

a truck comes down the road

by Robyn Gillam & Joe Galbo

If "discourse" (or "language" or "art" or "interpretation") is to have any real meaning there must be something that is not-discourse, not-language, not-art, not-interpretation. The truck that is coming down the road is fundamentally different from the interpretation "here comes a truck." To believe otherwise . . . is to risk becoming trapped in an implausible and highly artificial form of historical idealism. . . . The truck never comes down the road, though we may find ourselves talking endlessly about the ground for the possibility of our knowledge that it is coming.

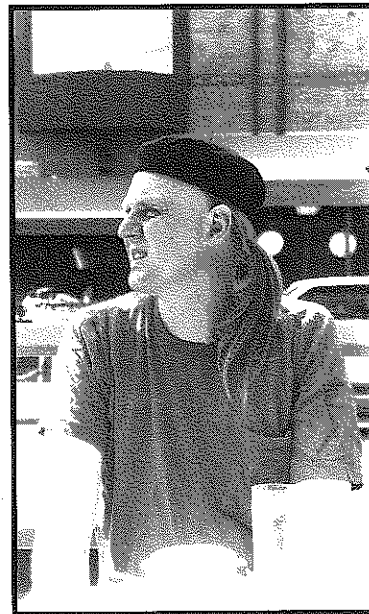
Allan McGill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*

It has often been pointed out to me that I tend to look at the world from a theoretical perspective, rather than one based on history or "fact" (I find it difficult even to write the word).

Daniel Jones, *This Magazine*, June/July 1991.

By the 13th of February 1994 neither discourse, language, art nor interpretation were sufficient to protect Daniel Jones from what they are not. Unable to cope with these absences and what they implied, he took his own life.

Jones was part of the *Border/Lines* collective for almost two years from 1989-1990, where he distinguished himself as an energetic and meticulous editor. Daniel left *Border/Lines*, as he did so many other similar projects, citing personality and political differences. Although most people who came into contact with him were impressed by his intelligence and energy, they often found him difficult to deal with because of his apparent moodiness and unpredictability. Not all of them realized that Jones's career as a



writer of fiction and poetry, essayist, editor and teacher was his form of resistance to a debilitating manic depressive disorder. Saddest of all, during the final months of his life he pushed away almost all of the people who cared about him and loved him, of which there were many.

We both knew Jones for a long time and saw first hand both the misanthropy and the generosity which were reflected in his writing and his relationships with other people. Jones's self image as an artist was tied to a deep rooted belief that disfunctionality is equated with artistic creativity, a Romantic notion that has often proved more destructive than beneficial to creative people. Jones's tragedy reflects not only his own life in Toronto but the tensions inherent in the position of the contemporary cultural worker in the west. The shamanistic role associated with the modern artist reveals the contradiction of living in a society that values spontaneity and personality, but only if it is marginalized from the more

utilitarian spheres of society. There is little doubt that economic problems due to the deteriorating position of funding for the arts in Canada added to Jones's despair, and his illness exacerbated his difficulties as a cultural producer in the post-NAFTA world.

There were many sides to Jones but one of his most important roles was as a catalyst. He was adept at bringing people together and making things happen in the small press scene and other fringe artistic communities in Toronto. He was author of a collection of poetry, *The Brave Never Write Poetry* (Coach House Press, 1985), and *Obsessions*, a work of experimental fiction (Mercury Press, 1992). His last work, *The People One Knows*, is scheduled to come out later this year from Mercury Press. He published extensively in the Toronto small press and, with Robyn Gillam, had his own imprint, Streetcar Editions. He was involved with *Piranha* and *What!* magazine, and over the last year he was editor of *Paragraph* after two years of being Book Reviews Editor. Many of those with whom he was involved, particularly in recent years as his work gained its greatest momentum, were shocked at the sudden cessation of such productive energy.

Jones always found dealing with the real world a difficult and painful engagement. For most of his life he pushed against the limits of what was sayable, and his final act ultimately went beyond art, language or interpretation. When the truck finally came down the road, there was no one there.

Robyn was married to Daniel Jones for eight years. Joe worked with Daniel Jones and knew him for over ten years.

Adios, Amazon Nation

BY Cynthia Wright

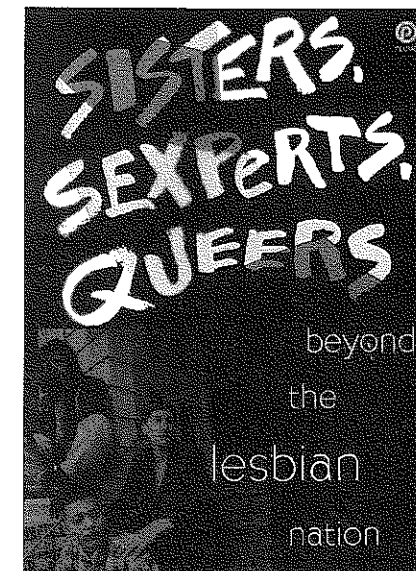
Arlene Stein, ed., *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers: Beyond the Lesbian Nation*. New York: Plume, 1993.

In the twenty years since Jill Johnston published her classic separatist polemic, *Lesbian Nation*, lesbian culture and politics have undergone a remarkable redefinition. Many young dykes have sought exit visas from the Amazon Nation, decrying what they see as the sexual silences, parochial politics and dull culture of seventies-style lesbian feminism.

Sisters, Sexperts, Queers brings together sixteen of these young (and a few middle-aged) dissenting voices to consider four themes: sexuality and lesbian identity; dykes in/and popular culture; lesbians, home and "the family"; and political organizing. Many of the contributors are hip, urban things out of the universities, film schools and queer magazines of New York and California, and their essays reflect that reality. Despite this limitation (and it is an important one), there is much that is valuable in this collection.

In contrast to the much tamer *Lesbians in Canada*, with its virtual silence on lesbian sexuality, *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers* opens with four essays on lesbian lust, sexual representation and identity. While lesbians are often stereotyped as the voracious sexual creatures of straight porn, the fact is that seventies-style lesbian feminists fought hard to "desexualize" the category "lesbian." It was a shared commitment to feminism, rather than sexual orientation as such, that brought many lesbians together and into alliances with heterosexual women. Even as lesbian-straight splits ravaged some women's organizations, lesbian feminists were far more likely to work with straight women than gay men.

By the early eighties, with the outbreak of what feminists would later call the "sex wars," the sexual silences within feminism, including lesbian



feminism, were dramatically ruptured by furious debates about pornography, censorship and sadomasochistic sex. While deep divisions on these issues continue to divide many feminists and lesbians, one positive result has been the emergence of a lot more talk about lesbian sexual practice.

In "The Year of the Lustful Lesbian," Arlene Stein skillfully dissects the work of Susie Sexpert and JoAnn Loulan, two California-based lesbian sex experts. Susie Sexpert, familiar to many for her cameo in the Monika Treut film, *Virgin Machine*, is the former editor of the highly-successful lesbian porn magazine, *On Our Backs*, and an outspoken advocate of lesbian sexual libertarianism. JoAnn Loulan, by contrast, might be described as Susie Sexpert Lite. She's a suburban, reassuring and folksy sort of gay gal, perfect for those women a bit too timid to go to the San Francisco lesbian strip shows championed by Susie Sexpert. But as Stein argues, Loulan reaches lesbians whose experience of sex carries emotional pain as well as pleasure, something rarely admitted in Susie Sexpert's hip landscape. And despite their many stylistic differences, both women display a very California savvy about the market for sexual material.

Has all this talk about lesbian sex actually produced much change in lesbian sexual practice? Stein has her

doubts: "as many lesbian therapists could tell you, for all but a feisty sexual fringe, the sexual revolution [within lesbian culture] was probably more about changes in representations of sexuality than about changes in behavior." On the other hand, that "sexual fringe" is, well, still feisty. Tracy Morgan's essay on butch-femme, for example, is part of the ongoing recovery and celebration of prefeminist lesbian sexual culture which began with Joan Nestle's work on femme identity and which also informs the recent National Film Board production, *Forbidden Love*. This work has been generated out of a rejection of the lesbian-feminist argument that butch/femme is oppressive and "male-identified"; Nestle, in particular, argues that butch-femme is a rich erotic vocabulary which lesbians should claim as part of their sexual heritage.

Other dykes have looked to gay male porn and sexual practice for new models, a strategy enthusiastically pursued by Susie Sexpert and lesbian porn writer, Pat Califia. But Vera Whisman, in "Identity Crises: Who is a Lesbian Anyway," questions the positioning of gay men as the standard for queer behaviour and suggests that the problem is not just lesbian sexual repression, but our oppression as women. As Liz Kotz says elsewhere in the collection, the lesbian

tendency to locate sexual expression within [the] pastoral, mythical realm may say a lot about how distant any public expression of sexuality has been from most women's lives, particularly within the kinds of urban spaces that gay men have long had access to.

Whisman's piece also explores the latest acrimonious debate about sexual practice to hit the dyke scene: lesbians who sleep with men ("hasbians"). She argues that twentieth-century definitions of "who is a lesbian" rely heavily on constructions of "true" versus "false" lesbians and don't always take into account the complexity of personal and political identities.

Now that we are in the era of "dyke chic," lesbians appear to be both everywhere (on the cover of