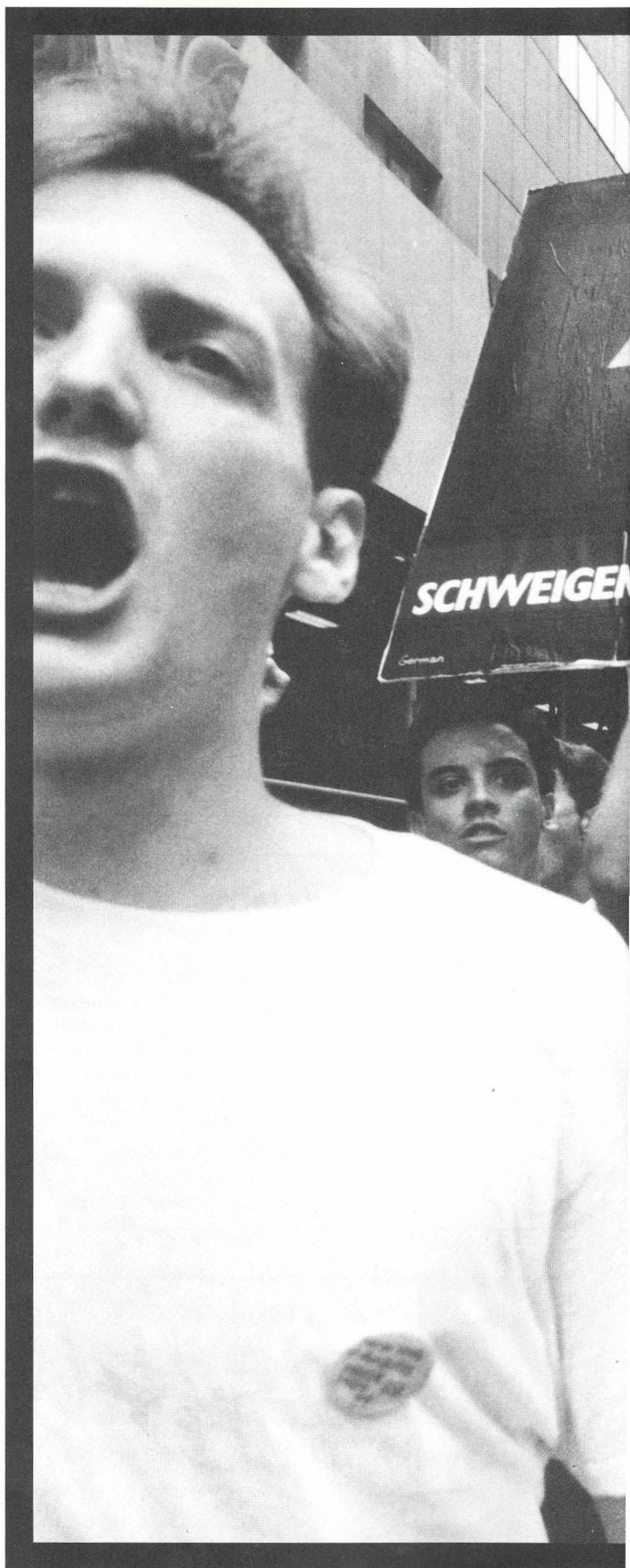
Art Acts Up

A Graphic Response to AIDS

by Douglas Crimp

HEALTH CARE is a national scandal in the United States; the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) are all critical to our surviving the epidemic, and we have monitored, lobbied, and fought them all. We have also taken our demands beyond US borders. The Fifth International AIDS Conference in Montreal in June 1989 was *our* conference, the first of these annual, mainly scientific and policymaking AIDS roundups to have its business-as-usual disrupted by the combative presence of an

This essay is excerpted from the introduction of Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston's forthcoming AIDS Demo Graphics (Bay Press), which describes the work of ACT UP—The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power—and the graphics it has used in its fight to end the AIDS crisis. Crimp writes from his perspective as a member of ACT UP New York, which was founded in March 1987.



"SILENCE=DEATH has come to



signify AIDS activism to an entire community of people confronting the epidemic."

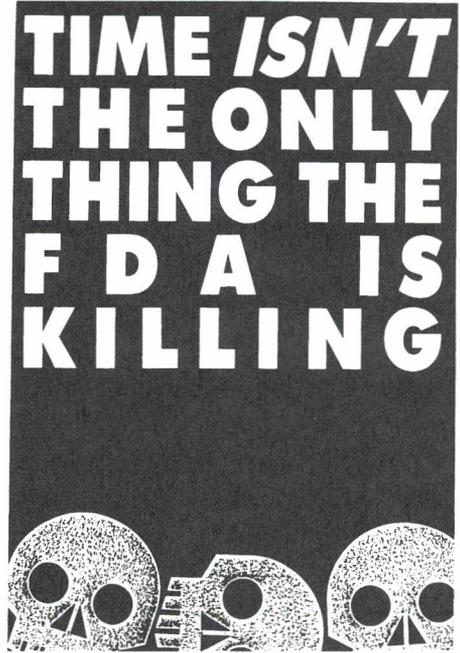
international coalition of AIDS activists. We took the stage—literally—during the opening ceremonies, and we never relinquished it. One measure of our success was that by the end of the conference perhaps one-third of the more than 12,000 people attending were wearing SILENCE=DEATH buttons.

That simple graphic emblem—SILENCE=DEATH printed in white Gill sans serif type underneath a pink triangle on a black background—has come to signify AIDS activism to an entire community of people confronting the epidemic. SILENCE=DEATH does its work with a metaphorical subtlety that is unique, among political symbols and slogans, to AIDS activism. Our emblem's significance depends on foreknowledge of the use of the pink triangle as the marker of gay men in Nazi concentration camps, its appropriation by the gay movement to remember a suppressed history of our oppression, and now an inversion of its positioning (men in the death camps wore triangles that pointed down; SILENCE=DEATH's points up).

SILENCE=DEATH declares that silence about the oppression and annihilation of gay



UNTITLED,
1989. ELLEN B. NEIPRISS



TIME ISN'T THE ONLY THING THE FDA IS KILLING,
1988. KEN WOODARD.

people, *then and now*, must be broken as a matter of our survival. Historically problematic as an analogy of AIDS and the death camps is, it is also deeply resonant for gay men and lesbians, especially insofar as the analogy is already mediated by the gay movement's adoption of the pink triangle. But it is not merely what SILENCE=DEATH says, but also how it looks, that gives it its particular force. The power of this equation under a triangle is the compression of its connotation into a logo, a logo so striking that you ultimately *have* to ask, if you don't already know, "What does that mean?" And it is the answers we are constantly called upon to give to others—small, everyday direct action—that make SILENCE=DEATH signify beyond a community of lesbian and gay cognoscenti.

Although identified with ACT UP, SILENCE=DEATH precedes the formation of the activist group by several months. The emblem was created by six gay men calling themselves the SILENCE=DEATH Project, and posters of it were printed and posted at their own expense. The members of the SILENCE=DEATH Project were present at the formation of ACT UP, and they lent the organization their graphic design for placards used in its second demonstration—at New York City's main post office on April 15, 1987. Soon thereafter SILENCE=DEATH T-shirts, buttons,

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FOR MANY
BLACKS AND
LATINOS
UNABLE
TO AFFORD
AIDS CARE
THE COST
OF LIVING IS
TOO HIGH.



REASONS TO ACT UP (12 VARIATIONS), 1989, KEN WOODARD.

and stickers were produced and sold—one of ACT UP's first means of fundraising.

Nearly a year after SILENCE=DEATH posters first appeared on the streets of lower Manhattan, the logo showed up there again, this time in neon as part of a window installation in the New Museum of Contemporary Art on lower Broadway. New Museum curator Bill Olander, a person with AIDS and member of ACT UP, had offered the organization the window space for a work about AIDS. An ad hoc committee was formed by artists, designers, and others with various skills to produce a photomural of the Nuremberg trials, *Let the Record Show*, which expanded SILENCE=DEATH's analogy of AIDS and Nazi crimes. *Let the Record Show* indicted a number of individuals for their persecutory, violent, homophobic statements about AIDS and, in the case of then president Ronald Reagan, for his six-year-long failure to make any statement at all about the nation's number-one health emergency. The installation also included a light-

emitting diode (LED) sign programmed with ten minutes of running text about the government's abysmal failure to confront the crisis. *Let the Record Show* demonstrated not only the ACT UP committee's wide knowledge of facts and figures detailing government inaction and mendacity but also its sophistication about artistic techniques for distilling and presenting the information. If an art world audience might have detected the working methods of such artists as Hans Haacke and Jenny Holzer in ACT UP's installation, so much the better to get them to pay attention to it. After taking in its messages, who would have worried that the work might be too aesthetically derivative, not original enough? The aesthetic values of the traditional art world are of little consequence to AIDS activists. What counts in activist art is its propaganda effect; stealing the procedures of other artists is part of the plan—if it works, we use it.

ACT UP's ad hoc New Museum art project committee regrouped after finishing *Let the*

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CITY CUT
AIDS
EDUCATION,
MORE KIDS
GET TO LEAVE
SCHOOL
EARLY.



REASONS TO ACT UP (12 VARIATIONS), 1989, KEN WOODARD.

WHAT DOES KOCH PLAN TO DO ABOUT AIDS? INVEST IN MARBLE AND GRANITE.



Welcome to New York, where AIDS is good for undertakers but bad for people. About 10,000 people. People the city left to die. And more will die, unless you do something. But what's something you can do?

Simple. Be at City Hall on March 28th at 7:30 a.m. Be a part of the largest AIDS demonstration ever. And what, exactly, are we demonstrating against? A city that spends only one half of one percent of its budget on AIDS. A city whose health department cuts costs by cutting estimates of people infected with HIV. A city where I.V. drug users with AIDS wait ten months to get into a treatment program when, on average, they have six months to live. A city that owns thousands of empty apartments while 5,000 people with AIDS live on the streets. And if you think AIDS only affects the people that get it, think

about trying to get a hospital bed when many hospitals in New York are at 95% capacity.

Which is why we're targeting City Hall. And why we're protesting two ways: With a legal picket, and more forcefully, through civil disobedience. Civil disobedience training will be held on March 25th from 12-6 p.m. at The Center, 208 West 13th St. between 7th and 8th Aves.

But whether you want to get arrested or not, join us on the east side of City Hall on March 28th. And if you want to know more about AIDS in NYC before the 28th, come to a teach-in at The Center on March 23rd (7-10 p.m.) or March 26th (3-6 p.m.). It's time we told City Hall to tackle the AIDS crisis, instead of burying it.

AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, 496 Hudson St. Suite G4, New York, NY 10014 (212) 533-8888.

ACT UP

INVEST IN MARBLE AND GRANITE, 1989, KEN WOODARD.

Record Show and resolved to continue as an autonomous collective—"a band of individuals united in anger and dedicated to exploiting the power of art to end the AIDS crisis." Calling themselves Gran Fury, after the Plymouth model used by the New York City police as undercover cars, they became for a time ACT UP's unofficial propaganda ministry and guerrilla graphic designers. Among the ways Gran Fury contributed to the distinctive style of ACT UP were its creation of counterfeit money for ACT UP's first-anniversary demonstration,

WALL STREET II; a series of broadsides for New York ACT UP's participation in NINE DAYS OF PROTEST, the spring 1988 offensive of ACT NOW (AIDS Coalition to Network, Organize, and Win—a national coalition of AIDS activist groups) whose most notable target has been the FDA; placards to carry and T-shirts to wear to SEIZE CONTROL OF THE FDA; and a militant *New York Crimes* to wrap around *The New York Times* for TARGET CITY HALL. Gran Fury's brilliant use of word and image has also won it a degree of acceptance in the art world, where it is now given funding for public artworks and invited to participate in museum exhibitions and contribute "artists' pages" to *Artforum*.

But, like the government's response to the AIDS activist agenda, the art world's embrace of AIDS activist art was long delayed. Early in 1988 members of the three ACT UP groups Gran Fury, Little Elvis, and Wave Three protested at the Museum of Modern Art for its exclusion of AIDS activist graphics. The occasion was an exhibition organized by curator Deborah Wye called "Committed to Print:

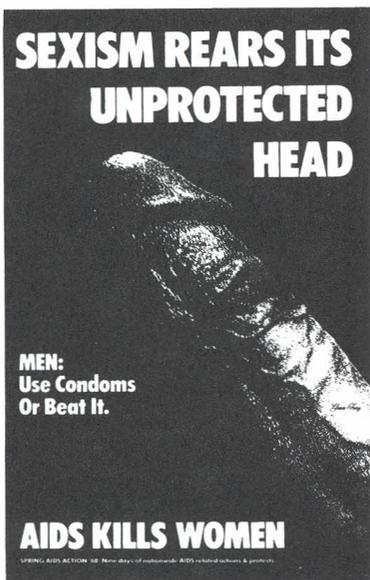


**10,000
NEW YORK CITY
AIDS
DEATHS
How'm I
DOIN'?**

HOW'M I DOIN'? 1989, RICHARD DEAGLE.

Social and Political Themes in Recent American Printed Art." Work in the show was divided into broad categories: governments/leaders; race/culture; nuclear power/ecology; war/revolution; economics/class struggle/the American dream; gender. The singleness of "gender" on this list, the failure to couple it with, say, "sexuality," reveals the show's bias. Although spanning the period from the sixties to the present, "Committed to Print" included no work about either gay liberation or the AIDS crisis. When asked by a critic at *The Village Voice* why there was nothing about AIDS, the curator blithely replied that she knew of no graphic work of artistic merit dealing with the epidemic. AIDS activists responded with a handout for museum visitors explaining the reasons for demonstrating:

- We are here to protest the blatant omission from "Committed to Print" of any mention of the lesbian and gay rights movement and of the AIDS crisis.
- By ignoring the epidemic, MOMA panders to the ignorance and indifference that prolong the suffering needlessly.
- By marginalizing 20 years of lesbian and gay rights struggles, MOMA makes invisible the most numerous victims of today's epidemic.
- Cultural blindness is the accomplice of societal indifference. We challenge the cultural workers at MOMA and the viewers of "Com-



SEXISM REARS ITS UNPROTECTED HEAD, 1988, GRAN FURY.

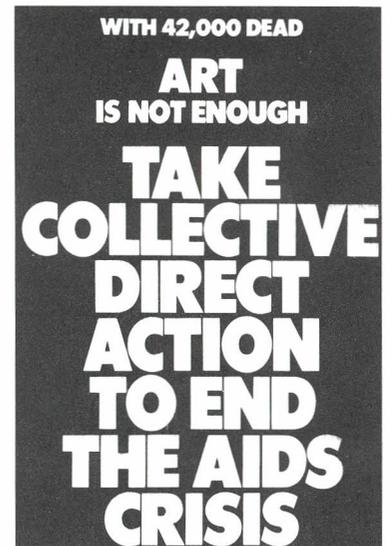
mitted to Print" to take political activism off the museum walls and into the realm of everyday life.

Rarely had the distance between downtown and uptown New York—and between their constituent art institutions—been so sharply delineated as it was with MOMA's blindness to SILENCE= DEATH, for it was only a few months earlier that Bill Olander had decided to ask ACT UP to design *Let the Record Show*. For more traditional museum officials, however, a current crisis is perhaps less easy to recognize, since they "see" only what has become distant enough to take on the aura of universality. The concluding lines of MOMA curator Wye's catalogue essay betray this prejudice: "In the final analysis it is not the specific issues or events that stand out. What we come away with is a shared sense of the human condition: rather than feeling set apart, we feel connected." The inability of others to "feel connected" to the tragedy of AIDS is, of course, the very reason we in the AIDS activist movement have had to fight—to fight even to be thought of as sharing in what those who ignore us nevertheless presume to universalize as "the human condition."

But there is perhaps a simpler explanation for MOMA's inability to see SILENCE= DEATH. The political graphics in "Committed to Print" were, it is true, addressed to the pressing issues of their time, but they were made by "bona fide" artists—Robert Rauschenberg and Frank Stella, Leon Golub and Nancy Spero, Hans Haacke and Barbara Kruger. A few collectives were included—Group Material, and Collaborative Projects—and even a few ad hoc groups—Black Emer-



IT'S BIG BUSINESS, 1989, ACT UP OUTREACH COMMITTEE.



ART IS NOT ENOUGH, 1988, GRAN FURY

AIDS: 1 in 61

One in every sixty-one babies in New York City is born with AIDS or born HIV antibody positive.

So why is the media telling us that heterosexuals aren't at risk?

Because these babies are black. These babies are Hispanic.

**Ignoring color ignores the facts of AIDS.
STOP RACISM: FIGHT AIDS.**

Uno de cada sesenta y uno de los bebés nacidos en la ciudad de New York nacen con SIDA, o con el anticuerpo HIV positivo.

¿Pero, por qué es que los medios de comunicación nos dicen que los heterosexuales no corren riesgos?

Será porque estos bebés son negros, o porque estos bebés son hispanos.

**El SIDA no discrimina entre razas o nacionalidades.
¡PARE EL RACISMO! ¡LUCHE CONTRA EL SIDA!**



ACT UP - AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACU) 1988 - ACT UP is a service user coalition which is a registered charity in Great Britain and is not for profit.

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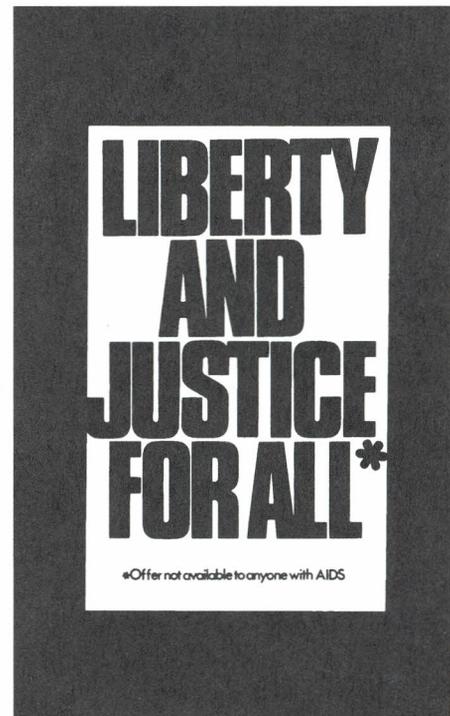
AIDS: 1 IN 61, 1988, GRAN FURY.

agency Cultural Coalition, and Artists and Writers Protest Against the War in Vietnam. But these were either well-established artists' organizations or groups that had been bur-nished by the passage of time, making the museum hospitable to them. The SILENCE=DEATH Project (whose AIDSGATE poster had been printed in the summer of 1987) and Gran Fury (which by the time of the MOMA show had completed its first poster, AIDS: 1 IN 61) were undoubtedly too rooted in movement politics for MOMA's curator to see their work within her constricted aesthetic perspective; they had, as yet, no artistic credentials that she knew of.

The distance between downtown and uptown is thus figured in more ways than one. For throughout the past decade postmodernist art has deliberately complicated the notion of "the artist" so tenaciously clung to by MOMA's curator. Questions of identity, authorship, and audience—and the ways in which all three are constructed through representation—have been central to postmodernist art, theory, and criticism. The significance of so-called appropriation art, in which the artist forgoes the claim to original creation by appro-

riating already-existing images and objects, has been to show that "the unique individual" is a kind of fiction, that our very selves are socially and historically determined through preexisting image, discourses, and events.

Young artists finding their place within the AIDS activist movement rather than the conventional art world have had reason to take these issues very seriously. Identity is understood by them to be, among other things, coercively imposed by perceived sexual orientation or HIV status; it is, at the same time, willfully taken on, in defiant declaration of affinity with the "others" of AIDS: queers, women, Blacks, Latinos, drug-users, sex workers. Moreover, authorship is collectively and discursively named: The SILENCE=DEATH Project, Gran Fury, Little Elvis, Testing the Limits (an AIDS activist video production group), DIVA TV (Damned Interfering Video Activist Television, a coalition of ACT UP video-makers), and LAPIT (Lesbian Activists Producing Interesting Television, a lesbian task group within DIVA). Authorship also constantly shifts: collectives' memberships and individual members' contributions vary from project to project.



LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL*, 1988, KEN WOODARD.

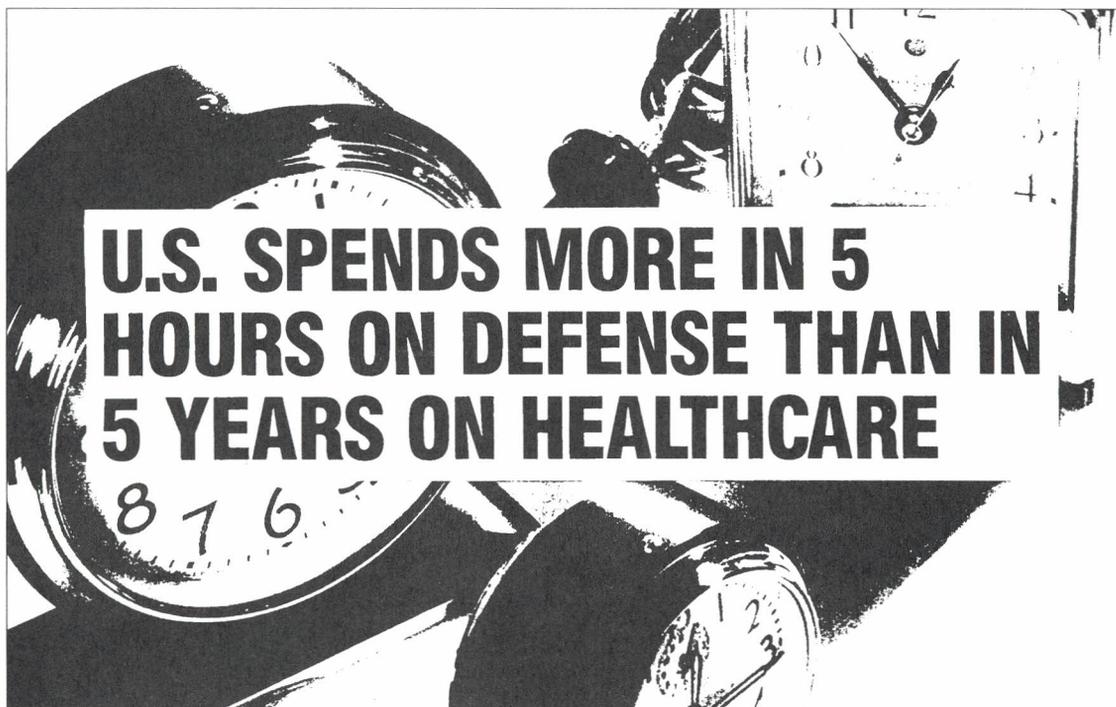
Techniques of postmodernist appropriation are employed by these groups with a sly nod to art world precursors. In a number of early posters, for example, Gran Fury adopted Barbara Kruger's seductive graphic style, which was subsequently, and perhaps less knowingly, taken up by other ACT UP graphic producers. Their best-known appropriation is undoubtedly the public-service announcement on San Francisco (and later New York) city buses produced for "Art Against AIDS on the Road," under the auspices of the American Foundation for AIDS Research. Imitating the look of the United Colors of Benetton advertising campaign, Gran Fury photographed three stylish young interracial couples kissing and topped the three images with the caption **KISSING DOESN'T KILL: GREED AND INDIFFERENCE DO.** The punch of the message, its implicit reference to the risk of HIV transmission, and its difference from a Benetton ad derive from a simple fact: only one photograph pairs boy with girl.

If their sophisticated postmodern style has gained art world attention and much-needed funding for Gran Fury, the collective has accepted it only hesitantly, often biting the hand that feeds. Their first poster commission from an art institution was discharged with a

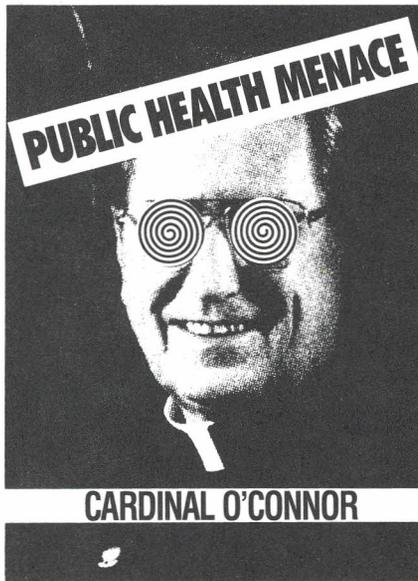
message about art world complacency: **WITH 42,000 DEAD, ART IS NOT ENOUGH.** Familiar with the fate of most critical-art practices—that is, with the art world's capacity to coopt and neutralize them—Gran Fury has remained wary of its own success. Such success can ensure visibility, but visibility *to whom?*

The constituency of much politically engaged art is the art world itself. Generally, artists ponder society from within the confines of their studios; there they apply their putatively unique visions to aesthetic analyses of social conditions. Mainstream artistic responses to the AIDS crisis often suffer from just such isolation, with the result that the art speaks only of the artist's private sense of rage or loss or helplessness. Such expressions are often genuine and moving, but their very hermeticism ensures that the primary audience that will find them so will be the traditional art audience.

AIDS activist artists work from a very different base. Their point of departure is neither the studio nor the artist's private vision, but AIDS activism. Social conditions are viewed from the perspective of the movement working to change them. AIDS activist art is grounded in the accumulated knowledge and political analysis of the AIDS crisis produced



AIDS FACTS,
(24 VARIATIONS),
1989, ACT UP
AD HOC GAY PRIDE
COMMITTEE.



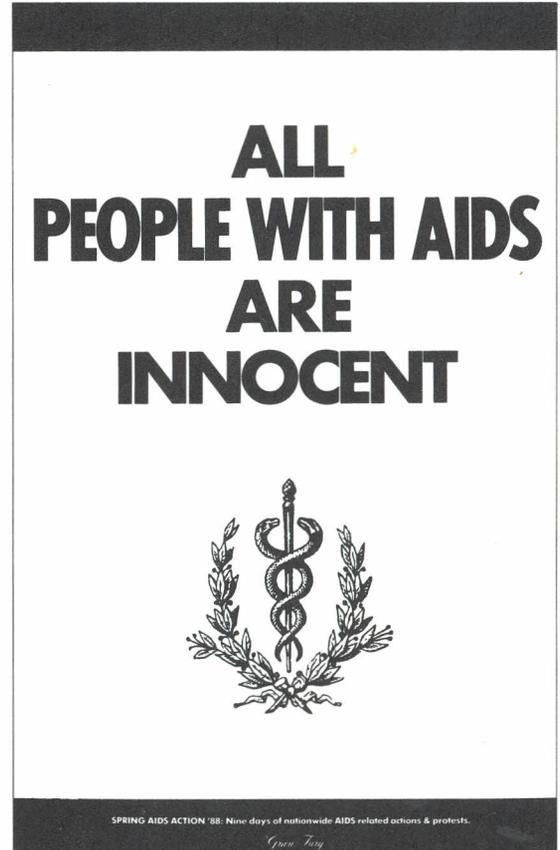
PUBLIC HEALTH MENACE,
1989, VINCENT GAGLIOSTRO.

collectively by the entire movement. The graphics not only reflect that knowledge but actively contribute to its articulation as well. They codify concrete, specific issues of importance to the movement as a whole or to particular interests within it. They function as an organizing tool by conveying, in compressed form, information and political positions to others affected by the epidemic, to onlookers at demonstrations, and to the dominant media. But their primary audience is the movement itself.

AIDS activist graphics enunciate AIDS politics to and for all of us in the movement. They suggest slogans (SILENCE=DEATH becomes "We'll never be silent again"), target opponents (*The New York Times*, President Reagan, Cardinal O'Connor), define positions ("All people with AIDS are innocent"), propose actions ("Boycott Burroughs Wellcome"). Graphic designs are often devised in ACT UP committees and presented for discussion and approval at the group's regular Monday night meetings. Contested positions are debated, and sometimes proposed graphic ideas are altered or vetoed by the membership. In the end, when the final product is wheatpasted around the city, carried on protest placards, and worn on T-shirts, our politics, and our cohesion around those politics, become visible to us, and to those who will potentially join us.

Sometimes our graphics signify *only* internally, as when an ACT UP affinity group went to TARGET CITY HALL wearing T-shirts silk-screened with a photograph of the actress Cher. The group adopted the movie star's name as a camp gesture, and each time someone asked what it meant, CHER became an acronym for whatever could be concocted on the spot: anything from "Commie Homos Engaged in Revolution" to "Cathy Has Extra Rollers." But ACT UP's humor is no joke. It has given us the courage to maintain our exuberant sense of life while coping every day with disease and death, and it has defended us against the pessimism endemic to other Left movements, from which we have otherwise taken so much. ▼

Douglas Crimp, recipient of the 1988 Frank Jewett Mather Award for distinction in art criticism, is the editor of AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism (October Press).



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Gran Fury

ALL PEOPLE WITH AIDS ARE INNOCENT, 1988, GRAN FURY.

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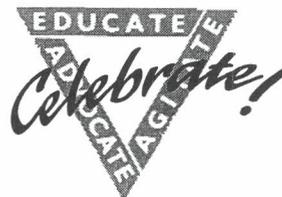
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I KNEW YOU didn't feel any pain. That's why you went barefoot in winter. And that's why the minute I loved you back you had to break my heart. So I decided to return to the city that was my foreign home, Amsterdam. On the train.

The sky was a big gray lid over Brussels. I hoped for a warm compartment where I could press my nose against the glass, watch the endless stripes of barren fields fly by. Then I'd shift my focus to my own reflection. My face would be sad, triumphant, stoical, and

the train would rock me across the miles, from Brussels to Antwerp, from Antwerp to Amsterdam.

Your offer to take me to the station was guilt-tinged, nothing like those first weekends together. Then you'd pick me up at the station, your quick and quirky pony stride just keeping pace with my longer legs. We'd walk along the train, your eyes flashing all kinds of blue, noticing all the details about me. I fell into the intensity of your interest.

The whistle was already blowing in the station, and I ran quickly along the train, looking for my car number. The hydraulic brakes hissed; it started to move; I jumped on anywhere. It was a weekday. Our relationship only happened on weekends. It was November, a month without holiday anxieties, vacationing families, or American students tasting Europe. The train wasn't full, only one or two people sat in each compartment. I strolled down the narrow hallway, my duffel bag pointing in front of me.

You'd lent me a white T-shirt for the trip. I had it packed on top where I could easily find it. When I'd asked for it, you weren't exact-

ly willing to lend me something clean and white and refreshing for the journey. You pawed through an extensive T-shirt collection in your top drawer, careful not to lend out the trendy productless logo from Covent Garden, or the extra-large Egyptian cotton model that swam around your tiny frame. Eventually you found something unsuited to yourself, with little white balls matted into the knitted fabric that had seen many washings.

I didn't remind you how you'd wheedled me out of my favorite cardigan, or how you'd put on my cashmere sweater last month and walked off with it. You tossed the white T-shirt and I took it. Now it was in the duffel bag, pointing its way down the corridor to my fine green upholstered cell where I would rock myself away from you.

I heaved the door open, threw the duffel bag down on the seat next to me, and snapped the shade of the window to the hallway closed. I sat down. The compartment was warm, overheated, even stuffy. I stood up briefly to open the transom window. I had everything. Warm feet, moist air sweeping down to my face in gusts, and a rocking motion filling my feet with a pleasure that worked its way up through my legs and gave me a heart massage worthy of the best resuscitation effort. The miles, darling, were going to stretch between us.

I looked at my reflection in the glass. I winked. I was alone. But not as alone as I'd felt in your presence. You'd ramble on, opinionating, posturing, anything to avoid contact. This last weekend you'd started out doting but ended up dismissive. You were requiring more calculation than application. So it was over.

I was so late for the train I'd had no time to buy the requisite water, ham sandwich, piece of

Mars BAR

BY MARY WINGS

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unwrapped the food. It was a housewife's origami, the edges of the paper folded in clean, angled creases.

Fresh bread, a lover's message, made earlier that morning. Dijon mustard, charcuterie ham, a love letter he took with him on the train.

As he pulled back each triangular flap, as the bread emerged, I could smell the almost acrid mustard, the slightly metallic ham. Finally the sandwich lay revealed, a miniature Mondrian, centered on the translucent paper.

He put out his hand and reached for half of the sandwich, looking for a moment in between the bread slices. I thought I saw him smile. I hated him. I hated this train ride, and for a moment I finally hated you.

Then I leaned forward, stretched across the fold-down table, laid my fingers on the remaining half of the sandwich, and plucked it clean away.

I held it in front of my face, my eyes glowing above the tops of the crusts as I peered at my unwanted traveling companion. Had he looked at me? Or had I missed his glance as I too had peered at the stripe of yellow and pink between the bread slices?

I had gotten him now; he was looking at his hands, chewing a bit faster than he had chewed my Mars Bar. I chewed too. It was smoked ham laden generously with mustard. It was real food and sustenance, and I had forced him to give it to me. I swallowed.

You were so capricious with food, with all sensual pleasures. Your culinary skills, your wild and tender fucking were gifts. Bribes. Ways of keeping yourself warm in your apartment. But I wouldn't have to wonder about those things anymore. My belly was filling and I was nearing home.

The train was pulling into the

Central Station of Amsterdam. The Frenchman and I stood up at the same moment. I towered over him and took up vast amounts of virtual space, swinging my black overcoat on. I stuffed the paperback into my pocket and swung the strap of the duffel bag over my shoulder.

The Frenchman reached down for the string handles of his bag, putting his other hand in his pocket. He gave a diminutive cough. The wax paper, with its memory of angled creases, lay on the fold-out table, the only evidence of the power struggle between us.

He hesitated, letting me walk out of the compartment in front of him, an ironic sense of chivalry. Later I waited by the door of the train to see him step out first. He took neat, quick little steps away from me. He would be slightly cold, and I was a bit hot. Amsterdam was warmer than I'd expected.

As I stepped out of the station, I felt relieved to be back in my foreign home, the city I had chosen to live in these last five years. The scent of the canal water was familiar, the tall purposeful Dutch citizenry contrasted with the shiftless colorful crowds making music and dope deals outside the station. I walked on the solid Dutch ground. Each step here was a bigger step away from you than the train rails had described.

I would continue in the days to come to try on memories of you like a warm coat; then I'd get overheated, stuffy, and throw it off again. I would be angry and bereft, tender and thwarted in turn.

I would change the last of my worn Belgian franc notes for the crisp and modern Dutch guilders, I decided. I walked to the money-changing booth. There were three people in line in front of me. I opened the zipper of the duffel bag. I started mentally unpacking,

anticipating arriving in my apartment. Tonight I'd really read that paperback book.

The line was slowly moving forward. I still had some guilders, but I had so many of those Belgian francs I wanted to get rid of them now. My hand dove into the duffel bag. I felt past the plastic sack; I would wash that lingerie in Woolite and hang it to dry in the shower stall tonight.

My hand found its way under the T-shirt. I fingered the balled-up knitted fabric. That event was losing its potency. In the end I knew that you hadn't taken anything from me that I hadn't offered myself.

I worked my way along the seam of the bottom of the duffel bag. I was giving up on changing the Belgian francs because I had found another kind of paper, a message to myself.

At the end of the seam, in the far corner, scratching the tips of my fingers, an edge of paper. Ricrac. Corrugated. And describing the surface of a slightly crushed, but perfectly whole, Mars Bar. ▼

Mary Wings has written two detective novels, She Came in a Flash and She Came Too Late. First published in Britain, her work has been translated into Dutch, German, and Japanese. She is currently working on a volume of short stories entitled Mighty Muff and Other Tales of the Erotic, Neurotic and Deadly.

**Your
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Bribes.**

***You were so
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on her lap, a frightened adolescent, and an angry adolescent. All were granted solitude. But there was no buffet car. And no empty compartments either. I was stuck with my hunger, my heart, and my Frenchman who looked past the glass.

I started the walk back through the train. The shade was still drawn across the window of my compartment. I hoped that that little tick of a man wouldn't be sitting there.

But what I couldn't have guessed, as I reached for the cold and greasy handle, turning it and swinging the door open, was that he would be sitting there eating my Mars Bar.

Yes, he was eating my candy, slowly pulling the paper off on one side, sinking his dentures into the dark chocolate. A caramel

string was escaping from the bar and clinging to his curving, chapped lips. He licked it off, keeping his head bent. But his eyes flickered a quick glance at my face.

I tried to formulate a French sentence, or reclaim a Flemish phrase, but no insults would come to mind. He would laugh at my pronunciation, I was sure of it.

I just stood there and watched the man deliberately ingesting my personal property, the only piece of sustenance I had making this journey through foreign territory.

Let him eat the candy bar, I decided. I wouldn't rise to his provocation. Instead I would enjoy the pit of hunger in my belly. The cheap confection would merely

have raised my blood sugar anyway. A temporary high that would have dumped my mood somewhere around the border.

I looked at the duffel bag to see if anything else had been touched. It was still offering the unread paperback, the unappreciated underwear in the plastic bag, the unused franc notes, and the clean white T-shirt, the whole matrix of the weekend that had meant the end of us.

I plopped down on the seat. I crossed my arms and stared at the little French weasel as hard as I knew how. I narrowed my eyes and made a little cough when he didn't look up. He was still staring out the window, chewing. He was busy with the final corner of my Mars Bar.

I threw the paper into the cardboard folder. When this didn't get his attention, I started pushing my weekend items back into the duffel bag. I made the largest sound I could closing the teflon zipper. I muttered, "Merde!" with an impeccable French *r* when the zipper caught on the paperback book.

I pulled the book out and threw it on the seat next to me. The plain frog in the brown shoes shifted his weight slightly as he continued to look out the window. The last bit of my Mars Bar was making its way down his throat. Then he turned toward me.

He put the wrapper of the Mars Bar on the table between us. With the side of his hand he smoothed out the brown paper, again and again, until it was quite flat. He folded it three times so that only the corrugated ricrac edges showed. Then he put it in the pocket of his corduroy pants, leaned back, and settled his glance out the window again.

Did he think I would leave this compartment? After all, I had been here first. I considered his gall. I considered murder. A large knife

that would pin him to the seat. He would bleed onto the upholstery, squirming around the blade as I got on with my letter to you. I looked out the window instead.

The landscape seemed filled with endless broken fences. A dog ran at us until her choke chain stopped her and she was thrown back with the same propulsion with which she had chased the train. The unhappy event retreated into the distance. I picked up the paperback book. I let my eyes follow the higgly-piggly shapes of the black type. I turned pages every now and then, but I wasn't reading. I was seeing you. And the Frenchman who taunted me and matched the upholstery and the gray landscape. I pushed my eyes over the type, line after line. For hours. Eventually I drifted.

Your nervous laugh entered my mind. You always tried too hard; that's why I wasn't irritated that first night when you'd dropped names like dog doo. It was hard to call you genuine. Of course you'd say this was all essentialist dogma, there were no genuine feelings, that we're always in flux, always a composite, always unknown to ourselves. You didn't fool me with that kind of maneuvering, but I was charmed by your words. And touched by the fear that generated them.

The landscape was darkening. The Frenchman was moving. He was bending over. I wanted to smash his face to the floor. He was reaching into his paper sack, pushing those thick hands carefully in between layers of stacked and folded items. He knew just what he was looking for; his mind was in his fingers as he felt the different textures within the bag. The hands finally emerged, with a wax paper square an inch thick.

He laid it on the table, which I had conveniently cleared for him earlier that afternoon. Carefully he

unwrapped the food. It was a housewife's origami, the edges of the paper folded in clean, angled creases.

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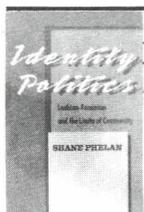


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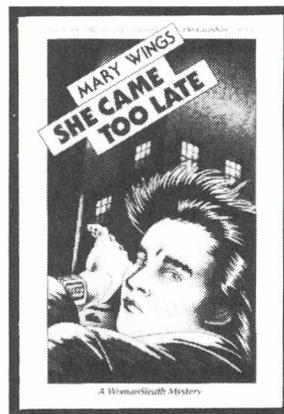
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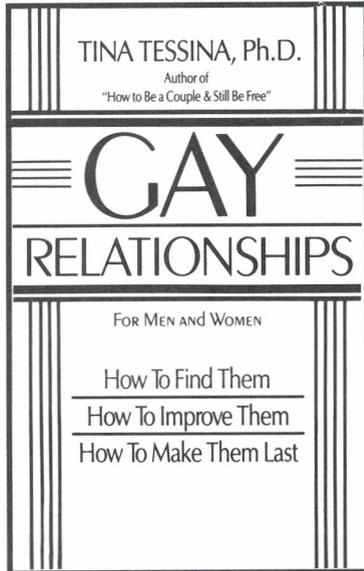
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*OUT Write '90, First National
Lesbian & Gay Writers Conference,
Keynote Address*

by Judy Grahn

WE DID IT! The lesbian and gay movements have created overtly lesbian and gay writing (for the most part), and this writing, in turn, has created and sustained and furthered the movement—they are phases of the same moon.

If there is a gay or lesbian writer who has never done any organizing, that person is taking a free ride. The rest of us have had to devote some amount of time, some of us many years of our lives, to developing an audience. Meaning: to give our people something tangible to hope for, to help them identify as gay enough to want to read about themselves. Hope is what entices people to read, to see themselves reflected accurately and respectfully, to imagine participating in the world of culture and activity that reflects them as they actually are—that tells their story in the stream of all story.

Judy Grahn receiving OUT/LOOK's award for her pioneering contribution to lesbian and gay writing.



BLAKE SORRELL

By "develop an audience" I mean develop some aspects of the political and cultural movements as physical entities and events. Sometimes that means going into the streets and public halls in action, shouting, risk-taking, demonstrating at top volume. Sometimes it means staying in airless rooms for hours and hours every day and every week and every month holding and attending endless dull meetings, or voter registering, or paper pushing of one kind or another. Sometimes it means taking years of effort and sweat and money starting and running and promoting gay and lesbian businesses, especially those based in the media—spreading ideas and images through inde-

pendent presses and papers, magazines, bookstores, and distributorships.

Sometimes it means taking time to help the "audience," one's people, with healing, keeping them from suiciding or OD'ing or dying of poverty and despair and neglect; or if not keeping them from it, at least noticing and witnessing that they are doing these things. Sometimes it means helping them wend their way through the endless health-and-welfare mazes. Sometimes it means helping them die as dignified *gay people*, holding their funerals and writing their funerals for them to use.

No one ever said all this was part of what we take on with the

otherwise privileged and exotic-sounding job title "gay or lesbian writer"—but it is. This is anything but an alienated occupation. This is a difficult, wholistic occupation that involves remaking the world even as you observe it, absorb it, experience it, and write about it for the consumption of others. Your first audience is your people, and by reflecting them to themselves and to the public at large, you help in very large measure to create them and sustain them as an existent entity.

How appropriate it is that two poets are leading off this historic and important conference, this gathering of an explosive people. Poetry is the mapmaking of our movement—in fact, it's the orien-

tation of civilization. Prose and fiction come later, to fill in the details, flesh out the muscle and bone of the structures that poetry lays down first. Poetry predicts us, tells us where we are going next. This is because, more than most other writing, poetry requires listening to spirits, to the largest voices of the cosmos. Poetry sets the rhythm for what we are doing as a group.

I hope those of you who are primarily prose writers can pay attention to the teaching in the poetry and don't listen to stupid advice about not writing poetry because "there is no money in it." There is no money in anything holy. There is probably no money in love, beauty, or wisdom. Everybody throws money at pain and trouble, and sudden sensation, emotion, and anesthesia. But poetry is a way of channeling divinity from the core of the earth herself, and poets are mapmakers who follow those key lines.

Standing as we are at the edge of a rapidly dying world, and with, we hope, another one trying to be born, we begin to articulate new understandings of the nature of death, transformation, life, sex, love, and what humans *are*. These articulations alter the world.

We didn't necessarily choose this cauldron, but it is the one we are in. I've always thought that if you become gay, you are choosing one cauldron or another.

And if you decide to be a writer, you are choosing to cook something up in your cauldron, something which the population at large, sooner or later, is going to eat. This food is called literature, and it leads nations, it establishes the imagery of entire populations, it manifests reality based in its own strength, imagery, and rhythm.

Speaking as poet, I can say that if you breathe out bitterness, your audience will breathe bitterness

back to you; if you breathe out sarcasm, your audience will breathe sarcasm; if you breathe out humor, humor; if anger, anger; and if you breathe out love, your audience will breathe back to you love.

What movement, what culture, what civilization is it that gay people are leading? I ask this not as a rhetorical question but as a reminder to us of who we are. I know that we are not in the habit—except for the queens, the queens who Larry Mitchell says wipe their asses with the priceless papers of our civilization—we are not in the habit of thinking of ourselves as leading our civilization, and yet we do.

This power to influence is the major reason for our suppression. We are the measure of suppression.

And we constitute here, in this gathering, a marvelous and I know quite anarchistic propaganda tool for ourselves, our gay culture and experience, our place in modern history. A chance, now, to expand into some new tribal names for who we are—cultural definitions of ourselves that go beyond lesbian and gay, that acknowledge and maintain same-sex gay bonding, leadership, and culture while spinning out to include bisexual relationships, celibacy, flaming queenship, whoredom, cross-cultural traditional marriage, and the multitude of alternative family systems needed to meet the needs of actual people in a shifting environment, when animal and plant environments themselves are shifting, when the earth is shifting.

This is why California is so at the heart of it, because the earth shifts so obviously here. This is why we call everything that we do here in California a "movement."

I AM GLAD SO many gay people have gotten into the recovery movement, because to a large

extent, it seems to me, the recovery movement advocates the telling of secrets. In a world that is dying and being born there is not much use in keeping secrets—we may as well tell everything we think and everything we know.

As a feminist, I am not so much interested in taking back the night as I am in taking back the world. And this world keeps coming back to us itself as we recover our history, and our gods and goddesses.

It is in a large degree through poetry that we can trace the antiquity of our existence:

- In the oldest mythologies in the Mideast of 5,000 years ago life and death danced in the underworld in the form of two female figures named Inanna and Ereshkigal.

- In the same area there is the story of Gilgamesh (where we can find the roots of materialism as a philosophy), in which two male friends are kissing and loving each other, loving to touch each other. . .

- Seventeen hundred years before Sappho the first signed poetry by any individual was written by a woman named Enheduanna, who in all probability—guess what—was a lesbian, was priestess of the goddess of life and beauty.

- Inanna's poetry contains a description of a gay ceremony in which the goddess takes two people, a man and a woman, and performs a ceremony called head overturning, in which she changes their gender. They are then given a special title and called *pili-pili*. After the ceremony of head overturning, each takes on the tools of the opposite gender and then takes on a special gay office described as ecstasy and trance, expression and lamentation. Does this sound familiar?

This was a public gay presence, and it was happening on the eve of the establishment of the first cities. Such a public gay presence seems

associated with those centuries of gigantic transition, of the passage of huge sectors from rural to urban bases, of the inclusion of matrilineal goddesses into the newer patriarchal religions, of the taking of women's technology and passing it into male hands, sometimes very traumatically—as with the witch burnings (from which we have not yet begun to recover, and the memory of which is carried in patterns of family violence) and what appears today to be a flowering of worldwide male technology that's badly out of balance and in need of female input.

Male and female are images, metaphors, as I have just used them, referring as much to lobes of the brain as to people. Gender bending is one of the tasks of gay artists.

Here we are again, in the current age, with a mass public gay presence. We are an indication of huge changes taking place everywhere. To tell you the truth, I actually thought you might all run out when the going got a little tough; but no, here you are, ready to take on the world in all its agony and glory.

I'm excited for all of you, and for your writing careers, and I'm proud and honored to be here with the kickoff talk, and I'm relieved that I can turn the artistic and political burden over to you all. That is what it feels like to me: sharing this great and good and terrible load and sharing it publicly. For the first time in my life I feel proud of myself.

The remarkable thing about this conference is the mixture of men and women, and the representation of people of color—still not enough, but a beginning. This mixture is also presented and reflected in the Larkin/Morse anthology *Gay and Lesbian Poetry in Our Time*.

Twenty years ago I attended another gay conference, and at that



JANE CLELAND

"Gay people are not in the habit of thinking of ourselves as leading our civilization, and yet we do."

conference I think there were 10 women, probably 300 men; there was one person of color, a very outspoken Black woman named Anna. And I read a paper there saying that men and women should all work together. . . I've never been all that timely with my predictions!

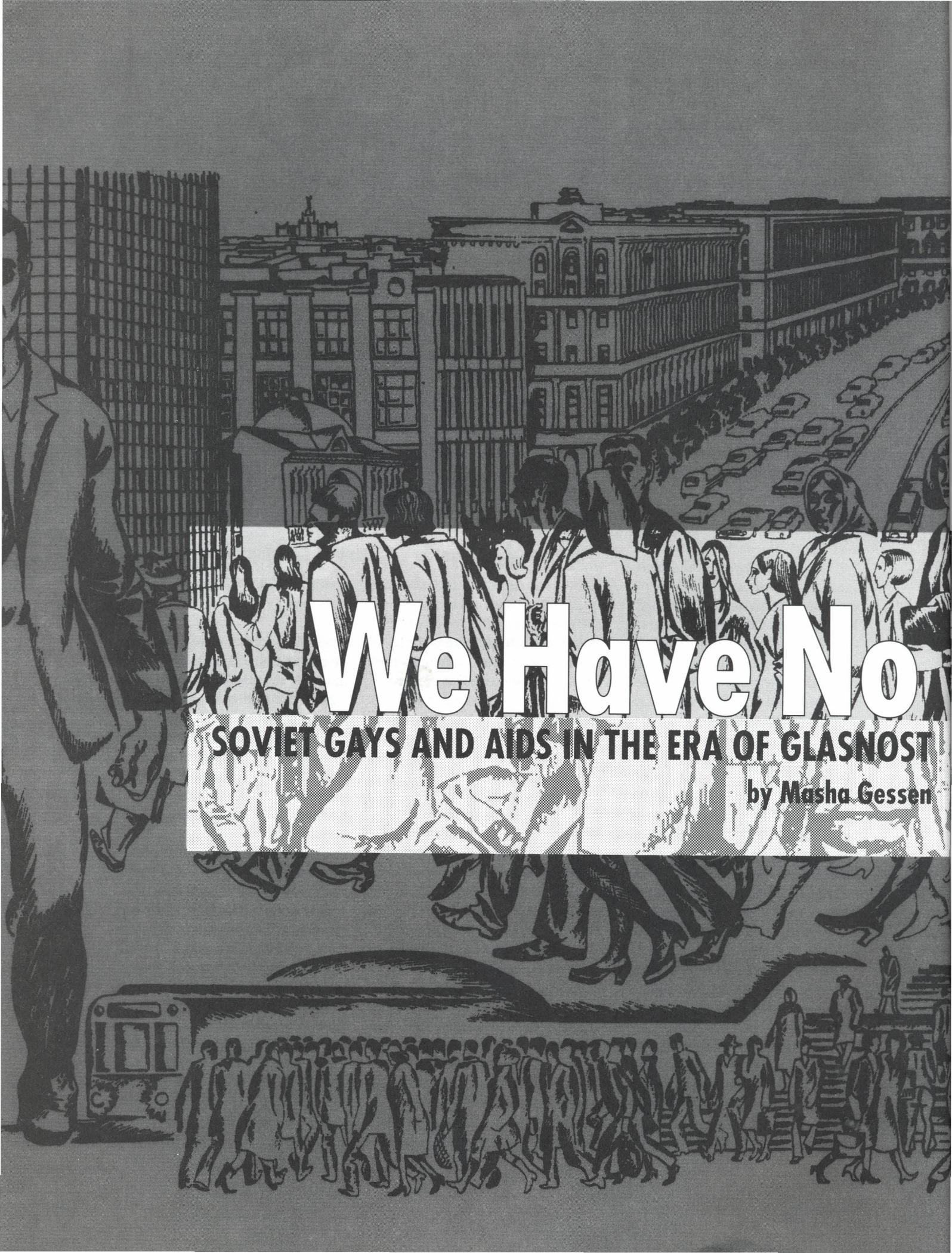
We got so frustrated at that conference that we women gathered together and formed lesbian separatism. And this mixture that we have at this conference is formed by separatism, which was already being practiced by people like Barbara Grier and by one organization of gay men in LA. The Black-power movement led by Malcolm X taught us how to use separatism as a tool, how to recover a base for who you are. And when it's used in that fashion, as a tool, it gives rise to what's here today. You can credit it exactly for this because it allowed us women, for instance, to develop our own agendas, net-

works, confidence, media, and presses, and it left men free to do the same thing without having to take responsibility for us. For a decade or so this happened.

So now we can come together from bases of power. The same thing happens with every kind of group—you see it in things like Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press and anthologies such as *Nice Jewish Girls* and *This Bridge Called My Back*, bases of power that enable us to come together as equals and share actual power.

This conference, then, took at least twenty years to develop. And we earned every word of it, every interaction, every disagreement, every common recognition. Guard them and grow them carefully. ▼

Judy Grahn is the author of Another Mother Tongue, Queen of Swords, and Really Reading Gertrude Stein. She is currently breaking the sound barrier with poetry.



We Have No

SOVIET GAYS AND AIDS IN THE ERA OF GLASNOST

by Masha Gessen

DURING THE FIRST US-Soviet “televideo” about five years ago, the Soviet participants were asked about the treatment of gay people in their country. “We don’t have homosexuality,” came the confident response of a woman in the Soviet audience. While the speaker’s compatriots nodded their agreement, a giggle swept through the American audience and the camera shifted to the US side, where a woman was knowingly shaking her head “no.”

Back then the Russian word for openness—*glasnost*—was not yet a household word in the US, and sex was still a taboo subject in the Soviet Union. Members of Phil Donahue’s first Soviet audience would just as sincerely have denied that their fellow citizens were sexual at all. Their choice not to engage in a discussion of matters sexual was wise for

movies, and periodicals distributed in the Soviet Union during the seven decades preceding *glasnost*: “Soviet literary authorities,” writes Yelena Gessen, a former Soviet editor and translator, “desperately want to forget that a person comes into this world endowed with sexual organs.”^{*1} Gessen describes a foreign-fiction anthology that lost an already-approved short story to censorship because, in the words of the editor, “it contained too much sex—and totally unjustified sex. One would be unable to explain why it was necessary.”

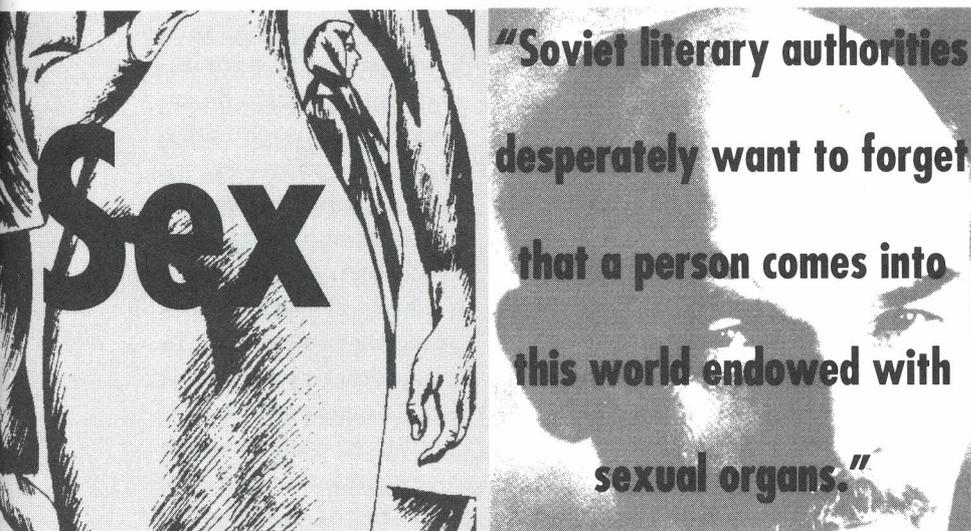
The notion that a person’s every action must be motivated by necessity is central not only to the peculiar art form known as Socialist Realism but to the study and execution of anything that can be fitted with an ideological underpinning—including, of course, the study of human sexuality.

The few Soviet scientists and laypeople who have chosen to study sexual orientation are no exception. The Soviet Union may be the only country in the world where almost everyone who has thought about it believes the same factor is at the root of homosexuality. Among Soviet citizens, explains Russian lexicographer Vladimir Kozlovsky, the preeminent theory is that homosexuals get that way in

the labor camps. He also notes, however, that in his studies of the Soviet gay subculture he met no one who had been incarcerated.²

We Have Little Sex

Laughable as the level of Soviet discourse about sex is, publication of even the most repressive articles about sexuality would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. In the spirit of *glasnost*, however, Soviet citizens have begun not only to chip away at the censorship establishment’s portrayal of the Soviet Union



many reasons, not the least of which is that such a discussion could not possibly have been conducted in language suitable for television. There is no socially acceptable vocabulary in Russian for discussing sexuality: the only sexually descriptive words belong to *mat*—a set of words that, its connoisseurs proudly point out, are more vulgar than words found in any other language. And even this lexicon is of little help in a conversation about homosexuality.

The lack of a sexually descriptive Russian vocabulary stems in part from the censorship of any and all sex-related material from books,

as a sex-free zone but to laugh at it. There is even a popular new souvenir on the shelves of Soviet stores: a plaque with two hammer-and-sickle-decorated stick figures who have no genitals, with a double entendre caption: "We have no sex."

Regrettably, most of the Soviet media's attempts to break through the sexual denial have been no more informative or graceful than these clay souvenir plaques. Last year, for example, the national monthly magazine for adolescents undertook the ambitious task of educating pubescent boys and girls about the changes taking place in their bodies. The first article for boys dealt with masturbation. Purporting to denounce the old stigma attached to masturbation, the author—a psychiatrist—assured her readers that their perfectly natural masturbatory urges would pass before too long, with the benefit of a little will power, a lot of exercise, and plenty of studying.³ Clearly, if the discipline of sex education in the Soviet Union continues to progress at the same pace, teenagers will begin learning about homosexuality sometime in the middle of the next century.

Like the masturbation article, a majority of recent controversial publications in Soviet periodicals have broken only halfway through any given taboo, almost never reaching far enough even to mention homosexuality. While the Soviet media have brought back to the Soviet reader the work of several authors who are known to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual, the accompanying commentaries have never explicitly mentioned the authors' sexuality. The works of André Gide were brought back from a fifty-year literary exile, together with articles that mentioned Gide's unflattering comments about the Soviet Union following his 1936 visit—but omitted the fact that these comments concerned the country's treatment of homosexuals.⁴ When the poetry of Sophia

Parnok saw print last winter, she was introduced to Soviet readers as "a friend" of the poet Marina Tsvetayeva, when she was, in fact, her lover.⁵ And a true feat of denial was accomplished when Soviet periodicals published interviews with and carefully chosen excerpts from the works of Eduard Limonov, probably the most controversial Russian-language writer, who gained notoriety with an autobiographical novel that included descriptions of his sexual acts, with both men and women. Soviet journalists simply stated that Limonov was a "scandalous" writer who "exposed himself" in his first book.^{6,7}

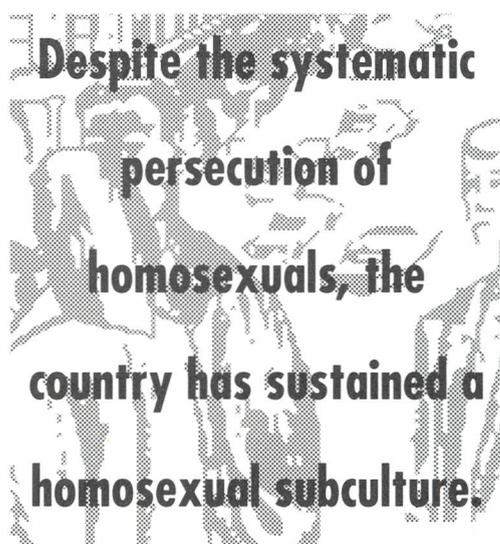
A different form of censorship has affected photographs and artwork showcased in Soviet periodicals. Here editors have opted for showing without telling. An essay on a female students' dormitory consists of half a dozen photographs, each with a detailed caption—except for the lone picture of two women under a blanket thrown over two single beds that have been pushed together.⁸ An article about the artist

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin is accompanied by reproductions of his paintings, each of which is analyzed in the text—except for one undeniably homoerotic painting of two naked pubescent boys.⁹

Of course, the only thing really new about the current censorship of gay-related material in the Soviet Union is that it has lessened somewhat. But even before the most recent thaw, and despite the systematic persecution of homosexuals throughout most of the last two centuries, the country has sustained a homosexual subculture.

Repress! Oppress! . . .

In czarist Russia voluntary participation in "the unnatural vice" between two men was punishable by incarceration for four to five



years, but the law was rarely, if ever, applied. The perpetration of the act upon a minor or a mentally incompetent or unwilling partner upped the sentence to ten to twelve years. The prerevolutionary government considered extending the law to heterosexuals but ended up deciding against it, and it entertained but took no action on a liberalization proposal made by politician Vladimir Nabokov (the writer's father). Ultimately, all laws of the empire were abolished in one fell swoop by the October revolution of 1917.¹⁰

The sodomy laws stayed off the books in Soviet Russia until 1933. But while this fact has often been cited in the West as an indication of the early Bolshevik government's lenient view of homosexuality, there is no evidence that the absence of anti-gay laws was intentional: after all, the new government did not even institute laws against murder, rape, and incest until five years after the revolution. At the same time, like their predecessors, members of the postrevolutionary governments briefly flirted with the idea of sexual liberation. Between 1921 and 1930, Soviet delegations attended the first four congresses of the World Society for Sexual Reform. But the government's commitment to sexual reform apparently faltered in 1931, with the cancellation of the fifth congress, slated for the discussion of "Marxism and the Question of Sex" in Moscow. (The gathering finally took place in Brno, Czechoslovakia, in 1932.)¹¹

By the early 1930s there was not a trace of liberalism left in any printed references to homosexuality. In an article on fascism published simultaneously in the country's two major dailies in 1934, Maxim Gorky, hailed as Soviet Russia's "writer of the proletariat," summed up the spirit of intolerance that had set in: "I will note that in the country bravely and successfully led by the proletariat, homo-

sexuality, which destroys the youth, is seen and punished as the antisocial crime it is. Meanwhile, in the so-called 'cultured country' of great philosophers, scientists, and musicians, it is allowed to run rampant. Hence the saying: 'Eliminate homosexuality, and you will make fascism disappear.'"¹²

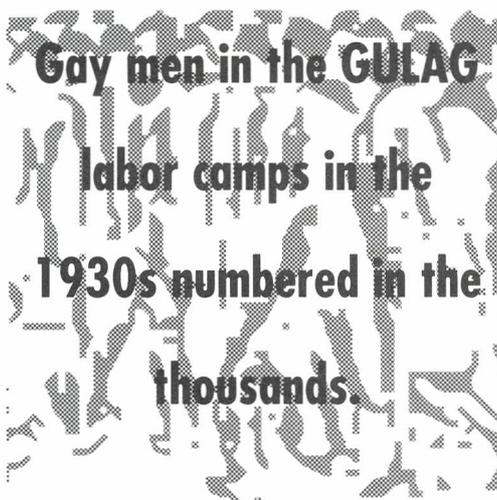
In January 1934 at least four major Soviet cities—including Moscow and Leningrad—became sites of mass arrests of gay men. According to Kozlovsky, former prisoners estimate that gay men in the GULAG labor camps in the 1930s numbered in the thousands. They were jailed under Article 121 of the 1933 law,

which provided for a prison sentence of up to five years for men convicted of voluntarily engaging in sex with other men and up to eight years for having sex with a male minor or with a person who was physically or mentally forced to participate.¹³

Since then the law regarding gay sex has remained essentially unchanged. There are no available statistics as to how often this law is

invoked, although legal expert Valery Chalidze reports that "the number of such cases was by no means small: men convicted of gay sex comprised 0.1 percent of all criminal convictions in 1966."¹⁴ Kozlovsky suggests that the number of men arrested under the provisions of Article 121 is far greater, but that the police and the KGB often prefer to make informers, rather than convicts, out of these detainees. According to a number of sources, local law enforcement authorities keep comprehensive lists of individuals believed to be gay.¹⁵

While neither Article 121 nor any other part of the Criminal Code prohibits lesbian sex, authorities apparently find ways to persecute the few lesbians who are part of the gay subculture. "Say, for example, they'll take me in for speculation [the sale and resale of goods,



especially foreign-made clothes, at inflated prices],” explains “Vera,” a twenty-year-old Moscovite. “So they’ll give me time for that, plus add a little because I’m a lesbian.”¹⁶

... You Will Never Suppress It!

In spite of the government’s persecution and the larger society’s complete intolerance of homosexuality and all other kinds of nonconformity, gay men and, to a far lesser degree, lesbians have managed to create and maintain a subculture, complete with gathering places, identifying gestures, and a versatile vocabulary. Every major city has what is known as the *marshrut* (“circuit”)—a set of streets along which a gay man is likely to spot another. In Moscow the *marshrut*, which circles the center of the city, has its heart in the square in front of the Bolshoi Theater. There gay men, often recognizable by mascara and unusually tight jeans, mix with a handful of lesbians, a few hippies, and scores of speculators who buy and sell foreign goods. The gay men and the speculators compete for the attentions of foreign actors and tourists—a scene also found in the lobbies of Moscow’s hotels.

Moscow, like other cities around the world, boasts a number of public toilets where men meet and have sex with other men. The omnipresent *banyas*—public baths—are also reportedly popular places for gay men to make contact with other gay men. And while there are no gay bars per se, there is always an eatery or two along the *marshrut* that particularly attracts the circuit regulars.

Like members of the American gay subculture of the 1950s, *marshrut* men and women differentiate heavily between “passive” and “active” homosexuals. It appears, however, that these distinctions are more meaningful in describing social and cultural identities than

actual sexual behavior. According to a gay man interviewed by Kozlovsky, most gay men are “synthetic”—what his American counterparts would call *kiki*, neither top nor bottom.¹⁷

The *marshrut* lifestyle carries a set of hazards that make it best suited for strong and healthy men. The Russian climate and Soviet law enforcement authorities make outdoor social life extremely unfriendly. In addition to the sodomy law, the police use laws against prostitution, speculation, and loitering to harass *marshrut* regulars. Extralegal assistance is provided by street hooligans, who bash gays regularly, sometimes on their own initiative

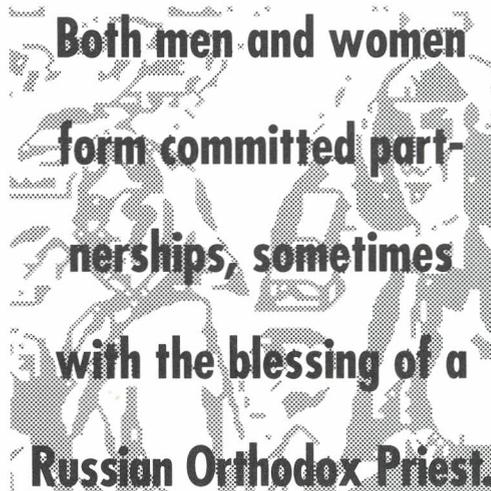
and sometimes at the suggestion of the police. Many who have done the Moscow circuit can recall being lured into an alley by a basher, or narrowly escaping—or not escaping—a gang of attackers. Not surprisingly, the *marshrut* is dominated by young people, many of whom stay around only long enough to find a partner.

Like their American counterparts, Soviet lesbians and gay men seem

to believe that the women among them are more likely to form permanent relationships than the men are. But, as in most places, both men and women form committed partnerships, sometimes even with the blessing of a Russian Orthodox priest. Many couples exchange rings, which, according to Kozlovsky’s “Vera,” are worn on the left hand, as opposed to the right, where Soviet heterosexuals wear their wedding bands.

The Tactful Intelligentsia

What Gorky did not foresee when he extolled the virtues of the country “bravely and successfully led by the proletariat” was that the gap between the proletariat and the intelligentsia would only grow wider with the development of Soviet society. But even



Both men and women form committed partnerships, sometimes with the blessing of a Russian Orthodox Priest.

though no one is supposed to be "more equal" than anyone else, completely separate cultures exist in different socioeconomic spheres. Because the solidarity among members of the homosexual minority is not nearly strong enough to bridge this gap, the gay culture in intellectual circles has almost nothing in common with the working-class *marshrut*. A gay mathematics instructor I interviewed from a large Soviet city put it this way: "How am I supposed to know what *the people* think of homosexuality? I am not one of the people!"

While heterosexual intellectuals rarely tolerate open discussion of homosexuality, every one of the interlocking circles that make up this class has a member or two who are known to be "that way." While gay men are acknowledged in their midst, the intelligentsia would swear on its libraries that lesbians simply do not exist outside labor camps. In contrast to the *marshrut* gay men, who wear makeup and use only feminine forms of verbs and adjectives, then, gay men of the intelligentsia are paragons of discretion, and its lesbians are simply invisible.

When a gay intellectual gets in trouble with the law, his case does not become a *cause célèbre*, as is the case with the trials of some dissidents. Instead, his social circle will quietly come to his aid. In the early 1980s, for example, members of the Moscow elite welcomed with open arms a Ukrainian theater director who they knew had changed his place of residence in order to stall his prosecution on sodomy charges. For over a year the man received legal aid, money, and housing from people with whom he shared nothing other than his social status and education level.

But while the intellectuals may rush to the aid of an artist in trouble, it would be a mistake to attribute this sympathy to enlightened attitudes toward sexuality. Like their working-

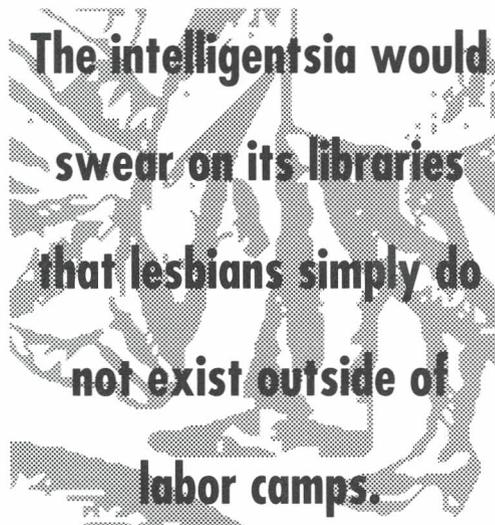
class compatriots, Soviet intellectuals use the words for "homosexual" and "pederast" interchangeably, refuse to recognize homosexual unions, and consider homosexuality a tragic but disgusting illness. In other words, gay members of the intelligentsia are safe as long as they keep the glass doors of their closets firmly shut.

A Rude Awakening

With the inauguration of *glasnost'* in 1986, Soviet journalists set out to identify and expose the societal ills they had so diligently ignored for the preceding sixty years. After tackling murders, drug addiction, and prostitution, the press was ready for homosexuality by early 1987. The honor fell to *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, a second-tier daily published by the KOMSOMOL, the Communist Party branch for fourteen to twenty-eight-year-olds.

The newspaper confronted the issue head-on, declaring that homosexuality was on the increase in the Soviet Union. The article quoted Vyacheslav Maslov, a specialist in sexual psychology, who cited the case of a man whose mother and grandmother had made him gay by "dressing him like a doll." The rising divorce rate, Maslov declared, forced children to grow up with role models from only one sex, which he claimed increases children's chances of growing up gay. The article ended with a call to arms. "If there is freedom for homosexuality, that means it would automatically spread. It would be the same as advertising it." The only way to prevent the spread of the scourge, the authors concluded, is to make sure that the laws against gay sex are enforced even more rigidly.

This and similar articles triggered the painful process of dragging homosexuality out of the collective unconscious, and gay men in



The intelligentsia would swear on its libraries that lesbians simply do not exist outside of labor camps.

Gennady Trifonov's Brief Stint as Russia's Gay Poet

Two gay men have mustered the courage to openly challenge the Soviet Union's overt and covert taboos on homosexuality. (There may have been others, but only these two have spoken loudly enough to be heard.) They are Moscow writer Evgeny Kharitonov and Leningrad poet Gennady Trifonov. Of the two, only forty-six-year-old Trifonov is alive today: Kharitonov died of a heart attack at the age of forty in 1981.

Trifonov is believed to be the first Russian poet since the 1920s to publish openly homosexual love poems. Handbound, handwritten volumes of these passed from person to person in the literary circles of Leningrad in the 1970s. In 1976 Trifonov was arrested, convicted on charges related to contributing to the delinquency of a minor, and sentenced to eight years in a labor colony.

Like other trials of this kind, Trifonov's case probably would have gone unnoticed if the Moscow weekly magazine *Ogonyok* had not included a gratuitous mention of Trifonov's "homosexual doggerel" and alleged criminal activities in an article on a seemingly unrelated subject. The article set off a chain reaction both in the Soviet Union and abroad, with Soviet periodicals suddenly—and very briefly—taking up the issue of homosexuality, and gay publications in the US, Canada, and England reporting on Trifonov's fate.

After several articles that linked homosexuality to everything from "violent anti-Sovietism" to murder, prisoner Trifonov sent an open letter to the high-circulation weekly *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. The December 1977 letter, perhaps the first written appeal for the liberalization of Soviet attitudes and laws regarding homosexuality, was never printed in the *Gazeta* but received wide play in the Soviet underground, as well as overseas.

Trifonov's long letter described the gruesome treatment of men accused or convicted under the sodomy law and related statutes, and concluded with this statement:

As a poet and as a citizen, as a human being and as a writer, I pledge to devote all my strength to the defense of those people in my country who . . . are the tragic victims of crimes without punishment: the crimes of stupidity, lying, cruelty and cynicism. This struggle is a function of basic decency, which is natural for all honest and enlightened people. The present and future of my life and work are devoted to this struggle.

Since his release from prison in the early 1980s, Trifonov reportedly has held a variety of menial jobs in Leningrad. Two years ago, in the midst of *glasnost'*, he completely reversed his position on homosexuality and published an article in a Leningrad journal in which he *thanked* the government for sentencing him to hard labor "for illicit activities which should, properly speaking, be punishable in any country" and ridiculed Americans who "fight for the rights of dolphins and lesbians."^{*}

^{*} "Letters from the Cellar," *Neva*, no. 7, 1987.

the Soviet Union found themselves in a new and uncomfortable position. With the majority of the population in a permanent state of denial on matters of sexuality, gay men had never found it necessary to work on being invisible: they just were. "You could go into a public restroom, or a bathhouse, and just look, or even cruise," remembers an American man I interviewed who makes frequent trips to the Soviet Union, "and no one would be suspicious, because homosexuality is just not a part of their vocabulary."

"Vlad," the mathematics instructor, agrees. "No one used to pay attention to the fact that I wasn't married and lived with another man," he recalls wistfully. "Now I hear people talking about it in the corridors at work, and the questions are beginning to come up."

Additional difficulties for gay men have been created by the rising moralistic fervor that has accompanied the appearance of comparatively sexually explicit articles and films—such as the movie *Little Vera*, which caused almost as much of a stir in the US as it did in the USSR. In the resulting backlash Soviet citizens have asserted moral views that may seem illogical in a country where the average woman has eight abortions, countless couples live together without registering their marriage, and the divorce rate among those who do marry is 30 percent.¹⁸

Ogonyok, the magazine that exposed the gay poet Gennady Trifonov [see sidebar], has been transformed from an unremarkable weekly into the main mouthpiece of *glasnost'* and *perestroika* proponents, and has broken new ground in Soviet journalism by undertaking public-opinion polls. A recent poll "on issues of family and marriage" showed that 84.5 percent of Soviet citizens believe that every person has an obligation to marry and build a family.¹⁹

When the magazine screened a video entitled *Risk Group* and asked thirteen viewers their opinion of it, the most tolerant view was expressed by a forty-five-year-old female architect:

Perhaps nowadays it's more interesting for a man to be with a man: there aren't any details

that complicate communication, there is greater mutual understanding. This phenomenon did not start yesterday. More likely, it appeared when millions and millions of people were sent to labor camps, forced to spend long periods of time away from the normal and natural lifestyle. I can neither justify nor judge these people. We created these groups ourselves.²⁰

A counterargument was provided by a male medical student:

If a man cohabits with another adult man—well, what can you do, it's an illness. But when a homosexual on the prowl begins to recruit adolescents, then that is complete perversion. So we must be cruel. We must take the Taras Bulba approach: 'I gave birth to you, and I will kill you.' Because our society does not need people like that.

Since *Ogonyok* attracts probably the most reform-minded members of the reading public, the predominant attitude toward homosexuality in the Soviet Union is likely even harsher than the above quotes suggest. In 1987 *Literaturnaya Gazeta* printed a letter from a woman who described what happened to her son, a promising young engineer who decided to "come out of the underground"—perhaps the only written account of the consequences of coming out published in the Soviet Union. Within days, wrote the woman, her son was expelled from the Communist Party by order of a specially convened meeting of the local committee. Immediately thereafter he was fired from his job. Months later he still had not found employment.²¹

It is no wonder that few, if any, Soviet homosexuals choose to confront such dire consequences. Many would probably prefer a

return to the era of silence. But in the era of AIDS more and more of them no longer have the luxury of choosing the closet.

Patient N. and the Soviet AIDS Crisis

In the winter of 1982 a thirty-one-year-old man was rushed to the clinic at the Central National Research Institute of Epidemiology directly from the international airport in Sheremetevo, near Moscow. The man's symptoms—fever, seizures, and diarrhea—were attributed to mononucleosis, an abnormal increase in the number of mononuclear white blood cells. The

man was treated at the clinic until his fever abated. "Patient N.," as he later came to be known, was then transferred briefly to another hospital before returning to the provincial town where he lived.

In the summer of 1985 the Soviet press mentioned AIDS for the first time, in warnings against contact with foreigners who were arriving for the Moscow Youth and Student Festi-

val. On October 30 of that year *Literaturnaya Gazeta* published an extensive article entitled "Panic in the West; or The Secrets Behind the AIDS Scandal," by V. Zapevalov. At that late date the article defined people at risk for AIDS as Haitian immigrants, homosexuals, drug addicts, and vagrants and advanced the hypothesis that AIDS was a result of CIA and Pentagon biological-warfare experiments gone haywire.

At the end of November, Valentin Petrovskiy, the president of the Soviet Academy of Medical Sciences and the director of the Central National Research Institute of Epidemiology, held a press conference to announce that no cases of AIDS had been reported in the USSR.²²

On December 7 an interview with V. M. Zhdanov, the director of the National Research



Institute of Virology, appeared in the weekly *Sovetskaya Kul'tura*. Zhdanov acknowledged that there were people with AIDS in the Soviet Union but claimed that they were fewer than a handful.²³

In a December 12 *Washington Post* article Moscow correspondent Gary Lee quoted several Western businessmen who had imported HIV-testing equipment to the Soviet Union. These businessmen were confident that cases of AIDS inside Soviet borders numbered at least in the hundreds. Lee quoted Moscow gay men confirming this information.²⁴

On December 11 *Literaturnaya Gazeta* printed an article entitled "AIDS: The Panic Continues." Dr. S. Drozdov, the director of the National Research Institute of Poliomyelitis and Viral Encephalitis, who was interviewed for the piece, no longer linked AIDS to chemical warfare but instead traced the syndrome's origins to "remote areas of Central Africa."

In 1986 the Ministry of Public Health unveiled so-called anonymous diagnostic sites and urged all people at risk for HIV infection to be tested immediately. Public-health officials assured citizens that all test results would be kept confidential. People familiar with the Soviet healthcare system, however, assumed that the guarantee of confidentiality would apply only to those who tested negative. They reasoned that when a person tested positive, the venereal-disease surveillance system would immediately kick in, as it does with syphilis: the person's place of employment would be notified, his or her passport for travel within the country would be stamped "infected," and public-health officials would set off in search of his or her sexual partners.

By March 1987 the country had established forty-five "anonymous diagnostic sites." Plans called for sixty operational sites by the end of the year, and three hundred in another

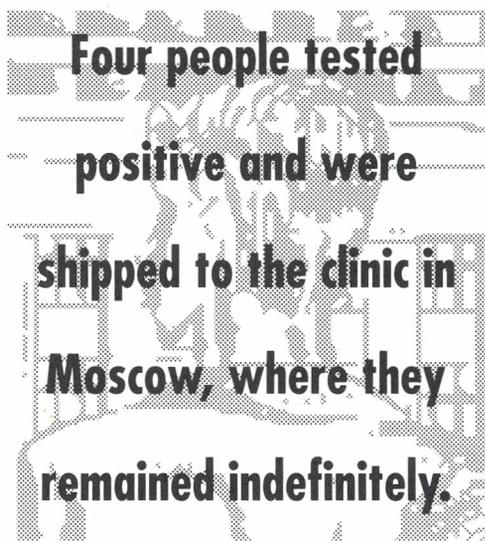
year. None of the clients of the forty-five laboratories had tested positive yet. Also in 1987 the Ministry of Internal Security decided to "take necessary prophylactic measures to prevent the occurrence of AIDS in places of incarceration." These measures took the form of mandatory testing of all prisoners, including those awaiting trial as well as all persons temporarily detained for vagrancy and loitering.²⁵

On March 4, 1987, a young provincial proctologist on a business trip in Moscow stumbled into a lecture for dermatologists. Vadim Pokrovskiy (Valentin's son), a senior research scientist at an HIV-testing laboratory in Moscow, was teaching dermatologists to recognize the symptoms of AIDS. The lecture reminded the proctologist of a patient whose strange set of symptoms she had been unable to diagnose. Back in her hometown the next day, the young doctor drew a blood sample from her mysterious patient and forwarded it to the HIV lab at the Institute of Epidemiology. The positive results came back late

that night. The following morning the proctologist delivered her patient to the Institute clinic, where the department head—a specialist in "rare infectious diseases of tropical origin"—immediately recognized Patient N.

The first order of business was to locate Patient N.'s sexual partners. Within hours the younger Pokrovskiy himself arrived in N.'s hometown, accompanied by a team of medical technicians armed with HIV-testing equipment. Over the next few days they located N.'s former partners and drew their blood "on location"—at their homes, or at their places of work when necessary. Four people tested positive and were immediately shipped to the clinic in Moscow, where they, like N., would remain indefinitely.

On March 16, speaking at an AIDS conference in Munich, Vadim Pokrovskiy informed



conference attendees that the first Soviet person with AIDS had been identified just twelve days earlier. Two months later *Ogonyok* printed an essay entitled "When Men Cry." This is how it began:

I have seen him—our first, the one who brought us that frightening disease. Emaciated, with shoulder blades that stick out, with red splotches on his face, he looks more like an infantile adolescent than a thirty-six-year-old man. He willingly showed himself to the many doctors, from this clinic and others, who had come to look—and in his very readiness to expose himself there was also something unnatural . . . But the most incredible thing was, he seemed not to comprehend what he had wrought, what kind of grief he had caused, what kind of a loss to this society he was responsible for.²⁶

Quest for Condoms

At the end of 1987 a gay French film director visited Leningrad. The day after he left the country, tells a Leningrad gay man, the approximately twenty men who had had sexual or social contact with the director were apprehended by the police. Samples of their blood were taken at the police precincts, where the men were held until the HIV test results arrived.

By the end of 1987 twenty-six people infected with HIV had been identified in the Soviet Union. None of them had been clients of the "anonymous diagnostic sites."²⁷

During the first four months of 1988, according to *Ogonyok*, authorities identified thirty HIV-infected individuals, bringing the total to fifty-six.²⁸

Early in 1988 a husband and wife tested positive for HIV. The news spread through their small town within days. The woman was forced to leave her job. The couple could not

venture outdoors without being verbally and physically harassed. Residents mounted a campaign to pressure town authorities to quarantine the couple. Finally, local doctors decided to hospitalize the two and placed them in an isolated unit for people with highly infectious diseases. The couple spent the next several weeks in a small room with no windows but a glass door, through which journalists continuously snapped photographs. Upon learning about the couple, Moscow authorities had them transferred to the clinic at the Institute of Epidemiology. Months later they returned to their hometown but were unable to find work there.

Around the same time, *Ogonyok* received a letter to the editor that read as follows:

I have tested positive for AIDS. I am twenty-six years old, and at this point perfectly healthy. I try not to think about what is going to happen to me. But sometimes I get very scared.

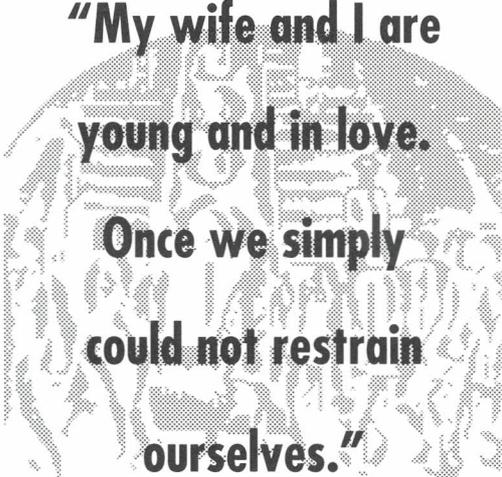
I told my wife right away . . . We went to the anonymous testing site. Fortunately, she tested negative. So now how do we live?

. . . We decided to use condoms. But they did not have any at the drugstore. It's been a month now, and I still cannot find condoms in any drugstores in Riga [the capital of Latvia].

My wife and I are young and in love. Once during this past month we simply could not restrain ourselves. I shook all night after that: what if I infected her?

God, can it really be an impossible challenge for our great country to manufacture enough condoms? Or does somebody up there need people to keep infecting each other?

In July 1988 *Ogonyok* published a groundbreaking article by journalist Alla Alova enti-



**"My wife and I are
young and in love.
Once we simply
could not restrain
ourselves."**

tled "Life in the Age of AIDS: Are We Prepared?" A first for Soviet journalism in many respects, the article contained the stories of the quarantined married couple and the Riga letter-writer, along with interviews with Soviet healthcare officials and a sexologist. The article stated, as simple truths, some revolutionary ideas for Soviet society: that the notion that people should abstain from sex is absurd; that gay men constitute a sizable group (estimated by the sexologist at between 2 and 5 percent of the population) and that occasional same-sex sexual contact among adolescents is widespread; that sexual orientation is usually unchangeable; that heterosexuals are at risk for AIDS; and that the decadent Westerners, with their sexual permissiveness, are better able than their "morally superior" Soviet counterparts to change their behavior in order to avoid contracting HIV.

The article also contained some sobering statistics. Alova discovered that government experts had estimated the need for condoms in 1988 at 600 million—which would give every sexually active Soviet man (figuring that half of the population is male, and a third of the males are sexually active) approximately fifteen condoms a year. The agency responsible for manufacturing condoms, however, rejected the estimate and lowered the target production of condoms to 220 million—or about five per man. Explaining the agency's decision not to make up the difference by importing foreign-made rubbers, the director of the Drugstore Department of the Ministry of Public Health stated, "The main thing is not to have casual contacts. Then condoms wouldn't be necessary."

Alova also reported that disposable syringes were practically unheard of in Soviet medicine. And while all healthcare providers were required to sterilize reusable syringes in

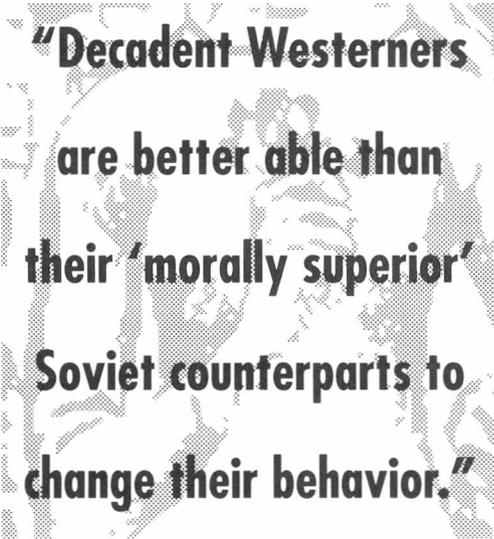
accordance with guidelines adopted during a 1978 outbreak of hepatitis B, many nurses did not have the education necessary to comprehend the instructions. As a result, while many conscientiously sterilized needles, they often did not bother with the syringes themselves. Others ignored the guidelines altogether. The country's total production of disposable syringes stood at 7 million, while the doses of injectable medication manufactured in the Soviet Union numbered 6 billion. While official plans called for 3 billion disposable syringes by 1991, there was no indication that the country's production capability would

exceed one-quarter of a billion. No plans to import disposable syringes existed. As for other disposable medical equipment—dialyzers, IV bags, and blood-storage containers, for example—the country had no capability for manufacturing these, and no new measures in this area were planned. Even the elder Pokrovskiy, when questioned by Alova, admitted that all was not well on the AIDS front,

and that the government-mandated testing of donated blood was performed strictly at the discretion of physicians.

A full year passed before Alova tackled the subject of AIDS again. But in June 1989 she was no longer playing the inquisitive but removed journalist: she was mad as hell, and she vowed "not to write another article about why there is no domestic equipment for the manufacturing of disposable syringes. I will not go to ministry spokesperson after ministry spokesperson, each of whom will rightly blame the other, forcing me to wax melancholic and draw some profound conclusion about the ill health of the healthcare system. No, I have firmly decided to use my journalistic privileges to find a solution."²⁹

With that, Alova became the first Soviet AIDS activist, and *Ogonyok* the first Soviet



**"Decadent Westerners
are better able than
their 'morally superior'
Soviet counterparts to
change their behavior."**

AIDS organization. For the conclusion of her article she proposed a radical solution: the Soviet Union's first private charity, a hard-currency fund that would be used by *Ogonyok* to purchase and distribute foreign-made disposable medical equipment and condoms.

Three weeks later Alova announced that "Account AntiSPID" (SPID is the Russian acronym for AIDS) had been opened at the International Bank of the USSR. The first contributors were Soviet writers, artists, and actors who had been paid in foreign currency. They were followed by Soviet émigrés in the West as well as some Western philanthropists.³⁰

Two weeks later Alova declared that "AntiSPID has begun its work," with a contribution of 60,000 disposable syringes by a consortium of Japanese corporations. The syringes were immediately delivered to a children's hospital in Moscow.

The AIDS activist, whose new byline reads "Alla Alova, AntiSPID Coordinator," has continued to print updates on the work of the foundation at least monthly. In six months the foundation's contributions of disposable syringes totaled over a million—about ten times the country's production of disposable syringes that year. All the contributions—the bulk of which hailed from Western Europe—were forwarded to regional children's hospitals. The foundation's original commitment to soliciting and distributing condoms, however, seems to have dissolved along the way: the single contribution of a large number of condoms, a shipment of 50,000 from Bulgaria, was sold to three Moscow drugstores, and the money was used to buy more syringes for children.³¹

By early August 1989 eleven people, including four children, had been diagnosed with AIDS. Two of them had died. Thirty-two million people who had come to "anonymous

diagnostic sites," or to whom an infected person had been traced, had been tested for HIV. Twenty million potential blood donors were screened as well. Two hundred eighty-nine individuals, including 115 children, had tested positive. Eight of them were identified through the screening of blood donors.³²

As of January 15, 1990, the World Health Organization had learned of twenty-three cases of AIDS in the Soviet Union—signifying a threefold increase in six months. While this number is much lower than the numbers of cases in other countries affected by the epidemic, Soviet epidemiologists' projections far

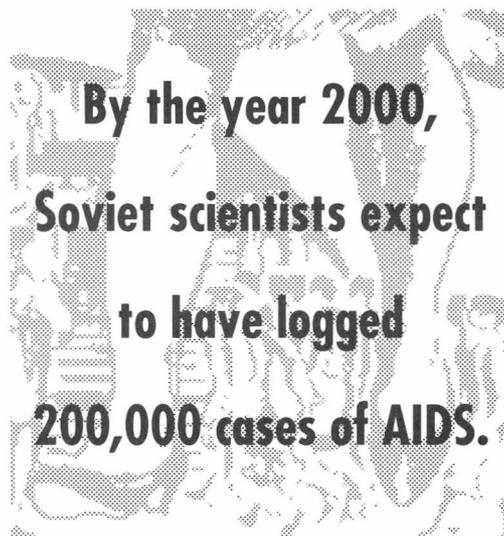
exceed any other government's worst-case estimate. By the year 2000, according to Alova, Soviet scientists expect to have logged 200,000 cases of AIDS and 15 million cases of HIV infection.³³

The Backlash

While gay men now figure less prominently in media coverage of AIDS than they did three years ago, as long as AIDS

stays in the news—as it will for many years—the Soviet public will not forget about the existence of homosexuals. Whatever the eventual outcome of the current political changes in the USSR, this generation of Soviets will probably be unable to pretend again that theirs is a sexless society.

Russian-speaking lesbians and gay men in the West have found the surfacing of the subject of homosexuality in Soviet society fascinating and exciting—in much the same way that Western Jews have taken pleasure in reading about Jews in the Soviet Union. But gays behind what used to be the Iron Curtain do not have the luxury of approaching the changes in their society and their lives as a curious phenomenon. Nor can they ignore the right-wing backlash that is gaining strength in the Soviet Union.



While US public officials have hailed the liberation of some Soviet media outlets, and while the US media have quoted generously from such sterling examples of *glasnost'* as *Ogonyok* and *Argumenty i Fakty*, they have all but ignored the rise of right-wing media. With greater circulation, size, and resources than the relatively progressive press, these publications function as mouthpieces for the reactionary group *Pamyat'* ("memory").

The stated objective of *Pamyat'* and other Russian nationalist organizations is to return Russia to the Russians, a strong, beautiful, and, most importantly, pure people. This means not only the end of communist rule but an end to all foreign influence on the Russian culture—an end to Satan worship, rock music, horror films, drug addicts, Jews, homosexuals, and all other sorts of decadence and decadents. And in a country where political reform has failed to improve the lot of the millions of people who have spent their entire lives in poverty, a group that places the blame on groups that are already perceived as privileged gains more sympathizers every day.

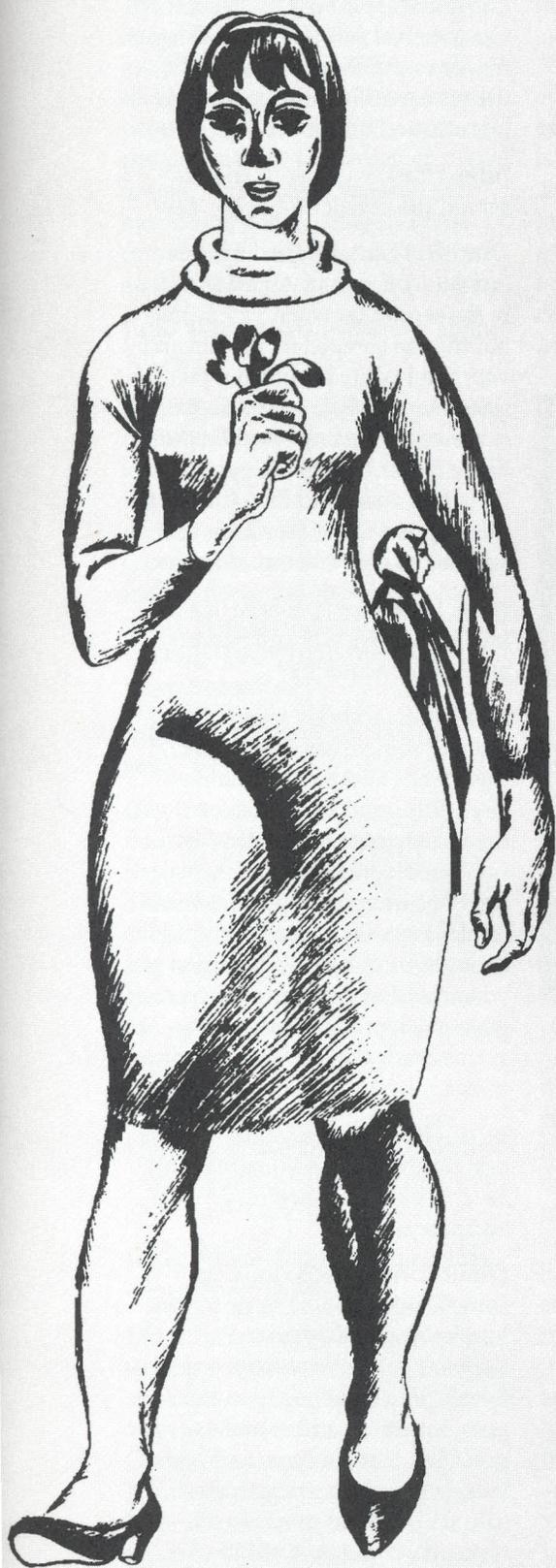
In keeping with the spirit of *glasnost'*, the new right-wingers are refusing to temper their anger or to cushion their hatred in socially acceptable terms. Spurred by *perestroika*, they join reformers in exposing the old liars, who told them that everyone was equally equal, and the new liars, who tell them that everyone is equally free. And with all the pain and rage that lay dormant for seven decades, they point the finger at Jews, gays, and other perennial objects of Russian fury, the victims of all of Russia's bloody revolutions—including this revolution of openness. ▼

Masha Gessen is a political refugee from the Soviet Union. She lives in Boston and works as a free-lance journalist and graphic designer. Artwork from Lenin's Moscow (Moscow: Progressive Publishing, 1975).

**Pamyat' wants to end
the influence of Satan
worship, rock music,
horror films, Jews, drug
addicts, and homosexuals.**

* This and all other quotations in this article have been translated by me. M.G.

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TEMA

ON THE THEME

Talking With The Editor of The Soviet Union's First Gay and Lesbian Newspaper

Dimitri R. is the editor of The Theme, a newly formed unofficial gay newspaper in Moscow. Julie Dorf, who has been involved with Soviet unofficial movements for the last four years, met with Dimitri in Moscow last November. This is the first interview with him ever published.*

Julie: Why is the name of your newspaper *The Theme*?

Dimitri: In Soviet gay slang the word for "theme" [*tema*] means gay. To be "on the theme" or "thematic"—both mean to be gay. Say you see somebody in a train and you know they are gay—you can tell your friend, "Look, he's thematic." Just so the people around you don't understand. It's like a code word that all the gay people know. Recently a new movie came out in Moscow, and it surely had nothing to do with being gay, but it was just funny—all over the city you could see posters with the word "THEME" in bold letters. Our people were just crazy!

Julie: Why did you decide to start the newspaper?

Dimitri: Well, to publish a newspaper is not the goal in itself. I would even say that to establish some kind of organization of gays and lesbians in the Soviet Union is not the goal in itself. The goal is to help to create an environment

* a pseudonym

where gays and lesbians will be able to express themselves and not feel lonely, to help stop the fear of dealing with people, to feel free. We want to give information, and want the naturals [*Russian version of "straights"*] to realize that there's nothing horrible about homosexuality.

The premier issue includes an article entitled "Perestroika and Homosexuality," which basically says that the Communist Party, as it works to consolidate all power and obtain total control of the country, had to repress every kind of alternative. It looked for any kind of personal information about anyone to make it possible to blackmail them.

I think that is why the infamous Article 121 came into being. The communists realized very well that as gays find themselves in the position of being outcasts in society, they may develop a more objective and balanced view of that society. Since the time when Andropov was the chief of the KGB, the police and KGB have avoided using the terms "homosexual" or "homosexuality" but rather call us "sexual dissidents."

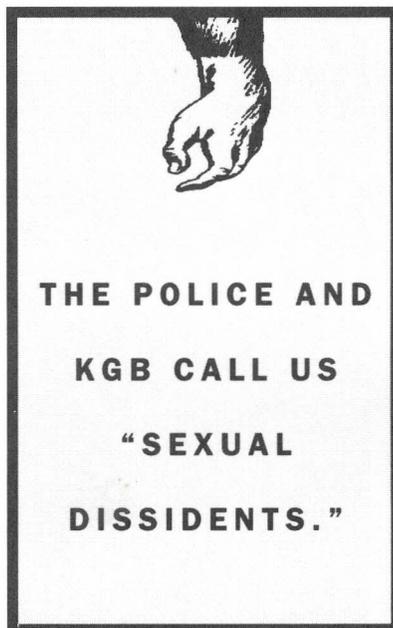
There are certain things about Article 121 that every one of our people should know and make use of. For example, it's very difficult to prove anything if the examination is not done immediately after the act is committed, and because of this it should be hard to convict someone even if there are witnesses, unless he admits it himself.

The fact is that if two male lovers are in bed—only male, because lesbian sex is not criminalized—even if they are in love and everything is consensual, they can still be prosecuted. Someone can inform on you, and then the officials follow you. They can break down the door and examine you—I mean examine the microtraumas in a passive partner's anus—parti-

cles of excrement on an active partner's penis. And depending on the results of this examination, regardless of consent, you can be sentenced to up to eight years in a labor camp. And these camps differ substantially from American jails.

Julie: Can you explain?

Dimitri: Soviet labor camps now do not differ much from those of the time of the GULAG [*a term used for Stalinist labor camps*]. Very



little food, very hard labor, psychological abuse, and you also find yourself among hardcore criminals there. A person who was convicted under Article 121 becomes an "untouchable"—he constantly gets raped and abused by his cellmates. It's very unlikely that anybody could serve a full term and remain physically or mentally healthy.

Julie: When do they use anti-gay articles like 121?

Dimitri: It's most likely to be used against somebody they need to eliminate by some means. Or to blackmail people to work as informers. Usually, investigations against people suspected of homo-

sexuality are performed not by the Lubyanka [KGB] but by the Petrovka [*criminal police*]. The KGB has a file for each Soviet citizen, and there's certainly information about homosexuality there too.

Julie: Have any of your friends served the penalty for being gay?

Dimitri: Thank God, no. I think our jails differ from American ones in the sense that when people get out they're completely broken and very rarely dare to confront the system again. Someone who has experienced a camp would most likely rather look for an opportunity to eat, sleep, and hide from people's sight, at least for a long time, and not take part in our activities.

Julie: Do gay people here usually talk to their friends and parents about their sexuality?

Dimitri: Everybody tries not to, but still sometimes they do. I told my friends and parents that I am gay because I don't like to lie. I got tired of changing pronouns—saying "she" instead of "he." I got tired of caring what people would think of me. If people are stupid enough to change their opinion of you after they find out that you're gay—well, probably it's only to your benefit that they're not your friend.

Julie: How did you get information for the articles you are planning to publish concerning AIDS and safe sex?

Dimitri: Well, not so long ago some Danish people came to visit here as a part of a "next step" initiative. They were with representatives from all the northern European countries, and somehow we managed to meet them and one of them gave me this poster about safe sex. I gave it to a friend to translate, and now we'll have it published in Russian. We had to edit it, though, because some

things were inappropriate here. For example, it says that all condoms that you can buy in the store are absolutely safe—this sounds like black humor in a Russian publication, because condoms are simply unavailable in the Soviet Union, and if you somehow manage to find some, the quality differs substantially from Danish condoms.

Julie: What do people know about AIDS?

Dimitri: It seems that the gay community, the same as in the States, is becoming the first group of the population to be seriously concerned about AIDS and safe sex. Our people are already used to feeling danger in their lives—certainly, they are reluctant to have the freedom of [unprotected] sex taken away too.

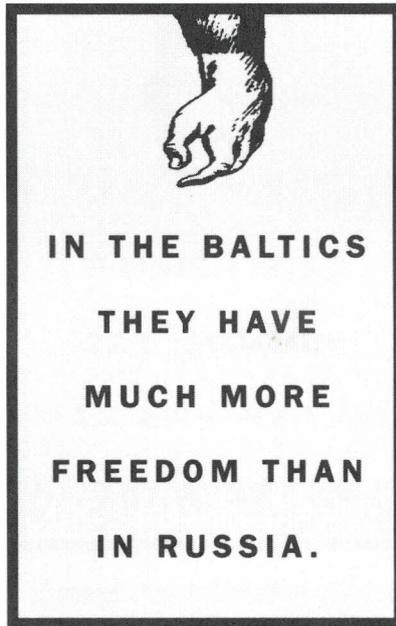
Julie: Do gay men practice safe sex?

Dimitri: I hope that our publication will help to promote safe sex. Basically, we face two problems. First, there is a very short supply of condoms. Second, and no less important, to use condoms one has got to live a certain type of sexual life. More organized, I would say. I mean, to use a condom you have to have one with you. And if you leave home in the morning not knowing if you are going to screw with somebody tonight, you probably won't take one.

Julie: Where do gay people usually meet here in Moscow?

Dimitri: Formerly, the usual places were the square in front of the Bolshoi Theater, "Sadko" Café, "Artists" Café, and also the part of Gorky Street opposite the INTURIST Hotel. But now the only place left—the slang for this kind of place is "blaze"—is Gorky Street, and only certain people would go there. I won't.

Several years ago the police let our people know that, instead of arresting us, they would rather "eliminate" us by closing their eyes to the actions of violent groups called the "fixers." "Fixers" is the slang for youth mobs, which are prospering thanks to us. They know very well that if an attractive guy is on the blaze, it's likely that he would be picked up by some respectable man, who is likely to invite him home with him. The fix-



ers follow them, rip up the apartment, et cetera . . . They know that the victim won't file a police report, given the circumstances of the encounter. That is why we don't really have any safe places to meet now.

Sometimes people meet in public bathhouses, sometimes at the public swimming pool. The only relief is going to the beach in summer. This beach is very far away, and all our people gather there. It is separated by high grass and bushes, and you can find a quiet spot. You can have a good time and relax a little. The only place I know of where lesbians meet is the square in front of City Hall. But not many people go there. In gen-

eral lately, no such places exist.

Julie: So then people usually spend time together at each other's homes?

Dimitri: Yes, at home. But you know, in my opinion a gay relationship is not only about sex, but it also is a very special state of one's soul, and very often you just need to feel your loved one close to you, need to talk to him—this is very difficult to arrange. Usually you have only two options: either you can talk or you can make love.

Julie: Is it possible for couples to live together?

Dimitri: Well, they can if they want to, but for that you have to rent an apartment, which is incredibly difficult to find. If you are lucky enough to have a place of your own, you can both live there. Just to let you know how hard it is to rent a place: The average salary of a worker in the USSR is 200 rubles a month. A young person can hardly make more than 150 a month. And you can't find a studio for less than 150 a month.

But money is not the worst of the problem. For example, my lover—the man I really love and would give anything to live with—has a very good income, and we can afford to rent if we could only find an apartment. There is a huge shortage of apartments to rent. I've asked all my friends to let me know if they hear about one, but still nothing. [*Soviet citizens are registered in communal or individual apartments, usually with their families. To change one's place of registration is a very involved bureaucratic procedure. Dimitri is referring to a space in addition to where one is officially registered.*]

Julie: Are there differences between the situation for gay people in the various republics of the USSR?

Dimitri: In the Baltics they have much more freedom than in Russia. But the attitude of Central Asians, Georgians, and other Caucasian people about homosexuality is very hostile. It is true that you can be killed for being homosexual in both Georgia and in Central Asia. Not even "can be killed," but rather, if they find out they *will* kill you. Here in Moscow I can come to class, take a seat, and, among my classmates who are aware of my homosexuality, say loudly, "I wish there was a good man here," and they will tolerate it.

Julie: What about gays in mental institutions—what is the situation there?

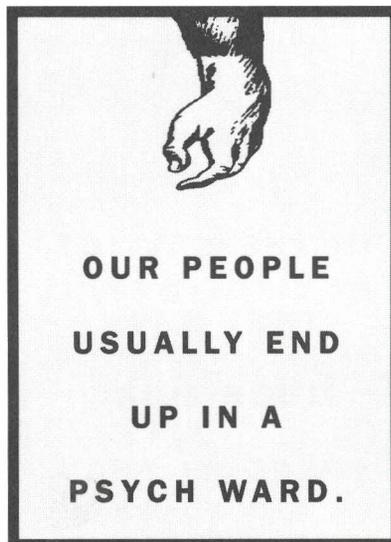
Dimitri: Well, things seem to be changing now. But still, there was a famous psychiatrist, Snezhnevskiy, who was the author of the "sluggish form of schizophrenia" theory. This diagnosis was widely used to institutionalize dissidents. There were legitimate medical terms, such as "hippie schizophrenia," "pacifist schizophrenia," "punk schizophrenia," and so on.

Homosexuality was also considered a type of schizophrenia. And very often, if they could not come up with any better diagnosis, they diagnosed "psychosis." So if somebody was known to the authorities as a homosexual but for some reason they didn't want to imprison him, he was institutionalized.

Our mental hospitals are still in the Stone Age. I spent some time in one of the better mental hospitals where the doctors are among the best. This is how it looks: A very long corridor, no windows at all. If you're lucky, your room has no doors. If you're not lucky, there are at least eighteen people in your room, where there is a door which is kept locked—except for the few times a day when patients are allowed to use the toilet. The air in such a room stinks horribly. People

mostly sleep all day because they are constantly numbed by heavy drugs or what they call "medicines."

Those who fail to behave "properly" are forcibly given shots of sulphazyn—usually four shots—which causes an immediate fever of up to 40° C, which lasts for several days. During these days a person is hardly alive, he can't do or think anything, and is completely helpless. They call this "cleaning



the body of harmful substances." Another means of disciplinary punishment is insulin shock. That means an injection of a crazy amount of insulin, which also leaves the person in a half-alive/half-dead condition for several days. And this is only what they call the "medical treatment," to say nothing of the beatings and the other means of terrorizing patients by the paramedical personnel. Any nurse can beat you up at any moment.

It isn't rare for people to never come out of psych wards. In the hospital I saw people who had been there for twenty to thirty years. Their whole life consists of getting up in the morning, taking a short walk down the corridor, then a meal, and back to sleep.

You are completely subjected to your doctors' authority. There is no term for you to serve, there's only your doctors, and they can keep you there as long as they want, and while you are still there they have the full power to do whatever they want to you. Anything they want—any drugs, any kind of regime for you, any violence. You don't know when or if they're going to let you out of there.

There's a rule that a person who has spent more than half a year in a psych ward can be released only by the authority of a special medical commission, which meets only twice a year. And if you dare to protest about the conditions of your detention, your chances of getting out are zero. You'll be kept there until they crush you completely with drugs, because no doctor will let you out before being sure that you won't complain about them. So you find yourself in a situation even worse than prison, since you don't know when you are going to be let out.

Our people usually end up in a psych ward either when they are forced by the system to admit their homosexuality or when they try to avoid army service. Our army is another story. The fact is that some time ago homosexuals didn't have to do army service, because they were considered mentally ill. That would mean that the person would be stigmatized for the rest of his life, would never be allowed to travel abroad, would never be allowed to occupy any decent position. But still, if one chose to, he just had to declare that he was gay and they would put him in a mental hospital for an examination. In a month or two he would obtain the "treasured" diagnosis of psychosis and would be free of army duty for the rest of his life.

Julie: How will *The Theme* be distributed?

Dimitri: The first issues will be sold openly on the streets by our own independent sellers, who will stand holding up one copy. Hopefully, people will walk down the street and see a new, attractive-looking magazine on sale and buy it. But in the long run I hope our magazine will become popular mostly among our people. We'll have subscriptions too, if we can figure out whose address we can use. *[Prior to this year, unofficial or underground literature was distributed privately, hand to hand, often wrapped in brown paper or newspaper. Only recently have unofficial organizations begun to sell their literature on the streets; state-owned kiosks do not sell independent publications—yet.]*

Julie: How much will it cost?

Dimitri: One ruble to buy and about sixty kopeks to publish one copy. *[One hundred kopeks equals one ruble, and one ruble is approximately equal to twenty-five cents.]*

Julie: How is the paper being financed?

Dimitri: With all my own money. It costs a lot to produce an independent paper in the Soviet Union. If our circulation is going to be 1,000 copies, that is 500 rubles, which is really a lot for a young person.

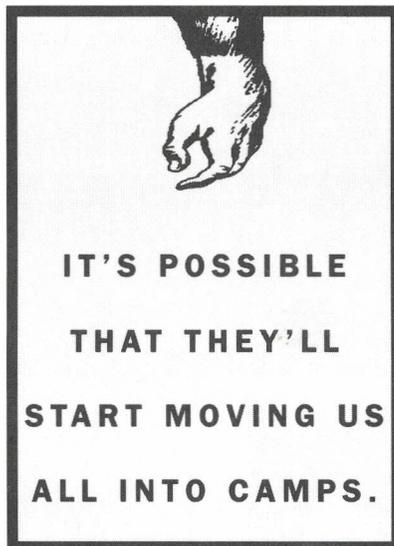
Julie: Maybe you will explain a little about the publishing process.

Dimitri: Because we can't have access to a printing plant, the newspaper will be mimeographed, or maybe we will be able to find a photocopier. First we'll try to find a computer to typeset. Then we'll print it out, paste up every page onto cardboard, and take it to the people who are willing to copy it for me in the Baltics—even though it is illegal—and then I will bring all the copies back to Moscow and distribute them.

Julie: And whose computer are you using?

Dimitri: Mostly, we find opportunities to illegally use office or laboratory computers after work hours—an hour here, an hour there. It's not so hard to find somebody who will let you get your stuff printed out. But if he sees what kind of material it is, he will never talk to you again!

Julie: Ideally, how often do you



want to publish and how many copies?

Dimitri: The best we can expect is to make the paper a four-page weekly.

Julie: Do the authors sign what they write?

Dimitri: Because we live in a society where it is still dangerous to be known this way, they all use pseudonyms.

Julie: What kind of help do you want to receive from the gay community in the West?

Dimitri: Well, we need your support by sending us information. The majority of our material is still translated and reprinted from foreign gay publications. We also

need the support of your community organizations. No one is sure what's going to happen here tomorrow—it's entirely possible that tomorrow they will start moving us all into camps. We need your support, so that if tomorrow we are arrested, there will be voices in support of us in the West. In the Soviet Union one of the few things that both the democratic movement and the gay movement can rely on for security is public support from the West. Our government now tries not to do anything that would disturb outside public opinion.

We are also looking for contacts, simple human contacts. Most Soviet gays are completely isolated, even from one another. The higher the position a person occupies in the social pyramid, the riskier it is for him or her to establish contact with others. Only those at the very bottom have contacts. So people are isolated from other gays and from any information about what happens in the West with people like us. It could be great if we could establish personal ties between gays and lesbians here and abroad and build a stronger international community. ▼

Julie Dorf is currently working on several projects with Soviet lesbian and gay communities including interviews with Russian lesbians and a documentary video. She coordinates a vocational training program for Soviet Jewish refugees in San Francisco. Lyonya Merzon assisted with the translation of this interview.

The first issue of The Theme came out in January. The front page had an article by a lesbian entitled "Come Out from Underground," along with an editorial column announcing the formation of the Gay and Lesbian Union of Sexual Minorities and "the beginning of the gay-rights movement."

Anyone interested in sending material to the editors can send it to:

121457 Moscow, USSR
Do Vostrebovanya
R. D. Smirnova

If interested in supporting this organization in other ways please contact Julie Dorf in care of OUT/LOOK.

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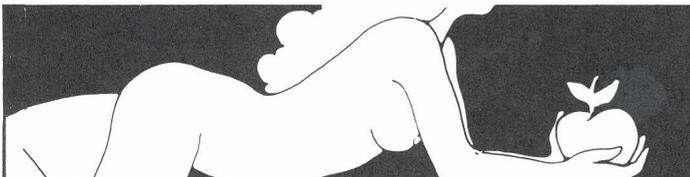
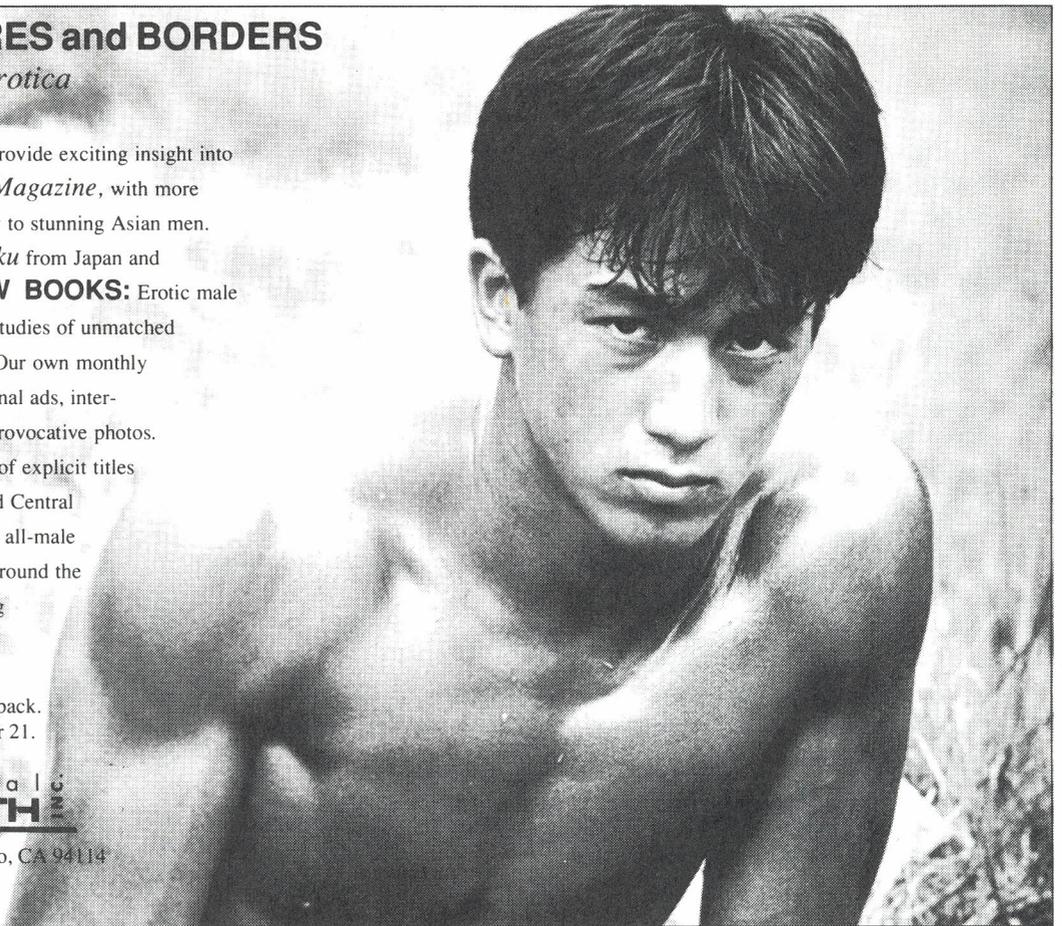
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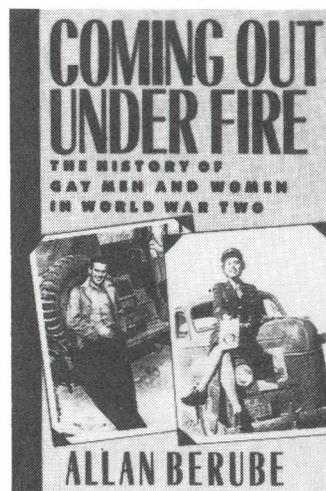
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Self-Hatred or Proud History?

IN THE SUMMER of 1967, when playwright Mart Crowley sat down to write *The Boys in the Band*, revolution was the last thing on his mind. Instead, after a series of setbacks in his career, and with the voices of childhood demons ringing increasingly loud in his ears, Crowley says, he was "frustrated and angry and confused and sick of it all! And I just struck out and wrote this play."

By the time *The Boys in the Band* premiered, however—in spring 1968—revolution was just around the corner. After a brief workshop production *The Boys in the Band* officially opened on April 14, 1968, at Theatre Four, an off-Broadway house on West 55th Street, where it ran for 1,001 performances. Some ten weeks after *Boys'* first anniversary, Judy Garland died. And the era called Stonewall began.

At least partly because of the historical coincidence of *Boys'* appearance with the Stonewall riots, Crowley's play was destined ever after to be evaluated in light of the new sensibilities of the liberated homosexual. And in the twenty-two years since it premiered, the play has been marked in equal parts by fame and infamy.

Though frequently credited with helping to usher in the age of Stonewall, *Boys* has just as often been denounced for setting gay lib back thirty years. While some have applauded *Boys* as the first play to give genuine dimension to the lives of gay characters, others have counted Crowley's portrayals of gay men among the most homophobic representations in theater history. Last year, as if to put a fine point on the debate, *The Alyson Almanac* gave *Boys* top spot on its list of "The Worst Gay Plays of All Time." Of that distinction, Crow-



STEVE SAVAGE

the Boys in the Band Come Back

by Wendell Ricketts

ley wryly remarked, "Now they call it a gay play. Once upon a time it was just a play."

The *Boys in the Band* controversy reignited last winter when San Francisco's Theatre Rhinoceros mounted a hugely popular revival of *Boys* on its main stage—the first-ever production of the play by a gay theater company. But no sooner had Rhinoceros announced the play's inclusion in its 1989–90 season than angry letters came firing in.

In one, printed as part of Rhinoceros's program note for *Boys*, the anonymous writer promised never to patronize the theater again. "Return to the gay and lesbian affirmative path blazed by [Theatre Rhinoceros founder] Alan Estes," he exhorted. "Shame!"

Shame, indeed. *Boys in the Band* appeared during an era of unprecedented political and social upheaval in America, and at a time when minority consciousness was undergoing a critical transformation. Shame, and homosexual shame in particular, was rapidly going out of style. Gay shame, in fact, was aggressively being replaced by gay pride, at least in the official version. By the end of the sixties, gay life—and gay theater—had reached a watershed.

BY NOW the major forces of pre-Stonewall gay and lesbian history are relatively well known: the wartime influx into cities of young, unmarried soldiers of both sexes; the publication of the Kinsey and Wolfenden reports; the formation of organizations such as the Mattachine Society, Daughters of Bilitis, and the Society for Individual Rights, to name a few.

Less well remembered is the pre-Stonewall history of gay theater, or, perhaps more accurately, of more or less identifiable homosexual characters on the stage. First into that category fall examples of the homosexuality-as-dirty-secret school of drama, including plays such as *The Children's Hour* (1934), *Tea and Sympathy* (1953), and *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958). These encoded, scandalous depictions of homosexuality often represented little more than what William Hoffman, playwright and editor of *Gay Plays*, called "winks across the footlights."

By the mid-to-late sixties, however, the pathetic invert was speaking his or her name in person in *The Killing of Sister George* (1965), *Staircase* (1966), *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1965)—these three imported from England—and *Fortune and Men's Eyes* (1967). Although these plays were all intended for mainstream audiences, and none of the portrayals of homosexual characters was flattering, they were, at least, some counter to invisibility.

But even so little gay presence was taken as a threat, and as early as 1962, New York critics began decrying the homosexual encroachment in theater. Some writers went so far as to attack *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, accusing playwright Edward Albee of camouflaging a homosexual relationship in the characters of George and Martha (an interpretation that seems to have occurred to everyone except the playwright).

Yet even as these portrayals and quasi-portrayals of homosexuals were being distorted by the social matrix in which they were embedded, an alternative voice was rising. That same year, for example, the playwrights of New York's

Caffe Cino had begun to produce club-style gay theater for the Greenwich Village art crowd. Although Cino was perhaps better known for its gay sensibility (like staging a drag version of *Medea*) than for its gay playwrights, the talents of writers such as Lanford Wilson, Robert Patrick, and Doric Wilson—perhaps the best-known Cino graduates—were nourished and first appreciated there.

A second vital force in the growth of theater produced by and for gay people was Ronald Tavel and John Vaccaro's Play-House of the Ridiculous, founded in 1966. The Play-House produced Charles Ludlam's first play, *Big Hotel*, as well as a series of campy, "low" theater spectacles before "artistic differences" sent Ludlam off to establish his own Ridiculous Theatrical Company.

What is interesting about the work produced by "gay theaters" at the time—and particularly the new plays that came out of Cino—is that the dramatic themes were not necessarily what might today be called positive. Homosexual characters were sometimes suicidal; promiscuity and exploitative relation-

The original 1968 production, Theatre Four, New York; Act II: The telephone game.

Back row, L-R: Harold (Leonard Frey), Larry (Keith Prentice), Michael (Kenneth Nelson). Seated: Emory (Cliff Gorman), Bernard (Reuben Greene).



PHOTO COURTESY OF PERFORMING ARTS RESEARCH CENTER

Camping it up with the Boys



PHOTO COURTESY OF PERFORMING ARTS RESEARCH CENTER (1968)

Whatever else audiences may have thought of Crowley's play over the years, *The Boys in the Band* has always made them laugh. One of the signs of *Boys'* impact on gay and lesbian culture, in fact, lies in the durability of its throwaway lines and put-downs—still to be heard at many a cocktail party. When it came to capturing the essence of gay male humor, *Boys* was light years ahead of Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp."

Here's a sampling of the memorable lines in *The Boys in the Band*.

(Harold, to a punched-out Emory):

"What happened to you? Your lips are turning blue. You look like you've been rimming a snowman."

(Alan McCarthy, on Emory):

"A bit effeminate? He's like a butterfly in heat!"

(Larry, after Michael suggests that an old college friend is straight):

"Straight! If it's the one I met, he's about as straight as the Yellow Brick Road."

(Michael and Donald, on Michael's coming out):

Michael: "Believe it or not, there was a time in my life when I didn't go around announcing that I was a faggot."

Donald: "That must have been before speech replaced sign language."

(Emory and Cowboy, the "gift" Emory's brought for Harold, after Cowboy says he may have to leave early because of an injury he got at the gym):

Cowboy: "I lost my grip doing my chin-ups and I fell on my heels and twisted my back."

Emory: "You shouldn't wear heels when you do chin-ups."

(And finally, the line director Bob Moore persuaded Crowley to cut from Emory's speech about his several bouts with hepatitis):

"One more shot of gamma globulin and my ass would've looked like a pair of colanders."

ships were depicted as a dangerous potential of gay life; the homosexual milieu was often constituted as cross-genderism, sexual innuendo, and a more or less romantic fatalism. There were, of course, many exceptions, but the tacit understanding seemed to be that such views of the homosexual subculture might be explored—at least within the closed circuit of the gay Greenwich Village theater-and-cafe crowd. Then, as now, setting made all the difference.

THE STORY behind *The Boys In the Band* is in many ways the quintessential show-biz saga. Fresh out of Washington, D.C.'s Catholic University of America, Mart Crowley came to New York in 1957 to work in film. His first position, with Elia Kazan's production company, led to jobs with other movie crews working in Manhattan, and Crowley's production credits eventually included *The Fugitive Kind* and *Butterfield 8*. During work on *Splendor in the Grass*, Crowley became friends with Natalie Wood, and when Kazan's company went on an extended hiatus in 1960, it was Wood who suggested to Crowley that he move out to Los Angeles to find an agent.

Crowley did just that, and worked as a Hollywood writer for six years. But in the fateful summer of 1967, he says, life "came crashing down" around his ears. Although Crowley had been thrilled by the sale of his first original screenplay to 20th Century Fox, the studio abruptly dropped the film in mid-production. A pilot he had written for Bette Davis was shot, then abandoned by the producers. As a final blow, Crowley was fired from his screenwriting job at Paramount. The chain of events devastated him, and the result of his dark summer was *Boys in the Band*.

Crowley was aware, however, that a script was not a production, and he was determined to see *Boys* on stage. When friends assured him that his play couldn't possibly be produced, Crowley hand-carried the script to a New York agent, who agreed to see him "only because she owed a favor to the man who sent me." Her reception, however, was equally dis-

couraging. Finally, Crowley says, "I was almost in tears. And, just off the top of my head, I asked her, 'Do you know Richard Barr?' "

Barr and Clinton Wilder, of course, had produced *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the winner of five Tony awards in 1963. Crowley didn't know Barr, but he thought that "anybody who produced *Virginia Woolf* certainly wouldn't be shocked by my play." Somewhat less than graciously, the agent agreed to solicit Barr's opinion.

The next day it was a toss-up whether Crowley or the agent was more stunned when she phoned him to say, "Richard Barr and Edward Albee would like to have a drink with you. Can you go to Mr. Barr's apartment tonight at five o'clock?"

Crowley went, and although the meeting was cordial, "They didn't say, 'Yes, we want to do it.' They thought they might consider doing it in their workshop. And *Boys* would have ended in the workshop. The first night I don't think anybody was there. But the second night there was a line around the block! And it started pissing with rain, and the whole rest of the week it rained and rained. And I said to Bob Moore, the director, 'My God, the front of the theater looks like the third act of *Our Town!* All those umbrellas. People were just standing in line in the rain to get in. The New York intelligentsia began to descend on the play, and suddenly it was famous."

Although the rain eventually stopped, the long lines went on for most of the next four seasons. Near the end of *Boys'* first year, the original cast left town for a London run, returning in time to begin work on director William Friedkin's film of the play. It was through the 1970 movie that literally millions of people were exposed to *Boys in the Band*, and it was through Friedkin's direction that the most sensational, piteous aspects of *Boys* became its leitmotif.

THE *BOYS in the Band* is set in the Manhattan apartment of Michael, the play's protagonist and, because *Boys* is essentially a

tragedy, its villain. The occasion is a birthday party that Michael is hosting for his friend Harold. During the first act the guests arrive—including, quite unexpectedly, Alan, a former college roommate of Michael's.

Because Alan is heterosexual and "square city," and because Michael has never come out to him, Alan's sudden arrival pushes Michael into an acute attack of nerves. His agitation is not helped when Alan punches Michael's friend Emory in the jaw or when Harold, the guest of honor, arrives over an hour late.

By the second act the contained farce of the ruined party has darkened as a drunken, hostile Michael systematically savages his guests. In a brutal telephone game that he invents, Michael dares his friends to call the one person they each have ever truly loved. Points are awarded for self-disclosure, Michael explains, but it is clear that he intends the game chiefly as a humiliation. The players, for him, have already lost.

It was this ritualistic torment that *Boys* exposed to public scrutiny, along with a host of other "secrets" of homosexual life—Emory's relentless effeminacy, for example, Michael's obsession with Hollywood grandes dames, and Donald's conviction that the dynamics in his family turned him into a "fairy."

But there was more. During the course of the play several characters describe trips to the baths, and there are jokes about rimming. Larry and Hank, the play's only intact couple, wage open war over Larry's infidelity, even as other characters dredge up their pathetic and unrequited attachments to heterosexual men. Through it all the melody of Michael's self-loathing is reaching crescendo, until he finally utters the play's most malevolent line: "Show me a happy homosexual," he bites out, "and I'll show you a gay corpse."

For gays the shock of *Boys in the Band* wasn't that Crowley dared to touch on these issues—they had been raised before and, in the explosion of gay-made theater that followed *Boys*, would be dealt with again. Rather, the discomfort of gay and lesbian audiences came because the play—and particularly the movie—aired the dirty laundry of homosexual life in the most public forum imaginable. Once



**1990 production,
Theatre Rhinoceros,
San Francisco; Act I:
Harold's birthday.**

Back row, L-R: Michael (Greg Hoffman), Donald (Todd Meeks), Bernard (Kevin Jones), Hank (Chris Mountain). Front row: Cowboy (Michael Morris), Emory (Scott Capurro), Harold (Mikael Duden), and Larry (Chuck Kubick).

loose, the images could no longer be controlled, nor could reaction to them. Even today that prospect terrifies many lesbians and gay men.

Over the last twenty years, of course, Mart Crowley has heard every conceivable objection to the kind of homosexuality he depicted in *The Boys in the Band*. He comments, "For whatever reasons, I just called 'em as I saw 'em! That play I wrote from my gut—the truth as I saw it of the gay scene at that time. Of course, I was living with a lot of gay people when I put this play on, and nobody said, 'Oh, this rings so false. We can't do this, this is a lie!' I never heard the word 'stereotype' until years later.

"If people think it's a negative aspect of gay life, well, that's just the way I felt about it. I was a person who was forming. I've changed over the years, like anybody else would. I'm not that person anymore. But all my own upbringing, the prejudices that I was exposed to, and certainly the Catholic guilt that was drummed into me all of my life—all of it reached its apex at this exploding moment in the summer of 1967.

"I do think we can find pieces of ourselves [in *Boys*], maybe even pieces of ourselves that we don't like. But it's ridiculous to sweep under the carpet anything that we don't want

to believe is there in ourselves. If we're going to have any kind of health, every aspect of our whole self ought to be admissible."

The San Francisco production, under the guidance of Theatre Rhinoceros's artistic director, Ken Dixon, answered the charges of *Boys*' "negativism" by focusing on the chorus of reaction and rebuttal that Michael's friends provide to his acts of malice. As Dixon

pointed out, "When Bernard is broken up about having called the boy he was in love with, Emory is there to see that he gets home, to make him coffee, and tell him everything is going to be all right. Harold, even after he tells Michael off, makes a point of coming back to say, 'I'll call you in the morning.' And after everything, Michael asks Donald, 'Will I see you next Saturday?,' and Donald says, 'Yes, if you don't have other plans.' So they haven't destroyed each other, and it isn't like they're never going to see each other again."

The other essential point is that Larry, when he calls Hank on Michael's private extension and tells him that he loves him, wins the telephone game. Hank and Larry are the specific counterpoint to Michael's belief that to love is to be humiliated, and to his assumption that no one at his party loves anyone who could love him back. Significantly, the only other winner of the game is Alan. Near the play's end he firmly shuts the door to Michael's apartment and returns to his wife, even as the reconciling Larry and Hank go upstairs and close the door to Michael's bedroom. In most discussions of *Boys* that crucial symmetry is ignored.

But questions of "image," of stereotype and representation, have continued to dog *Boys* as they have done gay and lesbian theater

generally throughout the two decades since Stonewall. The situation is not surprising. All "minority" groups seem to reach a stage in the creation of their public identities—of which theater is a vital tool—during which the forces of assimilation do battle with advocates of cultural separatism. On both sides of the argument, mainstream-media depictions—sometimes the only public images of the group—are always evaluated in light of how well or poorly they convey meanings that are considered politically expedient.

For art, however, such a burden is nearly impossible to bear, and all minority theaters have, to a certain extent, been plagued by internal censorship that is sometimes far more severe than anything from the outside. Such criticisms became quite heated, for example, when George Wolfe's *Colored Museum* premiered in 1986—both because the content of the play was critical of white-created and Black-created images of Blacks and because the discourse was presented to white audiences in mainstream theaters. Similar dissent is sure to accompany the San Francisco-based Lorraine Hansberry Theatre's scheduled production of Ntozake Shange's adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Writer Edmund White, in discussing the late Robert Mapplethorpe's photography, makes a related argument. Regarding the controversy generated by Mapplethorpe's famous portraits of Black men, he notes (and I paraphrase) that Blacks looking at Mapplethorpe's photos see individual people, not tokens of "the Black race." It's a symptom of our own racism, White suggests, that we view the photos as *representative* of Blacks, or as symbolic of Black-white relations.

Thus it may be with *Boys in the Band*. Michael *qua* Michael is no less human than Willy Loman, Hedda Gabler, or Genet's Madame Irma. One can scarcely imagine the stage without the appalling heterosexual jealousy of Othello, or the cannibalistic lust and amorality that cripple Chance Wayne and Alexandra Del Lago, the *heterosexual* antagonists of *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Yet in each of these instances, the characters' "negative" qualities are organic and broad. Michael's flaws, simi-

larly, can simply be seen as dramatic fuel—familiar (if painful) and yet not typical.

At the same time, theater can never separate itself entirely from the politics of its age. For better or worse, *Boys in the Band* provides the standard by which modern gay theater often measures itself—whether through imitation or renunciation. And, partly as a consequence of *Boys*, gay and lesbian theater has ever since been expected to encompass the need for visibility, the requirements of the political discourse against homophobia, the concomitant protest against the constraints of gay-created images, and the waves of trendy excursions into and away from isolation, assimilation, self-criticism, and celebration of gay and lesbian lives. There is, as a result, no chance of pleasing all of the people even some of the time.

The Boys in the Band, however, assumed a social context for gay life that was large enough to encompass a dialogue about gay life, one that could take gayness as the occasion for a larger examination of social function and dysfunction, of love's wounds and the implications of personal choice. There is, then, an auspicious harmony in the revival of *Boys in the Band* today, at the dawn of the second generation after Stonewall. A "post-liberation" *Boys* reveals the dual task that lies before lesbian and gay playwrights—both to transcend the political factionalism of the seventies and eighties and to view lesbian and gay theater as something other than a forum for public agendas. As Crowley suggests, lesbian and gay theater cannot be held hostage by the demand for "positive" images, as if lesbian and gay identity could withstand anything but a challenge.

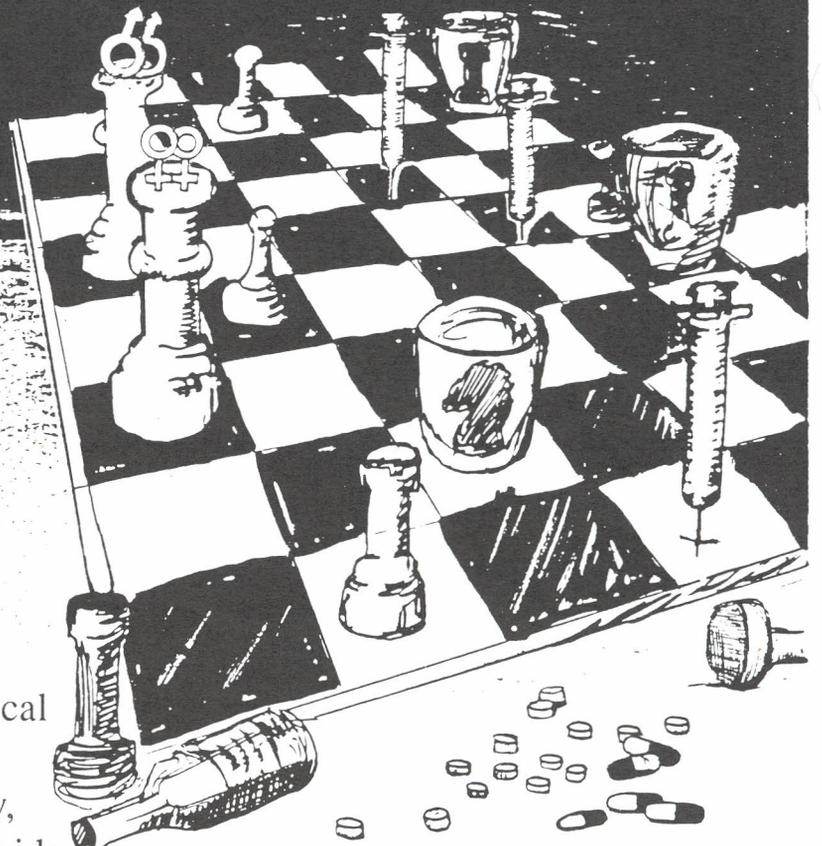
The best theater, it is often said, holds mirrors up and invites audiences to take a close look. It thrives on comparisons with life. But if the main function of gay theater is to reproduce the ways in which lesbians and gay men want to see themselves, then the face in the mirror is a stranger, and the stranger wears a mask. ▼

Wendell Ricketts lives in San Francisco and writes about theater for Bay Area Reporter, The Advocate, and other publications.

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*Dimanche.
He runs, screaming, la
lesbienne, femme et femme.*

*It's cold, like
November in the States, gray. Tiny
birds wing among
closely woven chairs, cafe
tables. All the chairs
face out. Make no mistake:*

*the lesbian will watch you.
A bird lands on the back
of my seat while unseasonable winds
blow rain in my coffee.
All the chairs facing out.*

*The lesbian walks
through dank church darkness
where each chair faces
the crucifix familiars
of her youth. She is being followed
by a man. Her feet fall*

*silently on stone, pausing
before St. Rita, contemplating
murder while bending over roses
brought for Mary. Candles*

*lit, her blood stilled
peacefully she smells dead men.
Only his shoes scrape the floor
as he flees fearful*

*in the face of her found
comfort. I dip
my spoon into coffee
smile at him
on his way out.*

One Butch Evening

*I'm not one to swagger
even while I drink beer throw
back my shoulders, point
my breasts at*

*your back. Feet planted
wide apart only mean
I am trying to secure myself
to this earth not necessarily*

*that I am advancing on you.
Spun sugar held tightly
by fists locked square. And when*

*you're not around my lips spread
out into the surrounding quiet
breathe across swept sand*

*the only streets I swagger
fall deep away
from food, from sex
to molder
steam
multiply bearing
the imprint of my heavy steps.*

*Linda L. Nelson is an editor of Trivia:
A Journal of Ideas and a production
manager for The Village Voice. She is
currently working on a lesbian road novel.*

THEY HAVE BEEN CALLED everything from anomalies to snow queens, dinge queens, rice queens, and taco-tasters. Some social scientists consider people of color's sexual attraction to whites "internalized racism." One thing is certain: each ethnic and cultural group can be hostile toward its members who cross ethnic or cultural lines; hostile toward outsiders. A puzzled white man once asked the late Mike Smith, founder of Black and White Men Together, why he (also a white man) liked Black men, to which he replied, "Why do you like white men?" There is no simple reason. We like who we like and we are what we are. Smith, a handsome, well-heeled, Harvard-educated man with an intact sense of self-esteem, made choices in with whom he slept. And his interracialism was a matter of personal pride.

Back in 1980 Smith stood on the corner of 18th and Castro in San Francisco and looked around and thought to himself, There has got to be a better way for interracialists to meet. So he ran a small classified ad in The Advocate, and that is how BWMT began. A year later there were thirty chapters and the first national convention was held in San Francisco. Smith's vision had ignited the imagination of other interracialists around the world. Ten years later BWMT remains the most identifiable beacon in the gay community for men of all colors who want to experience cross-cultural communication and relationships.

Smith observed, "We hurt when non-interracialists poke at us. And we resent their assigning us their racial hangups. Any person who has come to grips with his or her own minority—be it racial or sexual—is, in one sense, grateful for the 'affliction,' for it gives him or her the opportunity to become a better human being. Gay and lesbian interracialists are dealt an even greater 'affliction,' and those of us who weather it take a special pride in the accomplishment. When you ask me if I am glad I'm an interracialist, I'll ask you if you're glad you're gay. And if you say 'yes,' I'll tell you to double that feeling."

The tenth annual convention of the National Association of Black and White Men Together is being held in San Francisco June 24 through July 1. Previous conventions have been hosted by chapters in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Columbus (Ohio), Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York City, Tallahassee, and Washington, DC. NABWMT also has affiliates in Brazil and England. Some of its affiliates go by the acronyms of MACT or PACT—Men (or People) of All Colors Together—because they want to emphasize the multiracial inclusivity of their membership. Others have stuck with the original BWMT to honor how it all began: with Black and white men. But people of all colors, genders, and sexual preferences are welcome in all chapters.

John Teamer and Michael Warner are cochairs of NABWMT.

Teamer: Mainly, our goals are to fight racism; to provide supportive environments for gay interracial relationships. We do that through education, consciousness raising, social and political actions. Also to empower our minority members. We work on self-esteem; building confidence through interaction. We have separate caucuses for different races in some chapters and at our national conventions to address those issues.

Bean: I have a friend in Chicago who is an American Indian and an executive. He is more in the closet about being an Indian than he is about being gay. I think in part because of some of the things BWMT is doing in the gay community, he is feeling more comfortable about coming out; about who he is. He sees us challenging racism. Does BWMT have a political agenda regarding racism that it promotes?

Teamer: In many ways BWMT is a sleeping giant that has just awoken to smell the coffee. From the very beginning BWMT addressed bar discrimination, employment discrimination. BWMT-Atlanta lobbied and got a law on the books stating that bars cannot discriminate. The New York City chapter has done all kinds of political actions, and so have many other groups around the country. Recently we developed a

A Matter of Personal Pride: A Conversation About Black and White Men Together by Thom Bean

national focus. We have a national anti-racism subcommittee which is working on a plan of battle. We are challenging the gay press to be more inclusive and to cover people of color in the community. We look forward to coalition-building to pull the organizations together which share our concerns.

Bean: What sort of recognition does BWMT get from the Black gay community and the white gay community?

Teamer: We've been called all kinds of names by some in the Black gay community, I think partly because of a misunderstanding of our purpose. We have to own that we have not advertised who and what we are better. Some Black gay men feel that we are just a sex club, or provide an opportunity for older white men to get their hands on younger Black men. Some think the Black members of BWMT feel inferior, that we do not love our own race. But after ten years I think we are being accepted more than ever before in the Black gay community. I know that because people who wouldn't speak to me before because I was involved in BWMT are warm to me now.

Warner: Within the white gay community I found my white so-called friends stopped speaking when I became associated with this organization. And I've heard this same story many times from a lot of our members. But I have to be me and they have to be themselves. But to me it boils down to ignorance and fear. Everybody needs to learn this is a big world and that there are a lot of different people in it.

Teamer: There are some progressive white gays who are not members of BWMT but who understand that discrimination and racism exist in the gay community. The same is also true of progressive Black gays.

Bean: I think that there may be a metamorphosis going on in the gay community largely because of the toll that AIDS has taken. Some of the establishment in the white gay community has been diagnosed or is gone. AIDS has precipitated an unprecedented dialogue among all people with a common problem: survival. The AIDS organizations that first addressed the needs of the white gay community are now expressing an interest in people of color because they have to, in order to continue to exist; in order to defeat the virus. Also, people of color tend to process differently. We are not all "gay." We don't all identify because of a little genital manipulation. And because we have been excluded from the white gay community, we are harder to reach. When our lives are on the line, we tend to be more vocal. After all, many of us have been closer to the hard edge of survival all along than have whites. So now we are beginning to see more people of color out there expressing themselves. Some still do that with a brick. Others—and we are the ones who must be encouraged—want to further develop a constructive dialogue. So now there is an opportunity, for a horrible reason, for people of color to be more visible and work together toward *our* acceptance, *our* health crisis solution, and resolving *our* problems.

Warner: I think the interest in the Black community has always been there, but it has been the lack of funds which has thwarted participation. In the white gay community the funds were always there.

Bean: Well, don't you think that there are Black gays who have had the funds but who have chosen, for whatever reasons, not to identify with the white gay community?

Teamer: That's true. Black gays have not felt a part of the white gay com-

munity. There has been a lot of isolation and separation of people of color. AIDS has done a lot to break down barriers and pull people together.

Bean: How has BWMT accounted for issues of power within its structure? And are those issues race-related within the organization?

Teamer: We have racial parity across the board. The officers, the committee chairs, etcetera. We realized that was necessary to prevent any group from controlling another. We strive to empower members to do the work that needs to be done; to learn and grow from the experience of working with each other.

Warner: Even on a regional and local level we strive for racial parity.

Bean: What misconceptions about BWMT are still out there?

Warner: That BWMT is a sex club. That our members do not love other races but are just out there for some action. Our interaction with the gay community over the past ten years is breaking those misconceptions down.

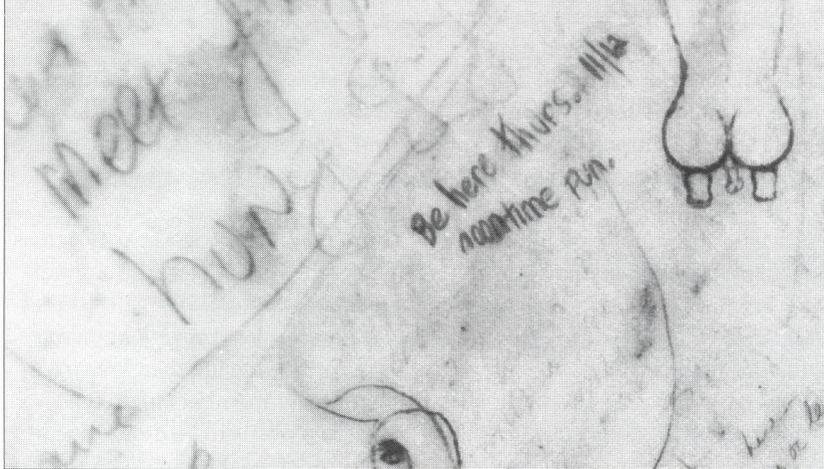
Bean: Do you foresee a time when the need for an interracial focused organization will not exist? By that I mean the gay community will be integrated to such a degree that it would be gratuitous to say Black and White Men Together?

Teamer: Not in my lifetime. But it is to our advantage to work toward that end. Maybe AIDS will speed up that process. ▼

Thom Bean is publisher/editor of Quarterly InterChange, an activist, and a free-lance writer. Bean was a founding member of BWMT and currently serves on the OUT/LOOK Foundation Board of Directors.

Desmond J. Waite

Lost Tribal Rites: A LAMENT



ANTHONY AZIZ

THE PLAGUE has revolutionized the tribal rites of gay men, those ephemeral exchanges of desires, fantasies, and propositions conducted beneath toilet stall partitions. And the mountainous body of literature that accompanied these rituals— toilet notes written to the sound of dripping faucets, driven by the urgent need for a blow job or a fuck—has been lost, flushed into oblivion.

Every major city and college campus had its famous—or notorious—provenances of such rites: public parks and roadside rest stops; bus and railway stations and airport terminals; certain high-rise office buildings with secluded facilities; museums, hotels, and expensive department stores. Even a few sterile suburban shopping malls became known as promising sites for a quickie.

In the sexual utopia of the 1960s and 1970s baths and backrooms flourished. Porno film houses featured as much live action in the audience and sequestered rooms as on their screens. In some cities sex clubs were available to almost anyone with the price of admission. Life was a continuous orgasm in private, semiprivate, and public places.

Men with wives or unresponsive lovers, the shy, the closeted, the unattractive, and the horny young

sought out the toilets to satisfy their biological, if not their emotional, needs. Men made their dicks and asses available—no names, no phone numbers, no committing hugs and kisses. Just slam, bam, thank you sir. And sometimes not even thanks.

To the sophisticated, the clues for identifying a ritual site were unmistakable—like paintings on the walls of Pompeii—beginning with abundant graffiti expressing various wishes or offering services to the needy. "Make date for. . ." Fill in the blank. Today these directives, lamentably, have been replaced with racial slurs and political statements.

Many sites bore certain markings: small peepholes between bored-through marble or metal partitions, or larger glory holes placed for easy enactment of tribal rites. Usually these occurred in toilets with double-entry doors that could signal the approach of an unfriendly or unsympathetic intruder. Other active toilets were arranged so that the ritual stalls were not in the immediate view of anyone entering; approaching footsteps alerted participants to interrupt their moments of passion, at least until it could be determined whether the intruder belonged to the same tribe.

The sex-seeker knew instantly if the occupant of the stall was a fellow seeker and available. Beneath the

stall, usually the one next to the wall, could be seen trousers—ranging from worn jeans to Brooks Brothers pinstripes—and underwear gathered at the ankles above running shoes, wingtips, or other footgear appropriate to social station or aspiration. Feet were thrust forward, legs widespread. If the vibes were right, if what the seeker saw suited him, he entered the adjoining stall rather than the *de rigueur* second stall away for ordinary crappers, and the ritual commenced in earnest.

Like his neighbor, he dropped his trousers and briefs to his ankles, sat on the stool with feet forward, legs widespread. Then a soft foot tap, subtle at first, greeted by a similar signal from the adjoining stall. Then three foot taps and the echo. Thereupon the ritual intensified. A rhythmically moving masturbatory shadow could be seen on the floor, indicating that preparations were under way and the occupant was interested. Then a grasping hand signal beneath the stall, movement from the next stall, and body shifting so that one butt cheek rested on the edge of the toilet seat. The grasping hand thus could have access to determine the suitability of what was available and the extent of further interest.

The grasping hand felt the cock, massaged the moist tip, cupped balls, tested the asshole with a finger. Then about-face, and the neighbor returned the play, if the seeker had not been turned off by an untractable foreskin, a cock size below specifications, or a hemorrhoidal asshole.

Correspondence then ensued. A penned note on toilet paper: "What do you like?"

Response: A wary "Everything. You?"

Reply: "Do you like to suck and get fucked?"

"Yes. And I like to eat ass."

"Sounds great. Do you have a place?"

"No. Do you?"

"No. We can get it on here."

"Is it safe?"

"Yes. We can hear if anybody comes."

The love notes, this intense ten minutes' worth of heartfelt correspondence, were deposited in the toilet bowl, the ink fading to stain the water, as the kneeling portion of the ritual took place, the bottom half of one torso thrust beneath the partition, cock erect, and the top half of the neighboring torso bent over it as wet lips and drooling mouth began their ministrations. The nose nestled in the pubic bush, and exciting, musky male pheromone was added to the olio of toilet scents.

Too soon the first torso would tauten; there would be a slight grunt, then withdrawal.

Follow-up note: "Thanks. That was great. I'm here at this time every day. I'd like to swallow that again."

But no response. A hasty pull-up of briefs, then trousers, then the flush away of penned endearments.

Other exchanges were lengthy fantasies comparable to some of the one-handed fiction that appears in beefcake magazines. "I'd like to spread-eagle you on my bed and work down your body with my tongue, first your back . . .," then a detailed description of the lingual dorsal bath from cervical vertebrae to the soles of the feet, followed by the more detailed frontal bath, ending with some variation on ". . . and tongue the tip of your cock, then swallow it until you shoot your hot juicy load down my throat." The recipient of such a flattering hand-delivered letter was hard put to match it and usually responded with something to the effect of "Sounds great. You've got me so hot I'm ready to shoot." A quick, urgent response: "Kneel down. I want your load." And *fait accompli*.

At times the two seekers would unite in a corner stall, where one pair of feet could be hidden so that rimming and more thorough bodylick could precede the blow job or, on occasion, fuck. An imaginative variation of this procedure involved two shopping bags—one person

could stand in them in a partner's stall while the ritual proceeded without raising the suspicion of intruders, except for the knowing, who would not care.

Rarely did the doer reciprocate for the doer. For these furtive rituals, roles, even though unwritten and unspoken, were strictly delineated. Rejection was as likely to occur under these circumstances as it was in bar or bath cruising. The polite response was the diplomatic lie "I'm waiting for someone," meaning "someone besides you." A liver-spotted hand, dark complexion, dirty fingernails, soiled underwear, or any number of other quickly observed faults could prompt such a reaction. Or a beneath-the-partition peek might reveal that the seeker wore glasses or had less than a full head of hair or, the ultimate defect, graying or gray hair. Others might respond, "I don't have time. I have to get back to work"—always a convenient response for the many department store clerks on a sex break.

There also were the teasers, who sent out signals of availability just so they could reject invitations. These were often the young, the beautiful, the most desirable-looking. Hustlers without much business also would sometimes "work the johns" and offer their dicks in trade for \$5.

Beyond the risk of transmitted disease, the toilet assignments car-

ried with them the risk of entrapment by pathologically disturbed vice squad officers—a pleonastic description, since vice squad officers are by definition disturbed. This resulted in, usually, a payoff or a trip to court and, sometimes, a period behind bars.

As the 1970s waned, building managers began removing stall doors to discourage the sex rituals; when this failed (as it often did), toilet doors were locked in department stores and office buildings, sending the sex-seekers to places where such countermeasures were not possible, such as libraries, transportation terminals, and college buildings.

Then came the Plague.

Never will tribal rites be exercised so widely and so freely as in the recent past. Here and there intrepid tribesmen continue to seek anonymous gratification, but with less and less success as caution conquers lust. Now that only a few fading graffiti remain, the history of quick-sex seekers has become as inaccessible as that of preliterate tribes. Just as the invading Catholic Spaniards destroyed the pagan Mayan codices in the New World, the tribal gay sex-seekers have destroyed their own literature and with it a key to a significant cultural history. ▼

Desmond J. Waite is the pseudonym of a writer who is better known under another name and must protect his involvement in the tribe he describes.

Different strokes for Different Milleus. Three female artists (known as *Kiss And Tell*), have made an art form out of "on the wall" commentary—as documented in this photo from *Drawing the Line*, an interactive exhibit and traveling show since 1988 that explores issues of censorship and sexuality. The originators of this collection of 100 black-and-white photographs of lesbian imagery ask viewers to write their comments directly on the gallery wall.

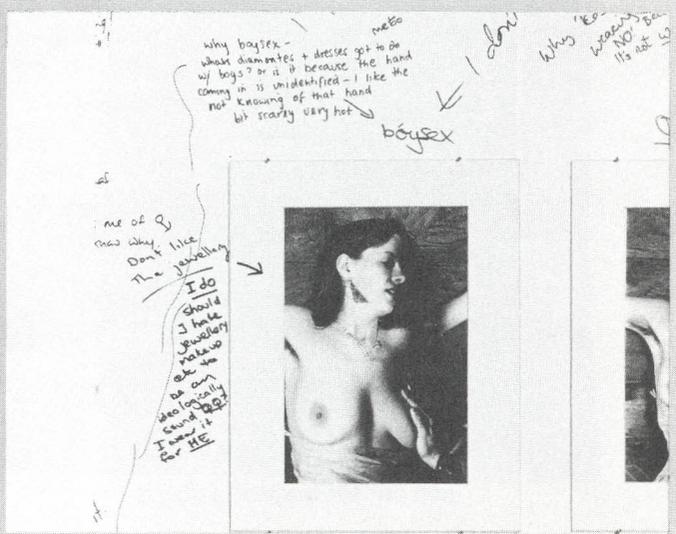


PHOTO COURTESY OF SAN FRANCISCO CAMERAWORK

The Dance of Masks



JILL POSENER

Summer 1990

by Barbara Smith

TONIGHT I FEEL HOT. I don't just mean randy, horny, whatever your euphemism is. I mean I feel *more* than sexual, I feel powerful, my whole body is sizzling with something that feels outside and beyond me, yet at the same time has its beginnings in me.

Like when my neighbour phones me and says, "OK, what's her name?" and I act all innocent and coy and say, "I'm sure I don't know what you mean." And she says, "Come on now, who's the new woman?" and I prolong the innocence and protest, "What makes you think I'm seeing someone?" And she replies, "Because you're walking differently. Because your head is up, your shoulders are back, your stride has a purpose, and my god your chest is puffed out like a strutting pigeon, so don't fucking lie to me, girl!" That's how I feel tonight, except the feeling comes from me.

Or other times, when one of the women at work would make some comment about my new haircut, like when it's really short they know I'm feeling bad about something. But they're straight—well, that's another story—and they don't understand the message. Short hair means business, means no more messing. Short hair means being a dyke, being butch. Short hair is *me*, and over the years I might have fucked around with perms and mohicans and crimping and trying to grow a tail and all the rest of that butchy-femme stuff, but it's like masturbating with your own image—in the end you want the real thing.

So in my cunt I can feel something's going to happen. Tonight I am hot to trot, as they say. Had a

good night's sleep. Woke up feeling alive. The sun was streaming through the shades, and for once the cat hadn't shat under the bed. Checked the post. Not only no bills, but that cheque I'd been waiting for for ages had finally turned up and it was hundreds of pounds more than I'd expected. So, first step, bank it, pay the bills, and then work out how much is left. What can I buy?

New clothes, of course, and a haircut, because I'm going out tonight and I want to look so sharp and cleaned up that I'll cut someone. Feel like an overgrown field, like watching my dad getting ready for some big dinner or something, watching him lather his stubbly face and shave off the deadwood. Stroke after stroke with the razor, he always wet-shaved when I was a little girl, I'd watch him clear away the facial debris, slick back his hair with Brylcreem, everything smoothed down, everything in its place and no superfluities.

My dad is wiry, spare face, prides himself on being the same weight now as he was in the air force during the war. A very dapper man my dad, looks good in a suit, a three-piece suit since he always wears the waistjackets too, shirt pressed just right, suit just back from the cleaners, small knot in his tie, hankie in his breast pocket, and no sideburns so you can see all his face. And look at his face shine, his cheekbones standing out and gleaming white in the reflection of the bathroom light like he had warpaint on. I always thought my dad was David Niven, minus the moustache, and I wished that I could shave my face too.

Shaving for men is not the same as makeup for women, you know. Shaving is a revelation, a paring off of layers of dirt, dead skin, and unwanted bristle. It lays bare the man, and he can't hide from himself. But makeup is a pasting over of the cracks, a concealment—not a conceit, because makeup can only work with what you've got in the first place. It's a guessing game but one that intrigues me. I love women in makeup. I want to know what's underneath but without removing the pancake, mascara, lipstick. No, they're not dolls. They are actors in an ancient theatre, real people playing out fantasies, actors playing characters wearing comic or tragic masks. And I am as fascinated by the mask as I am curious to remove it.

I dream sometimes of going to Pompeii, the ancient Roman city buried under searing layers of molten lava, volcanic ash, burning cinders, when Vesuvius belched out its apparent exasperation with a decadent civilisation. I want to go outside the city to the *Villa dei Misteri*, the Room of the Mysteries, and stare at the frescoes that cover all four walls. The scenes are from the initiation into the mysteries of Dionysus, the ancient Greek god of Chaos and Dissolution, and one in particular depicts an old satyr, half man half goat, holding a mask in one hand and in the other a mirror, angled so that the initiate sees the mask as *her* reflection. I want to revel in chaos and dissolution, because knowledge does not come in a climate of orderliness.

So I stroll up to that unisex hairdresser someone recommended. I want a short back and sides like my dad, so short that no one,

I want a short back and sides like my dad

so no one will be able to resist

running their hands

over my hair.

thank god, will be able to resist running their hands over my hair and feel it bristle busily under their palms. Then up the West End, Oxford Street, New Bond Street, *Knightsbridge*? Yeah, let's go to the posh places, get good clothes with a good cut, dole out a bit more dosh because it's going to be worth the extra. I want to cut a clean straight line. I want a nice tailored sharp *man's* suit, and a smooth pair of boots that I can see my face in. I want a crisp shirt that feels like it crackles when I move. Listen to me, sharp, cut, bristle, crisp, crackle, like breakfast cereal, I'll make so much noise that they'll hear me coming before I arrive. It's not only femmes who can make an entrance.

Butch on the streets, femme in the sheets maybe, but I've been fucking around with the femme in me for too long now. No wonder no one knows how to read me anymore, no wonder I don't know how to act anymore. I don't know who I am, and if I don't know who I am, how can I know what I want? And if I don't know what I want, how the fuck are they supposed to

know? No, knock it on the head. Playing around with contradictions is fine if you know what you're doing, but if you don't, forget it. Go back to basics and start again. So be cool. Dress for yourself. I like me butch, I know me butch, so *be* butch and dress for sex.

Well, that's what you want, isn't it, sex? You want a good fuck, don't you? 'Course I do, but I want an interesting chase. I like a little challenge on the way to foregone conclusion, fancied you the minute you walked in thought you'd never come over blah blah. I want to be obvious, obvious butch, obvious on the make. Steaming with passion, I want to smell of it, I want to ooze it, I want it sweating out of every pore, written in and between every line with no room for ambiguity, hidden behind every gesture and always on the surface, manifest in every easy joke that always gets a laugh, so far into me that it's almost in the background, my hungry cunt almost standing behind me like a predatory shadow. Watch out, here comes Barb with her cunt on a leash again. Yeah, but which one's the cunt? And does it bite?

So I'm going to stand at that bar, real cool, and hunt. Stand where I get a clear view of the door. Watch them all come in, eye-

ing them up and trying them on for size. I want to play that frightening, dangerous game with myself—how long can I act the cool butch? How long can I stand there looking mean and moody or bored or uninterested when my heart is racing with anticipation? How long can I keep it going before I run out of steam and they realise I'm lonely and shy and embarrassed?

Well, you can see through me if you want, but be gentle with what's underneath. I want to want and be wanted so badly that the merest finger touch, the slightest lifting of a femme's eyebrow when she evaluates *me*, feels like a knife slipping under my skin. But sometimes I can balance on that knife-edge, sometimes it doesn't cut my skin, sometimes I'm so on the spot, so well measured, so poised with my posing, that I can break-dance on the point of a needle.

Tonight I will be the entertaining, laugh-a-minute, woman-of-the-world butch. I will be the writer with the funny anecdotes, the witty comments, I will be barbed and bristling, busy busy with my butch performance. I will stand at that bar and select my femme who picked *me* out moments beforehand anyway, and I will dance my butch's dance for her. I will be dapper and aching to please this woman who spied the shark and reeled her in with a handline. I will stand there with my strong, clean, straight, sharp lines and wait for her to lay a gentle hand on me that will barely touch me, that will stroke me like a feather, that will soften the hard edges but not take away their power to cut. And she will slip her femme's dagger underneath my chain mail and expose the soft flesh underneath. And later when she strips for me, when she dances her femme's dance for me as both reward and punishment, when she reveals the

lace and satin and silk underneath, she will show me that vulnerability has its own power.

There was a woman once for whom I danced my butch's dance. And she danced her femme's dance for me and showed me what was underneath the mask. She was soft and curvy and as hard as flint, and she showed me that the mask was not a lie, not hers of apparent soft femininity nor mine of seeming steel and bluster. She taught me the excitement, the meaning of contradiction—not a flat negation of mutually exclusive opposites but the energising of molecules bubbling constantly from one extreme to the other and always in flux. She would take me in the palm of one hand like a precious talisman and excite me to power simply by the touching of me. She could hold me like that in a doorway, in midsentence, neither in nor out, neither touching nor untouching, she could suspend my movement and move me to the core of my being. She could stop my breath, my heart, and in that instant of timelessness I would die a thousand deaths and my cunt would ooze its admiration.

She initiated me, as surely as any high priestess, into the wonders of women's power. She would lay her soft, curvy, naked woman's body on the bed, place her hands behind her head, and unconsciously flex a brace of brawny biceps, and I'd think: Where the fuck did they come from? Always beneath the tranquil surface, a mask of apparent vulnerability and powerlessness, but with one swift movement women's power dashes out and lashes out of the soft curves and slaps you in the face with startling muscularity, a punishment for simplistically and impudently believing that the looked-at have no power.

Nothing is as it seems. Women are strong. Women can open doors

How long can I keep it going before I run

out of steam and they realise I'm

lonely and shy and

embarrassed?

for themselves, carry their own suitcases, change a tyre, repair a fuse—if they want to. It all comes down to choice. If men want to set us the riddle of being both Madonna and Whore simultaneously, then they have to accept the consequence that we might contrarily choose to be both. Our strongest choice, the one they didn't allow for, is to choose not to choose. This is what I love about women, what I love about femmes, what I love about myself.

For on occasion I have danced the femme's dance too, for myself and for another. I have danced it on the street and in the privacy of my home. I have danced it in the real world out there, and I have danced it in my imagination. In my fantasy I can do anything and everything. I danced the femme's dance, and I danced it well. I took off my butch's mask, danced myself to the edge of the cliff, and drove myself to distraction. I stood in front of the mirror, which usually reflected my cock, and dressed myself in lacy camisole, suspender-belt, and nylons. I put makeup on my face, where normally I dreamed of shaving straight lines, I put femmey earrings in my ears. And when I danced this femme's dance, I danced the butch's dance too, somewhere in my head. I became a whore for myself and wanted to

straddle my own thighs and lower myself onto my own cock and fall in love with myself.

A dildo is not a penis, but it is a mask. Cunt can also be a mask. Why can't I be anything and everything I please just because I want it and it pleases me? I can wear my cock and admire it in the mirror, like the satyr and the mask and the mirror of revelation. I can fuck my lover with my cock-mask, I can take it off and fuck myself with it, or she can fuck me with it. Or I can put it away and forget about it. Tell me, how many men can castrate themselves, bugger themselves with their own cocks, fellate their own cocks attached to someone else's body, take their cocks off, put them in a drawer and forget them—all that and not bleed to death? I can do anything that a "man" can, I can do anything a woman can—if I so desire. And if I do not "so desire," then I can choose not to choose. ▼

Barbara Smith recently had two stories published in the Sheba Feminist Collective's lesbian erotic anthology Serious Pleasure. She lives in London.

About the artist: Jill Posener is a photographer, writer, and playwright.

What this has to do with having sex with men is this: as I'm not a "separatist," I happen to have a couple of male friends whom I like and trust (up to a certain point, of course, since I'm a lesbian.) I'm considering bedding down with them because the ache for human physical affection of any kind is becoming unbearable. I've been celibate for over a year. But more importantly, the alienation I feel from the lesbian community as well as the straight community is taking its toll. Of course my "lesbian license" would be revoked immediately. But I haven't even earned it yet.

Name withheld
Eugene, OR

■ If an article by a "reformed" gay male had been sent to you saying how great and exciting it is being with a woman now, and how his former lifestyle was filled with death and desolation, would you have printed it?

S. C.
Detroit, MI

The Penis Problem

■ Dear Gutless Wonders of *OUT-LOOK*:

This letter is directed to the so-called lesbians on your staff. You must be either drag queens or cheap publicity seekers, or both. Your future success is dependent on people such as myself. But after your "Dykes Fall in Love with Dicks" propaganda, you may have sunk your own pretentious ship.

Betrayal of faith is costly. It will be costly to you.

Your real lesbian editors need to take charge of your company. Or leave and form another magazine free from the subversive influence of male, gay included.

I noticed that you idealize gay men, and put in the homeliest lesbians you can find, usually illustrations, no less. Is this coinciden-

tal? I think not. Gay men hate women because they are beautiful and they can't emulate beauty. The only reason gays and lesbians have come together recently is because thousands of gays are dying of AIDS. Would gays and lesbians be so chummy without the AIDS crisis?

Barbara Shelbourne
San Francisco, CA
"I'm your conscience"

■ Party-line politics are a major snore, and I'm glad *OUT/LOOK* is willing to publish controversial articles. But did you really have to feature *both* "When Lesbians Fall for Men" and "Sexual Lies: A Butch Fesses Up" [on the cover of] the Winter issue? If I were a just-coming-out teenage girl who happened to pick up that particular copy of the magazine, I'd walk away thinking that the major lesbian issue is penises—the main variation among us being whether we secretly want them in us or on us. Which sounds suspiciously like the pre-liberation party line we all grew up with.

Lindsay Van Gelder
New York, NY

■ Is it me, or are other lesbians also tiring of the "I am leatherdyke, hear me roar" phenomenon sweeping through the lesbian community? Jan Brown ("Sex, Lies & Penetration," Winter 1990) writes, with more than a hint of condescension, that she doesn't need to be "judged, pitied, or analyzed." Well, neither do I. Please don't feel sorry for my lover or me because we'll never experience the joy of having "someone's blood on our hands." Forgive me for not possessing an untamed, animalistic desire to beat on my girlfriend in the name of passion. Oh, and please stop thinking of me as repressed and hopelessly vanilla while patting yourself on the back

for being on the "sexual edge."

I'm perplexed by Ms. Brown's thoughts. The images she invokes are, at the very least, disturbing, at most disgusting. Where exactly does she draw the line between fantasy and reality? If she gets off by images of rape, and I assume, practiced "scenes" of rape, wouldn't it logically follow that the ultimate fuck would be "hauling [her] cock out of [her] pants to drive into a struggling body"—a body not of fantasy, but of flesh? In the end, Ms. Brown offers us no assurance that we haven't just read the musings of a lesbian Ted Bundy.

If Jan Brown wants to pretend she has a cock and lacks a cunt, fine. All I can say is I find some comfort in the fact she doesn't think of herself as much of a woman or much of a lesbian. Because that makes it easier for me not to either.

Karen Barber
Medford, MA

■ A National Lesbian Purity Board is called for in this time of wavering allegiance to the cunt. Laminated identity cards with small, colorful photographs could easily fit into one's wallet. And random vaginal smears would be helpful in culling imposters from the ranks.

Mary Wings
San Francisco, CA

Lead Us to Assimilation

■ I think the debate about gay marriage vs. domestic partnership ("Gay Marriage: A Must or a Bust?" Fall 1989) is fundamentally a debate about assimilation vs. separation. In this more fundamental debate, ideology is pointless—it all comes down to personal preference. But the gay rights movement faces a crucial decision: is it going to be directed by ideolo-

gy or practical politics?

If the majority of gays prefer assimilation, and I think they do, what is the gay rights movement doing for them if it does not promote gay marriage? Does the gay rights movement exist to promote the agenda of a radical anti-marriage minority of gays who claim to know what's best for all of us, or does it represent the interests of the majority of gays?

John A. Hules
Oakland, CA

Self-Censorship Doesn't Make Us Safer

■ I enjoy reading *OUT/LOOK* because it seems that no topic or point of view is beyond the pale. I certainly do not expect you to have a pro-s/m editorial policy. But I did not expect to encounter the same simplistic arguments that we've been hearing for the last fifteen years—not in the pages of a magazine devoted to being on the sparkling cutting edge of new ideas in gay and lesbian culture.

I am referring, of course, to "Of Torture and Tangents: Consequences of the Robert Mapplethorpe Exhibition," by Stuart Edelson (Winter 1990). The table of contents entry for this article asked the question, "Must we defend s/m in order to safeguard homoeroticism?" My answer to that question is, "Only if you want to keep getting your copy of *OUT/LOOK* and any other gay and lesbian publication."

Edelson feels differently. But first, like most would-be censors, he treats us to windy passages of self-justification that are supposed to lull the reader into believing that a faggot and an artist could not, by definition, advocate censorship or sexual prejudice. The boy has obviously done his homework and taken a page out of the Women Against Pornography workbook. Andrea Dworkin

couldn't have said it any better.

No reasonable person could hold Mapplethorpe responsible for the dearth of vanilla gay male sexual imagery. Removing s/m images from the discourse will not enrich it. Nor will it speed up the (homo) sexual education of mainstream American art fans. I question Edelson's apparent assumption that graphic photos of vanilla gay male sex would somehow be less offensive to the Moral Majority and the agents of the state than a photo of a leatherman on his lover's leash.

If we are going to learn from our differences instead of being torn apart by them, we have to get at least one thing straight: Gay and lesbian sexual minorities are not the enemy. The people who hate us don't care if we hate each other. The only people who can tell the difference between all of our factions is us. And we can't stop anti-gay violence, discrimination, or censorship by beating up on, insulting, or suppressing one another.

Pat Califia
South San Francisco, CA

Opinions: Love 'Em or Leave 'Em

■ There are plenty of opportunities for Stuart Edelson's ideas to be expressed—[by] the Mormon Church, the Catholic Church, the Reverend Wildmon, Senator Helms, Representative Dannemeyer, etcetera. If I want to read a case for having gays gain approval by not standing "far outside the mainstream of what convention defines as recognizably one's fellow man," I will read *National Review* or *The Advocate*.

OUT/LOOK is responsible for giving a voice and some credibility to Edelson's ideas. Therefore I am cancelling my subscription to your periodical.

Jerry Jansen
San Francisco, CA

■ Being, both of us, survivors of childhood sexual abuse, reading "Incest and Other Sexual Taboos: A Dialogue Between Men and Women" (Fall 1989), and then realizing that the magazine was going to maintain a self-righteous and self-defensive stance in relation to its publication felt like being abused all over again, and then being told that nothing inappropriate or wrong had taken place.

Incest and sexual abuse are not taboos; they are crimes! The next time you at *OUT/LOOK* feel like sitting around discussing your fears, misconceptions, and prejudices about a topic as volatile and important as sexual abuse, please do it in private, because to do it in public is the real taboo. We can no longer support your magazine and we will not be renewing our subscription.

Lisa Molinaro and Patti Levey
San Francisco, CA

■ I'm distressed by all the letters you publish that are a variation on the theme of "I'm cancelling/have cancelled/will cancel my subscription to your magazine because of the outrageous article about (fill in your favorite controversy)."

The extent to which many are willing to only listen to their own opinions repeated back to them is quite amazing. I suggest that these persons wake up to the fact that the lesbian and gay community is a huge and diverse one, just like any other large group of people. We don't achieve anything by creating an aura of political correctness (which borders on the fanatical, judging by some of the letters) to which everyone who is gay or lesbian must conform.

Tami Parr
Los Angeles, CA

■ Hot Damn! Jan Clausen's fabulous article is exactly what I was hoping for when I signed up for

OUT/LOOK: intelligent experience, style, necessary thoughts, guidance, contacts, the happiness of freedom. Also glad your margins are shrinking. The "right-brained" look looked insecure. Sign me up for another year pronto!

Mark Higgins
Washington, DC

■ I think your magazine is just terrible. I find the articles mostly lesbian-oriented and not interesting to read. I am an educated professional person but your magazine is boring.

Stephen E. Burke
Amesbury, MA

■ I just got my tax returns and what a better way to spend it than to help support one of the finest lesbian and gay publications I've ever come across. Keep up the great work and keep being as controversial as you have been. Our community needs it.

Kathleen Dermody
Cedar Grove, NJ

Mark your Calendar!

To be sure your letter is considered for publication in the Fall 1990 issue, we must receive it, typed double-spaced, by July 5, 1990. Letters may be edited for length.

Points of Clarification

- The dialogue between Jewelle L. Gomez and Barbara Smith ("Taking the Home Out of Homophobia," Spring 1990) was excerpted from *The Black Women's Health Book: Speaking for Ourselves* (Seal Press, Evelyn C. White, editor).

- The cover of the Spring 1990 issue was graced by Laura de (not da) Zison.

KRIS KOVICK



THE COMPLETE LIST OF COUNTRIES WHERE LESBIANS AND GAY MEN LEGALLY CAN GET MARRIED*

1. Denmark

**(and a description of how comprehensive that right to marry actually is)*

The Danish Act on Registered Partnership allows two persons of the same sex to enter into a "registered partnership."

Like marriage, this Act allows for:

- the possibility of gaining tax advantages (transfer of income);
- automatic full inheritance rights (in the absence of children);
- reduced inheritance tax even in the absence of a will;
- the right to retain the undivided possession of an estate;
- public and private pension and insurance rights;
- the right to court assistance in case of divorce;
- mutual liability for financial support (before having access to state support).

Unlike heterosexual marriage, however, the registered-partnership act does not allow gay or lesbian couples to:

- adopt children who aren't related to either individual;
- adopt each other's children even in the event of divorce or death;
- share common custody of children;
- have an "official" church wedding;
- register as partners if one of the partners is not Danish;
- have their registered partnership recognized in other countries.

—*The National Danish Organization for Gays and Lesbians*

OUT/LOOK & ALCOHOL DON'T MIX

Recently the Board of Directors of the OUT/LOOK Foundation, the nonprofit organization that publishes this magazine, decided not to solicit ads for alcohol. This policy emerged after many months of debate.

Some board members thought that the magazine's fragile economic situation precluded giving up revenue from *any* source, while others weren't convinced that alcohol ads lead to abusive alcohol consumption. But the prevailing sentiment was—given the high rate of alcoholism among lesbians and gay men—that *OUT/LOOK* shouldn't devote any pages to ads that promote drinking.

Furthermore, if an alcohol company were to place an ad with us, it would probably be a full-color one. We would have to place it on the back cover, since our text pages are printed in black and white. Many board members objected to giving up the fantastic art that usually adorns our back cover.

One of the consequences of this new policy is that we stand to forgo up to \$10,000 in lost ad sales each year. How will we make this up? Attracting other advertisers is certainly a goal. Increasing our circulation is another. But we also need to go to the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community and our friends for support.

We hope you'll help us keep art on the back cover by becoming a sustainer with the coupon on the next page. A sustainer is someone who gives at least \$50. In return you'll receive a year's subscription and never be bothered by renewal notices as long as you remain a sustainer.

— Jeffrey Escoffier & Kim Klausner,
publishers

We would like to express our gratitude to the following people for becoming sustainers since the publication of issue 7. (*As of April 9, 1990*)

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*and 42 others who preferred to remain
 anonymous.*

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Here's my tax-deductible gift to the
 OUT/LOOK FOUNDATION.

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List my name: [] Yes [] No

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Mail to: OUT/LOOK FOUNDATION
 2940 16th Street, Suite 319
 San Francisco, CA 94103

Mr. Benzine, after reviewing your application for the position, the review board has noted your far-ranging understanding of the lesbian and gay communities, as well as issues around gender, race, ethnicity, class, globalism and the Kinsey scale.* You're obviously an *OUT/LOOK* subscriber.

★



The Kinsey scale is named after researcher Alfred Kinsey who, in the early 40s, developed a survey questionnaire to evaluate a person's sexual orientation. Two scales, ranging from 0-6 were designed. Each scale ranged from exclusively heterosexual (0) to exclusively homosexual (6). One scale documents actual behavior and the other scale notes sexual fantasy.



Thank you,
Dr. Saggio.
Page 89
made it easy!

Improve your chances.
SUBSCRIBE

Queery #9

HOW ACTIVE ARE YOU?

- How would you describe your support for AIDS political activity? (Check as many as apply.)
 - I give money to AIDS organizations.
 - I have attended rallies or marches focused on AIDS.
 - I have engaged in civil disobedience.
 - I have written letters to politicians, newspapers, drug companies, or government agencies.
 - I have lobbied politicians in person or by phone.
 - Other: _____
 - My activism has led me to risk arrest.
 - My activism has led me to be arrested.
 - I don't consider myself an AIDS activist.
- If you consider yourself an AIDS activist, which category best describes what motivated you to become one?
 - I am a person with AIDS.
 - I am a person with ARC.
 - I am HIV+.
 - I lost a friend to AIDS.
 - I lost a lover to AIDS.
 - I lost a family member to AIDS.
 - Someone I care about has AIDS or ARC or is HIV+.
 - Because I'm gay or lesbian.
 - General social concern.
- Were you active politically before you started working on AIDS issues?
 - Yes No
- If you do not consider yourself an AIDS activist, which of these describe your reasons for avoiding involvement in AIDS-related politics? (Check as many as apply.)
 - I object to some of the more unconventional tactics of some activist groups.
 - I do not have enough time to become involved.
 - I direct my energy toward less "political" forms of AIDS involvement, such as caretaking,

- I do not support the political agenda of AIDS activist organizations with which I am familiar.
- As a woman, I feel excluded.
- As a person of color, I feel excluded.
- There is no local AIDS group with which I can become involved.
- Other: _____

5. What would most likely have to happen to move you into political activism around AIDS?

- Testing HIV+.
- Being diagnosed with ARC or AIDS.
- The death of someone close to me.
- An improvement in my health.
- Having more time.
- A change in public-health policy that I would consider unacceptable.

EFFECTIVE OR OFFENSIVE?

6. Rate the following examples of recent AIDS activism. (1 means you completely agree with this tactic; 5 means you completely oppose it.)

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

1 2 3 4 5

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

1 2 3 4 5

To protest US immigration policy regarding persons with AIDS or who are HIV+, OUT/Washington, DC jams phone/fax lines of the Immigration and Naturalization Service headquarters, effectively disrupting the day's business.

1 2 3 4 5

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

1 2 3 4 5

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

1 2 3 4 5

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

1 2 3 4 5

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

1 2 3 4 5

7. Are you generally opposed to protest actions that are aimed at the general public rather than a more specific target, such as a legislator or minister?

Yes No

8. Do you find it acceptable for AIDS activists to cause harm to or destroy public or private property as part of a protest action?

Yes No

OUTING

9. Do you support "outing"—exposing or threatening to expose as homosexual—elected or appointed government officials who consistently obstruct or harm the fight against AIDS?

Yes No

10. Do you support the outing of government officials who, by the policies they support, perpetuate homophobia and obstruct lesbian and gay rights?

Yes No

➤ (continued next page)

CLASSIFIEDS

CALLS FOR ENTRIES

ANTHOLOGY ON GAYS AND LESBIANS IN PRISON. Writings and visual art by and about gays and lesbians who have been or are currently in prison, their family and friends, and the legal community. Deadline 7/31/90. Please submit work to Prison Anthology, Goddard College, Plainfield, VT 05667

THE LESBIAN/GAY WRITERS' RESOURCE BOOK is now in preparation. Please send information about publishers/magazines newspapers/editors and agents who accept lesbian/gay writing to LOS HOMBRES PRESS, PO Box 1528, San Diego, CA 92115.

CONFERENCES

THE FOURTH ANNUAL Lesbian Bisexual & Gay Studies Conference will take place on October 26-28, 1990, at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. All contributors to the field of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Studies are invited to participate. Send papers and proposals for panels by May 31, 1990, to Vernon Rosario, Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay Studies, Harvard University, University Hall, Room B-5, Cambridge, MA 02138, or for further information, call Arthur Lipkin at (617) 547-2197.

15TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE on Men and Masculinity will be held in Atlanta, May 31-June 3, 1990. The theme of the conference is Ending Men's Violence: Pathways to a Gender-Just World. James Broughton, Judy Grahn, Essex Hemphill, and others. For information, contact: M & M Conference, c/o Men Stopping Violence, 1020 Dekalb Ave. #25, Atlanta, GA 30307, (404) 688-1376.

GIFTS/CRAFTS

NOTECARDS - beautiful, original pen/ink drawings. Each set has 6 different designs w/envelopes. \$5/set ppd. Specify Bulbs, Wildflowers, or Birds. Artemisia Designs, 55 Lucas Rd. Sterling, MA 01564.

HYPNO-EROTIC TAPES SASE Custom Hypnosis Tapes; 3370 North Hayden Road, Suite 123 Dept. OL, Scottsdale, AZ 95251.

GROUPS

MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE LESBIAN ALUMNAE NETWORK Over 350 Nationwide! All lesbian and bisexual womyn with ties to MHC welcome. Send SASE, short bio to D. Albino, 119 Dakota St., Boston, MA 02124.

GAY EX-JEHOVAH'S WITNESS'S SUPPORT network. Newsletter, pen pals. Reach out! PO Box 1173, Clackamas, OR, 97015.

VIDEOS

LARGE SELECTION of Lesbian videos. Olivia Records Anniversary, 2 in 20 the Lesbian Soap Opera and much more. **Free Catalog** Wolfe Video P.O. Box 64, New Almaden, CA 95042.

OPPORTUNITIES

Ad Rep: *OUT/LOOK* magazine seeks an ad rep in the Bay Area to sell display and classified advertising. Commission only. Sales experience necessary. Call Kim Klausner at (415) 626-7929.

LEARN ABOUT PUBLISHING We have many volunteer opportunities for people to see how *OUT/LOOK* is published. Help in our office. Must be available between 9 and 5.

Call Kelly Lee at (415) 626-7929.

DESIGN INTERN Two volunteer positions in the design and production department of *OUT/LOOK* available. 8 hours a week commitment and experience with Quark or Pagemaker necessary. *Only* written inquiries accepted. 2940 16th St., Suite 319, San Francisco, CA 94103 Attn: Art Director

PUBLICATIONS

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

GAY LITERATURE. 50 page catalog 1500+ items. Elysian Fields 80-50L Baxter #339, Elmhurst, NY 11373.

"CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE SEX PROBLEM." Joseph McCabe's authoritative, compelling historical analysis. Paper \$5.00 ppd. Independent Publications, Box 102, Ridgefield, NJ 07657.

HELPING HANDS

WANTED: AIDS POSTERS for small county fair in September. Can pay for postage only. Okan City AIDS Task Force, c/o Box 534, Brewster, WA 98812.

SUMMER HOUSING in SF Bay Area wanted for an *OUT/LOOK* intern. Will house-sit or do chores in exchange for rent. Call Kim Klausner at (415) 626-7929.

TRAVEL

THIRD WORLD REALITY TOURS Learn the issues firsthand. Meet with labor, religion, peace, environmental

organizations, gov. officials and scholars. Tours to Latin America, Africa, Asia, Middle East, the Caribbean and within the US. For more information contact: Global Exchange, 2141 Mission #202, San Francisco CA 94110.

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10% discount for four issue placement.

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Copy must be received by July 2, 1990 for Fall 1990, Issue 10.

Etcetera

All ads must be prepaid. Post Office boxes, phone numbers, zip codes, abbreviations and initials count as one word. Hyphenated words count as two.

Include your phone number with your order.

No personals.

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CHORES: The Results

What topic has motivated the most readers to date to respond to an *OUT/LOOK* query? Relationships? Jobs? Violence? No... chores. This is the 1990s—forget politics or sex. The issue that really gets under your skin is who takes out the garbage and who scrubs the tub.

Six hundred and sixty-eight of you—246 lesbian couples and 88 gay male couples—answered the survey in our Winter 1990 issue about chores. Dr. Marion Tolbert Coleman and Jana M. Walters of the University of Texas at Austin crunched the numbers. What follows are the highlights of their initial findings. They promise a more in-depth analysis, along with your own Chore Wars stories, for your future reading pleasure.

Pics and Pans

- Most popular chore: grocery shopping.
- Least popular: a tie between mopping and scrubbing the tub.
- Top four chores *least* evenly divided among couples: paying the bills; hand-washing dishes; cooking; and driving when in the car together.

- Top four chores *most* evenly divided: child-care (when couple has kids); loading and unloading the dishwasher; mowing the lawn; going to the laundromat.

Moral of the story (for those striving for equality): move to the suburbs, buy a dishwasher, and have kids?

- Seven percent of the couples hired someone else to do some of their chores. The leading candidates for hiring out: cleaning the bathroom sink, toilet, and tub; mopping; sweeping; vacuuming; auto repairs; and mowing the lawn.

“Woman’s Work Is Never Done”

- Lesbians spend a median of five hours a week on housework, while gay men spend six and a half. Debate rages as to whether that means lesbians are more efficient or gay men are more fastidious.
- Partners don’t spend the same amount

of time on housework each week. Lesbians differ by an average of four hours a week; gay men, slightly more than five.

- Up on a pedestal or in the doghouse? Thirty percent of respondents *overestimated* the amount of time their partners spend on housework each week by an average of 4 hours; 40 percent *underestimated* their partners’ contribution by an average of 5 hours a week.

- Seventy-six percent of respondents are pleased with the division of labor; 12 percent aren’t pleased; and 11 percent say they are pleased but, when pressed, do have some complaints.

The Couples

	Lesbians	Gay Men
Median difference in annual income within a couple:	\$10,200	\$15,000
Percent of couples with a gap of over \$20,000:	24%	37%
Average age difference:	4.1 years	5.4 years
Average years together:	3.7 years	6.5 years
Who respondents live with:		
in a couple only	88.0%	92.0%
with children	8.5	2.2
with same-sex adults	1.6	2.2
in a mixed gender setting	1.6	3.4

Expenses

	One partner pays all	Split 50-50	Negotiate	Common fund
Rent/Mortgage	16.1 %	38.5 %	14.2 %	31.3 %
Bills	17.6	38.8	8.9	34.8
Groceries	9.5	36.8	17.7	36.0
Household Repairs	13.7	29.6	21.7	34.9

Small-talk

Percent of couples who:	Discuss housework	Argue about housework	Discuss expenses	Argue about expenses
Daily	8.9%	1.5%	7.9%	0.5 %
1-2/week	45.6	13.5	38.0	5.4
1-2/month	24.7	22.6	40.1	16.1
<1/month	17.8	44.1	13.0	50.6
Never	3.0	18.2	1.0	27.5

- Chores most frequently negotiated: cleaning the bathroom, mopping, sweeping, and vacuuming

New Survey

AIDS ACTIVISM Tactics for the 1990s



RICK GERHARTER

The question of what tactics are most effective or appropriate in the political battle against AIDS has sparked vigorous debate in both the gay press and the mainstream media. Should we disrupt the opera, force closeted politicians to come out, take on the Church? This survey probes your opinions about these and other AIDS activism concerns. The results will be published in a future issue of *OUT/LOOK*, and, as always, your responses are confidential. We must receive your response by September 1, 1990, to include you in the results.

(continued next page) 

11. Do you support the outing of well-known individuals who are not politicians (like Calvin Klein and Malcolm Forbes), on the ground that they are depriving the lesbian and gay movement of visible role models?
 Yes No

TRENDS

12. Do you believe that the emergence of political activism is a temporary movement in our community (only for the duration of the AIDS epidemic)?
 Yes No

13. Do you believe AIDS activists are having a significant and positive impact on public-health policy?
 Yes No

14. Rate each of the following concerns from 1 to 3 as to how central they should be on AIDS organizations' political agendas. (1 means the issue should be a top priority for AIDS activists; 3 means addressing this issue detracts from the goal of stopping AIDS.)

- Sex education.
 Civil-rights issues.
 Reproductive rights.
 AIDS treatment development.
 AIDS treatment access.
 Creation of a national healthcare system.
 Working with other (say women's, people of color, environmental) social movements.
 Fighting homophobia and advancing lesbian and gay rights.

✍ (continued below)

➔ Detach this page, fold in thirds, secure with tape, and mail.



RICK GERHARTER

Please
Place
Stamp
Here

OUT/LOOK SURVEY
 AIDS ACTIVISM
 2940 16TH STREET, SUITE 319
 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94103

15. Do you feel that the cause of AIDS activism would be better served if a national leader emerged from our community to inspire the masses?
 Yes No

16. Increasingly, AIDS activists are gaining a forum within the government agencies from which they have long been excluded. Do you see a need for a significant change in tactics (namely, toning down the confrontational approach)

- now that AIDS political organizations have some respect as adversaries?
 Yes No

DEMOGRAPHICS

17. You are: Female Male
 18. You are _____ years old.
 19. You live in:
 a large metropolitan area.
 a small town.
 a rural community.

20. Other comments?

Thank you.

San Francisco AIDS activist Keith Griffith helped devise this query.

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