

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.

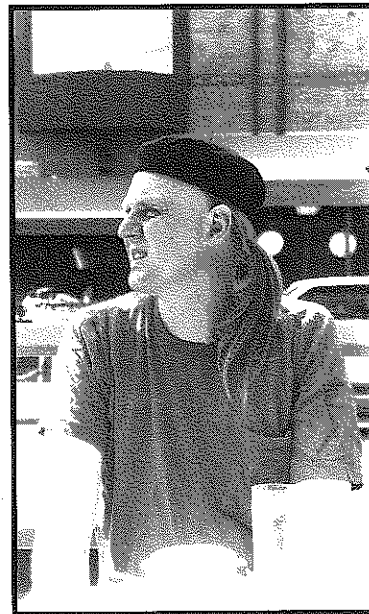
Allan McGill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*

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

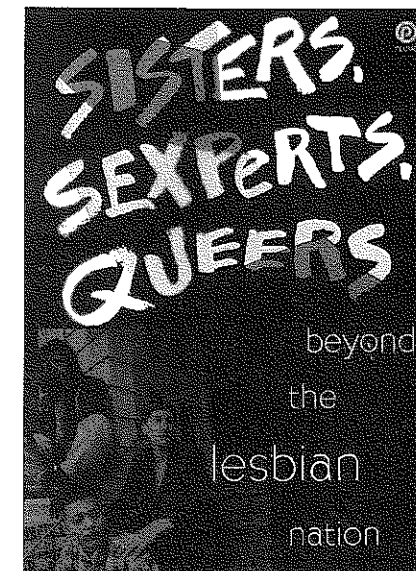
Arlene Stein, ed., *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers: Beyond the Lesbian Nation*. New York: Plume, 1993.

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

Newsweek and *Vanity Fair*) and yet nowhere. Part Two of *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers* explores this paradox in mainstream popular culture, and also examines the cultural productions (particularly film, music and 'zines) of lesbians themselves. The most interesting and original essay in this section is Jackie Goldsby's "Queen for 307 Days: Looking B(l)ack at Vanessa Williams and the Sex Wars." It is one Black lesbian's take on what happened when Vanessa Williams, the first African-American woman to become Miss America, was forced to step down after *Penthouse* magazine published photos of Williams engaged in lesbian sex with a white woman. Goldsby both examines her attraction to these photographs in the context of the dearth of black lesbian sexual imagery, and also interrogates "the premises on which we assumed then and continue to assume now that 'whiteness' figures the normative center of political and theoretical discussions about sexuality" - including lesbian sexuality.

Part Three of *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers* explores the meaning of home, kinship and "family" in a lesbian context. The right wing has consistently constructed lesbians and gay men as rootless, urban predators bent on destroying the heterosexual nuclear family and childhood innocence. In the current hysteria over family values, the immense creativity and tenderness of lesbian and gay kinship and support systems (particularly in the face of AIDS) have gone unrecognized. Some of that creativity is captured in anthropologist Kath Weston's article on the lesbian baby boomlet, "Parenting in the Age of Aids." Dorothy Allison, author of the acclaimed new novel *Bastard Out of Carolina*, contributes a typically powerful piece on growing up as poor white lesbian trash in the Southern USA. Important as her piece is, it is largely personal; the collection as a whole lacks a more analytical discussion of class and the lesbian community.

The lesbian and gay movement in North America is right now engaged in a difficult internal battle over the merits of re-claiming notions of "fami-

ly" and "spouse" for queer liberation. Catherine Saalfield's polemic, "Lesbian Marriage ... [K]not!" takes on monogamy, "compulsory coupledom," the family, lesbian marriage and spousal benefits. She is disturbed by the increasing willingness of queers to embrace oppressive heterosexual institutions such as marriage, and asks whether "the conservative backlash of the Reagan/Bush era and the crisis of AIDS doomed alternative possibilities once and for all, leaving us to wallow in a whirlpool of cynicism and apology?" Lourdes Arguelles' evocative and celebratory essay on the "crazy wisdom" of Cuban lesbians also decries the tameness and conservatism of contemporary lesbian life. Referring to Teresa, a *tortillera* [dyke] she knew in Havana, Arguelles writes:

the memory of her disdain for 'fitting in' keeps alive for me the archetype of the lesbian as a stranger, a misfit, one who is homeless, mysterious, unpredictable, and barren. For me this balances the increasing 'ladyfication' of our lesbian communities, with their penchant for ordinariness, procreation, and conventionality.

Saalfield and Arguelles are welcome reminders that there are still some crazy *tortilleras* and strange sisters out there who continue to make trouble, even if the rest of the community is actively embracing a domesticated lesbian existence.

In the end, however, I found this section on home the least satisfying of the four sections in *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers*. While Saalfield touches on many important questions, her essay is too brief to provide any sustained analysis of the intense homophobia and heterosexism embedded in the right-wing's "family values" campaign, and its effects on lesbian and gay lives, sexual/domestic arrangements and political strategy.

Part Four, on community and activism, unfortunately does not take up this question either; the focus of this section is largely on internal queer community politics. Two essays examine the politics of women-only groups, while two others look at

mixed lesbian and gay organizations, in particular ACT UP, AIDS service organizations and Queer Nation. Both Alisa Solomon and Lisa Kahaleole Chang Hall focus on the tendency within lesbian and women-only organizations to "forget the political and obsess on the correct" as if all the problems of the world could be solved by altering personal behaviour: "You end up," says one woman quoted by Solomon, "with a movement of five people who can follow every single rule instead of fifty people in struggle."

A lot of Solomon's examples of "political correctness gone wrong" are drawn from a manifesto produced by a Boston-based disabled women's group which called for, among other things, banning scents at lesbian, gay, feminist and left events. This has the effect of suggesting that disabled dykes are first among the Political Correctness Queens, and this is particularly unfortunate given that the anthology has nothing else to say about the lives and issues of disabled lesbians.

Hall reminds us of the painful reality that coalition-building "often means working with lesbians we can't stand." Citing Bernice Johnson Reagon's well-known article on coalition politics in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, Hall argues that "home" and "coalition" are not identical and that many women want their coalitions to be "safe spaces" rather than sites of struggle and transformation.

By the eighties, some lesbians were beginning to flee the trashing, conflict and just plain intensity of working in women-only groups in order to join coalitions and services made up of both lesbians and gay men. Maxine Wolfe, for example, became active in ACT UP New York out of frustration with identity politics and "the inability of lesbians to organize around or even figure out what their issues were." The final two articles in *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers* explore what happens when dykes and fags work together politically. They detail both the surprising pleasures of lesbian and gay male political and personal alliances, as well as the tensions, even explo-

sions, which have emerged.

Ruth Schwartz's essay on lesbians in AIDS activist groups and service organizations is the most probing of the four articles in this section, while Maria Maggenti's impressionistic take on Queer Nation, ACT UP and being a lesbian in the era of "dyke chic" is less analytical, but does capture some of the energy of the encounter between gay men and lesbian feminists in mixed activist groups:

In that hothouse called AIDS activism ... screaming, getting my butt kicked, and loving gay men for the first time, I experience things that lesbian feminism has not prepared me for and I discover that without that feminism I never could have lasted so long in a community made up of so many men. Feminism has not taught me about that delicious outrageous queer decadence indulged in by gay men as a survival strategy. So I dance about in my leather jacket and help gay-boy friends zip up the back of their goofy dresses as we march off to close down the stock exchange. But feminism has given me a political discipline that is sometimes more useful than drag.

Similarly, gay male sexual directness (often in the form of a constant stream of anecdotes about sexual adventures, crushes and tricks) made some lesbians uneasy, while leading others to a renewed appreciation of their "own gayness as a proud, lustful identity" and a dissatisfaction with the sexual silences within lesbian culture.

Frequently, however, political differences between lesbian feminists and gay men in AIDS services such as hotlines could be painful. Schwartz writes that "some of my most basic assumptions about the world, understandings I shared with other feminist lesbians about the role of class, race, and gender in people's lives, were brand-new and highly disputed concepts for many gay men." In addition, the increasing bureaucratization and professionalization of some AIDS organizations and the changing demographics of the PLWA population have produced new conflicts. Hard questions about activist versus bureaucratic models of fighting AIDS, and about the failure of many

gay, white men to see the need to build coalitions with women and people of colour, particularly now that AIDS is devastating the African-American and Latino/a communities, have been raised. Similar tensions emerged in some AIDS activist groups such as ACT UP.

To make matters worse, the larger lesbian community has not always understood, and supported, individual lesbians committed to AIDS activism. Some lesbians have complained that "too many women chose AIDS work over more 'authentically lesbian' issues." Lesbian AIDS activists are frequently asked, "If the AIDS epidemic had primarily affected women, would gay men have mobilized in the same numbers to help us?" Critics wonder whether lesbians are simply doing what women always do: taking care of men. Lesbians of colour working in AIDS organizations are confronted by community members who want to know why they work with "all these white men."

In response, some lesbian AIDS activists and workers have decided to re-direct their political energies, whether to the fight against breast cancer or in work with the growing numbers of HIV-positive women. Others have challenged the prevailing definition of what constitutes a lesbian issue. As Schwartz jokes, "the only exclusively lesbian issue" out there is the much feared "Lesbian Bed Death." But in the end, Schwartz's article fails to articulate exactly why lesbians ought to involve themselves in AIDS activism. In my view, the writing of lesbian AIDS activist Cindy Patton provides a much clearer political vision. In a 1990 interview, Patton argued:

We are in the midst of a huge cultural upheaval around sexuality. At a time when so many people's lives are being ruined not just by getting AIDS but by the cultural backlash of the epidemic, to refuse to participate in a cultural event which is so politically charged, to decide it doesn't apply to you, is very strange and wrong.

It is precisely this kind of understanding of the cultural construction of AIDS within the context of a major swing to the right in US politics that is missing

from Schwartz's otherwise important account.

Like a Sarah Schulman novel, *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers* is full of young, urban dykes in black leather and Chanel red lipstick shouting "Get used to it!" on their way to an ACT UP meeting or a screening of lesbian porn. At times you wonder, as Maggenti does, whether they "have any cogent analysis of where they stand in the world except that everyone should own a black bra." At other points, the writing is a real breath of fresh air for any dyke who has ever felt like a resident alien in the Lesbian Nation. Despite its limitations, *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers* is fun, provocative and - best of all - risk-taking.

Cynthia Wright is a Toronto writer and historian of mid-twentieth century shopping culture.

No More Confessions

BY Francisco Ibañez-Carrasco

Proust, Cole Porter, Michelangelo, Marc Almond and Me: Writings by Gay Men on their lives and Lifestyles. National Lesbian and Gay Survey. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Proust, Cole Porter, Michelangelo, Marc Almond and Me is a collection of "writings by Gay men on their lives and lifestyles." Its 195 pages are divided into eight sections; every section presents a specific theme preceded by intriguing titles such as "pride", "virus", "law", and "together." It is difficult to situate this book in a specific field such as anthropology or ethnomethodology. It is difficult to call it "journalistic" or to call it "fictional." This ambiguous location is symptomatic of this collection's inability to meet some of what have become basic standards in the burgeoning field of lesbian and gay writing. We queers are not easily pleased anymore with a book that is ambiguously sexy, scientific, informative or controversial.

The information presented in *Proust, Cole Porter...* was gathered by means of a "Mass Observation" project conducted through the 1980s. This pro-