One could say that testimonies are politically and socially significant. Biographies (with their ghost writer) are the result of individual work and their intent is largely self-serving. Bisex may be exemplary (like the lives of cómplices), but they are not necessarily "representative" in the politically queer sense of the word. Testimonials (used interchangeably but not unproblematically with testimony; oral history; life history; autobiography) are a result of some form of bello esistenza conducted with various contexts (e.g. feminist research, critical ethnography, anthropology) generally between individuals who are situated in symmetrical positions of power. The intent of testimonial is to document (like the Odyssey of Ormuz and the lladre were political for) advocate, denounced, denounced. Testimonials crack open the tragic explosion of the binary in the struggle between private/public. They subvert its appar- ent determinism. Personal narratives (like the well-known: "...Kikoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala" (Burgos-Folay, ed. 1984) maintain a delicate balance between explaining personal circumstances and feelings and having them stand for some universal experiences out of oppression and liberation. Sommers explains that "Rigoberta's" singular- ity achieves her identity as an expression of the collective. The singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguish- able part of the whole" (1988: 108).

Paul Moeritte partially achieves this "effect" in Horroctis Time (1988) and Becoming a Man (1992). Michael Kohn writes within the testimonial tradition in Surviving AIDS (1990) in which he interviews "other witnesses."

I cannot tell you how many T-Cells I burn squeezing through pores that tell me I am an AIDS community I have observed that many gay men find AIDS stories too traumatic and too much to deal with. The epidemic among gay men may well be mitigated but it is wasted in objectionable forces. In social terms, the non-social member is the opportunity to explain in detail how, why, and when the virus enters a line. It is not the AIDS testi- monials emphasis is given to the uni- verseal aspects of one person's individual experience. Themes such as "contamination," "fear of intimacy," "second coming out," and others are end- lessly repeated. They come to func- tion as mnemonic devices for audi- ences as we search our social mem- ories for the meanings of the AIDS tragedy and attempt to identify the important things to remember and pass on to the next generation. But in Preusl, Cole Porter... the stories about the "virus" seem to function more as confessions than anything else. The contradiction between testimonies and confessions has been detrimental in this regard. In the late 1970's and 1980's, confessions create victims that are either innocent or guilty (road warriors). Circe Dykes, in her essay "Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala" (Burgos-Folay, ed. 1984) which tells the story of how gay liberation's reversal ought to excite as fraud." AIDS confessions and testimonials are bound to be heard for as long as we want to break free from systemic clinical and legal frameworks. As Shoshana Felman and Doris Laub point out in their col- lection, Testimony, "through the [il- lusory] dimension of the testimonial, provide (allow us) to forgive and for- get."

Unfortunately, Preusl, Cole Porter... can easily be missed as a triv- ial book of fig stories. It resembles night-time radio talk shows where "troubled" night owls' musings are packaged in a pop-spy, dimin- ishing personality we have had such stories of gay men. The point is that we queer need to be very aware of how we are telling our stories, how we are being made into "holes" and re-defined by ourselves to the covers. This is not an easy task, as we well know, minorities have to work extra hard to be heard and not be reunderstood.

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Joan Nestle, editor

Dykes and Dicks
By Goshen Zimmerman

The one consistent refrain in The Persistent Desire is if it feels good, do it, or rather, if the dîke fits, wear it. The other recurring motif coincides with the queer notion, "we're here, we're queer, get used to it," or "we're femme, we're butch, fuck you very much." The Persistent Desire, entitled A Femme Butch Reader by Joan Nestle, (followed by a roster of butch women, and co-founder of the Lesbian Heritages Archives in New York, a group dedicated to the cultural and revolutionary look at a once taboo topic: butch/femme. The butch/femme roles that were popular among lesbians in the 50's are coming back, but this time they have a new identity, a wild pro- fundity, and a renewed sensibility. This new awareness includes a rejec- tion of the hetero-patriarchal notion that a butch wants to be a man, and is therefore a dysfunctional wo/man, and a firm denial that females are not displaced straight laced ladies. Simultaneously this new sensibility provides proof of a renewed strength and pride in butch/femme play.

Today there is a reclaiming of roles among butch/femme lesbians, roles that were made almost totally invisible during the 60's. Far from warping what it was as heterosexual "role reproduction", the re-emerging women's liberation movement re- eated outward, silenced and un/inten- tionally marginalized butch/femme pinings and displays. Even though the word "bisexual" was new and dyke represented an "in your face" rebutted of patriarchy and capitalism with which butch/femme women were read down with a femme (read a female cop-out), the she brought their own butch/femmes was not, and it was able in a sense. The mostly white, agile-bodied feminist movement and undeveloped butch/femme solutions as a direct mirroring of the inequitable heterosexual dynamic. But of course this was not really not what was happen- ing.

These 50s butch/femme women were surviving the worst way they knew how in a straight, hate filled universe. As contributor Leslie Feinberg writes, "when the bigots came in it was time to fight, and fight we did. We fought hard, butch and femme... These butches were tough and strong. They had to be to survive.
Femmes as well were expressing their own unique way of being in the world. Joan Nadel writes on being a 50s femme: "Oh, but we had style - our outfits, our perfumes, our performances - and we could lose ourselves under the charm of our dancing partners." Partners indeed. Just as disruptive, but not as well received, was the term femme which came to be a love for others, a desire to be desired by other women and an even stronger desire for butch/femme to continue as a valid, healthy and exciting way of life. These stories and the women behind them are living proof that, in Joan Nadel's words, "Butch/femme relations (are) complex erotic and social statements, not ghastly heterosexually feminine.

Barbara Smith also problematizes the "penis-substitute" myth when she writes, "I can fuck my lover with my cock...I can take it off and fuck myself with it, or she can fuck me with it...Tell me how many men can castrate themselves, bugger themselves with their own cocks, castrate someone else's body, take their cocks off, put them in a drawer and forget about them - all this and not be tied to death?"

There are many voices in The Persisterist desired: many stories, many voices (both good and bad), and many lives lived, either as a femme or as a butch. The one thing that all of these stories have in common is desire: a desire for other women, a desire to be desired by other women and an even stronger desire for butch/femme to continue as a valid, healthy and exciting way of life. This perspective on the stories behind them are living proof that, in Joan Nadel's words, "Butch/femme relations are complex erotic and social statements, not ghastly heterosexually feminine."

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